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CHILE: Installation of Transition Government

The inauguration today of a military-dominated transition government and the adoption of a new constitution presage no basic changes in Chile's domestic situation or foreign policies.

President Pinochet and the military junta will remain in office until civilian rule is restored in 1990. Pinochet could then seek an additional term as the first head of the elective government. Even under eventual civilian rule the government will retain authoritarian features, including a strong executive, military participation in an oversight council, and a proscription of Marxist parties.

Public endorsement of the constitution in a plebiscite last fall gave Pinochet's seven-year regime a legitimacy it had lacked. The addition of a constitutional foundation to his presidency will help strengthen Pinochet against any military opposition that might arise.

Pinochet is supported by the armed forces and much of the public, and the economy is strong. Faced with these conditions, civilian politicians are at a loss for a way to compete for a constituency. Radical opposition groups are no threat, although one small organization recently has increased antiregime violence.

Civilian opponents hoping to persuade Pinochet to soften some of his government's more restrictive policies may look to the US for support. They believe Washington's influence has been enhanced by such recent actions as the lifting of sanctions.