

# US Foreign Policy and the 1973 Coup in Chile

Written by Aiyetoro Hinds

This PDF is auto-generated for reference only. As such, it may contain some conversion errors and/or missing information. For all formal use please refer to the official version on the website, as linked below.

## US Foreign Policy and the 1973 Coup in Chile

<https://www.e-ir.info/2016/02/12/us-foreign-policy-and-the-1973-coup-in-chile/>

AIYETORO HINDS, FEB 12 2016

The 1973 Chilean Coup has sparked one of the most controversial policy debates in contemporary politics today. Many believe it can be used as a beneficial case study, which demonstrates how underlying and hidden factors, often affects US foreign policy. After months of rising political tensions on September 11<sup>th</sup> 1973 Chile's democratically elected president Allende's government was overthrown by the armed forces and national police (O'Shaughnessy 2013). Backed by the CIA and United States Government Augusto Pinochet head of the armed forces led the coup and rose to power. Although it is now confirmed that the US government were heavily involved within the coup in Chile, many academics still argue over the main logic for the coup policy. Through analyzing primary and secondary sources it is possible to attribute president Nixon, advisor Henry Kissinger and containment policy as the three main contributing factors, which are behind the logic towards Chile's policy.

Once analyzing declassified papers it is possible to come to the conclusion that presidential advisors played a leading role in the decision to throw a Coup in Chile. United States national security archive director Kornbluh attributes advisor Henry Kissinger specifically as one of the main architects behind the policy. From his releasing of declassified phone records it is not difficult to see that Kissinger was concerned with Chile long before the coup (Kornbluh 2013). Comments such as "we will not let Chile go down the drain" (Kissinger 1970) from records in 1970 demonstrate to readers that Kissinger was willing to take action in order to maintain US interests in Chile. Statements such as these are what justify arguments, which suggest that Kissinger's fear of communist influence in South America drove CIA operations in Chile (Wolf 2008, p.14). Moreover, within his report on the Chilean Coup Briscoe suggests that Kissinger was fearful of losing many South American countries to communism (Briscoe 2015). As Kissinger was national security advisor there is no doubt that his fears would have influenced presidential decisions throughout the 1970's. Kissinger's statement combined with these academics comments therefore can be considered to be useful in analyzing the logic behind the coup. They allow us to consider Henry Kissinger's fear of communist influence in South America as a large factor influencing the logic behind the coup.

Additionally, Wolf proposes that Nixon's advisors played a large role in making the president fearful of allowing Allende's United peoples government to maintain. Shortly after Allende's victory in September 1970 a memorandum between advisors Vaky and Kissinger demonstrates the fears of many US government officials. The memorandum proposes multiple courses of action with the main theme intending to make Allende lose his power (Vaky 1970). Furthermore, the memorandum concludes with plans to "develop an internal propaganda campaign to stir fear of communism" (Vaky 1970, p.6) in Chile. The memorandum gives readers insight into the key players that were behind the communist propaganda that created social and political tensions for Allende's government between 1970 to 1973. Statements such as these further supports Wolf's argument that suggests Nixon's advisors inflicted fear into the president after Allende's election making him more likely to support controversial policies (Wolf 2008). As Nixon had only been president for just over a year it is possible to come to the conclusion that he was more likely to take advice from his advisors. This analysis allows us to come to the conclusion that Kissinger was a main contributing factor behind the logic of the Chilean policy. Using Wolf's argument in particular Nixon was vulnerable and open to whatever policy options his advisors threw at him (Wolf 2008, p.19). However, despite the influence of advisor Kissinger, one must consider the full impact of Nixon's decisions on the Chile policy.

It is without contestation that the US president has a large amount of authority, which effects policy decisions. However, Neustadt's classical formulation demonstrates how underlying factors such as professional reputation and

# US Foreign Policy and the 1973 Coup in Chile

Written by Aiyetoro Hinds

popular prestige can often affect presidential power, resulting in them having less or more influence (Viotti 2010, 188-190). Using Neustadt's formula as a guideline it is possible to come to the conclusion that Nixon's power played a large role influencing the coup policy. Within a telephone conversation 5 days after the coup both Nixon and Kissinger make statements that suggests they both heavily influenced the policy (Henry 1973). The conversation comprises of comments, which suggest that Nixon believed Allende's government was anti-American giving them more justification to influence a coup. Furthermore, statements like "our hand doesn't show on this one though ." (Henry 1973) display both Nixon and Kissinger's covert influence on the Chile policy. Given the situation of the Cold war in 1973, Nixon's popular prestige would have affected his ability to make policy decisions, making him less likely to want the general public to know about his relation to the coup. Using Neustadt's formula, Viotti suggests that during the beginning of his presidency Nixon enjoyed a high amount of professional reputation, which would have allowed him to influence policy decisions greatly (Viotti 2010, p189). Moreover, pressure in Vietnam and the failure of his Vietnamization policy would have made him more eager to succeed in Chile 1973. As a result it is plausible to suggest that Viotti's argument is useful in this debate. Once considering the pressures Nixon was under due to Vietnam and his telephone comments to Kissinger one can come to the conclusion that he was behind much of the logic, which affected Chile.

Although Viotti's findings can be considered to be useful in this debate they ignore Nixon's deep ideologies and its influence on Chile policy. Within his paper Wolf considers Nixon's fear of communist influence in South America as a logical reason to support a coup policy. It is therefore understandable to why Nixon ordered a meeting between national security leaders shortly after Allende's election in 1970 (Wolf 2010, p.18). Within a memorandum between the national security directors Nixon's fears of a leftist government are expressed. Direct statements include decisions to limit Chile's ability to create any policy against US interests (National security decision memorandum, 1970), displaying to readers Nixon's fears of the new Chilean government gaining support. The memorandum can be used as a strong piece of evidence supporting Wolf's argument, as well as displaying how Nixon's fears eventually affected the coup policy. Briscoe's report further supports Wolf's argument for it discusses how uncovered CIA documents connect Nixon's leftist fears to many important policy decisions (Briscoe 2015). As a consequence it is possible to suggest that Nixon's hatred for communism would have affected a large part of his policy decisions. One must consider the context of the situation however when analyzing the logic behind the coup. Failures in Cuba and Vietnam in the 1960's would have undoubtedly increased pressures for presidents in the 1970's. It is therefore not difficult to comprehend why Nixon was fearful of leftist ties in Chile. As a result Nixon would have had a large voice in discussions on whether to have a coup in Chile. With popular prestige and professional reputation in mind it is easy to connect Nixon with the logic behind the coup.

Stemmed from fears of advancing Soviet influence it is possible to attribute containment theory as a main factor behind the logic of the coup policy. Originating from George Kennan's long telegram in 1946, the US government created a policy that sought to contain the Soviet Union's expansion of communism (Kennan 1946). Falcolff's views are useful in this debate for he suggests that the US believed the Chilean government had ties with the Soviet Union and Cuba. As a consequence many within the US government would have supported the coup because of containment policy (Falcolff 2011). National security memorandums are extremely useful when analyzing the effects of containment. Statements such as "the U.S. opposes consolidation of a communist state in Chile hostile to the interests of the United States.." display features of containment (National Security Decision Memorandum, 1970). This statement directly demonstrates the US government's objective to stop the spread of communism in other nations, strengthening Falcolff's argument altogether. Furthermore, Falcolff suggests that Allende's 1970 election was the end of an ideological journey for the people of Chile (Falcolff 2011). Given the traditional minority rule over the majority, it is possible to suggest that Chile was ready for socialist ideologies. As a consequence US intervention was therefore inevitable for containment theory was hostile against socialism.

In contrast Sigmund demonstrates that containment policy didn't necessarily have an effect on the coup. Sigmund suggests that the United States government cannot be held responsible for the outcome in Chile (Sigmund 1977, p.275). Using the tensions between political parties as his main argument Sigmund suggests that a coup was necessary to prevent eventual civil war. (Sigmund 1977, p.275) Although very controversial Sigmund's argument is supported by the reality that Allende's government was able to come into power in 1970 with only 36% of the country's vote (Sigmund 1977 p.276). As a result it is not difficult to understand why political tensions were high in

# US Foreign Policy and the 1973 Coup in Chile

Written by Aiyetoro Hinds

Chile. Although he contests the severity of US involvement it is still possible to use Sigmund's findings to display how containment theory was behind the logic of the 1973 coup. Memorandum notes between Kissinger and Vaky from 1970 display discussions of US responses towards Allende's victory (Vaky 1970). Focused mostly on how to gain support from anti-marxist groups in Chile Kissinger and Vaky's discussions demonstrate that the US would not allow a socialist government to remain in Chile. Any Country with leftist ties was considered to be a threat to the United States during the Cold War. Kissinger and Vaky's discussion can therefore be considered to be containment in practice for they are outlining ways to contain communism in Chile. Sigmund's analysis as a result can be useful in this debate for he recognizes how political tensions in Chile eventually led to a coup. Memorandum notes further support this idea for the US sought ways to influence non-communist opposition groups in Chile. As a result it is possible to attribute containment theory as the main factor, which was behind the logic of coup discussions.

Once considering the primary sources and multiple arguments discussed within this essay it is not difficult to come to the conclusion that the United States were heavily involved within the coup. This analysis however, gives readers insight into how the US reacts when a country goes against their own interests. Once considering the complexity and tension that existed throughout the Cold War it is possible to come to the conclusion that a covert coup was necessary. The containment of communism as a policy lasted from the 1940s all the way to the 90s. It is therefore plausible to suggest that this policy affected decisions in Chile and can be attributed to be the main logic behind the coup. The primary sources however, demonstrate that Kissinger had a large influence on Nixon's decisions as well, making him a main factor behind the policy. From these findings one can attribute Kissinger as well as containment as the two main factors behind the logic of the coup. Wolf and Falcolff's arguments are the most useful in this debate. Wolf's arguments are useful for they demonstrate Nixon's reliance on his advisors to make important policy decisions. Falcolff's arguments in contrast can also be considered to be very useful for he demonstrates that Chile was prone to socialism due to minority rule in Chile. Falcolff's argument allows one to consider that Socialism in Chile was inevitable without any Soviet influence. The United States concerns over communism can therefore be attributed to containment fears that were often disproportionate to actual threats during the Cold War. Containment theory can therefore be considered to be the strongest factor affecting the logic behind the coup.

## References

- Briscoe, DB (2015) *CIA admits involvement in Chile*. Available from: <http://abcnews.go.com/International/story?id=82588&page=1> [Accessed 7 December 2015]
- Falcolff, MF (2011). The Overthrow of Allende and the Politics of Chile. *Pacific historical review*.48 (4), pp.627-628
- Henry, K. and Nixon, R. (1973). TelCon:9. [telecon] National Security Archive. (online), Available from: <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB437/docs/Doc%207%20-%20Kissinger-Nixon%20telcon%20Sep%2016%201973.pdf> (Accessed 5 December 2015)
- Kennan, GK. (1946) Telegram to the Secretary of State, Department of State, National Security Archive (Online), Available from: <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/coldwar/documents/episode-1/kennan.htm> (Accessed: 7 December 2015)
- Kissinger, HK. (1970). [telecon] National Security Archive. (online), Available from: <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB437/docs/Doc%201%20-%20Helms-Kissinger%20telcon.pdf> (Accessed 5 December 2015)
- Kornbluh, PK. (2013). KISSINGER AND CHILE: THE DECLASSIFIED RECORD ON REGIME CHANGE. [online] Available at: <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB437/> [Accessed 6 Dec. 2015]
- National Security Decision Memorandum. (1970). [memorandum] National security Archive.
- O'Shaughnessy, HO (2013). *Chilean coup: 40 years ago I watched Pinochet crush a democratic dream*. Available from: <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2013/sep/07/chile-coup-pinochet-allende> [Accessed 7 December 2015]

# **US Foreign Policy and the 1973 Coup in Chile**

Written by Aiyetoro Hinds

Sigmund, PS. (1977). The overthrow of Allende and the politics of Chile, 1964-1976. Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, pp.275 – 295

Vaky, VV. (1970). Memorandum for Dr. Kissinger. [memorandum] National Security Archive. (online) Available from: <http://nsarchive.gwu.edu/NSAEBB/NSAEBB437/docs/Doc%20%20-%20Vaky%20to%20Kissinger%20Sep%2014%201970%20-%20Chile-40%20Committee%20Meeting%20Monday%20-%20Sep%2014.pdf> (Accessed 5 December 2015)

Viotti, PV. (2010) *American foreign policy*. pp. 186 -209.

Wolf, R. (2008). The Overthrow of Chilean President Salvador Allende Gossens. Master of Arts. Texas Tech University.

*Written by: Aiyetoro Hinds*  
*Written for: Dr Stephen McGlinchey*  
*Written at: UWE Bristol*  
*Date Written: December 2015*