

10 September 1979

MEMORANDUM FOR: J. Foster Collins
Special Assistant to the Secretary
(National Security)

FROM : [Redacted]
SUBJECT : [Redacted]
REFERENCE : [Redacted]

[Redacted]

Attachments:
as stated above

Regarded as Unclassified
when separated from
attachments

Declassified and
Approved for Release
July 2000

[Redacted]

[Redacted]

CHILE: Political Assessment

Chile's military government is headed by President Agosto Pinochet, leader of the coup that ousted leftist President Salvador Allende in 1973. Congress was dissolved at the time of the coup, and the military now dominates all government activity--an unusual situation for Chile, whose political history has been more stable and democratic than its neighbors'. Pinochet has said that general elections will not be held before 1985.

Domestic Policy

The Chilean regime is closer to the modern Brazilian-Peruvian model of nationalistic military government than to the old-style Latin military tradition. Pinochet plans a thorough restructuring of economic and political life before restoring civilian government.

In the first years after the coup, the regime employed harsh internal security practices. Some serious abuses of human rights still occur, but, in general, Chile's record has improved. The government sincerely believes that Chile faces a continuing threat from violence-prone leftists and the assessment, although exaggerated, has some factual basis. The divisions in Chilean society and the sometimes irresponsible policies of political parties encouraged leftist growth during the 1960s; this growth soared further during the 1970-73 term of Allende.

In theory, the Pinochet regime now maintains tight control over traditional opposition elements, but in practice, the press, political parties and, to a lesser extent, the labor unions enjoy considerable latitude. Political activities are prohibited, but parties hold small meetings, express some criticism of the government, and meet with foreigners. The threat of repression, however, keeps criticism within bounds.

Foreign Policy

Chile is regarded in much of the world as a pariah, largely because of the government's human rights record and the international perception--shared even by Western countries who were not in sympathy with Allende--that the Pinochet government is out of character for Chile. The regime has therefore had difficulty buying arms, finding loans, and gaining acceptance in international forums. The government has tried during the past two or three years to improve its image and expand contacts with Western and Third World countries but has been only partially successful.

Relations with the US have been poor throughout the 1970s, but there has been no open break. The most serious issue involves the question of the Chilean security agency's involvement in the 1976 Washington assassination of Chilean exile leader Orlando Letelier. The US has requested the extradition of former security chief Contreras in connection with the case, and the matter is now before the Chilean Supreme Court.

Chile's relationship with its neighbors in Peru, Bolivia, and Argentina is equally poor. Peru and Bolivia have repeatedly vowed to retake land Chile seized from them in the War of the Pacific, whose centenary is being observed this year; the more recent quarrel with Argentina over the Beagle Channel and surrounding territorial seas is being mediated by the Pope. Chile maintains diplomatic relations and a low level of trade with China, but ties with Cuba and the Soviet Union were broken soon after the coup.