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MEMORANDUM OF CONVERSATION

PARTICIPANTS: His Excellency Augusto Pinochet, President of Chile
VAD The Honorable Vernon A. Walters, Ambassador-at-Large
DATE/PLACE : May 13, 1982, Presidential Palace, Santiago, Chile
SUBJECT : Meeting with President Pinochet
DISTRIBUTION: ARA - Ambassador Enders
ARA/SC - Mr. Kemp

The President said that he is very concerned about the situation in the Falklands. There is one thing, however, of which he wanted to assure us, Chile will not attempt to take advantage of Argentina's problems. He thinks the Argentines got themselves into this fix through their own imprudence and aggressiveness. He suspects that had they not attacked the Falkland Islands, they might well have attacked the Chilean held islands in the Beagle Channel. However, Pinochet has taken a moderate position on this. He has not supported the Argentines as whole-heartedly as have many of the other Latin Americans. But he has, for instance, recently offered them the hospital ship, Piloto Pardo, to remove Argentine wounded from the Falklands to the mainland. The British have agreed to let the ship through, but the Argentines said they did not yet need it.

The President expressed great concern over Peruvian aid to Argentina and said he has evidence of a secret pact amongst Peru, Bolivia, and Argentina. Both Peru and Bolivia have territorial claims on Chile. He said Bolivia is not important except that it provides a land bridge between Argentina and Peru. He is convinced that the Peruvians and the Bolivians will one day ask for Argentine support against Chile to recover the territories lost in the Pacific War in 1879. He feels the U.S. has behaved very well and that Secretary Haig's offer to mediate should have been accepted by both parties, had they acted reasonably. While he did not condemn anyone, he did blame the Argentines for their intransigence in demanding sovereignty of the Islands as a precondition of negotiations rather than as the result of them.

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He asked me what I had been doing in Argentina. I replied that I did not go there to negotiate. The negotiations are still in the hands of the United Nations Secretary General Perez de Cuellar. I went there to see the Argentine junta hoping to preserve American-Argentine ties after the Falkland incident is over. I told him that I had seen all three members of the junta and each had all assured me on his word of honor that Argentina would not accept Soviet aid. President Pinochet expressed some dubiousness here. He believed they might take it through third parties such as Cuba or Peru, as a cover.

President Pinochet was in a philosophical mood. He said that he is concerned with what will happen in Chile after he leaves the government. Whether the system will go back to what it had been -- the old, quarrelsome, self-seeking politicians -- or whether some way could be devised that would allow the return of democracy without running the risk of the country falling back into its "evil, old ways"? He is very anxious for the U.S. to allow him to buy, he repeated "buy", not yet through foreign military sales or through U.S. aid, certain weapons that it would need to defend itself against Argentina, Peru, and Bolivia. I explained that the certification process is a complicated one but that he could be very helpful to us by making some gesture such as appointing a council of judges or jurists to review the applications of exiles who wanted to return to Chile. He thought about this for a while and then said that he would do it but he would announce it on September 11. I asked if he could not do it before then because it would be helpful to us in dealing with Congressional opposition on resuming aid or arms sales to Chile. He answered, "No", September 11 is a significant date for him and he will do it then.

He said that terrorists have been coming into Chile, trained in Cuba and elsewhere. The population, however, has cooperated very well; on a number of occasions people have denounced the terrorists and have pointed out their locations.

He returned to the theme of his own succession. Perhaps he has a premonition, but he seemed quite concerned with what will happen in Chile after he leaves the scene. He again expressed his puzzlement over the U.S. reluctance to sell him equipment. I pointed out the human rights cases are not the only issue. The Letellier case continues to give ammunition to Chile's enemies in the United States. Nothing has poisoned American-Chilean relations like the Letellier case. I said that while I realize that Chile is a sovereign nation entitled to its own judicial procedures, this case remains one of the primary obstacles to the loosening of the restrictions on sales of arms to Chile. He did not like this; but seemed to understand it.

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He expressed satisfaction with Ambassador Theberge, and stated that he seems intelligent, friendly, and helpful. He wished us well in our attempts to find a solution for the Argentine/British conflict, but said that he doubted a solution possible until the Argentines have been taught a lesson. He thanked me for stopping by to see him. I observed that the Foreign Minister is somewhat upset that he cannot go to Washington now. I told him that I had explained to the Foreign Minister over lunch that there are many visitors in Washington and that it would be better if he waited a while. He would then get the full and undivided attention of the authorities, who would not be preoccupied, as they now are, with the Falkland Islands conflict. He agreed.

President Pinochet thanked me once more for coming and I took my leave. The interview lasted about 30-35 minutes.

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