

US played key role in 1973 Chilean coup

Can Henry Kissinger be extradited?

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If Augusto Pinochet deserves detention, trial and punishment for mass murder, then what about his American controllers—Henry Kissinger, then-CIA director Richard Helms and other US government officials who inspired, directed and supported the 1973 military coup in Chile?

The official American reaction to the detention of Pinochet has been sympathetic to the former dictator. The Clinton administration is opposing his extradition out of concern that a public trial in Spain would bring to light the extensive involvement of US intelligence agencies in Pinochet's bloody deeds.

Pinochet's seizure of power on September 11, 1973 was the product of a protracted US campaign of political manipulation and destabilization in Chile. In 1964 the Johnson administration poured tens of millions of dollars into a covert campaign to insure the election of Christian Democrat Eduardo Frei as president, over the Socialist Party candidate Salvador Allende.

In 1970, with Frei ineligible to succeed himself and Allende the favorite to win the next election, Chile became a problem for the Nixon administration. The super-secret 40 Committee, a high-level body chaired by Henry Kissinger, with representatives from the State Department, CIA and Pentagon, decided that a massive electoral intervention would likely spark a backlash. US Ambassador Edward Korry urgently recommended a CIA covert operation to prepare a preemptive military coup.

Kissinger declared, "I don't see why we need to stand by and watch a country go Communist because of the irresponsibility of its own people." But he and CIA Director Helms blocked the proposed pre-election coup as unworkable. More time was needed, they argued.

Allende won the election on a reformist program, but

his victory sparked a mass movement of the working class and poor peasants which had immense revolutionary potential. Allende and his Stalinist backers in the Chilean Communist Party spent the next three years restraining, discouraging and disorienting the mass movement, blocking any decisive challenge to the Chilean ruling class and American imperialism, while the right-wing and fascist elements prepared their counterattack. During this period there were six unsuccessful right-wing coup attempts, most of them with direct American aid.

The US involvement in coup planning began even before Allende's election victory, under the codename FUBELT, with action plans prepared for Kissinger's consideration. One group of officers working under CIA direction carried out the assassination of General Rene Schneider, a pro-Allende officer, in an unsuccessful attempt to spark a full-scale coup before Allende could take office.

A CIA cable from October 16, 1970, released under the Freedom of Information Act, spells out US government objectives: "It is firm and continuing policy that Allende be overthrown by a coup.... We are to continue to generate maximum pressure toward this end utilizing every appropriate resource. It is imperative that these actions be implemented clandestinely and securely so that the USG and American hand be well hidden."

The CIA set up a fascist organization, Fatherland and Liberty, headed by a former public relations man for Ford Motor Company, Federico Willoughby McDonald, who became Pinochet's press secretary after the coup. It sponsored Operation Djakarta, a plan for the systematic assassination of leaders of Allende's Popular Unity government, named in honor of the CIA's bloodiest success, the 1965 military coup in

Indonesia in which 1 million people were slaughtered.

As it had in Indonesia, the CIA helped the military in Chile draw up lists of those to be exterminated. On September 10, 1973, the day before the junta struck, the names of 3,000 high-level and 20,000 mid-level leaders of popular organizations—trade unions, student groups, tenants’ groups, peasant committees, civil rights and civil liberties groups, left-wing political parties—were distributed to the death squads. Virtually all those who did not flee the country were hunted down and murdered.

In later closed-door testimony before a congressional committee, former CIA Director William Colby said that the mass executions had done “some good” by making civil war in Chile unlikely. Colby had followed a similar grisly logic in Vietnam, supervising the Phoenix Program under which 20,000 suspected opponents of the US military intervention were assassinated.

In his memoirs, Kissinger denied that the US government played any role in the coup, brazenly dismissing this well-documented fact as a communist-inspired “myth.” But he could not help solidarizing himself with the Pinochet regime, writing, “The Chilean military had saved Chile from a totalitarian regime and the United States from an enemy.”

American media reports on Pinochet’s arrest have been uniformly silent on the responsibility of the US government for the 1973 coup, and have largely downplayed the scale of Pinochet’s crimes—using, for example, the CIA estimate of 3,000 people murdered during the coup and its aftermath, although most independent estimates place the total at upwards of 50,000 dead.

It is predictable that the *Wall Street Journal* should denounce the arrest of one of its favorite world leaders. The *Journal* ‘s editorial derides Spain and Britain for detaining Pinochet instead of Fidel Castro, and declares, “General Pinochet headed the coup that saved his country.”

More significant is the response of such organs of official liberalism as the *New York Times* and the *Washington Post*. While giving grudging support to the actions of the British government, the *Times* worries that it might set a precedent for “rogue nations like Iraq” to seek international prosecution of “foreign leaders who opposed them.” This is a tacit admission

that the actions of Bush and Clinton, in enforcing a blockade that has caused the death of hundreds of thousands of Iraqi children, could be prosecuted as a war crime.

The *Post* takes the occasion to praise Pinochet’s record as ruler of Chile: “He did remove a democratically elected government and see to the killing of thousands and the detention of tens of thousands in 1973-1990,” the newspaper editorializes. “But he also saw to the rescue of his country ... and to its controlled evolution into a prosperous Latin democracy. So it is not only Chile’s military right but others grateful for his positive role who are troubled now by his arrest.”



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