

CIA Machinations in Chile in 1970

CIA Machinations in Chile in 1970

Reexamining the Record

Kristian C. Gustafson

From *Studies in Intelligence*, Vol. 47, No. 3, 2003 - Unclassified Edition

<http://www.cia.gov/csi/studies/vol47no3/>

Editor's Note: Mr. Gustafson received the Studies in Intelligence Walter L. Pforzheimer Award for this article in 2002. The prize is given to the graduate or undergraduate student who submitted the best paper on an intelligence-related subject during the preceding year.

*

From 1970 to 1973, the United States government was involved in overt and covert actions against the elected government of Chile led by Marxist Salvador Allende. Unfolding events during these politically tumultuous years included the death of Chilean Minister of Defense René Schneider in October 1970. Ultimately, Allende was overthrown and replaced by Gen. Augusto Pinochet. The initial history of this period, recorded in the 1970s and early 1980s, told of a US government that abused its power and betrayed its principles. Public reaction was universally negative. This interpretation of events has affected the conduct and perception of American intelligence activities ever since. [1]

A generation has now passed and it is time to reexamine this “accepted” version of events. Recently, the US government posted thousands of declassified documents to its on-line “Chile Collection.” [2] These newly available resources allow a more candid—and realistic—look into the actions and thoughts of the CIA agents and officers involved in those controversial operations. This study focuses on CIA covert action during the six weeks following Allende’s victory at the polls in mid-September 1970. While the activities of the CIA may not always be excused, they can at least be better understood.

Genesis

So sure were senior US officials that Salvador Allende and his coalition would be defeated in the September 1970 election, as he had been three times previously, that, despite CIA warnings, they were caught off-guard when he won a plurality. Undeterred by the voters' preference, President Richard Nixon delivered a clear and forceful Directive calling for expanded CIA operations in Chile. In the weeks between Allende's election and his inauguration planned for 3 November, the CIA actively sought to foment a coup in Chile. Washington was unequivocal about its desire to keep Allende from power.

American actions against the Allende government occurred in what Nixon's National Security Advisor, Henry Kissinger, called the "Autumn of Crises." [3] The Soviet Union was actively threatening American national security in several different arenas. Soviet missiles and technicians had been moved into Egypt. The rest of the Middle East was in chaos—Israeli attacks against its Arab neighbors were increasing daily, and Syria had attacked its supposed ally, Jordan. At the beginning of September, a large Soviet flotilla had arrived in Cienfuegos, Cuba: There was suspicion that the Soviets had designs on this harbor as a new submarine base in the Western Hemisphere. At a more global level, Washington was struggling to maintain momentum in the negotiations for the first Strategic Arms Limitation Treaty.

It was in this framework of global power plays between the Soviet Union and the United States that the White House had to deal with the election of a Marxist-oriented government in Chile. On 15 September 1970, President Nixon called Kissinger, Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) Richard Helms, and Attorney General John Mitchell into the Oval Office to provide executive guidance for US policy toward Chile and Allende. William Colby—then Deputy Director, later Director, of the CIA—noted that "Nixon was furious" and was convinced that an Allende presidency would ensure the spread of Cuban President Fidel Castro's communist revolution to Chile and the rest of Latin America. [4] He wanted to prevent Allende from being inaugurated. The message he delivered at the meeting reflected his anger. The handwritten minutes taken by DCI Helms are revealing:

One in 10 chance, perhaps,

but save Chile:

Worth Spending

Not concerned risks involved

No involvement of Embassy

\$10,000,000 available, more

if necessary

full-time job—best men

we have

game plan

make the economy scream

48 hours plan of action. [5]

Helms, understanding the import of the President's statements, commented: "If I ever carried a marshal's baton in my knapsack out of the Oval Office, it was that day." [6] The Administration moved quickly to implement the Presidential Directive. Kissinger was to oversee the project, which was to be called "Track II" to differentiate it from the ongoing diplomatic and related efforts to thwart communist influence in Chile, known as "Track I."

When Allende's candidacy was announced in early 1970, the State Department had developed a policy to try to dampen Marxist electoral prospects. This approach—Track I—primarily involved efforts by the US Ambassador and his diplomatic staff to hinder Allende through the manipulation of Chilean congressmen and senators within the framework of the Chilean constitution. At the time, the State Department made a conscious decision to exclude the CIA from the planning and execution of the policy, because it believed that the CIA's warnings of impending electoral defeat for Chile's centrist parties were exaggerated. The CIA, for its part, thought that the State Department did not have a clear understanding of Chilean politics and the nature of the Eastern Bloc threat posed by a Marxist state in the Americas. Such disagreements between the

CIA and the State Department would be a hallmark of American operations in Chile, and would continue until Allende was overthrown in 1973.

As time went on, Track I expanded to encompass a wide range of political, diplomatic, psychological, and economic policies, as well as covert operations designed to bring about the conditions that would encourage Chileans to stage a coup. The parallel secret approach of Track II involved more direct efforts to prompt Chileans to stage an immediate coup. Both paths aimed at the same policy objective—the removal of Allende—but they differed in their approach, means, and timing. On the day following the Oval Office meeting, William V. Broe, chief of the CIA's Western Hemisphere Division, circulated the first internal memo related to the new Directive. It recapped the President's orders, indicated that the Departments of State and Defense were to be excluded from the planning (removing the US ambassador to Chile and his defense attaché from the loop), and appointed the CIA's director of covert operations, Thomas Karamessines, to head the project. [7] While the removal of the other government agencies seems extreme, it was viewed as necessary to the secrecy of the operation and was within the President's authority with regard to covert activities. [8] The first Track II situation report, issued on 17 September, confirmed that the command structure for the Chile project had been established and that units would “operate under the cover of the [deletion] 40 Committee approval of 14 September for political action and the probing for military possibilities to thwart Allende.” [9]

The Presidential Directive had made it clear that the CIA was to do what it needed to do to prevent an Allende administration. The precise parameters of such action are not yet in the public domain. Helms later commented to a Senate committee that he did not believe that assassination was within the guidelines given to him by the President, “and I had made that clear to my fellows.” [10]

With marching orders from the White House, the CIA sent four “false-flag” officers to Chile, starting on 27 September. [11] They were to get in touch with Chilean military personnel, a task considered too hot for locally based CIA personnel. [12] With the assistance of these false-flag officers, the CIA made 21 contacts with officers in both the military and the Carabineros (the Chilean national police) from 5 to 20 October 1970. When contacted, “Those Chileans who were inclined to stage a coup were given assurances of strong support at the highest levels of the US government” [13] According to available records, the wisdom and legality of this action, questionable today, was not disputed at

the time.

The Chilean Military

Finding Chilean officers in favor of a coup was not an easy task. The officers of the Chilean armed forces were largely drawn from the middle class and, as such, were conservative and anti-Allende. Nonetheless, as an institution, the military was strongly “constitutionalist,” a stand championed by Gen. René Schneider Chereau, who had become the commander-in-chief of the Chilean Armed Forces in October 1969. [14] Underscoring the apolitical nature of the institution, the Chilean constitution describes the Army as a “non-deliberative body.” [15] In May 1970, during the election campaign, Schneider had told the newspaper *El Mercurio* that the Army would respect the constitutional process and make no move at intervention. [16] Although this “Schneider Doctrine” of non-intervention angered many in the staunchly conservative military because of Allende’s socialist platform, that anger did not necessarily equate to readiness to take action. [17]

A sobering consideration was the possibility that a coup attempt could trigger mass protests, street violence, or even civil war, given Allende’s strong base of support. To thwart such violence and secure a post-coup government, incipient plotters assessed that the military would need to act as a whole to rally behind the new leaders. Potential plotters who were contacted by US operatives reported that their commander-in-chief, Gen. Schneider, “will only agree to military intervention if forced to do so.” [18] They concluded, therefore, that Schneider had to be convinced to join the pro-interventionist camp soon. If he persisted in his constitutionalist stance, he would have to be removed from his position, in order to allow the military to intervene against the installation of an Allende government.

The Ambassador’s Perspective

The US Ambassador, Edward Korry, was aware of a long history of mini-plotting in the Chilean military and did not put much stock in the chances for effective action against Allende. The outgoing Chilean president, Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei, had tried the patience of many conservative army officers, and plotting had been rife within the military during his tenure. [19] Mutinies and small revolts had become a subject of concern, made more pressing by the revolt of the “Tacna” tank regiment—ostensibly over soldiers’ pay—in October 1969. During the “Tacnazo” rebellion, several generals had fled

the country or had been removed from command after being accused of coup plotting, among them Gen. Roberto Viaux, the alleged leader, who was forced into retirement. [20]

After Allende's election, scheming continued. A CIA report of 26 September 1970 noted that a number of former Chilean army officers were attempting to infiltrate leftist groups in the hopes of conducting terrorist acts that would compel an anti-communist crackdown by Frei and the Army. Others were working in primarily civilian rightist groups that had the same aim. The CIA observed: "President Frei taking no direct part in planning, but close supporters such as Perez [Zujovic] said to be acting in his name." [21]

Was everyone plotting against Allende? Amb. Korry doubted it. The Ambassador concurred that the Chilean military would need to act as a whole if military intervention were to succeed; simultaneously, however, he doubted that such coordinated action was possible. He reported to Washington, a full month before the beginning of Track II: "An attempt to rob Allende of his triumph by, say, a General Viaux, who has a certain mystique within the army, would, in all likelihood, fail in a post-congressional decision period and be almost impossible post-inauguration" [22] By mentioning a specific name, Korry was trying to exorcise the influence of this particular individual, at the center of coup speculation, from the plans of many in Washington.

Within weeks of Allende's success at the polls, Korry sent a message to the Under Secretary of State about coup plotting within the Chilean Army. He outlined one particular plan unwittingly related by a young Chilean officer to a CIA co-optee, and concluded by saying:

... less precise but equally lurid information has been reaching us from many quarters and it usually proves to be nothing more than wishful thinking. This report must be considered in the same vein I would prefer that we ceased to check out all such reports and to be totally surprised by whatever might develop in the armed forces. In the present circumstances, it is a waste activity for all concerned. Hence I am instructing [CIA station] to desist from the normal efforts to learn of possible military moves. [23]

Ignorant of the Track II initiative, Korry warned both the in-country CIA team and the State Department that to promote a coup with the climate and personnel at hand was to court a failure as massive and damaging to American interests as

the Bay of Pigs. [24] This warning was ignored in Washington. Korry soon was demanding “Washington consultations, noting that all elements in the mission accept Allende’s presidency as assured.” [25]

Launching Track II

The six weeks between Allende's election and his inauguration was not a long time to begin with, and, given the need to ensure secrecy while attempting to infiltrate operatives and promote a coup, it became incredibly short. With almost no contacts at the beginning of the operation and little knowledge of the key players, the CIA officers in the field considered "Operation Fubelt," as Track II was officially titled, to be a "crash endeavour." [26]

With the Ambassador's influence sidelined by the Presidential Directive, the CIA's William Broe was now directing the planning against Allende. Pressure for success came from Kissinger and the President. With time short, CIA officers in Santiago went against their better judgment and opened communications with retired Gen. Viaux, as well as two serving officers, Gen. Camilo Valenzuela, who commanded the Santiago Garrison, and Gen. Vicente Huerta, a senior officer in the Carabinero. [27] These latter two did not have anything close to definite plans and so for the time being were kept on the side.

Viaux took the spotlight. Though viewed by many as an unstable fool, and though he was no longer in the military, a CIA assessment concluded that he had "extensive support among non-coms and junior officers." [28] Another memorandum pointed out that since the Chilean military was led by a man who respected the constitutionality of the Allende government, the servicemen lacked a serving general officer to centralize the plotting and "look to Gen. Viaux for inspiration." [29] As early as 23 September, the CIA was reporting that Viaux "was in touch with active duty army officers who may or may not decide to move." [30] They noted, however, that as a retired officer, no plan by Viaux could succeed without the help of the regular army.

With the false-flaggers now established and operating in Chile, and with the secret assistance of the US defense attachŽ, the CIA in Santiago set out to determine what real support Viaux had within the army. The answer came back within a few days: "COS [Chief of Station] met with [a false flag officer] who said he had talked with Gen. Viaux, and as a consequence is convinced that Viaux has no military support." [31] This was troubling to the CIA officers, who passed to their headquarters the opinion that Viaux was not only dangerously unstable, but likely to lead whatever forces he could muster into a premature action that would do the anti-Allende forces more harm than good. They decided

to stop working with Viaux for the time being: “Santiago station was advised to use whatever channel available to persuade Viaux to hold off his action until a more opportune moment Since a mini-coup (which is what Viaux is most likely to produce) would be counterproductive to our objective [name deleted] has been advised to do everything possible to prevent a Viaux move, at least for the time being.” [32]

Frustration Builds

The CIA in Chile turned its attention to Gen. Valenzuela. While his plans were not solid, as a serving officer he was at least in a position to command troops in a coordinated action, and he was deemed psychologically stable. [33] Direct contact was arranged:

2. CIA agent] will see Genl Camilo Valenzuela, if possible, on [date deleted] Oct and brief him along these lines [CIA agent] will take opportunity to caution Valenzuela about precipitate moves by Genl Viaux (of which Valenzuela possibly cognizant).

3. CIA false-flagger] who briefed COS evening [date del] Oct, promised attempt to contact Valenzuela [deleted] ... will ask aforementioned to dissuade Viaux, without RPT without promising Viaux USG support for any later move. (FYI: [COS] relieved to learn [CIA asset] not goading on Viaux, which [we] would view as height of folly).

4. Urge you do not convey impression that STA has sure-fire method of halting, let alone triggering coup attempts. [34]

The fourth paragraph of this message makes a point repeated often by the CIA agents on the ground: They were not puppet masters, capable of fully controlling the Chilean officers they contacted. The message had already been passed that the United States favored military intervention, but the Santiago CIA operatives did not want to bear responsibility for unfortunate results should a coup be led by a man such as Viaux:

If Viaux moves on his own and succeeds (which is a distinct possibility) then we face the unpleasant prospect that Viaux's junta will be an autocratic, nationalistic military government, which may not necessarily be pro-US. Accordingly, Viaux should still be considered only as an opportunity of last resort ... A Viaux Government, though preferable to Allende, would be a tragedy for Chile and for the free world. A Viaux coup would only produce a massive bloodbath. [35]

A bloodbath led by an uncontrollable and mentally unstable officer was not the aim of the mission, as the CIA understood it. In short, a rightwing government was not attractive to the CIA or to the US government, for it would ultimately be

counterproductive. Associating themselves with dictatorial and bloodthirsty regimes would do little to forward American efforts for increased influence in the region.

The US personnel writing cables at the time did not assume that thwarting Allende had to be violent. To the modern reader, “military intervention” implies violence. In the case of Chile, however, what the CIA officers were looking for was, in the first instance, not actually a coup. Rather, they sought some type of parliamentary subterfuge, where the military would declare a state of emergency and seize power temporarily, justifying the dissolution of the government in order to call new elections. Chileans called this a “white coup.” [36] The obstacle to this preferred outcome was “that army not as yet set to move and that Schneider Doctrine still conditions its reflexes.” [37]

Moreover, the United States was not going to run a coup for the Chileans. On 6 October, Viaux approached the CIA and asked for weapons to start an uprising—bizarrely, he wanted “paralyzing gas grenades.” [38] The CIA in Santiago “turned down the proposal categorically,” with the reason given that “[USG] would not provide arms if the golpe (coup) were to be made contingent on a favorable [US] reaction. [USG] insists that the decision to move must be a [Chilean] decision.” [39] This does not mean that a forceful coup was entirely out of the minds of the CIA at this point, for there were routine exhortations on the “seriousness of USG intent to attempt deny [the] presidency to Allende.” [40] The CIA wanted the Chileans to do it on their own, but found Viaux’s plans “to be totally inadequate.” [41]

Another problem with Viaux was his high profile as an anti-communist agitator. Having already led one military revolt, he was under constant scrutiny by the state security apparatus, which made clandestine contact by the Americans dangerous. “It station’s firm opinion that further contact with [name deleted] presents too great a risk potential and offers very little in return. Considering the way the [defense attachŽ]-Viaux relationship is unfolding we feel [attachŽ] contact not worth maintaining ... as we approach the 24th of October [Viaux] will just be too hot to handle.” [42] To make matters worse, the CIA knew that the Chilean Communist Party (PCCh) had agents infiltrated close to Viaux and his associates. It would be foolish of Washington to offer Viaux continued support if the PCCh would later be able to disclose American activities. [43] Viaux was a disaster waiting to happen and had to be kept at a distance.

While the CIA wanted to keep Viaux at arm's length, the pressure on Agency officers in Santiago to come up with a "solution" to the Allende problem was massive, as attested by many of the men who worked in and around the project. [44] The problem was that there was no viable candidate to take the lead. Viaux, clearly, was compulsive and uncontrollable, probably even anti-American. [45] Valenzuela and Huerta had no plans, no forces assembled, and were perhaps a bit scared of moving. But the White House (the "highest levels" [46]) was demanding a solution, a military solution, and "all other considerations are secondary." [47] Ê The Santiago CIA station sent back what can only be called a cynical reply. It is worth quoting at length:

1. Station has arrived at Viaux solution by process of elimination:

a. Alto Mando (high command) solution cannot be achieved ...

b. [Frei Solution] cannot be achieved ...

c. Regimental commander solution: Station ... lacks requisite leverage to pry loose most commanders from their instinctive obedience to Alto Mando directives ...

2. What can Viaux accomplish under optimum conditions? He can split armed forces ... fencesitters will watch tide of battle before engaging themselves on either side. Carnage would be considerable and prolonged, i.e., civil war. Under best of circumstances, armed forces will break up and create unpredictable situation ...

5. Above not intended to be exhaustive enumeration of some of key factors that ought to have bearing on your final determination. You have asked us to provoke chaos in Chile. Thru Viaux solution we provide you with formula for chaos which unlikely to be bloodless. To dissimulate US involvement will clearly be impossible. Station [CIA] team, as you know, has given most serious consideration to all plans suggested by HQs counterparts. We conclude that none of them stand even a remote chance of achieving [USG] objective. Hence, Viaux gamble, despite high risk factors, may commend itself to you." [48]

In three pages, the CIA COS in Santiago made dramatically clear the problems he was facing in trying to carry out a near-impossible task. Constructing a coup in a country where no one was willing to start the action was possible, but not if the United States wanted its involvement to remain secret, and certainly not if it

wanted the action to be bloodless. As far as the Santiago station was concerned, Viaux was a no-win on all counts. Some days later, Santiago sent another message to Langley: “Station would appreciate firm and realistic guidelines from headquarters on what objectives to pursue in further dealings with General Viaux.” [49]

Reality Sinks In

Following this cable, CIA Headquarters initiated a series of study papers looking more deeply into the implications of supporting Viaux. The conclusions were not optimistic—one paper was titled “The Coup that Failed: The Effects on Allende and his Political Posture.” [50] Reality was slowly sinking in at Langley and the White House:

In summary, there is little climate in Chile to encourage or sustain a military move at this time, but Gen. Viaux continues to try with his major problems apparently being: (a) a sure way of containing the high command, especially Gen. Schneider in the early hours of a coup attempt, and (b) a method of controlling the pro-Allende mobs which very probably would swarm through downtown Santiago in the event of a coup attempt. [51]

The bottom line was that a Viaux coup would almost certainly result in American embarrassment and a strengthening of Allende’s position. Inputs from both the CIA COS in Santiago and Amb. Korry made it clear that “Viaux did not have more than one chance in twenty—perhaps less—to launch a successful coup.” The point had been made, and the Track II staff, Kissinger included, came to the conclusion that “... a coup climate does not presently exist. [Karamessines] noted that the highly unpredictable Gen. Viaux is the only individual seemingly ready to attempt a coup and expressed the view that his chances of mounting a successful one were slight... . [Kissinger] observed that there presently appeared to be little the US can do to influence the Chilean situation one way or another. Those present concurred.” [52] This was acted upon the same day, and a directive was issued to the CIA in Santiago to cut off plotting with Viaux:

It was decided by those present that the Agency must get a message to Viaux warning him against precipitate action. In essence our message was to state: ‘We have reviewed your plans, and based on your information and ours, we come to the conclusion that your plans for a coup at this time cannot succeed. Failing, they may reduce your capabilities for the future. Preserve your assets ... the time will come when you with all your other friends can do something. You will continue to have our support.’ [53]

Many commentators have pointed out that this message does not truly “turn off”

the Viaux plotting or, as Kissinger has stated, end Track II plotting entirely. Subsequent messages, however, shed some light on this controversial issue. One particular piece of evidence is a memorandum Kissinger wrote to the President on 18 October 1970. This lengthy memorandum starts by stating: “It now appears certain that Allende will be elected president of Chile in the October 24 congressional run-off elections. He will be inaugurated November 3.” [54] It is clear that Kissinger accepted the reality—that no coup could occur in time—briefed to him by Amb. Korry and many other individuals involved in Chile. The next step, Kissinger stated, was “the formulation of a specific strategy to deal with an Allende government.” Further statements in the same memo indicate that this step should be taken because: “Our capacity to engineer Allende’s overthrow quickly has been demonstrated to be sharply limited.” [55] Having ordered the end to US involvement over the short term with the only individual actively plotting a coup, the executive took the next logical step of planning for a coherent policy toward an Allende government.

Best Laid Plans ...

While the White House was developing a new strategy for Chile, Viaux was continuing to solidify his plans. By 14 October, the CIA had learned that the Viaux group had decided that the best way for them to trigger a coup was to kidnap Gen. Schneider and remove him from Chile. [56] This would convince the Chilean military that chaos was just around the corner and, therefore, they should prevent Allende from taking power. By assuming power themselves to quell the “chaos,” they could open the way—under Chilean constitutional law—for new elections, which, it was assumed, Eduardo Frei would win. The kidnapping, the CIA learned, was set for 17 October “between 0200—0700.” [57]

Coincident with the White House’s decision to put Viaux on hold, a Chilean officer approached the United States requesting funds for a similar “kidnap Schneider” plan. Although it initially seemed possible that he was “fronting” for Viaux, the CIA concluded that he was not and decided to provide the individual with some funds to purchase weapons. [58] This was a last-ditch effort, and the Agency was told by another contact on the same day that “[Name deleted] believes that Viaux’s attempt to kidnap Schneider will not be made and now sees no possibility for anything to happen prior 24 October... [CIA agent] reminded [Chilean contact] that US stands ready to help with anything plotting elements may need.” The contact replied with an honesty that may have been the best

summary to date of the Chilean situation: “What we need,” he said, “is not money but a general with b***s.” [59]

The appropriately equipped general was not far away, as it turned out. A memorandum of 16 October noted that “coup rumblings within and outside the military have increased in recent days.” [60] Gen. Valenzuela, still unsure of the necessity for a coup, arranged for a meeting with Gen. Schneider on the evening of 16 October to attempt to convince the commander-in-chief of the need for the military to intervene in the political process. The “meeting ... turned out [to be a] complete fiasco.” [61] The following night, Valenzuela, now finally convinced of the necessity of direct action, sent a representative to meet with the US defense attachŽ in a dark corner of Santiago. The contact requested three submachine-guns and tear-gas grenades. Despite puzzlement over the need for these items, CIA Headquarters authorized Santiago to fill the request—they were delivered at 0200 hours on 22 October. [62]

Officers in Washington were not fully aware of the provenance of the Valenzuela plot. CIA Headquarters had several questions:

a. What happened between morning 17 October and evening 17 October to change [deleted] from despondency to measured optimism?

b. Who exactly is involved in coup attempt? [63]

As it turned out, the Valenzuela plot was almost the same as Viaux’s plan, which had been disclosed to the CIA on 14 October. Schneider would be kidnapped when leaving a stag party the evening of the 19th. Once abducted, he would be flown to Argentina. Simultaneously, Frei would resign and leave the country. The cabinet would also resign, and a junta led by an unnamed general would dissolve the congress. The CIA learned that Valenzuela was at pains to state to his fellow plotters that the dissolution of the congress would be their only “unconstitutional act.” [64] Gen. Viaux, although aware of the Valenzuela plot, was not involved, it turned out. And Viaux, himself, may even have been a target for arrest by the Carabineros in the aftermath of a Valenzuela coup, since they planned to use the kidnapping to “justify a move against leftist and rightist extremists.” [65]

The first attempt by the Valenzuela group to kidnap Schneider failed because his team “became nervous due to inexperience.” [66] A second attempt on the

following night also failed, and the CIA assured Valenzuela that “USG support for anti-Allende action continues.” [67] Valenzuela, for his part, assured the Americans that the Chilean military was still set to move. While assurances were being traded, the CIA concluded that “since Valenzuela’s group is apparently having considerable difficulty executing even the first step of its coup plan, the prospect for a coup succeeding or even occurring before 24 October now appears remote.” [68] There would be no kidnapping, no coup.

Unexpected Turn

But, suddenly, events deviated from the anticipated script: Only five hours after the machine guns were delivered to the Valenzuela group on 22 October, armed men ambushed Gen. Schneider on his way to work. Drawing his sidearm, Schneider was shot by the attackers, who were part of Viaux's gang. He died on the operating table on 25 October. The shooting occurred just 48 hours before Allende was to be confirmed in a congressional vote.

After the shooting, there was confusion among the CIA officers in Santiago, as well as a degree of hope. They were not entirely sure who had launched the attack, and whether it was a kidnapping attempt or an assassination attempt. They hoped that the action was the beginning of a move against Allende, but there was no evidence that this was going to occur. [69]

No coup immediately followed the shooting. On the morning of 24 October, an intelligence summary produced at Langley stated: "Yesterday, Gen. Viaux informed some of his followers that a military coup would be attempted during the early hours of 24 October ... [but] there has been thus far no indication that the conspirators intend to push on with their plans to overthrow the government." [70] The cable concluded: "It was agreed that given the short time span and the circumstances prevailing in Chile, a maximum effort has been achieved, and that now only Chileans themselves can manage a successful coup."

In Santiago, a state of emergency was imposed after the shooting. Viaux and his gang surrendered, fled, or were arrested. The military and the Carabineros were confined to barracks. Valenzuela was appointed "Jefe del Plaza for Law and Order," and one Gen. Prats filled the spot of the then still gravely injured Schneider. Allende's Unidad Popular (the communist front party) reacted immediately with public appeals to block any "counter-revolutionary" actions, and the resulting tension seemed to favor a coup. But the CIA still reported "Santiago is quiet." [71]

Whatever the intended outcome from the kidnapping/assassination, it ultimately increased the desire of the politicians and most of the military to ensure that the constitutional process was followed. Although Valenzuela was in a powerful position and could have taken over, the mood had changed so dramatically that

he did not make a move. On Saturday, 24 October, Allende's election as president was duly confirmed by the Chilean congress—with 153 votes in favor and only 42 votes either against or abstaining. [72] Attempts to prevent Allende from taking power had failed.

Examining the American Role

Although a successful military move against Allende had been unlikely from the start, the death of Gen. Schneider guaranteed the collapse of American hopes. Clearly Schneider's murder was not in the interests of the American government. Could they have prevented it, and, if so, did they make any efforts to do so?

What the Americans did and did not know becomes clear in the message traffic immediately following the murder. A cable of 22 October relates intelligence to the effect that Viaux's gang had been told that their coup attempt was to be carried out that day, and that it would be initiated by "something big" that would take place in the early morning hours. The cable continued by speculating, after the fact, that "the assassination attempt on General Schneider, Commander-in-Chief of the Army ... was very likely the 'something big' which the plotters hoped to use to initiate their coup efforts." [73]

The uncertainty of the CIA can be ascribed both to lack of contact with Viaux and a reduction in intelligence-gathering assets. The CIA had started to pull out its false-flag officers from Chile a week before Schneider's death, a move one would think unlikely if the Agency was aware of a specific coup attempt. A memo dated 19 October 1970 states: "[Co-optee] not at all sanguine re chances perverting (sic) Allende from taking office and stressed fact that abortive coup now could spell end to any chance of success in future ... [CIA agent] has done his work well and there are no further tasks for the false-flaggers at this time he will be instructed depart Santiago [del] October ..." [74] Moreover, as of 21 October, the COS in Santiago was developing post-inauguration asset-management plans. [75]

The record shows that the kidnapping took the station by surprise and that the CIA did not have absolute knowledge of Schneider's attackers. A cable, written on 3 November 1970, discussed a review of the kidnapping attempt by the COS in Santiago, which stated that a particular Chilean contact "confirmed neither he nor [name sec del] involved in Schneider assassination." [76] If the CIA station was still discussing who may or may not have been involved in the attack, and was seeking confirmation from its Chilean contacts, that indicates they did not have firm knowledge to begin with. If they had planned the attack, as some accounts maintain, would they not have known who executed the plan? Another cable discusses their lack of knowledge:

Station unaware if assassination was premeditated or whether it constituted bungled abduction attempt ... We know that Gen. Valenzuela was involved [sec del] we have reason for believing that Gen Viaux and numerous associates fully clued in, but cannot prove or disprove that execution of attempt against Schneider was entrusted to elements linked with Viaux. Important factor to bear in mind is that Armed Forces, and not retired officers or extreme rightists, set Schneider up for execution or abduction ... Before trying to anticipate further course of events station would like to await events of 23rd Oct. which will obviously be decisive. [77]

Uncertain who had carried out the attack, the CIA worried that the weapons it had provided to Valenzuela's group might have been responsible for Schneider's death. Were the American weapons in fact used in the kidnapping attempt that turned into murder? The answer appears to be no. One CIA cable from Chile, sent on 29 October, hints at the confusion in Santiago in the aftermath of the assassination, and the trouble it caused station officers in determining what was going on. The message says that marshal law made their work difficult, but that on 28 October, they were "able to make first contact with [name deleted] ... [deletion] stated that when first heard of Schneider's assassination on radio he was quite upset but has since been informed by [name deleted] that three machine guns and ammunition are still in [name deleted]'s home and never given to anybody... . Also [name deleted] still has three tear-gas canisters and three masks." [78]

A CIA review of its own actions, undertaken in 1973, states that "three submachine-guns were provided to three military officers who planned to use them in instigating an uprising by the Armed Forces. This program was conducted at the request of President Nixon with the understanding that it was not to become known to the State Department or other members of the 40 Committee." [79] This is all true, but were the weapons given purposefully to assassinate Schneider? The CIA and the White House did not want Schneider assassinated. Documents from early October reveal that Washington understood that his death would benefit Allende more than it would his opposition by rallying "the army fully behind the flag of constitutionalism." [80] They trusted Valenzuela to carry out a kidnapping, but not Viaux, and to the last minute they attempted to keep Viaux from moving on his own. [81] The CIA and Washington specifically did not want their weapons in the hands of the unstable and dangerous Viaux. Indeed, one message directly discounts Viaux's exhortations that his group "did not like killing." [82]

Did Kissinger actually order an end to contact with Viaux? The evidence shows that he ordered Viaux to stand down at least over the short term. Did Kissinger intend Track II to end, as he has testified? Probably, but that was at a time when the White House, 40 Committee, Track II staff, and the CIA thought that Viaux was the only available option. Kissinger ended the Viaux operation while urging that pressure be kept on Allende “until such time as new marching orders are given.” [83] What Kissinger wanted was Viaux stopped for the time being without an end to all domestic plotting, which might pay off in the long run. Essentially, he did not want to discourage any anti-Allende faction, but sought to distance Washington from the most extreme elements.

Perhaps Kissinger need not have worried about issues of control. As the Chilean situation underscored, foreign army officers are not light switches that can simply be “turned off.” The CIA had spread the message that it was interested in a coup against Allende and “by now ... all interested military parties know our position.” [84] Whether the US position made a tremendous difference is a matter of dispute, and depends on how one views the autonomy of the Chilean officers who, even once American support for a coup apparently was toned down, continued to plot. This was clear from the moment that the CIA tried to “switch off” the plotters: “Station false-flag officer met with [Chilean] on [del] October and attempted to dissuade Viaux group from undertaking a coup. The group, however, had met on 16 October and decided to attempt a coup on 21 or 22 October.” This was not restricted to Viaux’s group; reporting indicated that everywhere “Coups plotting continues to flourish.” [85]

A cable from Santiago bears out US efforts to increase the distance between local officers and the plotters, saying that there was no one from the station sharing “in planning of professionally executed military coup, let alone to second guess ringleaders.” Indeed it was “pointedly stated” that the onus for action belonged to the Chilean military from that time forward. On a wry note, the cable offers the observation that “this whole operation [was] so unprofessional and insecure that, in [the] Chilean setting, it could stand a chance of succeeding.” All that was required of the station was to assure the plotters that they would not be left “high and dry” if their coup succeeded. “This we have done.” [86] Kissinger, nonetheless, was most likely happy to hear that the opposition’s plotting against Allende was going ahead, even if the reports he heard offered little chance of success.

Many have doubted the subsequent Hill testimony of Henry Kissinger and his

NSC deputy, Gen. Alexander Haig, who said that they knew nothing of the plots against Schneider. [87] Throughout the crucial weeks in October 1970, information continued to flow to Broe and Karamessines at CIA Headquarters, and both of these men testified that they met with Kissinger during this period. Attesting to connections at the most senior levels, a cable from his office to Santiago on 18 October demands details of coup plotting because “high-level policy decisions in USG may become necessary” [88] On 19 October, a message from CIA Headquarters informs Santiago that “[we] feel we must be prepared advise higher echelons of nature of new military leaders and their programs in event coup attempted or even succeeds.” [89] Karamessines stated in the same Congressional investigation that he had kept the White House abreast of all developments. His statements appear plausible in light of currently available documentation.

The bottom line, in my view, is that Kissinger and the White House were aware of the coup plotting and were happy to see it go ahead, but at the same time had no control over events. In light of the CIA’s surprise over the death of Gen. Schneider, the White House neither planned nor desired the assassination. Moreover, US officials may have failed to realize the level of complicity between all the various factions involved in plotting. Ultimately, it may have been impossible to separate the plotting of one group from the next.

When did Track II officially end? There are no memoranda or cables under the title “Track II” after the inauguration of Allende on 3 November 1970. The last mention of Track II in the CIA’s documents is a report of the CIA’s summary of Track II activity being delivered to the Attorney General on 2 December 1970. [90] An enigmatic cable dated 26 May 1971, may hold the key. This one line message reads: “Project [deleted] termination approved effective 30 June 1971.” [91] Could the deleted word be “Fubelt”? Regardless, Track II, which aimed at precipitating a military takeover to prevent Allende’s inauguration, effectively ended when that aim failed eight months earlier.

Despite the formal demise of Track II, American efforts to remove Allende continued throughout his administration. Karamessines, the CIA officer in charge of coordinating anti-Allende operations, told the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence in 1975 that: “Track II was never really ended. What we were told to do was to continue our efforts. Stay alert, and do what we could to contribute to the eventual achievement and the objectives and purposes of Track II.” [92] In other words, covert operations to encourage a regime change

by indirect means, which had always been a part of Track I, continued for several more years.

Nonetheless, the experience of 1970 carried its own lessons about the limits of American power. Through its machinations in Chile, Washington received a strong reminder that the power of the state operates on a significantly different level than that of individual actors. Though sincere in their fear of an irreversible Marxist regime in Chile, American leaders stopped short of promoting the use of outright force at all costs, a caution that sharply limited the exercise of American power. For all of America's banks and investments, nuclear missiles and aircraft carriers, it was not able to influence men such as Frei, Schneider, or Viaux to march to its tune.

Ê

Footnotes:

[1] Executive Branch and Congressional reviews of intelligence activities were initiated in the mid-1970s in response to several revelations, including public allegations of CIA wrongdoing in Chile. The probes led to more precise delineation of the Agency's powers by President Ford in Executive Order 11905, which, among other things, banned assassinations and increased executive oversight of the CIA through creation of the Intelligence Oversight Board. Moreover, the CIA was subjected to an unprecedented amount of public suspicion and distrust. Taken together, the investigations marked the end of the independence and relative freedom from scrutiny that Congress and the public had previously allowed the CIA.

[2] For this study, these documents were accessed at <www.foia.state.gov> between May and June 2002, using a "list all" function through all tranches of material. Specific URLs for CIA, State Department, and NSC documents are listed in subsequent footnotes.

[3] Henry A. Kissinger, *White House Years* (Boston, MA: Little & Brown, 1979), particularly chapters XV and XVI.

[4] William Colby and Peter Forbath, *Honorable Men: My Life in the CIA* (New York, NY: Simon and Schuster, 1978), p. 303.

[5] US Congress, Senate, *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign*

Leaders, Interim Report of the Select Committee to Study Government Operations with Respect to Intelligence Activities, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, (Washington, DC: US Government Printing Office, 20 November 1975), p. 227. Henceforward Alleged Plots.

[6] Alleged Plots, p. 228.

[7] Memorandum for the Record, “Genesis of Project Fubelt,” 16 September 1970. All CIA cables and memoranda used in this study were accessed at <www.foia.state.gov/vSearchPCIA.asp>. Unless otherwise noted, all documents cited are from the CIA.

[8] Colby, p. 303.

[9] Memorandum, “[Deletion] Situation Report #1,” 17 September 1970.

[10] Alleged Plots, p. 228.

[11] Ibid., p. 238.

[12] Cable, CIA HQs to Santiago Station, “As you will be advised,” 27 September 1970. A “false-flag officer” or “false-flagger” is an officer who operates under a forged third-party passport. False-flaggers are used to increase the “plausible deniability” of an operation, should it be compromised.

[13] Cable, CIA HQ to Santiago Station, “Highest Levels Here Continue,” 7 October 1970.

[14] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, “Effort to Contact and Influence Chilean Military Figures,” 2 October 1970. Biographic information on Schneider can be found in *Grandes Biographías de la Historia de Chile*, “Defensor del constitucionalismo de las Fuerzas Armadas René Schneider Chereau: 1913-1970,” at: <<http://icarito.tercera.cl/biografias/1958-1999/bios/schneider.htm>>.

[15] Luis Vitale, et. al., *Para Recuperar La Memoria Histórica: Frei, Allende Y Pinochet* (Santiago, Chile: Ediciones ChileAmerica-CESOC, 1999), p. 181. The Spanish of the constitution reads: “La fuerza publica es esencialmente obediente. Ningun cuerpo armado puede deliberar.”

[16] Andrea Ruiz-Esquide Figueroa, *Las Fuerzas Armadas Durante Los*

Gobiernos de Eduardo Frei Y Salvador Allende (Santiago, Chile: Centro de Estudios del Desarrollo, 1993), p. 51 (note 1).

[17] Vitale, p. 187. See also Paul E. Sigmund, *The Overthrow of Allende and the Politics of Chile 1964-1976* (Pittsburgh, PA: Pittsburgh University Press, 1977), p. 99.

[18] Memorandum, Chile Station to CIA HQ, "Intelligence," 26 September 1970.

[19] Albert L. Michaels, "Background to a Coup," paper presented at the State University of New York, 18-19 October 1974. (Buffalo, NY: State University of New York, 1975) p. 9.

[20] Memorandum, Chile Station to CIA HQ, "Intelligence," 26 September 1970.

[21] Memorandum, CIA Intelligence Note to File, 23 September 1970.

[22] Memorandum, Korry to Crimmins, 11 August, 1970. State Department cables accessed at: <http://www.foia.state.gov/SearchColls/CollsSearch.asp> using a "list all" function for all three tranches of "State Chile Collection." All cables/memoranda accessed May/June 2002. Subsequent State Department documents are marked "State" in parentheses following the citation.

[23] Memorandum, Ambassador Korry to Under-Secretary Johnson, 6 October 1970. (State)

[24] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Ambassador called in Defense AttachŽ and DCOS," 08 October 1970.

[25] Cable, "Track I Propaganda Placements," 10 October 1970. Emphasis in original. At the time, Korry's assessment was accurate. Even local CIA officers considered the task of thwarting Allende to be a "mission impossible." As one CIA officer later said, "the idea of a military overthrow had not occurred to us as a feasible solution." See Seymour Hersh, *The Price of Power* (New York, NY: Summit Books, 1983), p. 277.

[26] Cable, [CIA] Situation Report #1, 17 September 1970.

[27] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Puro Chile on 5 December," 14 December 1970.

[28] Memorandum for the Record, CIA, 23 September 1970.

[29] Memorandum, Chile Station to CIA HQ, "Intelligence," 26 September 1970.

[30] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "There is a possibility that coup attempt," 23 September 1970.

[31] Memorandum Intelligence Note to File, "Track II," 10 October 1970.

[32] Memorandum, "Track II," 7 October 1970.

[33] Memorandum, "Track II," 5 October 1970.

[34] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, 7 October 1970. Emphasis in original.

[35] Memorandum, "Long Range Solution," 9 October 1970. Emphasis in original.

[36] William I. Robinson, *Promoting Polyarchy: Globalization, US Intervention, and Hegemony* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 1996), p. 161. Also Gabriel Smirnow, *The Revolution Disarmed, Chile 1970-1973* (New York, NY: Monthly Review Press, 1979), p. 111.

[37] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "It Reported," 13 October 1970.

[38] Cable, CIA HQ to Santiago Station, "Viaux Recontacted ASAP," 13 October 1970.

[39] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Arms to Start Uprising," 06 October 1970. While the terms CIA, USG, and Chilean are all blanked from the document, a reading of the 2 full pages makes any other insertion inconsistent and unlikely.

[40] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "As Dialogue with Viaux Grows," 13 October 1970.

[41] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "In Fast Moving Situation," 10 October 1970.

[42] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "It Station's Firm Opinion," 10 October 1970. That this communication referred to the attachŽ can be determined by comparison of this cable with one cited in the Senate report *Alleged Plots*.

[43] Memorandum, "Track II," 12 October 1970.

[44] Hersh, p. 286.

[45] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Fact May Not Be Able," 03 October 1970.

[46] Cable, CIA HQ to Santiago Station, "Highest Levels Here Continue," 07 October 1970.

[47] Cable, CIA HQ to Santiago Station, "Instructs You Contact Military," 07 October 1970.

[48] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Station has arrived at Viaux Solution," 10 October 1970.

[49] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "After Debriefing," 12 October 1970.

[50] Memorandum, "The Coup That Failed," 15 October 1970.

[51] Memorandum, "Situation Report for Military Move," 13 October 1970.

[52] Memorandum for the Record, "Minutes of the 40 Committee Meeting, 14 October 1970," 16 October 1970. (State)

[53] Memorandum of Conversation, "Dr. Kissinger, Mr. Karamessines, Gen. Haig at the White House," 15 October 1970.

[54] Memorandum for the President, "Chile—Immediate Operational Issues," 18 October, 1970. NSC cable accessed May/June 2002 at:
<<http://www.foia.state.gov/SearchColls/NSC.asp>> using a "list all" function for both tranches.

[55] *Ibid.*

[56] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Viaux Group Will Meet," 14 October 1970.

[57] *Ibid.*

[58] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Summoned Morning," 16 October 1970.

[59] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Meeting Disaster Concerning Schneider," 16 October 1970. Italics added.

[60] Memorandum, "Intelligence Note," 16 October 1970. See also "Track II," 14 October 1970.

[61] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Meeting Requested," 16 October 1970.

[62] Cable, CIA HQ to Santiago, "Depending How Conversation Goes," 18 October 1970.

[63] Cable, CIA HQ to Santiago Station, "Realize this Message," 19 October 1970.

[64] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Chronology of Events 18 October," 19 October 1970. Although listed under "Chronology of Events 12 October," the date is clearly 18 October both in context and when examined with a magnifying glass. *Cf. Alleged Plots*, p. 244.

[65] Memorandum, "Special Report," 22 October 1970.

[66] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Sent to Visit," 20 October 1970.

[67] Cable, CIA HQ to Santiago Station, "Request Contact General Valenzuela," 22 October 1970.

[68] *Alleged Plots*, p. 245.

[69] Memorandum, "Special Report," 22 October 1970.

[70] Memorandum, "Track II," 24 October 1970.

[71] Memorandum, "Intelligence Note," 23 October 1970. See also Memorandum, "Track II," 24 October 1970.

[72] Sigmund, p. 123. See also Memorandum, Intelligence, "Recent Developments in Chile," 2 November 1970.

[73] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Supporters of General Viaux," 22 October 1970.

[74] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Suggested Retired Captain," 19 October 1970.

[75] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Reflect Realistic Assessment," 21 October 1970.

[76] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "On 2 Nov COS Reviewed," 3 November 1970.

[77] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Headquarters Will Have Noted," 22 October 1970.

[78] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Although Security Still Tight," 29 October 1970.

[79] Memorandum, "Overview Statements on CIA involvement in Chile in 1970," 20 February 1973.

[80] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Review of Significant Developments," 9 October 1970.

[81] Memorandum, "Track II," 19 October 1970.

[82] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Reports that meeting of Viaux Group," 16 October 1970.

[83] *Alleged Plots*, p. 242.

[84] Cable, CIA HQ to Santiago Station, "Agree [deleted] Should Cease," 20

October 1970.

[85] Memorandum, "Track II," 19 October, 1970.

[86] Cable, Santiago Station to CIA HQ, "Station Making No Attempt," 19 October 1970.

[87] *Alleged Plots*, pp. 246-249.

[88] Cable, CIA HQ to Santiago Station, "Realize this Message," 18 October 1970.

[89] Cable, CIA HQ to Santiago Station, "Recognize it Much," 19 October, 1970.

[90] Memorandum, Helms to Kissinger, "Delivery of Chile Paper on Track II," 2 December 1970.

[91] Cable, "Project Termination Approval," 26 May 1971.

[92] *Alleged Plots*, p. 248.

Kristian C. Gustafson is a Ph.D. candidate at Cambridge University, UK, where he is a Commonwealth/Overseas Trust Scholar.