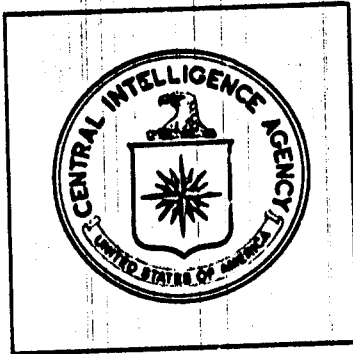


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Latin America

# REGIONAL AND POLITICAL ANALYSIS

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Chile: Reaction to Junta's Tough Line

Influential civilian supporters of the Chilean junta are alarmed over the tough measures it recently adopted. They believe that President Pinochet may have "gone too far" by outlawing all remaining political parties and stiffening the penalties for political activity.

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Youth leaders, for example, including representatives of a government-sanctioned group, issued a critical public statement last week. They expressed the hope that the government would "overcome the concerted action of certain fascists and extremists in general who seek to take advantage of the current situation to sharpen social and political tension." Two conservative newspapers--in indirect but unmistakable language--asked just how far the junta intends to go in limiting political expression. And the civilian head of the commission set up to draft a new constitution questioned the junta's need to assume authority beyond the vast powers it already has.

In addition to the political ban, increased restrictions on the press and an extension of the state of siege were announced. The party ban is the most disturbing development because it appears to end what faint hope there was for early restoration of traditionally open political practices. Most Chilean observers perceive no need for such a drastic measure; parties of the left had already been dissolved and those that remained were being closely watched.

Pinochet may have been taken somewhat aback by the criticism that his latest moves have drawn. On March 18 he addressed the nation in what seemed an effort to defend his actions and mollify Chilean public opinion. The President reviewed the junta's economic accomplishments and stressed the lack of social strife since the military takeover. Pinochet, nevertheless, repeated his charge that the Christian Democrats had consistently violated the political recess and had preached dangerous, "demagogic" solutions that could only lead to "chaos."

  
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The President offered a sop of sorts by announcing his intention to assign "important legislative projects to the Council of State, a civilian advisory group composed of distinguished citizens. He also suggested that the council could eventually evolve into a legislative chamber, but there are few local observers who believe the group will ever be more than window dressing.

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