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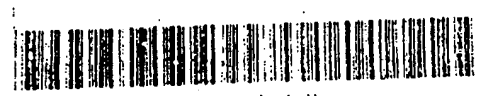
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CHILE: Wrestling With Human Rights Issue

The controversial issue of human rights abuses by the military since the 1973 coup is looming larger in domestic politics as Chile approaches next year's transition to civilian rule. President Pinochet recently announced that the human rights issue must be settled during his administration and that he will remain Army commander—he can stay legally for eight more years—to protect the military against "revenge." His call last week for an amnesty for armed forces members, to cover incidents since the amnesty he decreed in 1978, drew strong reactions from human rights groups and political parties across the spectrum. [REDACTED] the main opposition coalition is still debating how the government to be installed next March should handle human rights cases; the coalition is determined not to ignore crimes committed before the 1978 amnesty. The recent assassination by a leftist group of a former security officer, notorious as a torturer in the early 1970s, has sharpened debate on the human rights problem and heightened fears of spiraling violence. [REDACTED]

Comment: Pinochet, regarded increasingly as a lameduck, evidently hopes to preserve support in the armed forces by portraying himself as its ultimate defender against a vindictive civilian regime. His failure to control the human rights issue, however, could torpedo his prospects for remaining Army commander. Opposition leaders and even moderate rightists almost certainly would prefer to deal directly with the high command on the issue, however, because they realize that the stability of the next government will depend in large measure on reducing the military's anxiety about human rights matters. [REDACTED]

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