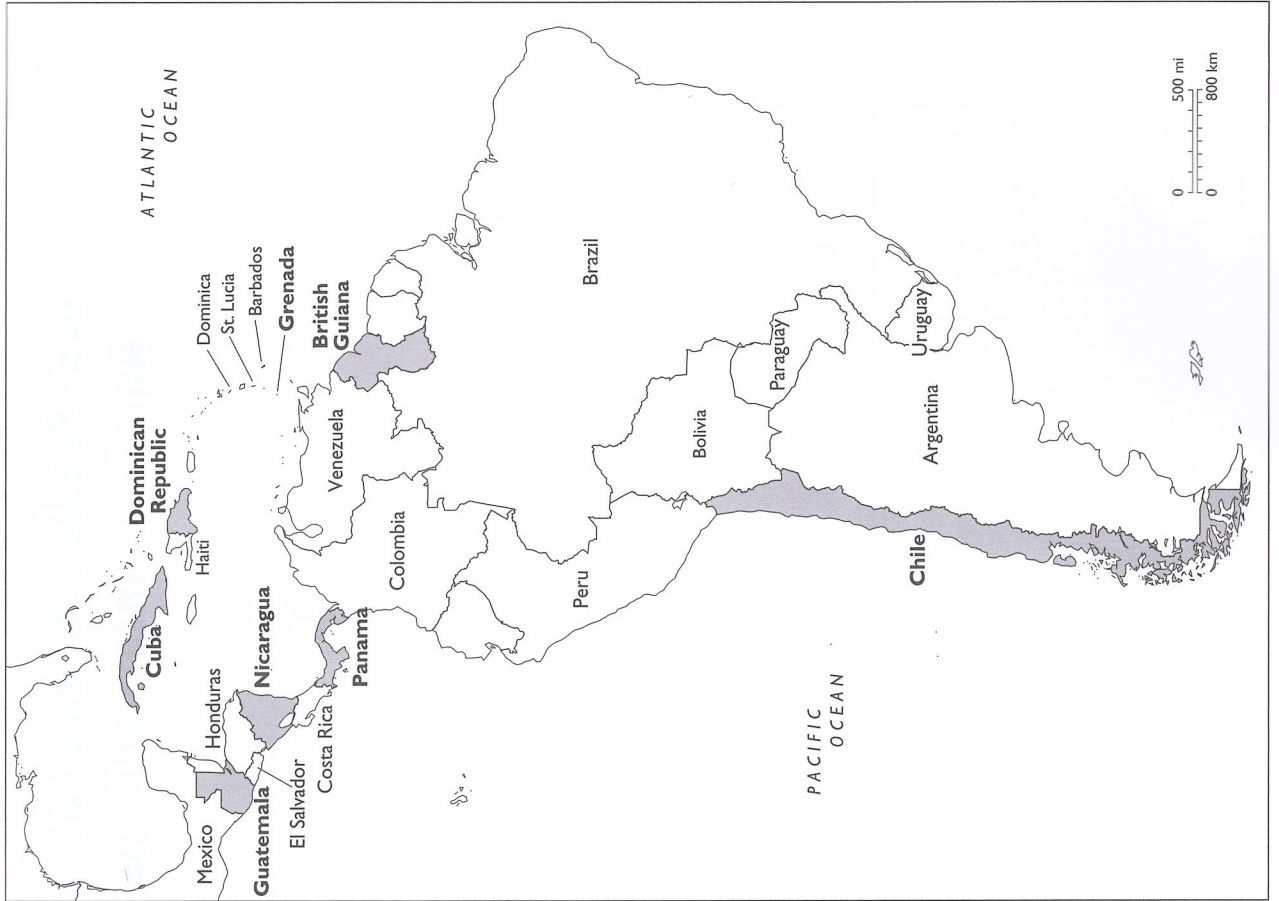


U.S. Presidents and Latin American Interventions

Pursuing Regime Change in the Cold War

Michael Grow



at that moment were “risking their lives” fighting communism in the field. Congress quickly passed the appropriation with only 10 dissenting votes, thereby giving its tacit consent, almost without debate, to the escalating U.S. military involvement in southeast Asia. By tying his Vietnam funding request to the fight against communist aggression in the Caribbean, Johnson had managed to obtain what historian Lloyd Gardner describes as “a new ‘small-scale Tonkin Gulf Resolution’” that “substituted . . . Dominican rebels for . . . North Vietnamese PT boats.”⁶⁰

What Johnson had not foreseen, however, was the havoc that the intervention would wreak on his own liberal political base. Many U.S. liberals regarded Juan Bosch as the Dominican Republic’s best hope for democratic reform, and for them the intervention was nothing less than a tragically misguided U.S. attack on the forces of progressive change in Latin America. The administration’s grossly exaggerated allegations of communist influence in the rebellion struck many liberals as evidence that U.S. foreign policy was suffering from delusions of anticommunist paranoia, while the White House’s heavy-handed military response to the crisis seemed disturbingly reminiscent of an earlier era of benighted U.S. imperialism in the Caribbean that Franklin Roosevelt’s enlightened Good Neighbor policy had brought to an end. “In short,” Brian VanDeMark writes, the Dominican intervention “outraged American liberals”—and the “angry liberal reaction” that it provoked quickly “sheared away the left wing of Lyndon Johnson’s Great Society consensus.”⁶¹ Within days, *New York Times* and *Washington Post* editorials were questioning the president’s decision to return to the policy of the “Big Stick.” By early May, Democratic senators Mike Mansfield of Montana and Joseph Clark of Pennsylvania were expressing concern that the intervention would reignite Latin American fears of U.S. gunboat diplomacy and thereby strengthen Fidel Castro’s hand throughout the hemisphere. Soon other prominent Democrats, including liberal senators Robert Kennedy and Frank Church, together with J. William Fulbright, the influential chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, were openly criticizing Johnson’s handling of the crisis. By the summer of 1965, the intervention had opened a serious breach between the president and his liberal supporters in Congress, the press, and the academic community.⁶² Over the next three years, the administration’s escalating military commitments in Vietnam then widened that breach beyond repair, ultimately destroying Johnson’s presidency.

CHAPTER FIVE

Chile, 1970

President Nixon was enraged. When Ambassador Edward Korry entered the Oval Office on October 13, 1970, to discuss U.S.-Chilean relations with the president, Nixon was slamming his fist into the palm of his hand and fuming, “That sonof-a-bitch, that sonofabitch!” The “sonofabitch” in question, Nixon quickly explained, was “that bastard Allende”—a profane reference to the newly elected president of Chile, Salvador Allende.¹

Nixon had ample reason to dislike Allende. The new Chilean president was, after Fidel Castro, one of Latin America’s most prominent Marxist political leaders. Allende and Castro were close friends and fellow revolutionaries. Allende, however, rejected the Cuban model of insurrectionary violence and armed struggle as a strategy for socialist revolution in Chile. Instead, he was committed to pursuing a peaceful, democratic “road to socialism” in his country—a *via parlamentaria*, or “parliamentary path,” in which Chile’s Marxist forces would first mobilize mass-based electoral support to win power democratically and then, once in control of the government, use constitutional processes and legislative enactments in the congress to construct a socialist society. The end result, Allende promised, would be a uniquely Chilean experience—a socialist revolution carried out in a framework of “democracy, pluralism, and liberty.” If his revolutionary strategy succeeded, he believed, Chile would become a “second model of the transition to a socialist society,” a peaceful, democratic alternative to the Soviet, Chinese, and Cuban models.²

Allende’s commitment to the *via parlamentaria* spanned some four decades. A founding member of Chile’s Socialist Party in 1932, minister of health in a Popular Front government during World War II, and a senator in the Chilean congress from 1945 to 1970, he had spent his entire political career as “a normal, democratic politician” working for socialist change from within Chile’s traditional institutional structures.³ Now, with his electoral victory in the 1970 presidential election, he had an historic opportunity to make his vision of a nonviolent, democratic Marxist revolution in Chile a reality.

Not all of Allende’s supporters shared their leader’s commitment to parliamentary democracy, however. Allende had campaigned for the presidency as the candidate of Unidad Popular (Popular Unity, or UP), a heterogeneous and fractious electoral coalition of leftist parties consisting of Chile’s Socialists and Communists along with four smaller organizations. The Chilean Communist Party—generally regarded as “the largest, best-organized, and most disciplined of its kind in Latin America”—was pursuing the *via parlamentaria* largely for reasons of tactical op-

portunism. Following orthodox Leninist strategy, the Communists had for years been embarked on a “long march through the institutions,” participating in Chile’s democratic political system in the hope of gaining power and introducing revolutionary changes without resorting to armed insurrection or civil war. The Communists viewed their participation in the 1970 Unidad Popular electoral coalition as an appropriate strategy for the party during a preliminary “national-democratic stage” of the revolution—when the Communists, in alliance with other “popular forces” and “progressive” sectors of “the bourgeoisie,” would win power electorally and implement broad reforms, attacking, weakening, and isolating Chile’s capitalist elites in preparation for a full transition to socialism and the eventual establishment of a Soviet-style “dictatorship of the masses.”⁷⁴

Ironically, a majority of Allende’s own Socialist Party was skeptical of the peaceful, parliamentary road to socialism and believed instead that a true socialist revolution could ultimately be achieved only through a process of revolutionary violence that would destroy socialism’s capitalist enemies. During the mid-1960s, the party’s leadership had fallen under the control of radicals, “mainly Trotskyites,” who looked to the Cuban revolution as their source of political inspiration. A 1967 party congress declared that “revolutionary violence is inevitable and legitimate” and that “peaceful and legal forms of struggle are limited instruments of action” in a political process that inevitably would end in armed struggle. Party radicals accepted the Socialists’ participation in the 1970 Unidad Popular electoral coalition for tactical reasons, but they made no secret of their belief that, if elected, Allende would at some point have to abandon “bourgeois legalism and constitutionality” and mobilize the working classes and popular masses for a decisive revolutionary assault on Chile’s entrenched elites.⁷⁵ Indeed, at the time of Allende’s election, many Socialist radicals openly supported the guerrilla-warfare tactics of the Movimiento de Izquierda Revolucionaria (Movement of the Revolutionary Left, or MIR), an organization of ultraleft Marxist militants that was carrying out a campaign of bombing attacks, hijackings, bank robberies, and illegal land seizures throughout the country.⁷⁶ Whether Allende would be able to control the radical elements in his own coalition when the peaceful road to socialism turned bumpy remained problematical as he prepared for his November 1970 inauguration.

Some of Allende’s political opponents even questioned the depth of his commitment to democratic processes. Both outgoing president Eduardo Frei of the center-left Christian Democratic Party and Jorge Alessandri, the defeated 1970 candidate of the conservative National Party, expressed fears that if Allende found the *via parlamentaria* blocked by centrist and right-wing forces in the Chilean congress, he might, under pressure from his radical-left supporters, suspend constitutional procedures and resort to authoritarian governance. To allay such concerns, Allende agreed prior to his inauguration to abide by a new constitutional “statute of democratic guarantees” that reaffirmed his commitment to preserve “the norms

of pluralistic constitutional democracy.”⁷⁷ Less reassuring, however, was the president-elect’s proposed plan to replace Chile’s traditional two-house legislature with a unicameral “assembly of the people” that would be empowered to select Chile’s supreme-court judges and supervise the nation’s judicial system. Given the pivotal role that Chile’s courts would play in sanctioning any socialist reform initiatives passed by the congress, Allende’s proposal only increased the fears of his political opponents that under his presidency Chilean democracy might mutate into an increasingly totalitarian system.⁷⁸

Salvador Allende was no friend of the United States. Like the Guatemalan and Cuban revolutionaries before him, he ascribed his country’s underdevelopment and poverty to an exploitative “symbiotic alliance” that Chile’s upper-class oligarchy had forged with U.S. private investors. Unidad Popular’s basic “Program” (which in effect served as Allende’s 1970 campaign platform) explicitly blamed Chile’s problems on “the imperialists and the ruling class,” “reactionary interests, both national and foreign,” and the “large-scale capitalists, both native and foreign” who “totally controlled” the country. Together, the UP Program claimed, “Imperialist capital and a privileged group of less than 10 per cent of the population monopolize half the national income,” condemning the majority of Chile’s citizens to deprivation and poverty. Chile was poor, the Program charged, because it was “a capitalist country, dependent upon imperialism, and dominated by sectors [of society] allied to foreign capital.” The solution, according to the Program, was “to end the rule of the imperialists, of the monopolies, of the landed oligarchy, and to begin the construction of socialism.”⁷⁹ As Allende’s first minister of economy, Pedro Vuskovic, put it shortly after taking office, the whole purpose of state control was “to destroy the economic bases of imperialism and the ruling class by putting an end to the private ownership of the means of production.”⁸⁰

“Imperialism,” of course, was a UP synonym for “U.S. economic domination.” In 1970, U.S. corporations had more than \$1 billion of capital invested in Chile, the bulk of it in the mining and communications industries. Allende and his followers were convinced that this “imperialist” capital had milked unconscionably large profits from the country—profits that by their calculations were “equivalent to twice the amount of capital invested” in Chile in its entire history.⁸¹ Allende’s socialist remedy was state ownership of Chile’s economic infrastructure and resources, and his highest and most immediate priority was the nationalization of Chile’s U.S.-owned copper industry. Copper was “the single dominant element in Chilean economic life”—“Chile’s bread,” in local parlance. Copper exports generated approximately three fourths of the country’s foreign-exchange earnings and a substantial percentage of the Chilean government’s revenues. The industry, however, was dominated by three U.S.-based copper companies—Anaconda, Kennecott, and Cerro—which together accounted for nearly 80 percent of the country’s annual production. Allende charged that the U.S. companies were reaping excess profits from their Chilean operations; by his calculations, they had reapa-

triated more than \$4 billion in profits on initial investments of “no more than \$30 million,” leaving far too little money behind to finance economic development or social progress. As one of his supporters put it, the U.S. companies “pulled the treasure from the earth, took it home, and left us the hole.” From Allende’s perspective, nationalization of the copper industry was the key to “controlling our economic destiny” and “winning our second independence.” It would restore Chilean control over Chile’s own resources and in the process provide his government with the financial resources to build “a strong internal market” and “raise the standard of living of the masses.” Unidad Popular’s Program promised financial compensation to the owners of all expropriated properties, but if—as seemed likely—Allende factored his estimates of the copper companies’ “excess” profits into his compensation figures, the copper companies could easily end up *owing* Allende’s government hundreds of millions of dollars after their expropriation.¹²

In his foreign-policy pronouncements, Allende frequently drew a distinction between his hostility to “imperialistic” foreign capital and his desire for harmonious relations with the U.S. government. During the 1970 election campaign, he promised to adopt an independent, nonaligned foreign policy that would maintain relations “with all . . . countries regardless of their ideological or political position, based upon respect for self-determination and the interests of the people of Chile.” After his election, he went out of his way to assure Washington that his government, although Marxist, posed no threat to the United States. Immediately following his swearing-in ceremony, he informed the head of the visiting U.S. inaugural delegation that although his government intended to nationalize the copper industry and other U.S.-owned enterprises, he nevertheless hoped to have “the best possible relations with the United States” and that U.S. security would “never be endangered by Chile or by anything that happens there.” Even though “the interests of the United States and the interests of Latin America” had “nothing in common,” he stated a few weeks later, Chile wanted “to maintain cordial and cooperative relations with all nations in the world and most particularly with the United States.” Shortly thereafter, he publicly reaffirmed that “we will never do anything against the United States or contribute to injuring its sovereignty.”¹³

The public record was nonetheless replete with less comforting statements. Allende had long advocated Chile’s withdrawal from the Rio Pact—the U.S.-led hemispheric security system that he contemptuously characterized as “one cat and twenty mice”—and he regularly disparaged the Organization of American States and other manifestations of inter-American collaboration. During a July 1970 campaign speech, he allegedly referred to the United States as “public enemy number one” in the Western Hemisphere. His Unidad Popular campaign platform conveyed strong tones of anti-Americanism. Among other things, the UP Program promised that Allende’s government would resist “any form of Pan-Americanism,” reject the OAS as “the tool and agency of North American imperialism,” and “revisé, denounce and cancel” all “treaties of reciprocal assistance and mutual aid” be-

tween Chile and the United States; it also expressed Unidad Popular’s “solidarity with the Cuban Revolution” and condemned “North American aggression in Vietnam.”¹⁴ Allende himself was an outspoken supporter of Castro’s Cuba. Although he rejected insurrectionary violence as a revolutionary strategy in Chile, he nevertheless praised the Cuban revolution as “a revolution for all of Latin America” that had “shown the way for the liberation of all our peoples.” In the aftermath of the Bay of Pigs debacle, he publicly condemned U.S. “aggression against Cuba” as “an aggression against the small nations of the world, against Latin America, and against Chile.” He played a prominent role in helping Castro establish the Organización Latino América de Solidaridad, a Havana-based “mini-Comintern” created in 1966 to promote the spread of Marxist insurrections in the hemisphere, and served as the organization’s first president.¹⁵ Secretly, meanwhile, Allende was functioning as a longtime “confidential contact” of the Soviet KGB, providing information on political conditions in Chile and neighboring countries as a self-avowed “friend of the Soviet Union” and receiving “personal subsidies” of up to \$50,000 from the Politburo for his services.¹⁶

All in all, Allende’s Marxist revolutionary agenda, nationalistic designs on U.S. investment capital, anti-imperialist rhetoric, close association with Castro’s Cuba, and secret collaboration with Soviet intelligence made it highly unlikely that the immediate future of U.S.-Chilean relations would be either “cordial” or “cooperative” as he prepared to begin his presidency.

Richard Nixon was not the first U.S. president to regard Salvador Allende as an enemy. In 1962, four years after Allende had lost the 1958 presidential election by less than three percentage points, the Kennedy administration mounted a covert campaign to prevent him from winning Chile’s next presidential election, in 1964. According to U.S. ambassador Korry, “The Kennedys utilized every means—illegal and unconstitutional as well as legitimate—to defeat . . . Allende.” Between 1962 and 1964, the CIA spent nearly \$4 million on some fifteen covert action projects in Chile. Some of the money helped to finance the campaign of the center-left Christian Democrats and their candidate Eduardo Frei, whose opposition to communism was, by his own definition, unalterable and whose international orientation was, in his words, irrevocably with the West. Much of the rest was used to fund “a massive anti-communist propaganda campaign” designed, in Thomas Powers’ words, “to scare the living daylight out of Chileans at the prospect of a victory by Allende.” CIA-generated campaign materials depicted Chile’s Socialists as “nakedly Stalinist,” while Agency-produced “posters of Russian tanks in the streets of Budapest and of Cubans in front of Castro’s firing squads proliferated on Chilean walls.” In the end, Frei’s landslide victory in the 1964 election owed at least a partial debt to the CIA-induced atmosphere of fear that helped to polarize Chile’s voters during the campaign.¹⁷

The Nixon administration, by contrast, was notably lax in its response to Allende's 1970 presidential bid. During 1969, embassy and CIA proposals for new covert operations to block Allende elicited no action by Nixon's National Security Council. Instead, preoccupied with serious international crises elsewhere and lulled into complacency by Chilean polls that showed conservative candidate Alessandri well in the lead, the White House failed to focus on the Chilean political situation until well into 1970. In late March, a small "spoiling" operation, modeled on the 1964 CIA propaganda campaign, was approved, with funding that eventually totaled some \$435,000. But, according to Henry Kissinger, Nixon's national security adviser, this U.S. "token effort" was "much too little . . . far too late" and was carried out "in only the most minimal and ineffectual fashion." By August, as the Chilean election campaign entered its final phase and Kissinger finally began to "focus on the dangers" inherent in the situation, he was appalled to discover "that nothing further could now be done before the election."¹⁸

Allende's dramatic election victory on September 4, 1970, left Washington in a state of stunned surprise, Kissinger recalls; "Nixon was beside himself" and desperate to do "something, anything, that would reverse the previous neglect." Over the course of the next eleven days, in an atmosphere that Kissinger describes as frantic and frenzied, the White House hastily improvised a two-track strategy of covert initiatives designed to prevent Allende from taking office. In Track I, U.S. officials in Chile were ordered to secretly promote a constitutional coup d'état. Because Allende had won only a 36 percent plurality in the three-candidate presidential contest, he faced a congressional runoff election on October 24 in which the Chilean congress would choose between Allende and the runner-up candidate Alessandri. The Nixon administration's Track I strategy consisted of various plans to prevent Allende's election in the congress. One option (the "Frei reelection gambit") involved the bribing of Chilean congressmen to vote for Alessandri, who would immediately resign the presidency, forcing a new election in which the popular Frei—constitutionally barred from succeeding himself in office—would be free to run for a second term. Another Track I option consisted of applying pressure on Frei to "voluntarily yield power to an interim military regime" prior to Allende's confirmation, again opening the way to fresh elections, which Frei would presumably win.¹⁹

Track II took form on September 15 when Nixon ordered CIA director Richard Helms to instigate a military coup in Chile that would "prevent Allende from taking power or . . . unseat him" if he took office. According to Helms' oft-quoted notes from the meeting, the president recognized that there was probably only a one-in-ten chance of success, but he was determined to "save Chile" and was "not concerned [with the] risks involved." Nixon indicated that he was prepared to make "\$10,000,000 available, more if necessary." Helms was instructed to assign the "best men we have" to the project, and to "make the [Chilean] economy

scream," presumably as a pressure tactic to prod Chile's armed forces into moving against Allende. As Helms later testified, "The President came down very hard that he wanted something done, and he didn't much care how." Within days of the September 15 meeting, the CIA found itself under "constant . . . continual pressure . . . from the White House" to accomplish its assigned mission.²⁰

In the end, however, Nixon's two-track strategy turned out to be "a real-life 'Mission Impossible'"—primarily because neither Frei nor any of Chile's key military officers would go along. As a result, Allende was confirmed as president-elect by the Chilean congress on October 24 and duly inaugurated on November 3.²¹ Having failed to block the Chilean Marxist's accession to power, the Nixon administration then settled into a public policy of "cool but correct" behavior toward Allende's government combined with a covert program of economic destabilization designed to wreak havoc on Allende's socialist experiment and force the Chilean military to oust him. That Janus-like policy remained in effect until September 1973, when Chile's armed forces overthrew Allende's government in a bloody military coup that left Allende dead in the presidential palace.²²

Any number of authors have attributed Nixon's Chilean intervention to economic motives. According to Seymour Hersh, "There is compelling evidence that Nixon's tough stance against Allende in 1970 was principally shaped by his concern for the future of the American corporations whose assets, he believed, would be seized by an Allende government." In his efforts to deny Allende the presidency, Hersh concludes, "Nixon was primarily protecting the interests of his corporate benefactors."²³ James Petras and Morris Morley characterize Nixon's interventionism as the effort of an imperial state to defend the interests of U.S.-based multinational corporations in Chile.²⁴ Allende and his advisers had said as much while they were still in office. In a 1972 speech to the UN General Assembly, Allende charged that his country was the victim of serious U.S. "aggression . . . designed to take revenge on the Chilean people for its decision to nationalize its copper." A 1973 internal report prepared by Allende's government also attributed Nixon's hostility to his anger at Allende's nationalization of the copper industry. "What the United States cannot accept," the report concluded, "is the existence of a government like Popular Unity that can decide to nationalize without indemnification, using legal methods that paralyze the U.S. capacity to respond."²⁵

The available evidence, however, is less "compelling" than economic interpretations would suggest. That U.S. companies lobbied the administration to intervene in Chile in 1970 is beyond dispute. In April, the board chairman of Anaconda Copper and a group of worried U.S. business leaders offered the State Department \$500,000 to assist in financing anti-Allende campaign efforts. In July and September, senior officials of the International Telephone & Telegraph Company, a cor-

poration with Chilean investments totaling \$150 million, offered the CIA up to \$1 million to help block Allende's accession to power. (International Telephone & Telegraph officials warned the White House that their company would be "in deep financial trouble" if it lost its Chilean holdings.)²⁶ Meanwhile, the administration's own intelligence assessments were predicting that Allende's election would lead to "harsh measures against U.S. business interests in Chile," resulting in "tangible economic losses" for the United States.²⁷ Nixon later acknowledged that he was aware of Allende's plans to expropriate U.S.-owned property at the time that he ordered the CIA to instigate a military coup.²⁸

Nevertheless, no conclusive evidence has yet emerged that the intervention was based on Nixon's concern for the welfare of U.S. investors in Chile. Kissinger has categorically denied that economic factors played a role in the White House's policy formulations. "Nationalization of American-owned property was not the issue," he wrote in his memoirs; "the Nixon Administration did not view our foreign policy interests through the prism of the financial concerns of American companies." Colleagues have described Kissinger's own attitude toward U.S. businesses overseas as "contemptuous"—"He never gave a shit about the business community," one recalled.²⁹ Nor did administration officials accept any corporate financial support for the intervention effort; every private offer to contribute funds was quickly rejected as inappropriate.³⁰

Nixon and Kissinger themselves, in their few public references to Chile, consistently defined their concerns in terms of U.S. national security. In his memoirs, Kissinger states categorically that "Our concern with Allende was based on national security, not on economics."³¹ Nixon, in a 1977 television interview with journalist David Frost, recalled that in 1970 he considered "a leftwing dictatorship" in Chile to be a threat to "our security interests."³² More specifically, both Nixon and Kissinger defined their security fears in terms of geopolitical "falling dominos." "I don't mean that [an Allende government] was an immediate threat," Nixon told Frost, "but I mean that if you let one go, you're going to have some problems with others. . . . Now we had one country in the Western Hemisphere, Cuba, that is, exporting revolution, and we didn't want another one, Chile, doing it." "Months before Allende came to power," Nixon recalled, "an Italian businessman came to call on me in the Oval Office and he said 'If Allende should win the election in Chile, and then you have Castro in Cuba, what you will in effect have in Latin America is a red sandwich, and eventually it will all be red.' And that's what we confronted."³³ Kissinger, in his memoirs, describes Allende as

not merely an economic nuisance or a political critic but a geopolitical challenge. Chile bordered Peru, Argentina, and Bolivia, all plagued by radical movements. As a continental country, a militant Chile had a capacity to undermine other nations and support radical insurgency that was far greater than Cuba's, and Cuba has managed to do damage enough. If Chile had followed the Cuban pattern,

Communist ideology would in time have been supported by Soviet forces and Soviet arms in the southern cone of the South American continent.³⁴

Nixon's and Kissinger's retrospective public explanations conflict sharply, however, with the views of their own security analysts at the time. In August, Ambassador Korry had informed Washington that the U.S. embassy in Santiago was "unable to identify any vital U.S. security interests in Chile. The fall of Chile to Marxist totalitarianism," he wrote, "cannot. . . be considered a threat to the nation in military terms." Three days after Allende's election, the administration's interdepartmental Group for Inter-American Affairs—made up of representatives from the CIA, the State Department, the Department of Defense, and the White House—reported that the United States had "no vital national interests within Chile," that "the world military balance of power would not be significantly altered by an Allende government," and that an Allende-led Chile would not pose "any likely threat to the peace of the region." It would be "hard to argue" that Allende constituted "a mortal threat to the U.S.," the National Security Council's chief Latin American specialist advised Kissinger a week later.³⁵ A National Intelligence Estimate prepared in July concluded that although Allende would attempt to take Chile "a long way down the Marxist-Socialist road" during a six-year term in office, he would first have to surmount a long list of powerful domestic obstacles, "such as Chile's security forces, the Christian Democratic Party, some elements of organized labor, the Congress, and the Catholic Church."³⁶

The intelligence community specifically discounted any likelihood that Allende's government would attempt to subvert its Andean neighbors and trigger a domino effect in South America. A CIA intelligence memorandum produced shortly after Allende's electoral victory predicted that the new Chilean president would be "cautious in providing assistance to extremists" in neighboring countries because of his "fear of provoking a military reaction in his own country." The memorandum also concluded that "the degree to which [foreign] revolutionary groups would be allowed to use Chile as a base of operations would be limited" because the Chilean Communist Party—Allende's partner in the Unidad Popular coalition—was opposed to "violence-prone groups."³⁷ Meanwhile, the U.S. embassy was continuing to assure Washington that an Allende government would pose no direct security threat to the region or to the United States. "Chile is really an island" isolated from its neighbors by geography, Ambassador Korry reported on September 5, the day after the election. Furthermore, Korry pointed out, "There is no country on earth that is so far from the two super-powers and Red China." Chile "is not Poland nor is it Mexico," he wrote, and "it will not require any massive commitment from anyone." Nor would the Soviet Union take advantage of Allende's victory to "expand its base" of influence in Chile, the ambassador informed Washington; instead, the Soviets would "move with caution" and not let Chile become "another Cuban drain of Moscow's resources."³⁸ Kissinger's off-

the-cuff quip to reporters that Chile was “a dagger pointed at the heart of Antarctica” suggests that, despite his “official” explanations for the public record, the national security adviser may have privately shared his security bureaucracy’s skepticism that an Allende-led Chile was a threat to U.S. security.³⁹

In actuality, Nixon’s hatred of Allende—and the U.S. intervention that resulted—can best be understood in the context of the goals that Nixon had set for his presidency. In direct contrast to his immediate predecessor in the White House, Nixon intended to achieve presidential greatness in the realm of foreign policy. He personally regarded himself as an expert in international affairs and confided to friends that he considered his life “dedicated to great foreign policy purposes.” According to historian Melvin Small, Nixon also understood that politically “a president enjoyed considerable freedom of action in international relations and that the chances of achieving successes there were far greater than in trying to resolve intractable domestic problems.” “I’ve always thought this country could run itself domestically without a President,” he told an interviewer a year before his election; “All you need is a competent Cabinet to run the country at home. You need a President for foreign policy.” He also thought the stakes were higher in international politics. “The American economy is so strong it would take a genius to ruin it,” he later observed, “whereas one small mistake in foreign policy could blow up the world.”⁴⁰

Nixon entered office with an ambitious—even visionary—objective for his presidency: to lead the United States out of the draining environment of Cold War confrontation and into “a new era of peaceful coexistence with the communist world.” Negotiations with the Soviet Union would produce a détente based on the concept of “linkage,” in which Soviet political and military restraint in such international trouble spots as Vietnam, Berlin, and the Middle East would be rewarded with U.S. cooperation on issues of vital interest to the Soviet Union, such as strategic arms limitation, increased access to Western food and technology, and recognition of existing boundaries in Eastern Europe. Normalization of relations with Communist China would place the United States in “a balancing position” vis-à-vis the two leading communist bloc powers, providing the Nixon administration with “a great strategic opportunity” to construct a more stable and peaceful world. The “subtle triangle of relations between Washington, Peking, and Moscow” that would result would first enable Nixon to end the Vietnam War, by giving his administration the increased bargaining leverage that would induce the Soviets and Chinese to apply pressure on Hanoi to “moderate its requirements for a cease-fire.” The broader long-term result would be a more stable international balance of power—a new multipolar “global equilibrium” based, in Kissinger’s words, on mutual restraint and “even eventual cooperation” among the major world powers.⁴¹ If his grand design worked, Nixon—the quintessential U.S. cold

warrior—would establish an historical legacy for himself as one of the twentieth-century’s great peacemakers.

The vision proved easier to conceptualize than to implement. In the twenty months between Nixon’s inauguration and Salvador Allende’s election, the administration’s efforts to give birth to a new international “structure for peace” ended mainly in what Nixon characterized as miscarriages. The communist world greeted the new administration with intransigence and acts of military aggression. In February 1969, a month after Nixon’s inauguration, the North Vietnamese launched what he described as “a small-scale but savage offensive into South Vietnam.” In April, North Korea shot down an unarmed U.S. EC-121 reconnaissance aircraft over the Sea of Japan, killing all thirty-one crew members. That summer, Hanoi bluntly rejected Nixon’s offer to negotiate a speedy end to the Vietnam War; in rebuffing Nixon’s conciliatory proposals, Ho Chi Minh “blamed the United States for the war, reiterated his determination to settle for nothing less than full independence of his country, and called for a complete U.S. withdrawal from Vietnam.” For their part, the Soviets displayed little interest in “linkage”-induced behavior modification; in his memoirs, Kissinger criticizes them for refusing to reduce tensions in the Middle East or Berlin and for failing to assist the United States in its efforts to disengage from Vietnam. By October 1969, Nixon was complaining that Moscow had done “nothing to help” settle the war in Vietnam except to arrange for an oblong negotiating table at the Paris peace talks.⁴²

The year 1970 brought more international crises. In March, the Soviets began a dramatic expansion of their military presence in the Middle East, pouring combat forces and advanced armaments into Egypt in support of the Nasser regime’s military buildup along the Egyptian-Israeli frontier. In early September, fighting broke out in Jordan when radical Palestinian refugees, backed by pro-Soviet Syria, attempted to overthrow the moderate, pro-Western government of King Hussein. Nixon captured the tension of the moment in his memoir *RN*:

One thing was clear. We could not allow Hussein to be overthrown by a Soviet-inspired insurrection. If it succeeded, the entire Middle East might erupt in war; the Israelis would almost certainly take pre-emptive measures against a Syrian-dominated radical government in Jordan; the Egyptians were tied to Syria by military alliances; and Soviet prestige was on the line with both the Syrians and the Egyptians. Since the United States could not stand idly by and watch Israel being driven into the sea, the possibility of a direct U.S.-Soviet confrontation was uncomfortably high. It was like a ghastly game of dominoes, with a nuclear war waiting at the end.⁴³

Simultaneously, halfway across the world, U.S. U-2 spy planes were producing evidence that a Soviet nuclear submarine base was under construction in Cienfuegos, Cuba; when completed, Kissinger informed Nixon, the base would mark

“a quantum leap in the strategic capability of the Soviet Union against the United States.”⁴⁴ Then, on September 4, the election returns from Chile presented the administration with yet another crisis situation.

For Nixon and Kissinger, the international crises of 1969–1970 represented “different facets of a global Communist challenge.” Both men believed that communists respected only “power and strength” and that Soviet foreign policy was predicated on a relentless probing for points of international weakness. Now, the White House concluded, Moscow was probing “in several directions at once” in order to test the credibility of U.S. power under Nixon’s stewardship. North Korea’s shoot-down of the EC-121 was, in Kissinger’s words, “a test of the new administration’s decisiveness.” The Jordanian crisis was “yet another test of U.S. resolve.” And the construction of the Soviet submarine base in Cuba was also “part of a process of testing under way in different parts of the world.”⁴⁵

Above all, the administration looked upon the Vietnam War as a *decisive* test of U.S. global credibility—and the one that would determine the success or failure of Nixon’s international grand design. According to Melvin Small, “Nixon and Kissinger were . . . certain that how the United States ended the war in Vietnam would influence upcoming negotiations with the Russians and Chinese. Relations with the communists could not be stabilized unless the United States left Vietnam with dignity.” Kissinger had been warning since 1966 that a U.S. defeat at the hands of a “third-class Communist peasant state” like North Vietnam would “strengthen” America’s enemies, “demoralize” her allies, “lessen the credibility” of the United States throughout the world, and tempt other countries to shift their alignments to the communist bloc.⁴⁶ In his memoirs, Kissinger writes that it was crucial for the United States to avoid the perception of having been “routed” in Vietnam:

As the leader of democratic alliances we had to remember that scores of countries and millions of people relied for their security on our willingness to stand by allies. . . . No serious policymaker could allow himself to succumb to the fashionable debunking of “prestige” or “honor” or “credibility.” For a great power to abandon a small country to tyranny simply to obtain a respite from our own travail seemed to me . . . profoundly immoral and destructive of our efforts to build a new and ultimately more peaceful pattern of international relations. We could not revitalize the Atlantic Alliance if its governments were assailed by doubt about American staying power. We would not be able to move the Soviet Union toward the imperative of mutual restraint against the backdrop of capitulation in a major war. We might not achieve our opening to China if our value as a counterweight seemed nullified by a collapse that showed us irrelevant to Asian security. Our success in Middle East diplomacy would depend on convincing our ally of our reliability and its adversaries that we were impervious to threats of military pressure or blackmail.⁴⁷

Kissinger’s views mirrored those of the president. “I am utterly convinced that how we end this war will determine the future of the U.S. in the world,” Nixon told several top advisers in July 1970. “We can maintain the American position in Europe and Asia if we come out well.”⁴⁸

Nixon interpreted the North Vietnamese military offensive of February 1969 as “a deliberate test, clearly designed to take the measure of me and my administration at the outset.” He immediately responded by ordering the secret bombing of Vietnamese communist sanctuaries in Cambodia as a demonstration to Hanoi that his administration was “different and tougher” than its predecessors.⁴⁹ A year later, in April 1970, he told a national television audience that his controversial decision to widen the war by deploying U.S. ground forces into Cambodia was designed to put

the leaders of North Vietnam on notice that . . . we will not be humiliated. We will not be defeated. . . .

If, when the chips are down, the world’s most powerful nation, the United States of America, acts like a pitiful, helpless giant, the forces of totalitarianism and anarchy will threaten free nations and free institutions throughout the world. . . .

If we fail to meet this challenge, all other nations will be on notice that despite its overwhelming power the United States, when a real crisis comes, will be found wanting.⁵⁰

Allende’s election victory was seen in the White House as yet another communist challenge to U.S. interests—the latest in an accelerating series of communist “tests” of U.S. power under Nixon’s leadership. Nixon recalled in his memoirs that “America was being tested in the fall of 1970—by war in Vietnam; by the threat of war in the Middle East; by the introduction of threatening nuclear capabilities in Cuba. In Chile the test was just as real, although much subtler.” According to Kissinger, “We were faced simultaneously with a civil war in Jordan, a Soviet attempt to build a submarine base in Cuba, and the coming to power of Allende in Chile. It was at once *the most dangerous and decisive period of the new administration.*”⁵¹ “The Chilean election results,” Kissinger continued,

came in just as Moscow and Cairo were rejecting our protests of Middle East cease-fire violations; Jordan feared an imminent move by Iraqi troops against the King; a Soviet naval force was steaming toward Cuba. By September 8, the day the Chilean developments were first discussed by an interagency committee, several airplanes had just been hijacked in the Middle East and the Soviet flotilla was nearing the port of Cienfuegos. Six days later, on September 14, when Chile was next considered, the Jordan situation had deteriorated, and Cuban MiGs intercepted a U-2 flight seeking to photograph Cienfuegos and

the mission had to be aborted. In the weeks that followed, our government pondered Chilean events not in isolation but against the backdrop of the Syrian invasion of Jordan and our effort to force the Soviet Union to dismantle its installation for servicing nuclear submarines in the Caribbean. The reaction must be seen in that context.⁵²

From Nixon's and Kissinger's perspective, the Soviets were now probing for new weak points in the Western Hemisphere. If they encountered "mush," they would proceed; if they encountered "steel," they would withdraw. The administration felt that it had to demonstrate its steel in Chile. The United States could not be "found wanting." The stakes were too high.⁵³

Most immediately, a Marxist-led Chile would further erode the unity of the United States' hemispheric alliance system. According to Kissinger, Allende's government would represent "a permanent challenge to our position in the Western Hemisphere," while Nixon worried that the Chilean election would have "profound implications . . . for the inter-American system."⁵⁴

But the implications extended far beyond Latin America. At the time of Allende's election, the administration was preparing for a new round of peace talks with North Vietnamese representatives in Paris, and Nixon was finalizing secret plans to withdraw 150,000 U.S. troops from Vietnam over the next several months. He feared that if the United States passively accepted the establishment of a new Marxist state in its own hemisphere, Hanoi would have even less reason to believe that the new president was "tougher" than his predecessors or that the United States had the strength of will to remain in Vietnam "for the duration." Why, then, would the North Vietnamese agree to a negotiated settlement of the war? More broadly still, why would Soviet and Chinese leaders agree to "mutual restraint," détente, or rapprochement with a "pitiful, helpless giant" that could no longer maintain hegemony in its Latin American sphere of influence? Ambassador Korry later acknowledged that the Nixon administration's "number one" concern in Chile was its fear, "at a time that we were about to . . . begin the scale down and withdrawal from Vietnam, and . . . launch new initiatives with Moscow and Peking, that for the United States to act indifferent to the disappearing of a democracy, of a unique democracy in what was viewed throughout the world as its back yard, could have a significant effect on those who made policy in the Soviet Union and the People's Republic of China."⁵⁵ The principal concern in Washington, Korry told Senator Frank Church, was

the probability that the governments in Moscow and Peking would misread US indifference in Chile. . . . At the time of the Chilean election campaign, the US [was] engaged in the reordering of its relations with the USSR and the PRC. I speculated to and in Washington that if the US did nothing to sustain a democ-

cracy of the caliber of Chile . . . then either or both of the two major Communist powers might conclude that the US disasters in Indochina, the subsequent demoralization within the US and abandonment in Chile—in our own hemisphere—taken together with the evident crises in Western Europe at that time, signified a general Western collapse in the offing. They might, I said, adopt the analysis of the leadership of Allende's own Socialist Party—that the US was incapable of defending its interests and, as the leader of the Socialist Party, Sr. Altamirano, kept emphasizing in Chile, the collapse of the US would be hastened by kicking it hard and often.⁵⁶

The administration's "number two" concern, according to Korry, was the "certain effect" that Allende's Chilean model would have on political trends in Western Europe. Kissinger in particular was worried about the growing strength of communist parties in Italy and France. He feared that the successful example of a freely elected Marxist coalition government in Chile would encourage the "Eurocommunists" to seek political alliances with Socialists and Christian Democrats in upcoming elections and gain control of the Italian or French government as members of leftist popular-front coalitions. If communists came to power in Italy or France, Kissinger believed, the consequences would be devastating for the West's position in the Cold War and for the Nixon administration's goal of achieving peaceful co-existence. "The world balance of power," he wrote in 1969, "depends on our ability to deny the resources and manpower of Western Europe to an aggressor," while any "true relaxation in [East-West] tensions presupposes Western unity." In his view, there was "no doubt that a Communist breakthrough to power or a share of power in one country will have a major psychological effect on the others, by making Communist parties seem respectable, or suggesting that the tide of history in Europe is moving in their direction. . . . [T]he accession to power of Communists in an allied country would represent a massive change in European politics . . . [and] would have fundamental consequences for the structure of the postwar world as we have known it and for America's relationship to its most important alliances." According to political scientist Robert H. Johnson, "Kissinger argued that the military strength of NATO would be 'gravely weakened' because governments containing Communists would have to be excluded from discussions of classified subjects, [and] because they would seek to weaken NATO defense efforts. . . . With NATO weakened, member countries would be forced to accommodate to Soviet power and 'massive shifts against us would occur.'" In short, from Kissinger's perspective, "Allende's success would have had implications . . . for the future of Communist parties in Western Europe, whose policies would inevitably undermine the Western Alliance." "The political evolution of Chile," he remarked soon after Allende's victory, "is a very serious matter for the national security interests of the United States because of its effects in France and Italy."⁵⁷

Ambassador Korry shared “the conviction that were the U.S. to act indifferently to [Chile’s] fate . . . , the effects would be devastating in other countries where a communist party had meaningful political influence or where ultra-Marxist-Leninists might play a significant role. I had in mind not only, or even primarily, Latin America,” the ambassador recalled; “Chile seemed to share Western European political structure and outlook, so I spoke then to Washington of France, Italy, Spain—even Japan.”⁵⁸

Kissinger worried that the Chilean model of a democratic road to Marxist revolution could also have a harmful effect on Latin American politics. One of his staff assistants later recalled that “Henry saw Allende as being a far more dangerous threat than Castro. If Latin America ever became unraveled, it would never happen with a Castro. Allende was a living example of democratic social reform in Latin America. All kinds of cataclysmic events rolled around, but Chile scared him. He talked about Eurocommunism the same way he talked about Chile early on. Chile scared him.”⁵⁹

According to another aide, “Henry thought that Allende might lead an anti-U.S. move in Latin America more effectively than Castro, just because it *was* the democratic route to power.”⁶⁰ It was this aspect of the Chilean situation that the U.S. intelligence community found to be the most worrisome. An interagency intelligence assessment produced three days after the Chilean election warned that although the United States had “no vital national interests within Chile,” an Allende government “would . . . create considerable political and psychological costs. . . . Hemispheric cohesion would be threatened by the challenge that an Allende government would pose to the [Organization of American States], and by the reactions that it would create in other countries.” “An Allende victory,” the assessment concluded, “would represent a definite psychological set-back to the U.S. and a definite psychological advance for the Marxist idea.”⁶¹ Nixon personally underscored the dangerous effect that the Chilean model could have on international politics when, three days after Allende’s inauguration, he told the National Security Council: “Our main concern in Chile is the prospect that [Allende] can consolidate himself and the picture projected to the world will be his success.”⁶²

The available evidence suggests, then, that the United States intervened in Chile in 1970 not for reasons of economic self-interest or military defense but because the Nixon administration viewed Salvador Allende as a dangerous challenge to its international credibility and strategic goals. The White House believed that it had to respond aggressively to what it regarded as a new communist “test” in Chile if it hoped to end the Vietnam War “with honor” and persuade the Soviets and Chinese to participate in a new global “structure for peace.” The administration feared that a perception of U.S. weakness in Chile would damage its credibility in the eyes of communist bloc governments and hinder its “efforts to build a new and ultimately more peaceful pattern of international relations.” “If . . . we are ac-

commodating” to Allende, Kissinger told his Senior Review Group shortly after Unidad Popular’s election victory, “we risk giving the appearance of weakness or of indifference to the establishment of a Marxist government in the Hemisphere.” “If [Allende] is inaugurated,” Korry advised from Santiago, “the United States has admitted its impotence.” The communist world respected “power and strength,” not impotence, and as Kissinger put it, “displays of American impotence in one part of the world . . . would inevitably erode our credibility in other parts of the world.” In the national security adviser’s evocative metaphor, the administration simply could not afford to look like “a sort of mother hen clucking nervous irrel-evancies from the sidelines”—especially not in the middle of its “most dangerous and decisive period” in office.⁶³

Administration officials likewise believed that the mere example of an Allende government could disrupt the East–West balance of power and endanger their plans to forge a more stable relationship with the communist bloc. In their view, the Chilean model had the capability of undermining the Western Alliance—first by fueling the political momentum of communist parties in Western Europe, with potentially disastrous consequences for NATO, and second by damaging the inter-American system, eroding “hemispheric cohesion,” and possibly leading to Latin America’s eventual “unraveling.” Nixon and Kissinger believed that a “true relaxation in [Cold War] tensions” required “Western unity”—because communists compromised only when confronted by strength. There consequently could be little hope for successful negotiations with Moscow, Beijing, or Hanoi if the U.S. alliance system appeared to be falling apart in Western Europe and Latin America. To an administration that already considered itself under assault from communist “tests” and “challenges,” Allende’s government was an unacceptable threat to the stable new international system that Nixon was seeking to construct as his great historical legacy.

There was also a domestic political dimension to the intervention. More primal even than Nixon’s hope for great achievements in international affairs was his desire to be a two-term president. As one of his presidential biographers writes, “Nixon began to think about his second term almost as soon as he took office” in 1969. Kissinger recalls that “[Nixon had three goals] as he entered the White House: “to win [reelection in 1972] by the biggest electoral landslide in history; to be remembered as a peacemaker; and to be accepted by the ‘Establishment’ as an equal.”⁶⁴

From the start, Nixon understood that his reelection prospects hinged on his ability to extricate the United States from Vietnam. Domestic opposition to the war had forced Lyndon Johnson to abandon plans to seek a second full term in 1968, and Nixon was already being warned as he entered office that he too would be a one-term president unless he found a way to end the war quickly. His early re-

liance, however, on military escalation to push Hanoi toward a negotiated settlement not only failed to achieve the desired result—it triggered massive and increasingly violent antiwar protests at home. By mid-1970, the White House was literally besieged by antiwar demonstrators, and the president and his advisers found themselves embroiled in what they regarded as a virtual civil war in the United States. In September, when Chile added itself to the list of the administration's worries, Nixon's public-approval rating dropped below 50 percent for the first time in his twenty months as president. It was clear, he told Kissinger, that the war in Vietnam was "sapping his domestic support and therefore had to be ended before 1972."⁶⁵

In the days leading up to his decision to intervene in Chile, Nixon was focusing heavily on his 1972 reelection strategy. On September 12, 1970, according to White House Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman, the president ordered his aides to "gear everything to '72, reelection and winning Congress." According to Haldeman, Nixon spent the morning of September 15—the day he ordered the intervention—working on his "basic political approach" to reelection in 1972.⁶⁶

Chile complicated his plans. A Marxist takeover of a second Latin American country would increase the already embattled president's political vulnerability. Nixon had built his political career on what Kissinger characterizes as "a tough, occasionally strident anti-Communism"; from his 1946 campaign for the House of Representatives onward, he had routinely accused his campaign opponents of weakness in combating communism. He believed that the reason he had lost the 1960 presidential election was because, as he wrote in his memoirs, "Kennedy conveyed the image . . . that he was tougher on Castro and communism than I was"; according to Kissinger, "Nixon was determined that no one would ever be able to make this charge again." During the early 1960s, he had heaped criticism on the Kennedy administration for its handling of Cuba—for having "goofed on an invasion [and] given the Soviets squatters' rights in our backyard." Thanks to Kennedy's policies, he charged in 1963, "Cuba is western Russia, and the rest of Latin America is in deadly peril."⁶⁷ Now, in 1970, Nixon feared that it was payback time—the Democrats would blame him for having "lost Chile," for having been "asleep at the wheel" "on his watch."⁶⁸ To make matters worse, he knew that he was exceedingly vulnerable to such charges. Throughout 1969 and early 1970, his administration had taken no action to prevent Allende's election, despite recommendations from Korry and the CIA that covert anti-Allende blocking efforts should be initiated. According to Kissinger, the reason Nixon was "beside himself" when he received the news of Allende's election victory was because "for over a decade he had lambasted Democratic administrations for permitting the establishment of Communist power in Cuba. And now what he perceived—not wrongly—as another Cuba had come into being during his own Administration. . . . This explains the virulence of his reaction and his insistence on doing something, *anything*, that would reverse the previous neglect."⁶⁹

The National Security Council reinforced Nixon's political concerns. On November 3, 1970—the day Allende was inaugurated—it warned that "the U.S. Congress and knowledgeable sectors of the public will follow with interest the political course which Chile takes internally and its attitudes and actions with regard to the United States. . . . As the actions of the Allende government become more overtly hostile to U.S. interests . . . we may expect adverse reaction by some sectors of the U.S. public, press, and Congress to the 'establishment of another communist government in the hemisphere.'" Failure on the administration's part "to take any steps" against Allende, the NSC concluded, "would leave the initiative in his hands, discourage opposition to Allende in Chile, weaken our hemisphere leadership, and create serious problems with public and Congressional opinion in the United States."⁷⁰ The following morning, Kissinger defined the danger in terms that went to the heart of Nixon's fears: "Chile," the national security adviser told White House aide Dwight Chapin, "could end up being the worst failure in our administration—'our Cuba' by 1972."⁷¹

And so Richard Nixon intervened in Chile because he viewed Allende's Unidad Popular government as a threat not only to his foreign-policy goals but to his domestic political ambitions as well. It was this dual nature of the threat that Ambassador Korry highlighted in his September 5 cable to Washington informing the administration of Allende's election victory. "Chile," he wrote, "voted calmly to have a Marxist-Leninist state, the first nation in the world to make this choice freely and knowingly. . . . It will have the most profound effect on Latin America and beyond; we have suffered a grievous defeat; the consequences will be domestic and international. . . ." According to Kissinger, Nixon underlined the italicized sentence on his copy of Korry's cable.⁷²

Finally, Nixon's decision to intervene was also influenced by the lobbying efforts of Allende's Chilean political enemies. A few days after Allende's election, Agustín Edwards, Chile's "most powerful businessman," called on Ambassador Korry in Santiago and asked whether the United States intended to "do anything militarily—directly or indirectly" to block Allende's accession to power. Korry's answer was no. Edwards then traveled to Washington, D.C., on what a Nixon administration official later described as "a last-minute effort" to recruit U.S. support for a plan to prevent Allende from taking office. In the United States, the wealthy Chilean capitalist—whose business empire included the conservative *El Mercurio* publishing chain, Chile's largest granary, a major poultry business, and a Pepsi Cola bottling plant—was the houseguest of PepsiCo chairman Donald Kendall, one of Nixon's "closest friends and largest campaign contributors." On September 14, Kendall visited the White House and personally conveyed Edwards' thoughts on the Chilean political situation to Nixon. The following morning, September 15, Edwards was granted a one-hour breakfast meeting with Kissinger and Attor-

ney General John Mitchell and a separate meeting with CIA director Richard Helms. Although the details of his conversations with Nixon's senior advisers remain classified, he likely warned them that Allende was "a Soviet dupe" who would transform Chile into "another Cuba." The suggested courses of action that he urged the U.S. government to consider bore a striking resemblance to the Track I and Track II covert operations that the administration subsequently implemented. A few hours after the meetings, Nixon ordered the intervention—and Edwards' input clearly had a significant impact on his decision to do so. Helms later testified that he had the "impression" that the president took action on the fifteenth "because of Edwards' presence in Washington and what he heard from Kendall about what Edwards was saying about conditions in Chile and what was happening there." Kissinger goes further, stating frankly that Nixon was "triggered into action . . . by Augustin [*sic*] Edwards . . . who had come to Washington to warn of the consequences of an Allende takeover."⁷³

Edwards' lobbying activities were by no means an isolated phenomenon. Korry recalls being "propositioned by key Chileans anxious to involve the United States in hair-brained plots" against Allende. He later told a Senate subcommittee that "there were a great many Chileans who wanted the United States to do their bidding, a great many, and who were very active in Washington, who tried to manipulate the pressures on me in Chile. And in certain instances . . . they were very successful, indeed." "There were Chileans very anxious to involve us," he reiterated later in his testimony—"so many Chileans that were trying to entrap us, one way or another in this thing."⁷⁴

Korry also mentions a "provocative" and "highly inflammatory" anti-Allende letter that outgoing president Frei sent to Nixon "the week before" September 15.⁷⁵ The impact of the letter is unclear, but Frei subsequently played a significant role in shaping Nixon's policy toward Chile after Allende was sworn in as president. On November 3, the day of Allende's inauguration, the National Security Council produced an "Options Paper on Chile" that outlined several alternative courses of action available to the United States in dealing with Allende's government. Option D called for the Nixon administration to "maintain an outwardly correct but adversary posture, [and] adopt without delay economic, political and diplomatic measures designed to prevent Allende from consolidating his position." "This option," the NSC paper noted, "reflects the reported evaluation of the situation by ex-President Frei . . . that Chile is dead, without any future except as a fully Marxist state, and that the only miracle that might save it would be the incapacity of the government to handle the economic situation."⁷⁶ Option D became the basis of U.S. policy toward Chile from 1971 to the military coup of September 1973 that destroyed Allende and his Unidad Popular government.

Quietly, behind the scenes, Chile's political and economic elites worked to instigate a U.S. intervention and helped conceive the program of U.S. economic

destabilization that contributed to Allende's eventual demise. Richard Nixon ordered the U.S. intervention in Chile because he believed that core elements of his presidential agenda—a reduction in Cold War tensions, an honorable withdrawal from Vietnam, reelection in 1972—were at stake, but Allende's Chilean opponents played an influential background role in the affair.