

Introduction: History and Accountability

It is not a part of American history that we are proud of.

—Secretary of State Colin Powell, responding to a question on the morality of the U.S. role in Chile, February 20, 2003

Just before midnight on October 16, 1998, two Scotland Yard officials slipped through the halls of an elite private clinic in London and secured the room in which former Chilean dictator, General Augusto Pinochet, was recovering from back surgery. With English efficiency, they disarmed his private bodyguards, disconnected the phones, posted eight policemen outside the door, and then proceeded to serve Pinochet with a warrant from INTERPOL. Within minutes, British authorities accomplished what the Chilean courts had refused to do since the end of his military regime in 1990—they placed Pinochet under arrest for crimes against humanity.

General Pinochet, whose name became synonymous with gross violations of human rights during his seventeen-year dictatorship, spent 504 days under house arrest in London. Only aggressive diplomatic intervention by Chile's civilian government, pressured by the *Pinochetistas* in the Chilean military, and an adroit propaganda campaign waged by his lawyers, kept him from being extradited to Spain to stand trial for offenses ranging from torture to terrorism. After sixteen months in detention, the British government released the eighty-four-year-old general on what it termed "humanitarian grounds." When he returned to his homeland, however, he was stripped of his immunity from prosecution, indicted, and interrogated. At one point Pinochet even faced the ignominious prospect of being fingerprinted and posing for a mug shot. Eventually, the Chilean courts ruled that due to age-related dementia Pinochet could not be put on trial for the abuses committed under his military reign.

Pinochet evaded punishment. But the saga of the "Pinochet Case," remains a historic milestone in the pursuit of accountability over atrocity. His arrest marked a long-awaited vindication for not only Pinochet's victims, but the victims of repression everywhere, as well as a turning point in the use of international law to pursue their repressors. It will forever be remembered as a transformational moment for the human rights movement, and a landmark event in both Chile and the United States of America.

For the cause of human rights, the drama of Pinochet's detention has established a precedent for the globalization of justice. Now that the Pinochet case has empowered the concept of universal jurisdiction—the ability of any state to hold gross violators accountable to international codes of justice—tyrants will no longer be able to leave their homelands and feel secure from the reach of international law. For Chile, Pinochet's arrest ended his ability to repress his nation's collective memory of the horrors of his rule, and restrain his victims from seeking legal accountability for the crimes committed during his regime. Although Pinochet eluded justice, he did not escape judgment. Moreover, a number of his top military men have been indicted, arrested, and imprisoned.

As Chileans continue to resurrect and redress their bloody and buried past, in Washington Pinochet's arrest has led to a massive exhumation of secret U.S. government archives. The declassified Pinochet files not only renewed international interest in the history of his regime; they have refocused public attention on the United States's own responsibility for the denouement of democracy and the rise of dictatorship in Chile.

The Other 9/11

For almost three decades, September 11 marked a day of infamy for Chileans, Latin Americans, and the world community—a day when Chilean air force jets attacked La Moneda palace in Santiago as the prelude to the vicious coup that brought Pinochet to power. In the aftermath of "9/11," 2001, it is more likely to be remembered for the shocking terrorist attack on the World Trade Center and the Pentagon. With that horror, the United States and Chile now share "that dreadful date," as writer Ariel Dorfman has eloquently described it, "again a Tuesday, once again an 11th of September filled with death."

But the histories of the United States and Chile are joined by far more than the coincidence of Osama bin Laden's timing. Washington has played

a pivotal role in Chile's traumatic past. Beginning in the early 1960s, U.S. policy makers initiated more than a decade of efforts to control Chile's political life, culminating in a massive covert effort to "bring down," as Richard Nixon and members of his cabinet candidly discussed, the duly elected Popular Unity government of Salvador Allende. Within hours of realizing that goal on September 11, 1973, the White House began transmitting secret messages welcoming General Pinochet to power and expressing a "desire to cooperate with the military Junta and to assist in any appropriate way." Until September 1976, when Pinochet sent a team of assassins to commit an act of international terrorism in Washington, D.C., Secretary of State Henry Kissinger steadfastly maintained a posture of avid support for the Pinochet regime. The assassination of Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt on the streets of the nation's capital would dominate U.S.-Chilean relations for the next decade, until the dictatorship began to unravel under growing popular pressure in Chile, and the United States fully and finally abandoned its one-time anticommunist ally. U.S. policy had an impact in changing not only the composition of Chile's government but also the course of its violent future for the next seventeen years.

If U.S. policy has had a major influence on events in Chile, those events have returned to influence the political discourse of the United States—and indeed the world. The country that Chilean poet Pablo Neruda described as a "long petal of sea, wine and snow" holds a special place in the hearts and minds of the international community. Since the early 1960s, Chile has attracted international attention for a number of utopian political projects and economic and social experiments. In 1964, Chile became a designated "showcase" for the Alliance for Progress—a U.S. effort to stave off revolutionary movements in Latin America by bolstering centrist, middle-class, Christian Democratic political parties. But with the election of Salvador Allende on September 4, 1970, Chile became the first Latin American nation to democratically elect a socialist president. The *Via Chilena*—peaceful road to socialist reform—captured the imagination of progressive forces around the globe, while provoking the consternation of imperial-minded U.S. policy makers. "We set the limits of diversity," Kissinger was heard to tell his staff as the United States initiated a series of covert operations against Allende, which "at a minimum will either insure his failure," according to a SECRET Kissinger proposal to Nixon, "and at a maximum might lead to situations where his collapse or overthrow later may be more feasible."

The sharp contrast between the peaceful nature of Allende's program for change, and the violent coup that left him dead and Chile's long-standing

democratic institutions destroyed, truly shocked the world. The Pinochet regime's dictatorial bent, and abysmal human rights record quickly became a universal political and humanitarian issue. Revelations of CIA involvement in Allende's overthrow, and Washington's unabashed embrace of the Junta raised Chile's worldwide profile even further, to a point where U.S. policy makers could no longer ignore the condemnation. "Chile has taken on Spain's image in the 1940s as a symbol of right-wing tyranny," an aide reported to Kissinger in one SECRET briefing paper. "Like it or not, we are identified with the regime's origins and hence charged with some responsibility for its actions." "Chile," the U.S. embassy noted in a 1974 strategy paper stamped SECRET,

has become something of a cause celebre in both the Western and Communist worlds. What happens in Chile is thus a matter of rather special significance to the United States. Distant and small though it is, Chile has long been viewed universally as a demonstration area for economic and social experimentation. Now it is in a sense in the front line of world ideological conflict.

In the United States, Chile joined Vietnam on the front line of the national conflict over the corruption of American values in the making and exercise of U.S. foreign policy. During the mid-1970s, events in Chile generated a major debate on human rights, covert action, and the proper place for both in America's conduct abroad. The Kissingerian disregard for Pinochet's mounting atrocities appalled the public and prompted Congress to pass precedent-setting legislation curtailing foreign aid to his regime, and to mandate a human rights criteria for all U.S. economic and military assistance. At the same time, revelations of the CIA's covert campaign to block Allende's election and then destabilize his democratically elected government generated a series of sensational intelligence scandals forcing the country for the first time, according to the late Senator Frank Church, "to debate and decide the merits of future use of covert action as an instrument of U.S. foreign policy."

Indeed, Chile became the catalyst for the first public hearing ever held on covert action. Senator Church's Senate Select Committee to study Government Activities with Respect to Intelligence—known as the Church Committee—conducted the first major Congressional investigation into clandestine operations and published the first case studies, *Covert Action in Chile, 1963-1973*, and *Alleged Assassination Plots Involving Foreign Leaders*, detailing those operations abroad. Once revealed, the U.S. government's covert

campaign in Chile led to the exposure of other foreign policy excesses, scandals, and corruptions.

The findings of the Church Committee, and the public revulsion of Washington's ongoing association with Pinochet's brutality, prompted a widespread movement to return U.S. foreign policy to the moral precepts of American society. "Chile is just the latest example for a lot of people in this country of the United States not being true to its values," one internal State Department memo conceded in June 1975. The debate around U.S. misconduct in Chile, as Richard Harris wrote in *The New Yorker* magazine in 1979, raised the fundamental question: "How did we become such a nation?"

That question remains relevant to the worldwide debate over the exercise of U.S. power in the twenty-first century. Indeed, a historical review of U.S.-Chilean relations raises many of the same contentious issues the American people, and the international community, confronted as the Bush administration launched its war on Iraq: regime change, unilateral U.S. aggression, international terrorism, political assassination, sovereignty, human rights, and the deaths of innocents. After so many years, Chile remains the ultimate case study of morality—the lack of it—in the making of U.S. foreign policy. "With respect to . . . Chile in the 1970s," as Secretary of State Colin Powell conceded when asked how the United States could consider itself morally superior to Iraq when Washington had backed the overthrow of Chilean democracy, "it is not a part of American history that we are proud of."

Chile Declassified

For all of Chile's importance and notoriety in the ongoing debate over U.S. foreign policy, the historical record has remained largely hidden from public scrutiny. The covert operations, murders, scandals, cover-ups, and controversies over human rights violations—all generated massive amounts of top-secret documentation. But only a handful of the hundreds of documents reviewed by the Senate Committee staff in the mid-1970s were actually declassified. Legal proceedings against former CIA director Richard Helms for lying to Congress on covert operations in Chile, and civil lawsuits brought by the families of Pinochet's most famous victims Charles Horman, Orlando Letelier, and Ronni Karpen Moffitt, yielded references to thousands of records on U.S. relations with the Pinochet regime at the height of its repression; but the U.S. government refused to release most of those. The documents the government did declassify were so heavily censored—many completely

blacked out except for their title and date—as to render them useless for judicial or historical evaluation.

Pinochet's arrest in London renewed national and international interest in the vast secret U.S. archives on Chile. Those records—CIA intelligence reports, State Department cables, Defense Department analysis, NSC memoranda, among other documents—were known to contain extraordinarily detailed coverage of Pinochet's atrocities, the inner workings of his internal repression and acts of international terrorism, as well as Washington's policies toward his regime. U.S. documentation would provide a wealth of evidence to prosecute Pinochet and his subordinates—if only the Clinton administration could be persuaded to declassify thousands of files containing tens of thousands of pages of secret information compiled during Chile's military dictatorship.

The Clinton White House had already pioneered a process of declassifying U.S. documentation to advance the cause of human rights. During his first term, President Clinton authorized major declassifications on El Salvador, Honduras, and Guatemala in response to scandals over U.S. misconduct and repression in those countries. On Chile, the administration faced a chorus of strong and poignant voices from the families of Pinochet's American victims, as well as pressure from Congress to release evidence that would assist Spain's efforts to bring Pinochet to justice. Both publicly and privately, human rights and right-to-know groups including my organization, the National Security Archive, lobbied administration officials to declassify documents in the name of human rights, justice, and history.

For a variety of political reasons, the Clinton administration resisted any policy initiative or gesture that would aid Spain's unprecedented application of universal jurisdiction to Pinochet's crimes. Doing nothing, however, would be perceived as protecting the vilest of Latin American dictators in recent history. Eventually, the administration agreed to conduct a "Chile Declassification Project"—not to provide documents to Spain but for the benefit of Chilean and American citizens. The declassification review, the State Department announced in February 1999, would "respond to the expressed wishes" of Congress and the families of Pinochet's American victims, and encourage "a consensus within Chile on reinvigorating its truth and reconciliation process."

To its credit, the Clinton administration pulled, prodded, and pushed the secrecy system into divulging significant amounts of information. Under the leadership of Secretary Madeleine Albright, the State Department appreciated the need for thorough declassification to advance human rights and historical honesty; the National Archives (in charge of presidential papers), the NSC,

Pentagon, and Justice Department in descending degrees also cooperated in the project. But the “securocrats” in the CIA—the agency with the most revealing documentation to offer, but also the most secrets to hide—proved to be particularly recalcitrant. For months, Agency officials sought to withhold any document demonstrating covert U.S. involvement in the death of democracy and rise of dictatorship in Chile. A special amendment to the Intelligence Act in 1999 required the Agency to produce a written report for Capitol Hill on its covert operations, *CIA Activities in Chile*. But only significant public pressure—from human rights groups, key members of Congress, and dedicated officials inside the executive branch including President Clinton himself—forced the CIA to partially open its secret files on covert American ties to the violence of the coup and, in its aftermath, to the military and secret police institutions that systematically carried out Pinochet’s abuses.

The Chile Declassification Project yielded some 2,200 CIA records. In addition, approximately 3,800 White House, National Security Council, Pentagon, and FBI records were released, along with 18,000 State Department documents that shed considerable light on Pinochet’s seventeen-year dictatorship as well as U.S. policies and actions in Chile between 1970 and 1990. In all, the Declassification Project produced 24,000 never-before-seen documents—the largest discretionary executive branch release of records on any country or foreign policy issue.

These documents provide a chronicle of twenty dramatic and dense years of American policy and operations in Chile, as well as a comprehensive chronology of Pinochet’s rampant repression. Stamped TOP SECRET/SENSITIVE, EYES ONLY, NODIS [no distribution to other agencies] NOFORN, [No Foreign Distribution], and ROGER CHANNEL [high urgency, restricted dissemination], among other classification categories, they include White House memoranda of conversation [memcons] recording the private commentary of U.S. presidents and their aides; decision directives and briefing papers prepared for Richard Nixon, Gerald Ford, Jimmy Carter, and Ronald Reagan; minutes of covert-action strategy meetings chaired by Henry Kissinger; high-level intelligence reports based on informants inside the Pinochet regime; and hundreds of heavily redacted but still revealing CIA Directorate of Operations communications with agents in its Santiago Station that detail massive covert action to change the course of Chilean history.

Indeed, the documents contain new information on virtually every major issue, episode, and scandal that pockmark this controversial era. They cover events such as: Project FUBELT, the CIA’s covert action to block Salvador Allende from becoming president of Chile in the fall of 1970; the assassination of Chilean commander-in-chief René Schneider; U.S. strategy and op-

erations to destabilize the Allende government; the degree of American support for the coup; the postcoup executions of American citizens; the origins and operations of Pinochet's secret police, DINA; CIA ties to DINA chieftain Manuel Contreras; Operation Condor; the terrorist car-bombing of Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt in Washington, D.C.; the murder by burning of Washington resident Rodrigo Rojas; and Pinochet's final efforts to thwart a transition to civilian rule. Many of the documents name names, revealing atrocities and exposing those who perpetrated them. These records have been, and are being, used to advance judicial investigations into the human rights atrocities of Pinochet's military and to hold regime officials accountable for their crimes.

They are also being used to rewrite the history books on the U.S. role in Chile. For students of this history, the declassified documents offer an opportunity to be a fly on the wall as presidents, national security advisers, CIA directors, and secretaries of state debated crucial decisions and issued nation-changing orders. They also allow the reader to observe the minute-by-minute, day-by-day process of how those orders were implemented in Chile. A comparison between what was said and done in secret and the official statements, testimonials, and memoirs reveals, in stunning detail, the mendacity that accompanied U.S. policy.

The documents also permit a reexamination of many if not all of the outstanding questions that haunt this history. Questions such as:

- What role did the United States actually play in the violent September 11, 1973, coup that brought Augusto Pinochet to power?
- What motivated President Nixon and his National Security Adviser Henry Kissinger to authorize and oversee a campaign to overthrow and undermine Chilean democracy?
- What support did the CIA covertly provide to help the Pinochet regime consolidate? What assistance did the CIA give to the murderous secret police, DINA?
- Were U.S. officials negligent, or possibly complicit, in the execution of Charles Horman, an American citizen detained by the Chilean military following the coup whose case became the subject of the Hollywood movie, *Missing*?
- What did U.S. intelligence know about Operation Condor, the Chilean-led network of Southern Cone secret police agencies that organized international acts of state-sponsored terrorism to eliminate critics of their regimes?

- Could U.S. officials have detected and deterred the September 21, 1976, car-bombing that killed Orlando Letelier and Ronni Karpen Moffitt—the most egregious act of international terrorism committed in Washington, D.C. before the September 11, 2001, attack on the Pentagon.
- And, in the end, what role did Washington play in the denouement of General Pinochet's dictatorship?

The Pinochet File

This book is an effort to revisit the complex and controversial history of U.S. policy toward democracy and dictatorship in Chile. The secret files declassified pursuant to Pinochet's arrest constitute a trove of new evidence that goes well beyond what the Church Committee reported in the mid-1970s on U.S. efforts to destabilize Chile's democratically elected government. CIA memoranda with titles such as "Chile: Initial Post Coup Support," and "Western Hemisphere Division Project Renewals for FY 1975," shed considerable light on the long hidden history of secret U.S. efforts to support the incipient military Junta. Intelligence reporting on the regime's machinery of repression provides a clear chronology of what Washington knew and when it knew it regarding General Pinochet's campaign of terror—both inside Chile and abroad. And the declassified record reveals, in rather extraordinary detail, what U.S. officials did and did not do when confronted with that knowledge.

Drawing on the abundance of information contained in the declassified documents, *The Pinochet File* provides an investigative narrative to advance a history that remains disputed to this day. At the same time, the book is an attempt to tell the story of the United States and Chile through a representative selection of documents, drawn from the long paper trail left by multiple U.S. offices and agencies, from the White House to the CIA Santiago Station. Distilling a full history into a compilation of one hundred or so reproduced records is, admittedly, impossible; for reasons of space, I have been forced to select relatively short documents and in some cases only partially reproduce them. Dozens of key documents that could not be included are quoted at length in the text. Full versions of abbreviated records published in this book, along with additional germane documentation, can be accessed on the National Security Archive's Web site, www.nsarchive.org. Ambitious readers who want to explore the broader universe of declassified documents on Chile

can consult the Department of State Web site—www.state.gov—for the full collection of 24,000 U.S. records declassified under the Chile Declassification Project.

Documents are essential to the reconstruction of history, but they do not always tell the whole story. Still classified records—and there are many on Chile—may contain additional or even contradictory information; moreover elements of these events may not have been recorded on paper. Where possible, I have attempted to supplement and clarify the information in the documents through interviews with the retired U.S. foreign policy makers who wrote or read them, among them former assistant secretaries of state for Inter-American affairs, NSC senior advisers on Latin America, several ambassadors and numerous State Department, NSC, Justice Department, and intelligence officials. I have also sought to determine what information remains hidden under the blackened sections of key documents. In a number of cases—designated in the text by information inserted within parenthesis—material blacked out in one document could be gleaned from another. There are still secrets being kept on Chile, to be sure; but today there are fewer of them.

That the secrecy surrounding Chile and U.S. relations with Pinochet has been maintained for so long reflects both the controversial nature of this past, as well as its continuing relevance to the ongoing and future debate over American intervention abroad and the moral foundations of U.S. foreign policy. The declassified documents highlighted in the pages that follow are, in essence, a dossier of atrocity and accountability, addressing not only the general and his regime, but also the shameful record of U.S. support for bloodshed and dictatorship. “One goal of the project,” states the White House statement that accompanied the final release of thousands of once-secret papers, “is to put the original documents before the public so that it may judge for itself the extent to which U.S. actions undercut the cause of democracy and human rights in Chile.” This book, hopefully, can contribute to rendering that judgment.