

President Defends Operations in Chile

Ford Defends Action

By Laurence Stern
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President Ford defended U.S. covert political operations in Chile last night and said they were designed to preserve the opposition press and political parties after the 1970 election of the late Salvador Allende.

State Department and White House spokesmen were unable, however, to amplify on the President's assertion that the Allende government attempted, after its accession, "to destroy opposition news media . . . and to destroy opposition political parties."

Mr. Ford said that the covert program was "in the best interests of the people in Chile and certainly in our best interests."

At the time of Allende's overthrow and death on Sept. 11, 1973, some 10 major newspapers covering the entire political spectrum nearly two dozen radio stations and all major political parties were operating in Chile.

The military junta that ousted Allende from power terminated operations of all political parties and permitted only pro-government newspapers to resume publication. The Chilean Congress, which ratified Allende's election in 1970, was also closed.

Both White House and State Department spokesmen said they had "no guidance" on the President's explanation for the initiation of the covert programs in Chile.

The issue emerged during the press conference in the context of recent disclosure that Central Intelligence Agency Director William E. Colby told a House subcommittee some \$11 million in covert funds were authorized by a National Security Council body and targeted against Allende both before and after his election in 1970.

Mr. Ford also endorsed the kinds of covert actions carried out in Chile and other countries that are supervised by

the Forty Committee, an inter-departmental panel of the NSC responsible for management of those programs.

Ford noted that the Forty Committee reviews "every covert operation undertaken by our government and that information is relayed to the responsible congressional committees where it is reviewed by House and Senate committees.

"It seems to me that the Forty Committee should continue in existence and I am going to meet with the responsible congressional committees to see whether or not they want any changes in the review process so that the Congress as well as the President are fully informed and are fully included in the operations for any such actions," Mr. Ford added.

As far as could be determined in interviews with chairmen and members of the two principal oversight committees in the House and Senate last week, they had not previously been briefed by past administrations on the details and scope of the anti-Allende operations as they were revealed in the Colby testimony.

Sen. Stuart Symington (D-Mo.), one of the most senior CIA overseers on Capitol Hill, told The Washington Post he

was "very surprised" at Colby's recent revelations.

Asked whether, under international law, the United States has a right to seek to destabilize a constitutionally elected government abroad, Mr. Ford said: "I'm not going to pass judgment on whether it's permitted or authorized under international law. It's a recognized fact that, historically, as well as presently, such actions are taken in the best interests of the countries involved."

The President said he has been reliably informed that Communist countries spend "vastly more money than we do" for covert operations.

He reiterated the claims made by Secretary of State Henry A. Kissinger and CIA Director Colby that "our government had no involvement whatsoever in the Allende coup . . . The facts are we have no involvement in any way whatsoever in the coup itself."

Last night the only record of an anti-press action by the Allende government was the closing June 21, 1973, for six days of the leading opposition newspaper El Mercurio on a charge that it was inciting subversion. The newspaper, which controls the country's major news chain, was reopened by an appellate court decision.

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