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Chile: Election Postscript

The endorsement of the Chilean Government's position in the national referendum last week was a clear personal victory for President Pinochet that exceeded his own expectations. The turnout was exceptionally heavy--about 5.4 million out of almost 6 million eligible voters, with 75 percent favoring the government's rejection of the UN resolution censuring Chile for human rights violations.

We have no evidence that the government employed fraud in the plebiscite. The referendum was carefully worded to appeal to the strong nationalism of the Chileans; Pinochet thereby assured himself of an overwhelming advantage against those groups that urged a negative vote.

Pinochet's victory will consolidate his support within the military, particularly the Army, where doubt



Pinochet in downtown Santiago before referendum

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about his judgment and leadership was beginning to spread, and will reaffirm his preeminent position in the junta. As a result, he will now have a freer hand in many areas.

Domestic Policy

Pinochet will not hesitate to point to the referendum as evidence of his government's legitimacy and of his own political astuteness. He has remarked that there will be no more elections or voting for a decade and evidently intends to act as though he has a mandate for the slow transition to civilian rule that he outlined last July. His remarks on presidential and congressional elections have been inconsistent, however, and he may show some flexibility on this point. The Chileans, having now been allowed to exercise the vote, are likely to be more strident in demanding greater political participation. 150

We expect no harsh new crackdown, but Pinochet will almost certainly be tougher toward his opponents in the outlawed political parties and in labor and church circles. Although he has proclaimed that the curfew and the state-of-siege restrictions will remain in force, there is a good chance that he will relax them when he thinks the point has been made that Chile is not bending to foreign pressure.

Pinochet will, however, weed out dissenters within the government. He has announced his intention to reorganize the Foreign Ministry. A number of officials in this Ministry, including Admiral Carvajal who heads it, had protested the call for the referendum. The two junta members who opposed the vote--Air Force chief General Leigh and Navy chief Admiral Merino--may be forced to step aside.

Leigh is still sniping at Pinochet. Although he has publicly reaffirmed his loyalty and brushed off suggestions of a split in the junta, Leigh has confided to a few newsmen that the President is becoming a power-hungry dictator. Leigh also alleged that the CIA is backing hard-liners in hopes of toppling Pinochet.

It is hard to see what Leigh hoped to gain from his statements. They are almost certain to leak and will

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make his position even more untenable. Leigh may be trying to provoke Pinochet into removing him, perhaps on the assumption that such a step would catalyze opposition within the armed services and lead to Pinochet's removal. This is probably a misjudgment on Leigh's part.

Foreign Policy

Pinochet has stressed that his government will now adopt a more aggressive foreign policy, presumably a harder line toward the UN and other critics.

It is difficult to judge how he will play the relationship with the US. Although improved relations with Washington remain a fundamental objective of Chile's military leadership, Pinochet probably feels a specific quid pro quo--such as support for Chile's requests for loans through international organizations--should be forthcoming if there are to be further responses on human rights issues.

Chile has made substantial progress in improving its human rights practices, and most Chileans probably resent what they regard as a lack of recognition of this change. Among the improvements noted [redacted] by the Red Cross and other international organizations that monitor human rights are:

- A marked reduction in reports of torture, illegal detentions, and "disappearances."
- Considerable improvement in treatment of political prisoners. About 250 persons remain imprisoned on security-related charges.
- The release of 4,000 political prisoners over the past several years. [redacted]

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