

# The Chilean 9/11: A Forgotten Tale

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*Thinking of 9/11, scenes of chaos in 2001 — of the Twin Towers plane crashes, the Pentagon crash and havoc in the US — come to our minds, but unfortunately the world has forgotten another important event in world history that not only shook Chile but also a major part of South America.*

It was the same date, September 11, in 1973 that the Chilean president, Salvador Allende, was overthrown by an army general, Augusto Pinochet, with the presidential palace bombarded on Pinochet's orders. Allende died resisting Pinochet's men and Chile, along with five other South American states, entered into a phase of tyranny and oppression.

During his rule, Pinochet ordered strict measures against dissidents, especially Marxists. He was responsible for the murder of more than 3,000 Chileans, whereas his alliance with South American dictatorships such as those in Argentina, Brazil, Bolivia, Paraguay and Uruguay — Operation Condor — resulted in the deaths of more than 60,000 people. The major purpose of this alliance was to root out socialist and communist influence from the region and suppress any potential opposition. The US was again the chief supporter of this alliance, providing the countries with important intelligence and technological support.

In all these states citizens were abducted, murdered and extra-judicially killed to silence and curb any possible opposition. Some 200,000 Chileans went into exile to different parts of Europe. Many of them took up murder charges against Pinochet in European courts but all their efforts were in vain.

The Condor alliance was initially encouraged by the CIA but that later backfired on the US as it received criticism from all sections of the media and society for supporting dictators. John Dinges, the award-winning journalist, writes in his book, *The Condor Years* that, initially tagged as “remarkable” by *Foreign Affairs* magazine, this association of the US, CIA and South American dictators was nothing less than a terrorist organisation responsible for the massacre of thousands of innocent civilians.

A famous Chilean journalist and writer, Antonio Castillo, tells his childhood story in the following words: “Soon we realised that the brutality of the armed forces would reach us too. On 13 September, my father did not come home from work. He had been arrested, and his workplace — a nido de comunistas (nest of communists) for the new authorities — became a military concentration camp, where the cancer marxista (Marxist cancer) would be extirpated. My father survived. Many of my friends' fathers or mothers didn't.”

The Pinochet Files, a classified document of the US-Chile transactions, proved that the US's policymakers and 'securocrats' (military officers having policy making power) backed Pinochet to overthrow Allende. "It is firm and continuing policy that Allende be overthrown by a coup," reads a CIA document from October 1970 leaked in these files. "It is imperative that these actions be implemented clandestinely and securely so that the USG [US government] and the American hand be well hidden," stated another document. Two days after this document was written, top US intelligence officials ordered the launching of campaigns to persuade people to accept a military coup. "Concur giving tear gas canisters and gas masks...working on obtaining machineguns," read another CIA memo dated October 18, 1970.

Another handwritten note by the then-CIA director, Richard Helms, having orders from President Nixon, stated: "One in 10 chances perhaps, but save Chile! Worth spending; not concerned; no involvement of embassy; \$10,000,000 available, more if necessary; full-time job — best men we have; game plan; make the economy scream; 48 hours for plan of action. This presidential directive initiates major covert operations to block Allende's ascension to office, and promote a coup in Chile."

Although publicly disowning the Pinochet regime amid criticisms of human rights abuses, the US still helped Chile in international business transactions. Manuel Contreras, the Chilean secret police chief and also allegedly on the CIA's payroll, when he visited Washington was asked to meet officials from Anaconda (Copper) and General Motors for possible investments in Chile.

It was not because the US sensed a threat from Allende, being a Marxist and pro-USSR, but because he was elected by a narrow margin, represented a weak left wing in the country, and his economic policies were gaining unpopularity among the masses. That is why overthrowing a weak president was never a hard task to achieve by backing a strong military general, such as Pinochet.

It is indeed interesting to see that many of Condor's perpetrators and murderers were never brought to justice, with many of them enjoying a dignified retired life in America. So much so that criminal charges could never be brought even against Pinochet, as before any level of conviction he died. Support for such a dictator by the then-Nixon administration may fog many minds, as Pinochet was well known for his human rights violations. Furthermore, overthrowing a democratically-elected president by backing a dictator was another example of an indirect intervention in a sovereign country by the US.

Western media, as always, remains silent on the first major 9/11 and the human atrocities committed as a result. With no statement or report covering the grief of Chileans, it will not be wrong to say that the modern day media works on its own agenda and narrative.

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