

HOWARD ZINN AND THE EDITORS ON KOSOVO
AN INTERVIEW WITH ROBERT PINSKY

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THE CHILE FILES

**Pinochet,
the Lincoln Brigade,
and Me**

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Kissinger's Secret Memo

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Holland

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

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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



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human rights in general terms and human rights in a world context. I will refer in two paragraphs to the report on Chile of the OAS Human Rights Commission. I will say that the human rights issue has impaired relations between the U.S. and Chile. This is partly the result of Congressional actions. I will add that I hope you will shortly remove those obstacles.”

He told Pinochet, “I will also call attention to the Cuba report and to the hypocrisy of some who call attention to human rights as a means of intervening in governments.”

Kissinger suggested to Pinochet that his statements on Chile were calibrated to avoid greater damage to the country. “I can do no less without producing a reaction in the U.S. which would lead to legislative restrictions,” he said. “The speech is not aimed at Chile. . . . We have a practical problem we have to take into account, without bringing about pressures incompatible with your dignity, and at the same time which does not lead to U.S. laws which will undermine our relationship.”

Kissinger explained: “My statement and our position are designed to allow us to say to the Congress that we are talking to the Chilean government and therefore Congress need not act.” He emphasized the point: “My statement is not offensive to Chile. Ninety-five percent of what I say is applicable to all the governments of the

Hemisphere. It includes things your own people have said.”

As if Pinochet could have had any doubt, Kissinger said, “We welcomed the overthrow of the Communist-inclined government here.” By overthrowing Allende, you have done a great service to the West, Kissinger told him. “We are not out to weaken your position.”

The memorandum also reveals that Pinochet twice complained about Orlando Letelier, Allende’s former foreign minister, who was assassinated by Pinochet’s forces in Washington, D.C., on September 21, 1976, three months after the Kissinger-Pinochet meeting.

Kissinger knew that Pinochet had set up an infamous international terrorist network, Operation Condor, to assassinate his enemies. In 1974, when the CIA discovered that Chile and its allies wanted to set up a covert office in Miami as part of Operation Condor, Kissinger rejected his own State Department officials’ advice to publicly protest the plan.

That would have been a warning to prospective victims who had sought safety in exile, but Kissinger opted instead to let the CIA quietly pass on the word to Chile’s secret police, the Directorate of National Intelligence (DINA), and the office wasn’t opened.

But Operation Condor continued to tar-

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get and murder Pinochet’s enemies. In September 1974, agents assassinated General Carlos Prats, Pinochet’s constitutionalist predecessor who had been forced out and had fled to Buenos Aires. The following September, Operation Condor organized the Rome attack that disabled Christian Democratic oppositionist Bernardo Leighton and his wife. Then in September 1976, the operation returned to the United States with a vengeance, planting the car bomb that killed Letelier and his Institute for Policy Studies colleague Ronni Moffitt in Washington.

George Landau, the U.S. ambassador in Paraguay, had warned the CIA that two Chilean agents had been trying to get visas to the United States in Asunción under false names, but the CIA never warned Letelier, a prime target for Pinochet, nor did it act through its agents at other U.S. consulates to block the agents’ travel. The U.S. consulate in Santiago issued the killers visas to the United States.

Manuel Contreras, head of Pinochet’s secret police, who is serving seven years in prison in Chile for his role in the murders, declared in December 1997 that he was following Pinochet’s orders.

Pinochet had no reason to believe the bombing would cause problems for him. After all, he had just had a warm private meeting with Henry Kissinger.

At that meeting, Pinochet said: “We are

Henry, the Revisionist

Kissinger's new book, *Years of Renewal* (Simon & Schuster, 1999), includes a twelve-page section entitled "Chile, Human Rights, and the Organization of American States." His account of his meeting with Pinochet varies greatly from the one in the State Department memo I obtained.

In his book, Kissinger writes: "As fate would have it, the meeting was planned to be held in Santiago. . . ." But in the memo, Kissinger says it wasn't fate at all: "I encouraged the OAS to have its General Assembly here. I knew it would add prestige to Chile. I came for that reason." Manuel Trucco, who was then Chile's ambassador to Washington, told me that U.S. Assistant Secretary of State for Latin America William Rogers opposed Chile as a venue because of Pinochet's cancellation of an OAS human rights mission.

On human rights, Kissinger writes in his book: "Our strategy offered the occasion and enabled us to raise the human rights issue bilaterally with the Chilean authorities as a test of good relations with the United States."

Kissinger emphasizes in his book that he told Pinochet that Chile's human rights violations cited in an OAS report had impaired the relationship between the two countries. He says he encouraged the general to ease up: "All friends of Chile hope that obstacles raised by conditions alleged in the report will soon be removed." Kissinger writes: "Inevitably, a considerable amount of time in my dialogue with Pinochet was devoted to human rights."

However, the memo reveals that Kissinger actually went to great lengths to reassure Pinochet that the discussion of human rights was strictly pro forma, designed to derail Pinochet's opponents in the U.S. Congress. "We have a practical problem we have to take into account," Kissinger told him. "My statement and our position are designed to allow us to say to the Congress that we are talking to the Chilean government and therefore Congress need not act."

Kissinger also omits in his book the fact that he told Pinochet that "you are a victim of all leftwing groups around the world." He also omitted this comment: "You did a great service to the West in overthrowing Allende."

In his book's account of their conversation, Kissinger writes: "Pinochet reminded me that 'Russia supports their people 100 percent. We are behind you. You are the leader. But you have a punitive system for your friends.' I returned to my underlying theme that any major help from us would realistically depend on progress on human rights."

Actually, Kissinger's next remarks, according to the memo, were: "There is merit in what you say. It is a curious time in the U.S."

Pinochet responded: "We solved the problem of the large transnational enterprises. We renegotiated the expropriations, and demonstrated our good faith by making prompt payments on the indebtedness."

Kissinger, in the memo: "It is unfortunate. We have been through Vietnam and Watergate. . . . We welcomed the overthrow of the communist-inclined government here. We are not out to weaken your position."

—L.K.

constantly being attacked by the Christian Democrats. They have a strong voice in Washington. Not the people in the Pentagon, but they get through to Congress. Gabriel Valdez [a leading Christian Democrat] has access. Also Letelier."

Kissinger: "I have not seen a Christian Democrat for years."

Pinochet: ". . . Letelier has access to the Congress. We know they are giving false information. . . . We are worried about our image." Kissinger did not take the occasion to indicate America's support for the rights of political opponents.

Foreign Minister Carvajal, who had coordinated the attack on La Monedada, didn't like pressures on human rights that were being brought by U.S. Ambassador David Popper. At the meeting, he said to Kissinger, "I don't get along

with Ambassador Popper. I don't understand him, or he doesn't understand the situation here."

"Yes, yes," Kissinger told Carvajal. "Yes, I understand."

Popper had enemies in the State Department. The Pinochet government often got unofficial, unrequested information from them—gossip or photocopies of things that had been said by the man whom Department conservatives called "the Red Popper." One of his enemies flagged the information for the Secretary of State in a routine cable from the U.S. embassy in Santiago.

As investigative reporter Seymour Hersh first reported, Kissinger wrote on the document, "Tell Popper to cut out the political science lectures."

The ambassador got a call from Rogers, who said, "You should know that at higher

levels, a certain disquiet has been caused." Harry Schlaudeman, an assistant secretary for Latin America and number two at the American embassy in Chile during the U.S. pre-coup destabilization campaign, drafted a letter to Popper in which he tried to suggest that the ambassador was getting "too enthusiastic."

One bizarre note in the Kissinger-Pinochet memorandum suggests that the general recognized he was violating human rights. He told Kissinger, "On the human rights front, we are slowly making progress. We are now down to 400. We have freed more. And we are also changing some sentences so that the prisoners can be eligible for leaving." Kissinger's response: He advised Pinochet to "group the releases" for better "psychological impact."

After the formal meeting, Kissinger and Rogers went off to have lunch with Pinochet on another floor of the Diego Portales building.

Kissinger's address to the assembly that afternoon was one of his usual *tour d'horizon* speeches. As he had promised Pinochet, Kissinger cited the reports of human rights abuses in Chile but didn't condemn the government. "The condition of human rights as assessed by the Organization of American States' Human Rights Commission has impaired [the U.S.] relationship with Chile and will continue to do so. We wish this relationship to be close, and all friends of Chile hope that obstacles raised by conditions alleged in the report will soon be removed."

Rogers, who had helped draft the speech, told me he had "pushed Henry's envelope to the outer edge in terms of emphasizing human rights." The statement about the U.S. vote on authorization of a human rights commission was worked over carefully. Rogers got Kissinger to say it, but noticed that he chafed over it before and after the speech. Nobody else thought it was terribly bold.

Carvajal thought Kissinger's speech "balanced," and was pleased that it referred to the exaggerations of the Chilean problem. Carvajal told me that he interpreted Kissinger's private remarks to Pinochet to mean that he didn't really believe what he had said publicly. Carvajal said, "The U.S. understands that things in Chile are difficult, that maybe the steps taken by Washington were exaggerated, that things would have been worse if Chile hadn't acted."

Kissinger and Rogers left two days later. Kissinger told a Chilean diplomat in Washington that he and his wife, Nancy, had been received like pop stars.

James Wilson, then the State Department's coordinator for humanitarian affairs, heard that shortly after his return to Washington, Kissinger passed the word to his staff that he did not want all he had said publicly applied too literally in practice. ■