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MEMORANDUM

TO : ARA - Covey T. Oliver DATE: November 24, 1967

FROM : ARA - George Lister

SUBJECT: Proposed Public Statement in Favor of Constitutional Government and Against Military Golpes in Latin America

The democratically elected governments of Peru, Chile and Venezuela are in serious domestic trouble. Undoubtedly more trouble is coming for those and other "democratic" governments. There are numerous reliable reports of a possible military coup in Peru, patterned on Argentine lines, and it is very possible the military in some other Latin American countries are beginning to consider seriously similar aspirations. Would this not be a timely moment to make a major policy speech including emphatic references to our hopes for the continuation and increase of constitutional governments in Latin America? Naturally no mention would be made of any specific country.

Because the subject is extremely delicate, particularly at this time, this portion of your speech would have to be worded very carefully. Possibly we could lead into it by some discussion of the Latin American "arms crawl" controversy, and then some common sense statements on how the nature and role of the military has changed for the better in much of Latin America. This would provide an opening for emphasizing at some length that we hope for the continuation and development of constitutional governments, even though we realize the subject is far from simple, Anglo-Saxon logic and traditions should not be applied automatically to Latin America, etc. One way or the other, the net balance in the

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E.O. 13292, Sec. 3.5

NLJ/CIS 06-33

By ebm, NARA, Date 1-12-07

speech would be heavily in favor of democratically elected governments. One of President Johnson's relevant statements could be used as a peg. At the same time, to minimize Latin American resentment over imagined condescension or intervention on our part, you could include some graceful references to our own shortcomings, unsolved problems, etc., to make clear that we are not speaking as infallible teachers but from a very imperfect democracy of our own.

We could, if we wished, privately call your anti-military golpe statements to the attention of Belaunde, Frei, Leoni and possibly some others. But this might not be necessary, or even advisable.

There are some obvious risks and drawbacks. Some of the Latin American military might be extremely angered, despite your praise of their positive role. Questions would be raised concerning our present attitude towards military regimes, the overthrow of Goulart, etc. We might also find ourselves at some later date hoping for the military to take over some government which was falling under Communist domination. I think these difficulties can be taken in stride and insured against, and should not be regarded as overriding.

The speech should yield some important benefits. It would provide some timely and salutary clarification of our policies, placing our preference squarely on the side of "democratic" government, even with all the limitations that term involves in today's Latin America. It might help to cool off some undesirable Latin American military plans. It could help to improve our relations with Belaunde, and should also be useful in Santiago, Bogota, Caracas, Guatemala City, etc., as well as with some pro-democratic parties and supporters. It might serve to reduce Communist exploitation of a future military coup in Peru or elsewhere as Yankee supported or contrived. The net effect in this country should be very good, especially among present critics of the White House.

I believe the speech would also add some badly needed substance and stature (and possibly dignity) to our policy.

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and performance, which for so long seems to have been dominated by grappling with crises, negotiating grants, loans and sales, writing CASPs, and conducting endless meetings among ourselves (at the expense of making more impact on Latin Americans), plus all the gigantic, overblown, exclusively internal administrative-managerial operations which absorb such an appallingly high percentage of our personnel and effort. Not least of all, the speech would have a very healthy effect on those inside and outside the Government who have been waiting for some sign of a significant departure from what in recent years has appeared to many as a pretty grubby, "pragmatic" Latin American policy characterized mainly by bland "business as usual" and hastily improvised reactions to day to day events.

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ARA:GLister:sn