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Chile: The Regime Views its Foreign Critics (U)

The current UN resolution condemning Chilean human rights violations--like the recent US actions in the Letelier case--is likely to leave Santiago unmoved because the Pinochet regime approaches its problems from a perspective fundamentally different from that of its foreign critics.

The Chilean Government is not only hardened to international criticism, but--as the country's position has strengthened in the years since the coup--feels increasingly less vulnerable to anti-Chilean sentiment. Contrasting the political chaos and triple digit inflation of the Allende administration with the economic recovery and relatively high popular support for the government today, military leaders claim their policies have been vindicated. They still subscribe to the view that the Allende period was a cataclysmic national experience from which Chile could recover only by a thorough reorganization of its economy and political system. Believing they could implement this program only by rooting out all leftist extremists, military leaders now rationalize the severe, massive human rights violations of the regime's early years as the necessary cost of larger political objectives. The nation's dramatically improved human rights record since 1976 is, therefore, due primarily to the regime's belief that the threat from the left has partially subsided.

In holding these views, the Chilean military remains at odds with most of the international community. Santiago has long since discarded its initial hope that many nations--and, in particular, those of the West--would appreciate its efforts to crush "Marxist dictatorship" and recognize the "need" for firm measures. Moreover, Chile still does not share the general international perception that a protracted period of authoritarian rule is out of place in Chile--one of the few Latin American countries with a long democratic tradition.

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Santiago, therefore, has difficulty understanding the strength of anti-Chilean sentiment abroad and is chagrined at what it sees as a gullible West--fed by Soviet propaganda--applying a double standard in judging rightist and leftist governments. [REDACTED]

The Pinochet regime particularly resents what it believes to be inadequate recognition of improvements in its human rights record. Chilean frustration on this score was evident in December 1977, when, after a year of significant amelioration of human rights conditions in Chile, the UN's annual resolution failed to acknowledge fully these gains. Santiago responded by holding a plebiscite in which Chileans rejected the UN findings by a three to one vote and, in doing so, gave an implicit vote of confidence to their government. [REDACTED]

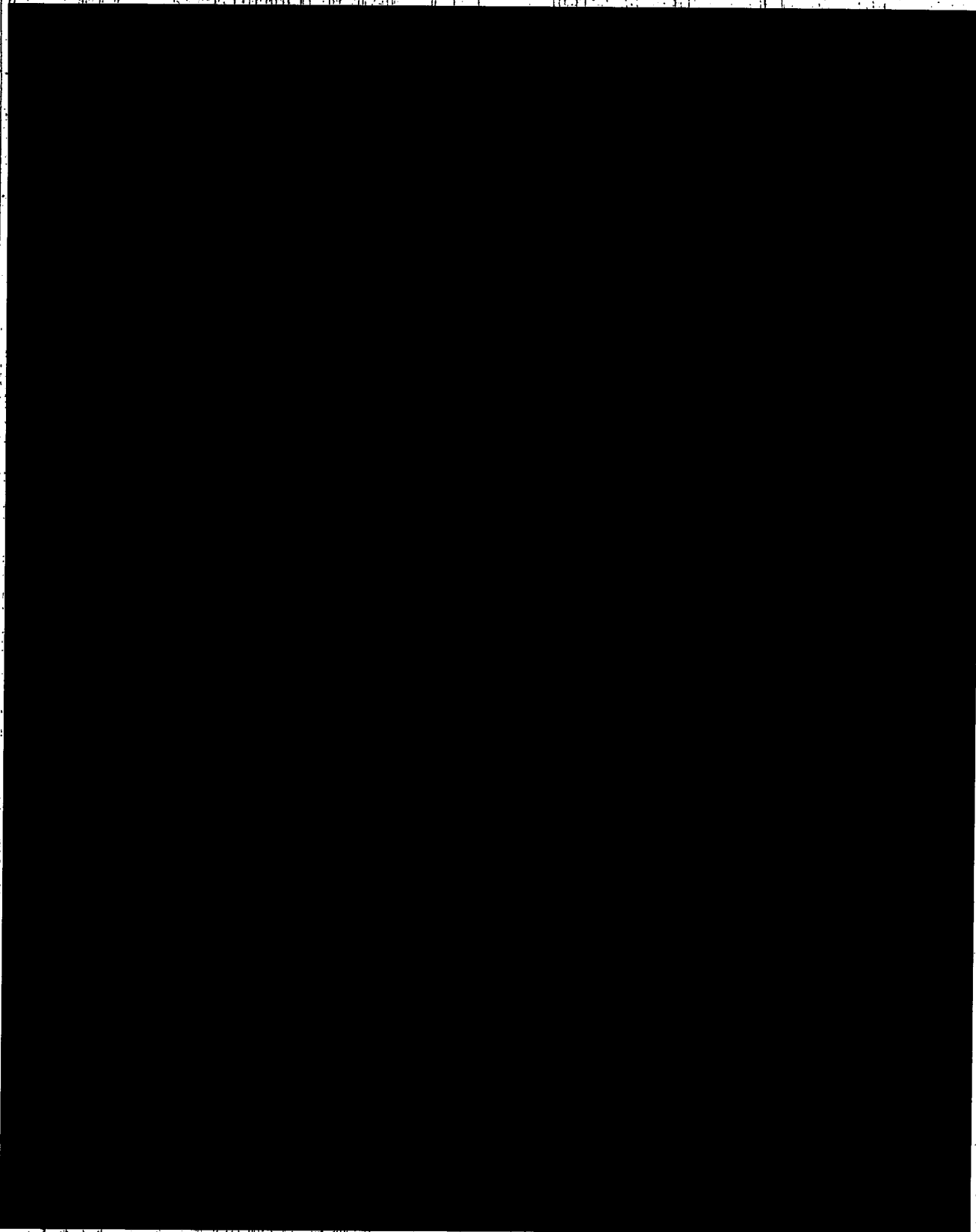
To a large extent, the Pinochet regime is pragmatic--as indicated by its fairly close ties to a government as ideologically dissimilar as China's--and therefore is able to be flexible for the sake of practical advantage. For example, when international labor organizations threatened to boycott Chilean shipping last January, Santiago placated them by easing restrictions on Chilean labor. [REDACTED]

Nonetheless, Santiago apparently feels little compulsion to yield ground to the United States and most other Western countries at this time, perhaps because reductions in their public assistance to Chile have lessened their leverage. As indicated by its refusal to make even a credible show of investigating the Letelier case, the regime does not believe that Washington is in a position to make Chile pay a very high price for its obstinacy. As long as these circumstances prevail, the withholding of approbation by the international community cannot be expected to result in further improvements in Chile's human rights record. [REDACTED]

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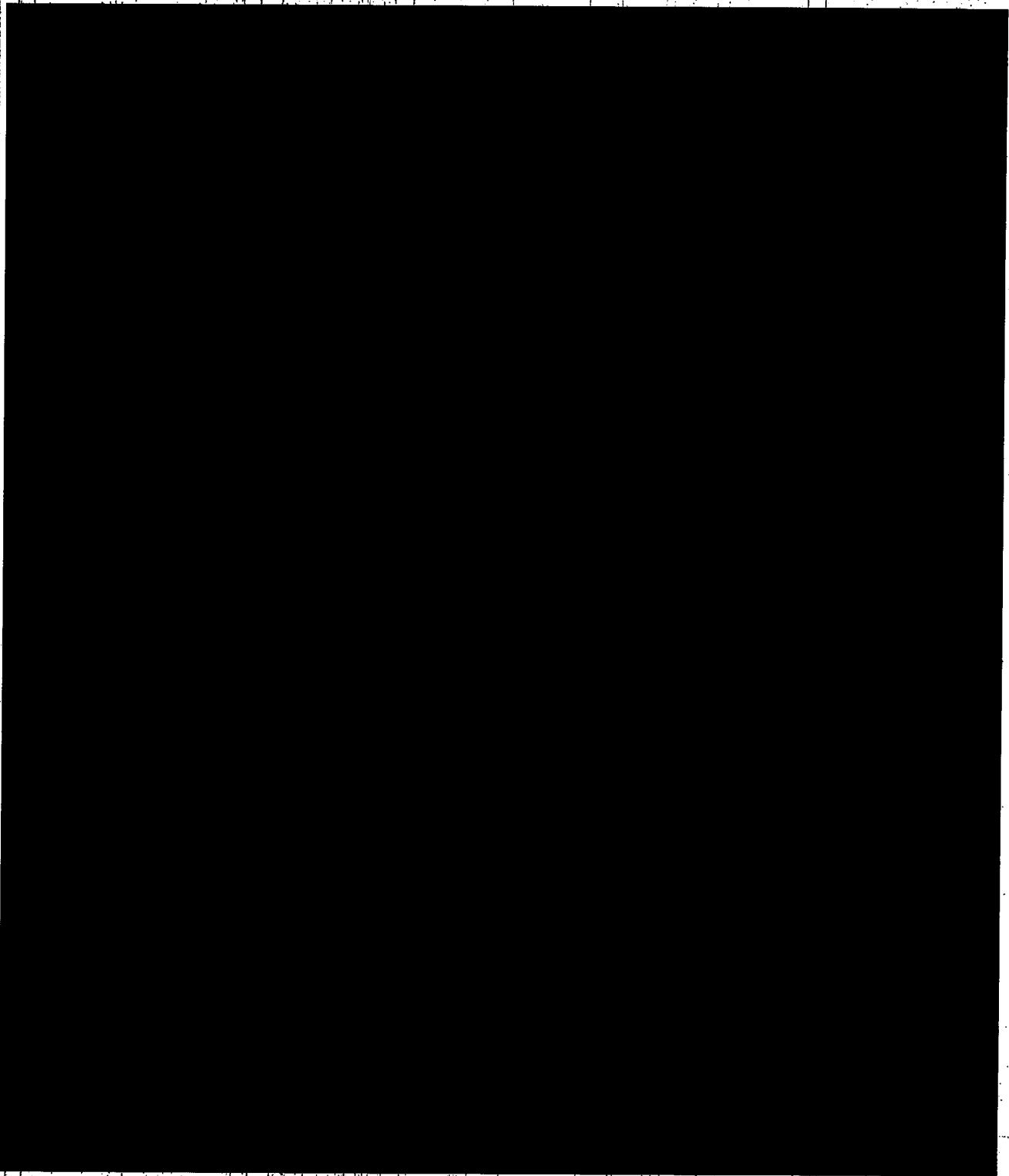


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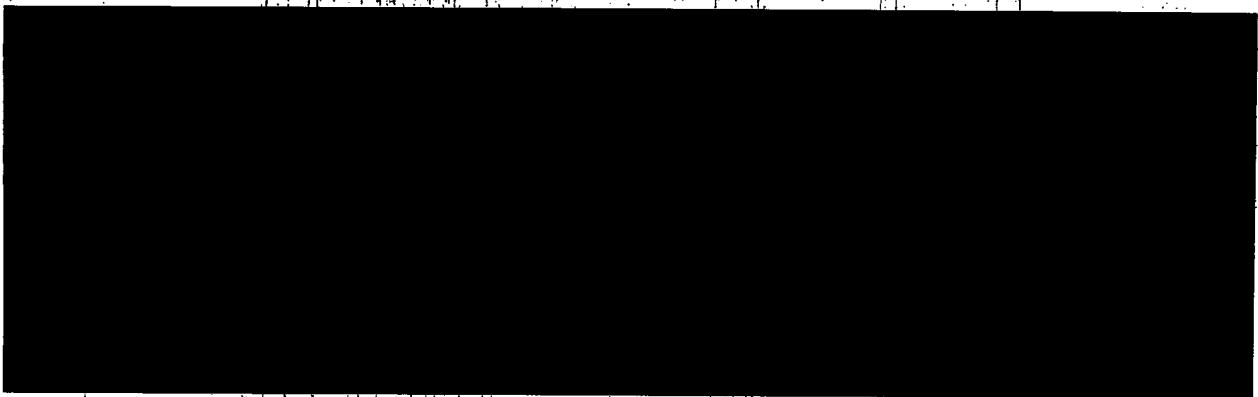
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