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Hostile Intent: U.S. Operations in Chile 1964-1974. Kristian Gustafson. Washington DC: Potomac Books. 2007. 316pp.

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Salvador Allende's presidency (1970-1973) and his subsequent overthrow have been the subject of massive scrutiny, and indeed the latter represents one of the watershed moments in U.S.-Latin American relations. In 1999, the Clinton administration declassified thousands of documents, which have been combed over by scholars to learn more about U.S. involvement in plotting against the Allende government. Kristian Gustafson's *Hostile Intent* is one of several books published in the last few years that make use of those documents.

The goal of the book is to counter the argument that "the Americans are assigned almost total agency in the collapse of Chile's democracy" (p. 238). The debate over the Chilean coup, he argues, is split so that "those who write about Allende's overthrow are inexorably pigeonholed as either left-wing or right-wing" (p. 2). Either the United States is totally responsible, or not at all. Gustafson seeks what he asserts is the missing middle ground.

This would be an interesting thesis if it were true. The essential problem, however, is that he does not cite major works that have already rejected the "total agency" thesis. Instead, the book routinely makes references to those "with a more conspiratorial view of U.S relations with Allende's Chile" (p. 156) but provides only a small handful of citations, often from journalists (such as Seymour Hersh and Christopher Hitchens).

In fact, prominent Chileanists have long concluded that the United States government was not directly involved in the coup that overthrew Allende. Published over thirty years ago, Frederick Nunn's classic work on the Chilean military argues that the coup "was more a result of internal pressures than of external forces brought to bear through intrigue."⁽¹⁾ Brian Loveman's political history of Chile concludes that "[s]hort of military intervention, the United States did not have enough leverage, even with the variety of economic and political screws it did tighten, to guarantee Allende's failure."⁽²⁾ Paul Sigmund writes that "there is no evidence of U.S. participation in, or direct encouragement of, the coup."⁽³⁾ Even Peter Kornbluh, who receives considerable criticism from Gustafson, argues that the "Nixon White House sought, supported, and embraced the coup, but the political risks of direct engagement simply outweighed any actual necessity for its success."⁽⁴⁾

The other element of the book centers on what Gustafson believes *should* have happened, namely preventing Allende from winning the 1970 presidential election. He believes that Allende was "a devoted Marxist working—if without sound political tactics—to convert Chile into a Marxist people's republic" (p. 7). Therefore, Chapter Two focuses on the idea that the United States should have funneled money to the National Party and not to the Christian Democrats: "Indeed, there needs to be a clear reappraisal of [Ambassador Edward] Korry's actions throughout his tenure as ambassador in light of his unwavering support for the PDC" (p. 76). Further, spending on covert activities was insufficient: "it is clear the Socialist bloc had taken advantage of the somnolent and overconfident Americans" (p. 100). Over time, there was *too much* reluctance to approve covert operations, which "led to a disastrous neglect of affairs in Chile" (p. 240). In this sense the book is novel, since few works claim that the United States should have been *more* responsible for interfering in Chilean politics.

Along similar lines, part of his effort is also to analyze the problems of interagency cooperation, and how that affects covert operations. He catalogues the initial failures of the CIA to understand local political realities, and the inability of either the Johnson or Nixon administrations to coordinate different U.S. government agencies (especially the CIA and State Department) within a coherent and realistic policy plan. For example, efforts to influence the 1969 legislative election constituted a "procrastinating half-effort that compounded future troubles for American operations in Chile" (55). Better coordination, it seems, would have made for improved interference.

Ultimately, however, the overall narrative is familiar. The Nixon administration believed the Allende government to be a security threat with global implications. Especially after Allende took office, the United States did what it could to undermine the Chilean government, fund the opposition, and make clear to all that a coup would be welcomed. Thus far, new work on the topic has provided more details about that narrative, but has not changed it substantially.

Endnotes

- 1 Frederick M. Nunn, *The Military in Chilean History* (Albuquerque: The New Mexico Press, 1976): 296-297.
- 2 Brian Loveman, *Chile: The Legacy of Hispanic Capitalism*, 3rd Edition (New York: Oxford University Press, 2001): 259.
- 3 Paul Sigmund, *The United States and Democracy in Chile* (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1993): 83.
- 4 Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: The New Press, 2003): 114.

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