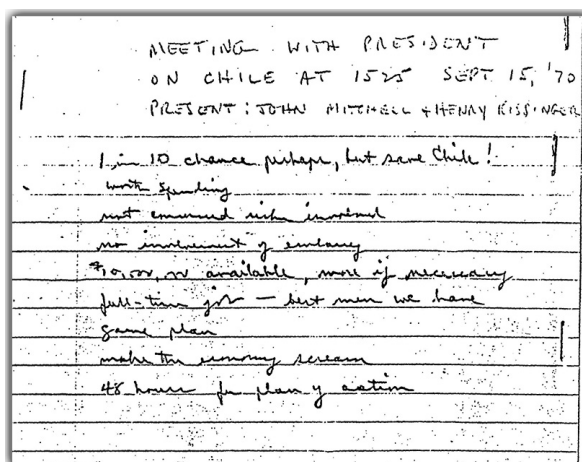




30 YEARS OF OPENING GOVERNMENTS AT HOME AND ABROAD

"Extreme Option—Overthrow Allende"

National Security Archive Marks
50th Anniversary of Nixon Order to
Foment Coup in Chile



Washington, D.C., September 15, 2020 – On September 15, 1970, during a twenty-minute meeting in the Oval Office between 3:25 pm and 3:45 pm, President Richard Nixon ordered the CIA to foment a military coup in Chile. According to handwritten notes taken by CIA Director Richard Helms, Nixon issued explicit instructions to prevent the newly elected president of Chile, Salvador Allende, from being inaugurated in November—or to create conditions to overthrow him if he did assume the presidency. “1 in 10 chance, perhaps, but save Chile.” “Not concerned [about] risks involved,” Helms jotted in his notes as the President demanded regime change in the South American nation that had become the first in the world to freely elect a Socialist candidate. “Full time job—best men we have.” “Make the economy scream.”

Fifty years after it was written, Helm’s cryptic memorandum of conversation with Nixon remains the only known record of a U.S. president ordering the covert overthrow of a democratically elected leader abroad. Since the document was first declassified in 1975 as part of a major Senate investigation into CIA covert operations in Chile and elsewhere, Helms’s notes have become the iconic representation of U.S. intervention in Chile—and an enduring symbol of Washington’s hegemonic arrogance toward smaller nations.

To mark the 50th anniversary of Nixon's order to overthrow Allende, at precisely 3:25 pm – when the meeting began – the National Security Archive today posted a selection of previously declassified documents that trace the genesis of this consequential presidential directive and the historical circumstances in which it took place. “These documents provide a

roadmap of U.S. coup-plotting and regime change,” notes Peter Kornbluh, who directs the Archive’s Chile project and is the author of *The Pinochet File*. “The September 15, 1970, Oval Office meeting marked the first major step in undermining Chilean democracy and supporting the advent of a military dictatorship.”

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