

Kissinger

DECLASSIFIED

BY LUCY KOMISAR

I recently got hold of a declassified memorandum about Henry Kissinger's only meeting with Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet. The meeting occurred on June 8, 1976, in Santiago, and the internal State Department memorandum shows how hard Kissinger tried to shield the Chilean general from criticism and assure him that his human rights violations were not a serious problem as far as the U.S. government was concerned.

I had been trying since 1995 to get the memorandum, which was stamped SECRET/NO DIS (No Distribution). My initial request was refused, but suddenly, to my surprise, the State Department "memorandum of conversation" arrived in the mail in October, shortly after Pinochet's arrest, with a note explaining that, on re-review, it had been opened in full.

The memo describes how Secretary of State Kissinger stroked and bolstered Pinochet, how—with hundreds of political prisoners still being jailed and tortured—Kissinger told Pinochet that the Ford Administration would not hold those human rights violations against him. At a time when Pinochet was the target of international censure for state-sponsored torture, disappearances, and murders, Kissinger assured him that he was a victim of communist propaganda and urged him not to pay too much attention to American critics.

The meeting occurred at a gathering of the Organization of American States (OAS). Against the advice of most of the State Department's Latin America staff, Kissinger decided to go to Chile for the opening of the OAS general assembly. He and Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American Affairs William Rogers flew into Santiago June 7 and met with Pinochet the

Lucy Komisar, a New York journalist, is working on a book about U.S. foreign policy and human rights in several countries, including Chile, in the 1970s and 1980s. Support for this article was provided by The Fund for Investigative Journalism, Inc.

next day. The site of the meeting was the presidential suite in Diego Portales, an office building used during repairs on La Moneda, the presidential palace Pinochet had bombed on September 11, 1973, when he overthrew Salvador Allende. Chilean Foreign Minister Patricio Carvajal and Ambassador to the United States Manuel Trucco were also there. (I've interviewed Rogers, Carvajal, and Trucco, but not Kissinger, who has refused requests.)

Kissinger was dogged by charges he had promoted the military coup against an elected Allende government, and he sought to maintain a cool public distance from Pinochet. But at his confidential meeting, he promised warm support.

Kissinger first assured Pinochet that they had a strong bond in their overriding anti-communism. Pinochet noted that though the Spaniards had tried to stop communism in the Spanish Civil War, it was springing up again. Kissinger replied, "We had the Spanish King recently, and I discussed that very issue with him."

Then he made clear that the U.S. government was squarely behind Pinochet. "In the United States, as you know, we are sympathetic with what you are trying to do here," Kissinger told Pinochet. "I think that the previous government was headed toward communism. We wish your government well."

A little while later, he added: "My evaluation is that you are a victim of all left-wing groups around the world, and that your greatest sin was that you overthrew a government which was going Communist."

Kissinger dismissed American human rights campaigns against Chile's government as "domestic problems." And he assured Pinochet that he was against sanctions such as those proposed by Senator Edward Kennedy, Democrat of Massachusetts, which would ban arms sales and transfers to governments that were gross human rights violators.

Kissinger joked with Pinochet, saying: "I don't know if you listen in on my phone, but if you do, you have just heard me issue instructions to Washington to make an all-out effort to [defeat the Kennedy Amendment]—if we defeat it, we will deliver the F-5E's as we agreed to do." He told Pinochet, "We held up [the fighter planes] for a while in order to avoid providing additional ammunition to our enemies."

Both men also indicated worry about an amendment by Representative Donald Fraser, Democrat of Minnesota, to ban nonmilitary aid to egregious human rights violators. "As you know, Congress is now debating further restraints on aid to Chile," Kissinger told Pinochet. "We are opposed."

Still, Kissinger was being pressured by the U.S. media to make a statement on human rights. He had just received an OAS report saying that mass arrests, torture, and disappearances continued in Chile. "Numerous political prisoners have been killed arbitrarily or have died from torture received or from lack of medical treatment," the report said. An earlier OAS report had detailed those tortures: women beaten, gang raped, and forced to endure electric current applied to their bodies; men subjected to electric current, especially to their genitals, burned with cigarettes, hanged by the wrists or ankles.

The speech Kissinger would give that afternoon to the OAS couldn't ignore human rights. It had to be something Republicans could point to. But it also couldn't offend or weaken Pinochet.

Kissinger wanted Pinochet to know that the speech should not be interpreted as a criticism of Chile. He told him, "I will treat