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NATIONAL SECURITY ARCHIVE

30 YEARS OF OPENING GOVERNMENTS AT HOME AND ABROAD

Allende and Chile: 'Bring Him Down'

Salvador Allende's Historic Inauguration 50 Years Later

Declassified White House Records Show How Nixon-Kissinger Set Strategy of Destabilization—And Why

Washington D.C., November 3, 2020 — Several days after Salvador Allende's history-changing November 3, 1970, inauguration, Richard Nixon convened his National Security Council for a formal meeting on what policy the U.S. should adopt toward Chile's new Popular Unity government. Only a few officials who gathered in the White House Cabinet Room knew that, under Nixon's orders, the CIA had covertly tried, and failed, to foment a preemptive military coup to prevent Allende from ever being inaugurated. The SECRET/SENSITIVE NSC memorandum of conversation revealed a consensus that Allende's democratic election and his socialist agenda for substantive change in Chile threatened U.S. interests, but divergent views on what the U.S. could, and should do about it. "We can bring his downfall, perhaps, without being counterproductive," suggested Secretary of State William Rogers, who opposed overt hostility and aggression toward Chile. "We have to do everything we can to hurt [Allende] and bring him down," agreed the secretary of defense, Melvin Laird.

"Our main concern in Chile is the prospect that [Allende] can consolidate himself and the picture projected to the world will be his success," President Nixon explained as he instructed his national security team to adopt a hostile, if low-profile, program of aggression to destabilize Allende's ability to govern. "We'll be very cool and very correct, but doing those things which will be a real message to Allende and others."

Marking the 50th anniversary of Salvador Allende's inauguration, the National Security Archive today posted a collection of documents that provide a comprehensive record of how and why President Nixon and his national security advisor, Henry Kissinger, established and pursued a

policy of destabilization in Chile—operations that "created the conditions as best as possible," as Kissinger later put it, for the September 11, 1973 military coup that brought General Augusto Pinochet to power. The detailed deliberations and decisions they contain clarify the misrepresentations by former policy actors over the years, Kissinger among them, of the true intent of the Nixon administration posture toward the Allende government.

A half century after the inauguration, according to the Archive's senior analyst on Chile, Peter Kornbluh, "these documents record the deliberate purpose of U.S. officials to undermine Salvador Allende's ability to govern, and 'bring him down' so that he could not establish a successful, and attractive, model for structural change that other countries might emulate."

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