

Washington and the Pinochet coup in Chile

Declassified documents confirm US role in 1973 death of Charles Horman

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More than a quarter century after the execution in Chile of Charles Horman, an American freelance journalist, Washington has released a document admitting that US intelligence agents played a role in his death.

The Horman case was made famous by the Hollywood movie *Missing*. Directed by Constantino Costa Gavras, the film dramatized the struggle of Charles Horman's family to uncover the truth about his murder and the collaboration of US officials with the Chilean military dictatorship of General Augusto Pinochet in carrying it out.

The State Department memo, dated August 25, 1976, was declassified just over two weeks ago (October 8), together with 1,100 other documents released by various US agencies. These papers dealt primarily with the years leading up to the military coup that brought Pinochet to power in September 1973. An initial set of 5,800 previously classified documents, made public last June 30, concerned the first five years of the dictatorship, when tens of thousands of Chilean workers, students and political oppositionists were imprisoned, tortured and executed.

Charles Horman was one of the victims of the Pinochet coup. On September 17, 1973, six days after the US-backed military takeover, Horman was seized by Chilean soldiers and taken to the National Stadium in Santiago, which had been turned by the military into a make-shift concentration camp. There prisoners were interrogated, tortured and executed. One month later, Horman's body was found in a morgue in the Chilean capital. A second American journalist, Frank Terrugi, was killed in the same fashion.

Written by three State Department functionaries—Rudy Fimbres, R.S. Driscoll and W.V. Robertson—and addressed to Harry Schlaudeman, a high-ranking official in the department's Latin American division—the August 1976 document described the Horman case as "bothersome," given reports in the press and Congressional investigations charging that the affair involved "negligence on our part, or worse, complicity in Horman's death." The memo was

written while Henry Kissinger was still Secretary of State.

The State Department, the memo declared, had the responsibility to "categorically refute such innuendoes in defense of US officials." It went on, however, to lay out the case that these "innuendoes" were well founded.

The three State Department officials said they had evidence that "The GOC [Government of Chile] sought Horman and felt threatened enough to order his immediate execution. The GOC might have believed this American could be killed without negative fall-out from the USG [US Government]."

The report went on to declare that circumstantial evidence indicated "US intelligence may have played an unfortunate part in Horman's death. At best it was limited to providing or confirming information that helped motivate his murder by the GOC. At worst, US intelligence was aware the GOC saw Horman in a rather serious light and US officials did nothing to discourage the logical outcome of GOC paranoia."

What the document does not mention is that the US military and the Central Intelligence Agency had their own reasons not only to feed the Chilean dictatorship's "paranoia," but also to take a direct role in sanctioning the execution. Horman spent the day of the military uprising and several days thereafter in the resort town of Viña del Mar, near the port of Valparaiso, which was a key base for both the Chilean coup plotters and US military and intelligence personnel who were supporting them. While there, he spoke with several US operatives and took careful notes documenting the US role in overthrowing the elected government of President Salvador Allende.

After the release of the State Department memo, Horman's widow, Joyce, described it as "close to a smoking pistol."

The same document had been released to the Horman family more than 20 years ago. But the paragraphs cited above were blacked out by the State Department. It took nearly two decades for Washington to reveal what had been hidden in the 28 lines blacked out by government censors.

Still, the Clinton administration's "Chile Declassification Project," touted by the president as an effort to "shed light on human rights abuses, terrorism and other acts of political violence" under Pinochet, has amounted to an exercise in hypocrisy. Motivated by Washington's desire to distance itself from its former ally after the ex-dictator's arrest in London and efforts to extradite him to Spain, the declassification has hidden more than it has revealed.

The Horman document released October 8 came from the State Department, as have the vast bulk of the material that has been declassified. In it, the State Department officials themselves express skepticism about the account given by the CIA of its relations with key Chilean figures involved in Horman's case.

While this section of the document still has sections deleted for reasons of "national security," it declares that the agency's account "needs further illumination no matter CIA disclaimers." It goes on to declare that the authors find it hard to believe "that the Chileans did not check with [name deleted] regarding two detained Americans ... lack of candor with us on other matters only heightens our suspicions."

But where are the CIA documents, both those shared with the State Department at the time and those whose concealment prompted such suspicions? They remain classified, as do documents from the Pentagon which would have recounted contacts between US military officers and Charles Horman in Viña del Mar.

In the first batch of declassified material, 5,000 of the 5,800 documents came from the State Department, while the CIA released only 500. Out of some 25,000 pages of reports, memos and cables that have been made public thus far, not a single one provides any information on the part played by the CIA, the Pentagon or other US agencies in the Chilean coup itself and the bloody repression which followed.

There is no dispute that these documents exist. Daily cables went back and forth between Washington and Santiago as the CIA and the Nixon government followed the progress of "Track II," as the planned coup was known in intelligence circles. These documents have been referred to repeatedly in congressional investigations and access to them has been repeatedly denied in various Freedom of Information requests.

One of the recently released State Department documents gives an indication of the scale of US collaboration with Pinochet's preparations. It establishes that US military aid was raised dramatically between the coming to power of Allende in 1970, when it amounted to \$800,000, to \$10.9 million in 1972, as the coup plans were elaborated. Even as Nixon and Kissinger vilified the Allende government, they poured vast resources into the instrument they would use to overthrow it, the Chilean military.

Further documents withheld by the CIA and other US intelligence agencies concern the 1976 car bomb assassination of Orlando Letelier, a former Chilean minister and opponent of the dictatorship, together with his American aide, Ronni Moffitt, in Washington, DC. American officials have made the improbable claim that these documents must remain secret because they are material to the investigation of Pinochet's crimes.

According to Peter Kornbluh, a senior analyst at the National Security Archive, the CIA has rejected any review of documents emanating from its Directorate of Operations, the covert arm that earned the agency the nickname Murder Inc., on the grounds that the US government has never officially acknowledged carrying out covert operations in Chile. Similarly, the agency has taken the position that planning and policy documents are not covered by Clinton's declassification order.

This guarding of Washington's dirty secrets relating to Chile is motivated in part by the fact that former and present US officials who played a role as criminal as that of Pinochet himself are still alive. They, like the ex-dictator, could conceivably be called to account.

Men like ex-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger and the CIA's former coup master in Latin America, General Vernon Walters, are among them, as are many lesser-known functionaries of US intelligence and the Pentagon.

Even more important, "national security interests" are at stake in keeping these documents secret because, 25 years after the Chilean coup, US imperialism is still prepared to use the methods employed by Pinochet and his American backers in defending the interests of the US banks and multinationals and suppressing the struggles of the working class all over the world.



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