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# The death of Allende: Just what does it say?

## THE LAST TWO YEARS OF SALVADOR ALLENDE

by Nathaniel Davis

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**T**HE role of ambassador is an inherently tragic one. By tradition it is highly honorific, carrying with it the prestige of representing, even embodying the power of nations and of kings. Yet, although an ambassador may need experience and skill to carry out his or her (usually his) duties, he is essentially without any personal power at all.

In modern times, ambassadors for the most powerful nation the world has ever known have become even more impotent. The system of covert activities which represents a fundamental, but usually unacknowledged, arm of US international relations requires that accredited diplomats be provided with a mantle of deniability which leaves them ignorant of aspects of policy being implemented through their embassies—that little island of national property in a foreign land over which they are supposed to wield sovereignty.

The description Mr. Davis provides of the role of his predecessor, Ambassador Edward Korry, in Chile during the election of Salvador Allende amply demonstrates the fact. Korry was kept in ignorance of Track II, the CIA plot to prevent Allende from becoming president of Chile.

Davis makes much of the fact that the Track II scenario was to be a kidnapping of General Rene Schneider, chief of staff of the Chilean Army, rather than the assassination it became. He also spends a chapter trying to ascertain whether Allende lost his life during the coup through assassination or suicide. The correctness of these facts does have historical value. But does this deal with the fun-

damental historic issues?

The basic premise of US foreign policy in Latin America, and in many other parts of the world, which Mr. Davis spent his life trying to help carry out, is that US power should predominate. This involves putting into place and maintaining through overt and covert means governments of foreign nations that officeholders in the United States regard as conducive to the continuation of US hegemony. This is a bipartisan foreign policy. There may be disagreements from time to time, or even shifts in judgment about which types of foreign leadership will promote US hegemony, but the fundamental right and need to play this worldwide game is never questioned. It is the basic acceptance of this position that make this such a frustrating book.

Illy researched account is not a diplomat's approval of a controversial policy of Richard Nixon. Nixon and Henry Kissinger made it their project to overthrow the democratically-elected Allende because he was a Marxist. He was also a democrat determined to bring about a peaceful, legal transition to socialism. In his introduction Davis concedes that he has not been able to "reveal all", because some information remains classified.

However, he does assure us that "No false impressions have been knowingly created by artful omission" (p. xiii). However, the American Institute of Free Labor Development (AIFLD) is widely believed to have been an instrument of the CIA and is considered by many writers to have been an important conduit for destabilization in Chile. In his discussion of this issue, Davis acknowledges only that AIFLD activities were controversial in Chile and elsewhere in Latin America because "free trade unionism is usually a politically sensitive matter". (p. 40)

**D**AVIS's account seems primarily motivated toward establishing that the United States was not covertly involved in organizing the coup which overthrew the Unidad Popular government of President Allende. He does this by a lengthy examination of the public record, augmented by the personal assurances of the regional head of the CIA, David Attlee Philips, that this was so. Logically, the lack of documentation is not adequate to demonstrate something did not happen.

And, somehow, one is not reassured by the protestations of Mr. Philips, whose presumed training and practice would not dispose him to acknowledge anything as yet unrevealed. Moreover, Mr. Davis does not cover all the bases. One issue which he does not deal with is the matter of psychological warfare which was raised in a book that he does use extensively in the section on the death of Allende. This work, *Death in Washington* by Donald Freed and Fred Landis, describes the use of the newspaper El Mercurio for subtle psychological techniques to create a national climate conducive to the destabilization of Chilean society. It was the authors' contention that this was directed by the CIA.

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History will have to wait to pass judgment on whether or not the US was directly involved in the Chilean coup. Davis's discussion, lengthy as it is, does not erase doubts from the minds of those who know the history of US involvements in other areas. Davis's own resignation as Assistant Secretary of State for Africa because of by that time Secretary of State Kissinger's desire to use covert activities in Angola is a case in point. However, it is not covert action alone that helps foment a coup.

Yes, the United States set the stage for the overthrow of the government and constitution in Chile. But that is not extraordinary. Since the World War II era the US government has been instrumental in the overthrow of three chief executives in Guatemala, two in Honduras and the Dominican Republic, and one in Panama, Bolivia, Brazil, Grenada, Guyana and El Salvador and it is currently trying to overthrow the government of Nicaragua. This is the context of the Chilean events, this and US efforts to manipulate rulership throughout the Third World.

In the past US presidents have tried to kill the Cuban president with poison, high-powered weapons and a Mafia contract. Honored persons like Nathaniel Davis are gentlemen in a world meaner and greedier than the concealing diplomatic niceties of their offices. Today in the realm of real power our government demands that a small Central American country says "uncle" on pain of continuing to suffer from murderous invading bands dispatched by the CIA.