

**Nixon's Foreign Policy in Chile:  
Economic Securities over Human Rights  
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Historians have often misunderstood Nixon's interest in Latin American countries such as Chile during his time in the Oval Office, declaring the region to be of little importance to the former US President.<sup>1</sup> Even Nixon himself once remarked "Latin America doesn't matter [...] people don't give one damn about Latin America [...] the only thing that matters in the world is Japan, China, Russia and Europe."<sup>2</sup> Yet throughout the 1990s and 2000s, the release of new tapes and transcripts has exposed Nixon's involvement in Latin America, particularly in Chile.

Documented conversations between Nixon, the Secretary of State, and other high-ranking officials indicate Nixon's willingness to manipulate Chilean politics in order to advance economic securities for the United States. Action was taken by Nixon to prevent the 1973 election of the Socialist Party of Chile under Salvador Allende, overthrow his government, and to support the subsequent Chilean military dictatorship under Augusto Pinochet. American intervention cost many Chilean lives, reduced human rights, and benefited only a select amount of the population, while in turn economically benefiting the United States. Nixon's attitude and policy towards Latin America should thereby not be remembered as uninterested or passive, but rather as active, aggressive, and destructive.

### **First Impressions**

In May 1958, Richard Nixon, then Vice President, embarked on a goodwill trip to Latin America. The Cold War was in full swing, and countries in Latin America were complaining that they needed economic assistance, instead of the arms which America was providing them in order to be able to extinguish communist forces. Many in Latin America believed that economic growth was more urgent than repelling communist influences. Nixon's trip was meant to clarify to these nations the advantages of receiving arms, as well as to discuss future plans for economic

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<sup>1</sup> Mark Atwood Lawrence, "History from Below: The United States and Latin America in the Nixon Years," In *Nixon in the World: American Foreign Relations, 1969-1977*, ed. Fredrik Logevall and Andrew Preston (Logevall: Fredrik and Andrew Preston, 2008), 269.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

aid. The trip likely did not go as he expected. He engaged in angry confrontations with protest groups he encountered while passing through Uruguay and Bolivia, and on May 13<sup>th</sup>, his motorcade was stoned by a crowd in Venezuela.<sup>3</sup> This incident likely had a strong influence on how Nixon would regard Latin America when he became President in 1969.

### **American Views on Chile**

Between the time Nixon served as Vice President and his election to the Presidency, the Oval Office was occupied by the Democratic Party for two terms; first under John F. Kennedy, then Lyndon B. Johnson. For those eight years the attitude Washington had towards Latin America was characterized by John F. Kennedy's 'Alliance for Progress' initiative.<sup>4</sup> This campaign focused on sending aid to Latin American countries in hopes to boost economic progress and democracy.<sup>5</sup> The concern for stable democracy in Latin America had been part of America's Cold War anxiety dating back to the beginning of the war.<sup>6</sup> The belief for Kennedy was that financial support for infrastructure would spark economic growth, which would in turn improve the livelihood of Latin Americans. Kennedy was confident that once the livelihood of citizens improved, stable democracy in Latin American countries would flourish. However, by the end of Johnson's administration, this strategy failed to produce the results that Kennedy had originally desired.<sup>7</sup> The stability Kennedy had originally believed would follow the financial aid never came. Johnson grew impatient waiting for the aid to produce stability, and instead chose to back military coup d'états in Brazil, Bolivia and Argentina as an alternative to achieve it. Along with his previous impressions, this new approach for hemispheric security would be a strong influence on Nixon's strategy towards Latin American policy by the time he became president. In regards to the military dictatorships in Brazil and the Dominican Republic, Nixon exclaimed (to the Gulf-Western Chairman Charles Bluhdorn): "I like them...not because they're dictatorships, but because they're friends of the United States... Friends of the United States will

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<sup>3</sup> Tad Szulc, "Vice President Unhurt As Furious Crowds Halt Reception," *New York Times*, May 14, 1958.

<sup>4</sup> Lawrence, "History from Below: The United States and Latin America in the Nixon Years," 271.

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>6</sup> Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger: Partners in Power* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 243.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 271.

be rewarded... Enemies of the United States will be punished!”<sup>8</sup> A socialist Chile under Salvador Allende fell under the latter category.

### **Action on Allende**

As audio tapes from the Nixon archive released to the public in 1997 reveal, Nixon and Kissinger tried to stop Allende from being elected President of Chile. In a telephone conversation on March 23, 1972, Nixon confirms to Press Secretary Ronald Ziegler that Edward M. Korry, the American Ambassador in Chile, “had received instructions to do anything short of a Dominican type [intervention].”<sup>9</sup> The intervention being referred to was the occupation of the Dominican Republic by a combination of American troops and right-wing militants in order to overthrow the democratically elected Juan Bosch, as ordered by President Johnson in 1965. The March 23 tape also expresses Nixon’s frustration when Korry didn’t follow through on his instructions. Nixon exclaims: “he just failed, the son-of-a-bitch. That’s his main problem. He should have kept Allende from getting in.”<sup>10</sup> Furthermore, the tape reveals the efforts made to cover up the leaking of an International Telephone and Telegraph (ITT) memo to the public in which Korry confessed he was instructed to prevent Allende from being elected:

Nixon: What did you—Have you said anything, Ron, with regard to the ITT  
and Chile? How did you handle it?

Ziegler: The State Department dealt with that today.

Nixon: Oh, they did?

Ziegler: Yes, sir.

Nixon: What did they do? Deny it?

Ziegler: They denied it.<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>8</sup> Nixon Tape Audio - Conversation No. 523-004, Date: June 16, 1971, Time: 3:40 – 4:30 p.m. Participants: Nixon, Gulf-Western Chairman Charles Bluhdorn, John D. Ehrlichman, and Peter G. Peterson <http://nixontapeaudio.org/chile/523-004.pdf> (last accessed 25 March, 2011).

<sup>9</sup> White House Audio Tape, President Richard M. Nixon and White House Press Secretary Ron Zeigler, March 23, 1972 [http://nixontapes.org/pdd/1972-03-01\\_31.pdf](http://nixontapes.org/pdd/1972-03-01_31.pdf) (last accessed 28 March 2011).

<sup>10</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*

Further information about this incident leaked to the public by Jack Anderson in the Washington Post based on files he received which were stolen from the ITT.<sup>12</sup> These files exposed the plot between the ITT and the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) to “plunge the Chilean economy into chaos and thus bring about a military uprising that would keep Allende out of power.”<sup>13</sup> Jack Anderson’s articles spurred demonstrations in Chile, resulting in the formation of a committee to investigate the issue.<sup>14</sup> The United States formed a similar committee, but waited until after the 1972 elections to publish its findings.<sup>15</sup> It is evident that Nixon went at great lengths to try to prevent Allende from being elected, and also from trying to conceal this information from the public.

### **Allende’s Nationalism and American Economic Interests**

Efforts were made to block Allende from office due to the impact his policies would have on American economic interests in Chile as well as fears that these policies would spread to other countries in Latin America. Allende campaigned on “a new land reform and a complete nationalization of copper, with redistributive measures, such as wage policies and taxes, and with welfare state-type policies, such as the creation of a universal security system and a universal health care system.”<sup>16</sup> These nationalist policies opposed neoliberal policies espoused by the Chicago school of economics, which believed in the “necessity to reduce the government’s role in economic activity to a subsidiary, minimal role.”<sup>17</sup> Allende’s policies proposed barriers to trade which would in effect prevent American economic interests in the region. These policies concerned Nixon and Kissinger for a second reason as well: Chile would be participating in an ideology parallel to that of the Soviet Union, which could potentially lead to an alliance. Nixon and Kissinger can be heard expressing some of these concerns in a recorded White House tape

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<sup>12</sup> Mark Falcoff, *Modern Chile, 1970-1989: A Critical History* (New Brunswick, U.S.A.: Transaction, 1989), 199.

<sup>13</sup> Jack Anderson, “ITT Pledged Millions to Stop Allende,” *The Washington Post*, March 22 1972.

<sup>14</sup> Falcoff, 199.

<sup>15</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>16</sup> Silvia Borzutzky, *Vital Connections: Politics, Social Security, and Inequality in Chile* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 2002), 124-125.

<sup>17</sup> Luigi Manzetti, *Neoliberalism, Accountability, and Reform Failures in Emerging Markets: Eastern Europe, Russia, Argentina, and Chile in Comparative Perspective* (Pennsylvania: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2009), 208.

on June 11, 1971, where Nixon firmly states that if they do not take action on Allende “it’s going to encourage others to go and do likewise.”<sup>18</sup>

Kissinger played a significant role in encouraging Nixon to take action in Chile. To heighten the anxiety Nixon felt towards Allende, Kissinger selectively passed along memos of the state officials who shared similar concerns. When the U. S. Military attaché in Paris warned Kissinger, “we must ensure that [Chile] is neither turned against us nor taken over by those who threaten our vital national interests,” he immediately forwarded it to the President.<sup>19</sup> In a memorandum to the President on November 5, 1970, Kissinger himself emphasised “a successful elected Marxist government in Chile would surely have an impact on—and precedent value for—other parts of the world...the imitative spread of similar phenomena elsewhere would in turn significantly affect the world balance and our own position in it.”<sup>20</sup>

Regardless of whether or not Kissinger’s efforts can be claimed to have made an impact, Nixon was convinced that Allende’s election would be a disaster. In a meeting with Kissinger and Chief of Staff H. R. Haldeman held on the morning of June 11, 1971, Nixon remarked that many of Allende’s actions were “just like Hitler.”<sup>21</sup> However, despite the efforts made by both Kissinger and Nixon, Salvador Allende was elected President of Chile on September 11, 1970. The fears of an elected Allende and his policies which had been expressed between high ranking members of the U. S. Government had now become exacerbated. The alarmist attitude held by the White House while Allende was a mere candidate heightened the urgency for action once he took office.

### **Augusto Pinochet: A More Suitable Leader**

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<sup>18</sup> White House Audio Tape, President Richard M. Nixon and White House press secretary Ron Zeigler, June 11, 1971 <http://nixontapeaudio.org/chile/517-020.pdf> (last accessed 25 March 2011).

<sup>19</sup> Robert Dallek, *Nixon and Kissinger* (New York: HarperCollins, 2007), 238.

<sup>20</sup> Central Intelligence Agency, “Hostile Intent: U.S. Covert Operations in Chile, 1964-1974” <https://www.cia.gov/library/center-for-the-study-of-intelligence/csi-publications/csi-studies/studies/vol52no3/hostile-intent-u.s.-covert-operations-in-chile.html> (last accessed 25 March, 2011).

<sup>21</sup> White House Audio Tape, President Richard M. Nixon and White House press secretary Ron Zeigler, June 11, 1971 <http://nixontapeaudio.org/chile/517-020.pdf> (last accessed 25 March 2011).

Nixon and Kissinger found the means for achieving their goals in General Pinochet of the Chilean military. General Pinochet was a high ranking, power hungry member of the Chilean army.<sup>22</sup> When the U.S. and the Chilean economic elite proposed to support him if he were to overthrow Allende, he immediately agreed.<sup>23</sup> The economic elite in Chile also supported Pinochet, knowing that he would reverse many of Allende's nationalist policies which encouraged redistribution of their property.<sup>24</sup> The deal then was to the benefit of all three parties involved: the economic elite of Chile saw it as a way to regain their wealth, the United States saw it as a way to open Chile's markets and intimidate other leftist countries, and Pinochet saw it as a means to get the position he long desired.

On September 11, 1973, General Pinochet took the presidency by force; the Allende government was dissolved and banned, while Allende and over 100 others were killed in the process.<sup>25</sup> Many of these facts came to light after the U.S. Senate investigation after Watergate revealed the extent of the involvement of the White House, but were mostly kept to United States officials at the time. Immediately following the coup, Kissinger tried at lengths to convince U. S. officials that the U. S. should continue to support the Pinochet regime. Kissinger organized a Secretary Staff meeting a few short weeks after the overthrow, in order to clarify the American position on Chile. He told those who were present: "we should understand our policy—that however unpleasant they act, this government is better for us than Allende was...we shouldn't support moves against them."<sup>26</sup> It is evident that his concern was not over the violent activity Pinochet engaged in to obtain the presidency, but more over what Chile's policies meant for America. Years later, Kissinger insisted to the same crowd that they should continue to aid Pinochet's regime, in spite of the many human rights violations that were continually brought forth.<sup>27</sup>

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<sup>22</sup> Roger Burbach, *The Pinochet Affair: State Terrorism and Global Justice* (London: Zed Books, 2003), 31.

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*, 45.

<sup>24</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>25</sup> Latin America Bureau, *Chile: The Pinochet Decade* (London: Latin America Bureau, 1983), 4.

<sup>26</sup> National Archives – Secretary's Staff Meeting, October 1, 1973.

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB110/chile03.pdf> (last accessed 25 March 2011).

<sup>27</sup> National Archives – Secretary's Staff Meeting, September 29, 1975.

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB110/chile08.pdf> (last accessed 25 March 2011).

Beginning in December 1974, efforts were made by Senator Edward Kennedy to respond to the human rights violations by restricting US aid to the Pinochet regime to 10 million dollars. During this period Kissinger played a key role in damage control, as can be seen in the minutes of the three secretary staff meetings occurring in December 1974. The question was raised: “what are the options going to be for Chile to overthrow the military—to bring a government in that’s going to be extremely hostile for us, in all probability? ...we’re concerned about it.”<sup>28</sup> When Mr. Rogers expressed to Kissinger that human rights violations were in fact much higher in Chile than other parts of Latin America, Kissinger responded: “well, I think consequences could be [more] serious if we cut them off from military aid.”<sup>29</sup> To this, Rogers replied: “There’s no question about it.”<sup>30</sup> On what grounds these thoughts and assumptions of greater human violations were based is unclear. What is certain is that they provided moral justification for rejecting Kennedy’s proposal and maintaining a high level of support for a regime which supported neoliberal policies, which would greatly benefit the American economy as well as the economic elite of Chile.

Despite its economic success, the benefits of neoliberalism were accompanied by negative effects on various industries, such as health care, textiles, and water rights. The textile industry is a strong example: once Pinochet came into power he implemented neoliberal principles by dropping the tariff on textiles drastically, allowing foreign competition to overtake Chile’s market and leaving the majority of textile workers unemployed.<sup>31</sup> The textile workers called out to the Pinochet regime for support in order to save their jobs and their country’s textile industry, but Pinochet refused, insisting on the benefits of the applied economic sanctions, and pointing to the new low prices of textiles.<sup>32</sup> The health care system also became to a large extent privatized due to neoliberal policies, and those who could not afford to pay for it no longer had

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<sup>28</sup> National Archives – Secretary’s Staff Meeting, December 3, 1974

<http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB110/chile05.pdf> (last accessed 27 March 2011).

<sup>29</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>30</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>31</sup> Peter Winn, “No Miracle for Us: The Textile Industry in the Pinochet Era, 1973-1998,” In *Victims of the Chilean Miracle: Workers and Neoliberalism in the Pinochet Era, 1973-2002* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2004), 129.

<sup>32</sup> *Ibid.*, 128.

access to the same care they did previously.<sup>33</sup> This was a huge issue for many Chileans in the mining industry, who were reporting high rates of tuberculosis at the time and could no longer receive adequate treatment.<sup>34</sup> Another result of neoliberal policies in Chile was the privatization of water, which classified water as “separate from land,” thereby denying property owners the right to the water their property was on.<sup>35</sup> This was an extreme benefit to the few wealthy business owners, who were able to gain a monopoly on water sources, but resulted in many small farmers losing access to water for their crops. Neoliberal policies implemented by the Pinochet regime, while benefiting the economic elite, were clearly ruinous for many Chileans.

## Conclusion

Along with the deaths caused by the military coup during the overthrow of Allende’s government and the direct human violations that occurred under the Pinochet regime, the negative social outcomes which occurred in Chile under the Pinochet regime can also be seen as a direct result of the decisions made in the White House by President Richard Nixon and his Secretary of State Henry Kissinger. The overthrow of a democratically elected President was justified on the grounds of the fear of the spread of communism as well as the economic gains which occurred in the years that followed. Although some have remarked that Nixon and Kissinger held “exceedingly modest ambitions” in Latin America, the social outcomes of their actions in Chile demand a more significant recognition of their activity there.<sup>36</sup> When considering the experience of Chile, Nixon’s policy is seen as aggressive, lethal, and socially destructive, and his foreign policy towards Latin America ought to be remembered as such.

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<sup>33</sup> Joan E. Paluzzi, “Intersections or Fault Lines? Chile’s Free National Tuberculosis Treatment Program Within a Privatizing Health System,” In *Lost in the Long Transition: Struggles for Social Justice in Neoliberal Chile* (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 69.

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid.*, 66.

<sup>35</sup> Jessica Budds, “The 1981 Water Code: The Impacts of Private Tradable Water Rights on Peasant and Indigenous Communities in Northern Chile,” In *Lost in the Long Transition: Struggles for Social Justice in Neoliberal Chile*, (Lanham: Lexington Books, 2009), 42.

<sup>36</sup> Lawrence, “History from Below: The United States and Latin America in the Nixon Years,” 269.



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