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Department of State

TELEGRAM
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Chile Project (#S199900030)

U.S. Department of State

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ACTION H-03

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FM AMEMBASSY SANTIAGO
TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 4655

C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 SANTIAGO 00204

E.O. 12356: DECL: OADR
TAGS: PGOV, CI
SUBJ: CONGRESSMAN MCCAIN'S DISCUSSIONS WITH PINOCHET AND MERINO

1. CONFIDENTIAL - ENTIRE TEXT
2. CONGRESSMAN JOHN MCCAIN, PRIOR TO HIS DEPARTURE FROM CHILE ON JANUARY 2, BRIEFED LABATT ON THE RESULTS OF HIS DECEMBER 30 MEETINGS WITH PRESIDENT PINOCHET AND JUNTA MEMBER ADMIRAL MERINO. MOST OF HIS 30-MINUTE MEETING WITH THE PRESIDENT, AT WHICH FOREIGN MINISTER DEL VALLE AND A MINISTRY STAFF MEMBER WERE PRESENT, WAS SPENT IN DISCUSSING THE DANGERS OF COMMUNISM, A SUBJECT ABOUT WHICH THE PRESIDENT SEEMS OBSESSED. THE PRESIDENT DESCRIBED CHILE'S RECENT HISTORY IN THE FIGHT AGAINST COMMUNISM, AND DISPLAYED CONSIDERABLE PRIDE IN THE FACT THAT THE COMMUNIST MENACE HAD BEEN DEFEATED IN CHILE. THE PRESIDENT STRESSED THAT CHILE HAD STOOD ALONE IN THIS BATTLE, AND COMPLAINED THAT UNITED STATES FOREIGN POLICY HAD LEFT THEM STRANDED. THE CONGRESSMAN ADDED THAT TALKING TO PINOCHET WAS SOMEWHAT SIMILAR TO TALKING WITH THE HEAD OF THE JOHN BIRCH SOCIETY. PINOCHET ALSO TOLD THE CONGRESSMAN THAT HE WAS PERSONALLY UPSET WITH THE ACTIVITIES OF THE AMBASSADOR ADDING THAT HE DID NOT MIND THE AMBASSADOR'S CALLS

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ON THE OPPOSITION POLITICAL GROUPS, BUT HE DID

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RESENT THE PUBLICITY GIVEN TO THESE CALLS. HE THOUGHT THAT SUCH CALLS SHOULD BE DONE QUIETLY. ANOTHER SUBJECT TOUCHED ON BY THE PRESIDENT WAS THE NEED FOR CHILE TO HAVE ACCESS TO AMERICAN TECHNOLOGY. A SUBJECT HE ALSO EMPHASIZED IN HIS NEW YEAR'S SPEECH TO THE NATION. CONGRESSMAN MCCAIN DESCRIBED THE MEETING AS FRIENDLY AND AT TIMES WARM, BUT NOTED THAT PINOCHET DOES SEEM OBSESSED WITH THE THREAT OF COMMUNISM.

3. DURING THE MEETING DEL VALLE WAS QUIET EXCEPT WHEN THE SUBJECT OF U.S. FOREIGN POLICY WAS TOUCHED UPON, AT WHICH POINT HE MADE RATHER HEATED REMARKS ABOUT THE INABILITY OF THE USG TO UNDERSTAND THE CHILEAN SITUATION, AND OUR FAILURE TO SUPPORT CHILE IN THE FIGHT AGAINST COMMUNIST EXPANSION.

4. THE CONGRESSMAN DESCRIBED HIS HOUR-LONG MEETING WITH ADMIRAL MERINO AS WARM AND VERY FRIENDLY. IT COVERED MOSTLY THE ADMIRAL'S WELL-KNOWN VIEWS ON THE IMPORTANCE OF CHILE IN THE BATTLE TO KEEP THE SEA LANES OPEN, AND THE ATTEMPTS BY THE RUSSIANS TO GAIN A FOOT HOLD IN THE AREA. THE MOST INTERESTING PART OF THE CONVERSATION, ACCORDING TO THE CONGRESSMAN, WAS MERINO'S STATEMENT THAT HE AND OTHER MEMBERS OF THE JUNTA HAD RECENTLY TOLD PINOCHET THAT HE SHOULD NOT EXPECT ANY SUPPORT FROM THE JUNTA IF HE SHOULD DECIDE TO BE A CANDIDATE FOR PRESIDENT IN 1989. MERINO ADDED THAT THE 1989 ELECTIONS WOULD NOT BE AS ENVISAGED IN THE 1980 CONSTITUTION, BUT WOULD BE A FREE AND OPEN
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CHOICE BETWEEN VARIOUS CANDIDATES. HE DESCRIBED THE PORTION OF THE CONSTITUTION CALLING FOR A SINGLE CANDIDATE PLEBISCITE AS BEING RIDICULOUS AND UNSUPPORTABLE. THE CLEAR IMPLICATION WAS THAT THIS PART OF THE CONSTITUTION WOULD BE CHANGED WELL BEFORE 1989. IN RESPONSE TO THE CONGRESSMAN'S QUESTION IF PINOCHET MIGHT BE ONE OF THE PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATES IN 1989, MERINO STATED THAT THIS WOULD NOT BE THE CASE. MERINO ALSO MADE THE SAME TYPE OF REMARKS ABOUT

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THE AMBASSADOR'S ACTIVITIES, BUT MORE IN THE SENSE THAT THIS NEW STYLE OF DIPLOMACY WAS SURPRISING AND THEREFORE UPSETTING.

5. CONGRESSMAN MCCAIN ALSO NOTED THAT HE HAD SPENT CONSIDERABLE TIME WITH FORMER FOREIGN MINISTER HERNAN CUBILLOS, WHO HAD TOLD HIM THAT HE IS BEING CONSIDERED AS A PRESIDENTIAL CANDIDATE FOR 1989. CUBILLOS TOLD THE CONGRESSMAN THAT HE VIEWS HIMSELF AS A BRIDGE BETWEEN THE PRESENT MILITARY GOVERNMENT AND THE CIVILIAN POLITICIANS, AND COULD THEREFORE EXPECT SUPPORT FROM BOTH SIDES IN 1989. HE HAS NO INTENTION OF ANNOUNCING ANY TIME SOON HIS AVAILABILITY FOR THE PRESIDENCY, NOTING THAT THE TIMING OF THIS IS OF GREAT IMPORTANCE, AS A PREMATURE ANNOUNCEMENT WOULD ONLY UPSET THE GOVERNMENT AND PREPARE THE OPPOSITION. CUBILLOS ALSO MADE NOTE OF THE WAVES BEING CREATED WITHIN THE GOVERNMENT BY THE AMBASSADOR'S NEW STYLE OF DIPLOMACY, ADDING THAT IT WOULD NOT DO TO HAVE THE

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