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KROIP

CHILE: PLEBISCITE GOES FORWARD AS PINOCHET APPARENTLY LOSES

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Air Force junta leader Matthei, entering the presidential palace at 1:00 am Santiago time (midnight EDT) for a junta meeting, told reporters that it was clear to him that the "no" vote had won and that the junta would now have to "analyze" the situation, according to Embassy Santiago. One hour later, Interior Ministry Subsecretary Cardemil announced the "no" led the "si" 53-44 percent, with 71 percent of the vote in. Later, Interior Minister Fernandez and said "we accept the results". The Committee for Free Elections, sampling approximately ten percent of the voting tables, projected the final vote would be 55.3 percent "no" and 42.7 percent "si", with the balance being null and blank ballots. The Christian Democrat Party (PDC), doing its own parallel count, had the opposition leading Pinochet by 59-41 percent with 45 percent of the vote counted. The "No Command" vote had the opposition leading 56-41 percent, with 70 percent of ballots counted. The "Independents for the si", a government-connected group, struck a discordant note by reporting Pinochet ahead by a narrow 50.3 to 49.6 percent margin, based on 30 percent of the vote. Voting was heavy (over 90 percent of the 7.4 million registered), largely peaceful and clean. Meanwhile, the Foreign Minister told Ambassador Barnes that US allegations that the plebiscite would be nullified were "offensive", according to Embassy Santiago. A similar message was passed to an Embassy officer by a secret police official, who also made a veiled threat that Barnes would be declared persona non grata. An Air Force General close to Matthei said on October 4 that Pinochet still planned to do whatever was necessary to stay in power, according to Embassy Santiago. Pinochet reportedly told advisors, "I'm not leaving, no matter what." The Air Force officer believes US actions in raising concerns about contingency plans to overturn the plebiscite helped to stay Pinochet's hand, but it was possible he could mount a coup after October 5.

Comment Though the government did not announce final results, it will be hard for the regime not to recognize its loss later today. Many of the missing votes are from Santiago, and would likely widen the opposition's lead. Pinochet's apparent choice not to implement contingency plans to overturn the plebiscite was likely influenced by junta importunings, publicity about the plan, and concern over the costs of acting contrary to the wishes of much of the military. Pinochet's manuevers suggest he will continue scheming to hold power, though he may have difficulty in doing so over the long-term and might find himself increasingly boxed in as time wears on. The opposition will follow up its victory by seeking talks with the military on amending the constitution and moving up the date of the December 1989 presidential and congressional elections. Initially, at least, the military may be resistant to these changes. Pinochet's defeat will lead to calls for his immediate retirement, though moderates will tread lightly on this subject, lest they worry the military. The far left, however, will push for Pinochet leaving and a provisional government and also try to undercut any accomodation moderates may seek with the government through demonstrations (perhaps as early as today), armed violence and sabotage.

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