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Cutting Off the Dictator: The United States Arms Embargo of the Pinochet Regime, 1974–1988

JOHN R. BAWDEN*

Abstract. In 1976, the US Congress halted arms sales to Chile. This paper examines the congressional debate over arms sales to Chile and the political and military consequences of the action. Recent scholarship has largely overlooked the embargo and its implications for regional security dynamics in South America. Initially US sanctions increased Chile's diplomatic isolation and military vulnerability, which made regional conflict more likely. However, Chile's ability to surmount the effects of the embargo eventually increased Augusto Pinochet's independence vis-à-vis Washington. When the Reagan administration began pushing for a transition to democracy, it lacked two key instruments for influencing a military government: weapons sales and security assistance.

Keywords: US–Latin American relations, Pinochet, Cold War, arms sales, Chile

Introduction

In 1974, Chile's military government placed orders for US\$ 68.2 million worth of armaments from the United States, including 16 Northrop fighter jets. That year, however, Congress denied President Nixon's request for US\$ 21.3 million for security assistance to Santiago.¹ US lawmakers went even further in 1976, fully stripping President Ford of his authority to approve commercial arms transfers to Chile. Henceforth, the sale of US weaponry would depend on congressional certification that the Chilean government had not engaged in a pattern of gross human rights violations. The Kennedy Amendment, known for its passionate Senate sponsor, Ted Kennedy,

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¹ Congressional Record (CR), 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, p. 32717 (26 Sep. 1974). US Senate, Foreign Relations Committee, *Hearings: Foreign Assistance Authorization Arms Sales Issues*, 94th Congress, 1st Session (17 June 1975), p. 141.

demonstrated to Chile's military regime that fervent anti-communism would not necessarily translate into automatic support from the US government. It also expressed a 'new internationalism' among legislators who believed that promoting democracy and human rights abroad represented the best strategy for winning the Cold War.² This point of view matured at precisely the moment that Chile began to symbolise what had gone wrong with US foreign policy during the previous decade.

The Kennedy Amendment was a major victory for individuals committed to the defence of human rights, and welcome news for Chile solidarity campaigns across the globe.³ In the 1970s activists signed petitions, participated in protests and urged their national governments to saddle the Chilean junta with high-impact sanctions such as arms embargoes or blocked access to credit from international lending agencies. On one level the movement succeeded: due to the concerted efforts of journalists, politicians and organised groups, General Augusto Pinochet's military regime faced persistent diplomatic isolation, and the issue of human rights continued to have a negative effect on Chile's foreign relations. At the same time, however, Pinochet – an international symbol of brutality and repression – remained in power until 1990.

This paper examines the US arms embargo of Chile based on primary research in the Congressional Record, presidential libraries, federal agencies and Chilean sources. It falls into two major parts. Firstly, it considers the policy process and political context that made the Kennedy Amendment possible. The polarising Vietnam War, for one, prompted members of Congress to assert their role in foreign policy formulation, while the unfolding Watergate scandal helped create the impetus for legislators to exert control over policy instruments once considered the executive's prerogative.⁴ Another major reason Congress imposed tough sanctions on Chile is connected with the outrage engendered by revelations that Nixon had ordered covert operations to subvert Chile's democratically elected president, Salvador Allende (1970–3). This disclosure fed a conviction that Congress had a special responsibility to moderate a military regime that many US lawmakers felt their country had been partially responsible for creating. Supporters saw the embargo as achieving multiple aims: ending the United States' association

² See Robert David Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006).

³ Patrick William Kelly, 'The 1973 Chilean Coup and the Origins of Transnational Human Rights Activism', *Journal of Global History*, 8: 1 (2013), pp. 165–86.

⁴ A long-standing theme in US–Latin American relations is the impact of US domestic politics on policy towards the region: see, for example, Lars Schoultz, *Beneath the United States: A History of US Policy toward Latin America* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

with Chile's junta, putting a check on presidential power, atoning for past misdeeds, and establishing a moral dimension to US actions abroad. At the same time, Chile inspired great passion among conservative critics who denounced the sanctions as, among other things, foolhardy, counter-productive and harmful to US interests. The congressional debate underlines a number of practical and ideological questions related to the export of arms from one country to another.

Secondly, the paper examines the political and military ramifications of the Kennedy Amendment for South America as well as Santiago's perception of, and response to, the legislation. Scholars have paid little attention to the Chilean military's perspective during the period or the implications of the embargo for inter-American relations, especially with respect to the Beagle Channel dispute and Washington's ability to pressure Pinochet during the country's transition to democracy. In the historiography the Kennedy Amendment is typically referred to as a justified sanction of a repressive dictatorship and a positive reorientation of US policy towards Latin America – but while the embargo may have been just that, it had other significant effects as well. Most immediately, the sanctions heightened Santiago's diplomatic isolation and sense of military vulnerability. Chile's chief antagonists, Peru and Argentina, not only possessed superior conventional forces in the mid-1970s, but also depended less on the United States for the supply and maintenance of their defence structures. Thus the Kennedy Amendment altered regional security dynamics to Chile's detriment and fed a siege mentality in Santiago. Ultimately, Chile located new arms suppliers and developed domestic capacity to manufacture weaponry, factors that lessened Santiago's political and material dependence on Washington. Indeed, Chile's ability to surmount the effects of the Kennedy Amendment enhanced Pinochet's ability to dismiss US pressure. When officials in the Reagan administration began pushing the dictator for a transition to democracy, they discovered their lack of the traditional instruments for influencing a military government: weapons sales, military aid, and institutional contact with the country's armed forces.

In the last 20 years, the field of US–Latin American relations has evolved considerably. Diplomatic history has moved away from an exclusive reliance on US archives, having recognised the importance of foreign sources for any serious understanding of the asymmetrical relationship between Latin America and the United States.⁵ Many nuanced analyses of the US–Latin American encounter move beyond the traditional focus on state-to-state interactions to

⁵ Max Paul Friedman, 'Retiring the Puppets, Bringing Latin America Back In: Recent Scholarship on United States–Latin American Relations', *Diplomatic History*, 27: 5 (2003), pp. 621–36.

consider cultural influences and 'soft' power.⁶ This body of scholarship places greater emphasis on the role of Latin American agency, the nature of and limits to US power, and the unintended, often paradoxical repercussions of foreign interventions in Latin America.

In the case of Chile, the violent overthrow of Salvador Allende by US-backed military actors in 1973 influenced a generation of scholars to view policies formulated in Washington as absolutely central to the country's political fortunes.⁷ If true, the focus of research would necessarily privilege US perspectives, archives and actions. New studies, however, show convincingly that Chilean affairs could not be decisively controlled or manipulated from abroad.⁸ As a result, the research focus becomes more a question of how Chilean actors responded to international constraints and, crucially, how they bent external circumstances to their own objectives.

US Military Assistance and Arms Sales to Chile, 1945–73

Following the Second World War, every country in Latin America joined a security framework designed to contain communism and coordinate hemispheric defence. Its cornerstone, the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (1947), committed signatories to mutual defence in the event of outside attack, and member states qualified for US arms, technology and training under the terms of the Military Assistance Program (MAP). In 1952 Chile's Senate approved the *Pacto de Ayuda Militar* (Military Assistance Pact) over the protests of left-wing senators, who warned that the agreement created a political dependence on the will of the United States. Rafael Fernández, the army's commander-in-chief, countered that such concerns paled in comparison to the danger of forfeiting an opportunity to train with advanced weaponry that the Chilean state could not afford.⁹ General Guillermo Barrios, then serving as defence minister, agreed: 'It is important to consider that every country accepting US military aid will receive a fixed amount of it at no cost whatsoever. Given the present availability of resources, it would take Chile a long time to acquire these weapons by itself.'¹⁰ Indeed, *refusing* US aid would have threatened Chile's national security if

⁶ Gil Joseph, Catherine LeGrand and Ricardo Salvatore (eds.), *Close Encounters of Empire: Writing the Cultural History of US–Latin American Relations* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 1998).

⁷ See Peter Kornbluh, *The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability* (New York: New Press, 2003).

⁸ See Tanya Harmer, *Allende's Chile and the Inter-American Cold War* (Chapel Hill, NC: University of North Carolina Press, 2011); and Kristian Gustafson, *Hostile Intent: U.S. Covert Operations in Chile, 1964–1974* (Washington, DC: Potomac Books, 2007).

⁹ *Historia del Ejército de Chile*, vol. 8 (Santiago: Estado Mayor General del Ejército), pp. 84–5.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

soldiers in Peru and Argentina received arms and training while Chileans did not. US hegemony flowed from such dynamics.

During the 1950s the United States transferred an array of used, Second World War-era military hardware to Chile, including tanks, planes, submarines and artillery. Under the terms of the programme Congress reserved the right to repossess any weapons if the recipient nation waged war against a country with which the United States had an alliance. The Chilean navy agreed to carry out upgrades of MAP destroyers and submarines in the United States rather than domestically or at another country's shipyards.¹¹ Such conditions were not always appreciated, but Chilean officers concurred that the principal benefit of US assistance was the transfer of technical knowledge in fields such as radio communications, meteorology, engine mechanics, avionics and rocket propulsion. An editorial in the *Revista de la Fuerza Aérea* commented in 1959:

A great deal of what the air force has accomplished in recent years is due to the technical assistance and equipment received through the Military Assistance Program subscribed to by the governments of Chile and the United States. Thanks to the assistance of specialists from North America who have trained Chilean officers within or outside the national territory, the efficiency of the entire air force has been elevated, making it an instrument of great value for national defence.¹²

Between 1945 and 1975 Chile received more US military aid, per capita, than any other Latin American country except Uruguay.¹³ One result of this privileged access to US assistance was that it created a familiarity with, preference for and dependence on North American weapons and methods. Moreover, during this time Chilean officers acquired a sense of belonging to a global struggle to contain communism in the western hemisphere; Joaquín Fermandois even suggests that Santiago developed a strategic attachment to the United States as a potential protector in the event of trouble with Argentina, Peru and Bolivia, its neighbours and rivals.¹⁴

Following the Cuban Revolution, Washington prioritised internal security and counter-insurgency training at the continental level rather than conventional combat training. Departing from this strategy, the Pentagon deemed supersonic jets inappropriate for the region's militaries and likely to result in arms proliferation. Of course, South American governments viewed

¹¹ See Ismael Huerta Díaz, *Volvería a ser marino* (Santiago: Editorial Andrés Bello, 1988), p. 318.

¹² 'Editorial', *Revista de la Fuerza Aérea*, 72 (1959), p. 3. All military journals cited are available at Chile's Biblioteca Nacional in Santiago.

¹³ Figures taken from Brian Loveman, *For La Patria: Politics and the Armed Forces in Latin America* (Wilmington, NC: Scholarly Resources, 1999), p. 152.

¹⁴ Joaquín Fermandois Huerta, *Chile y el mundo, 1970–1973: la política exterior del gobierno de la Unidad Popular y el sistema internacional* (Santiago: Ediciones Universidad Católica, 1985), pp. 89–93.

arms controls as paternalistic encroachments on their national sovereignty. In the mid-1960s US–Peruvian relations deteriorated precipitously as a result of sharp disagreements over sovereignty-related issues such as maritime boundaries, the expropriation of US property, and weapons sales.¹⁵ Peruvian nationalists wanted to modernise the country's armed forces, while European countries offered to sell defence technology on a cash basis with few political conditions. The watershed moment came in 1967 when Peru completed the purchase of 12 supersonic Mirage 5 fighter jets from France over the Johnson administration's vigorous protests.¹⁶ In response Congress passed the Conte-Long Amendment (1968), which prohibited the Pentagon from providing credits to underdeveloped countries for advanced weaponry unless the US president determined the sales to be in the nation's vital security interest. Congress also established new controls over the export of US military products, technologies and services.

South American countries responded predictably. Argentina signed contracts with French, British, Swiss and West German firms for co-production and licensing agreements to manufacture everything from warships to machine guns and missiles. Peru's military government accepted Soviet credits for the purchase of fighter jets and battle tanks.¹⁷ In 1968 Chile's president, Eduardo Frei, authorised the purchase of 21 used subsonic Hawker Hunter jets from the United Kingdom, representing the country's first commercial acquisition of aircraft since the 1930s. Yet the Frei government actually made substantial cuts to defence spending from 1964 to 1970. By the time Britain delivered the first group of Hunters in 1971, Peru possessed supersonic jets, modern armoured cavalry and air defence radar systems. By contrast, Chile remained equipped with a larger quantity of obsolete MAP hardware.

That same year, as South American countries raced to modernise their arsenals, Richard Nixon lifted the US\$ 100 million annual ceiling on arms transfers to Latin America. His administration observed that South American defence spending continued to rise in spite of congressional efforts to prevent proliferation. Two years later Nixon lifted restrictions on the sale of supersonic aircraft to Venezuela, Colombia, Chile, Brazil and Argentina, citing US national security interests. Increased weapons transfers, went the argument, preserved Washington's influence across the region, benefited

¹⁵ Richard J. Walter, *Peru and the United States, 1960–1975: How Their Ambassadors Managed Foreign Relations in a Turbulent Era* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2010).

¹⁶ See François Le Roy, 'Mirages over the Andes: Peru, France, the United States, and Military Jet Procurement in the 1960s', *Pacific Historical Review*, 71: 2 (2002), pp. 269–300.

¹⁷ See Luigi R. Einaudi (ed.), *Arms Transfers to Latin America: Toward a Policy of Mutual Respect* (Santa Monica: Rand Corporation, 1973).

defence contractors in danger of losing out to European firms, created highly paid manufacturing jobs and improved the nation's balance of payments deficit.¹⁸ It is worth noting that commercial sales implied a diminished US capacity to contain regional antagonisms. MAP weapons had come with strings attached; they could not be used in any inter-American conflict.

In testimonial literature, commanders of Chile's armed forces all describe the country's declining military potential relative to neighbouring states and the professional frustration, not to mention security concerns, that this engendered.¹⁹ Chile's civilian leaders did not trust the military regimes established in Argentina or Peru (in 1966 and 1968 respectively) – and, to be sure, the suspicion was mutual.²⁰ One especially revealing episode occurred in August 1973 when José Toribio Merino, the commander-in-chief of the Chilean navy, dispatched retired captain Roberto Kelly to confer with Brazilian intelligence officers about Lima's intentions towards Chile. Specifically, the navy wanted to know if Peru's nationalistic military regime might opportunistically exploit a military coup against Salvador Allende in order to reclaim territories lost to Santiago during the War of the Pacific (1879–83).²¹ Kelly received assurances in Brasília that Lima was planning no such action. Nonetheless, the episode illustrates the Chilean military's tremendous anxiety with respect to Peruvian objectives.

The Breakdown of a Cold War Consensus

In 1947 Harry Truman announced that the United States would aid free peoples resisting subjugation by armed minorities or outside pressures. Citing the threat of global communist expansion, Truman secured from Congress large-scale military and economic assistance to Turkey and Greece. In the same year Congress approved the National Security Act, which, among other things, created the country's first peacetime intelligence agency. Foreign policy imperatives seemed to justify the rapid expansion of presidential power, but it remained unclear how Congress would supervise or limit the executive's conduct of US foreign policy on a global scale.

In subsequent decades Congress funded military actions abroad and generally consented to the president's requests for assistance to countries deemed strategic allies; similarly, lawmakers rarely asked questions about the

¹⁸ See Michael T. Klare, 'Political Economy of US Arms Sales', *Social Scientist*, 4: 11 (1976), pp. 3–19.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Carlos Prats González, *Memorias: testimonio de un soldado* (Santiago: Pehuén, 1985), p. 148.

²⁰ Walter, *Peru and the United States*, pp. 147, 237–8.

²¹ Patricia Arancibia Clavel, *Conversando con Roberto Kelly V.: recuerdos de una vida* (Santiago: Editorial Biblioteca Americana, 2005), pp. 144–7.

CIA's overseas operations. However, a sea change occurred during the 93rd Congress (1973–4). As the Watergate scandal engulfed and profoundly weakened the executive, Congress passed the War Powers Act (1973); this limited the president's authority to deploy large-scale military forces abroad, as had been the case in Korea and Vietnam. Following the overthrow of Salvador Allende's Marxist government on 11 September 1973, Nixon increased various forms of bilateral assistance to Chile. Congress consented in 1973, but not in 1974. What changed?

Firstly, political groups oriented towards humanitarian values and concerned with South America's growing number of military regimes had already come into existence.²² Secondly, the violent breakdown of Chile's democracy sparked international outrage and resulted in an exodus of well-educated exiles to Western countries, where they tapped into political lobbies in Washington and elsewhere.²³ Concurrently, the mid-term elections in 1974 saw Democrats increase their majorities in both houses of Congress. This event empowered legislators who rejected uncritical support for anti-communist dictators and favoured limiting the president's leeway to approve arms sales and other forms of assistance to governments that he deemed strategic allies.²⁴ Robert David Johnson writes: 'A sizeable bloc of Senate liberals, eventually joined by ideological comrades from the House, attempted to use congressional power to remake American foreign policy, abandoning what they saw as the rigid, military-centred anti-Communism of the Cold War era and adopting instead an approach focused on promoting human rights and democracy overseas.'²⁵

As the tortuous Vietnam debacle came to a conclusion, Congress and the administration clashed on the issue of foreign aid. Lawmakers questioned the practical value of doling out generous foreign aid in the face of domestic economic difficulties – inflation, unemployment, fiscal deficits, rising oil prices – while the State Department and Pentagon maintained that military aid and arms transfers to the third world strengthened Washington's political influence over recipient nations, especially in areas where US and European exporters were competing for multi-million-dollar contracts. The Pentagon argued that military assistance to underdeveloped nations fortified Washington's connections to a powerful sector of society (the armed forces)

²² See James N. Green, *We Cannot Remain Silent: Opposition to the Brazilian Military Dictatorship in the United States* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2010).

²³ Alan Angell and Isabel Turrent, 'La cooperación internacional en apoyo de la democracia política en América Latina: el caso de Chile', *Foro Internacional*, 30: 2 (1989), pp. 215–45; Lars Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy toward Latin America* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1981), pp. 344–79.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 196–8.

²⁵ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, p. 241.

and established preferences for US weaponry. In short, military aid and arms sales maintained loyalty to the US government.

In 1975 an army general, Howard Fish, explained to the Senate Subcommittee on Foreign Assistance: 'When a country purchases modern arms to the extent that that country requires provision of spares from the United States, it is tied to us as far as the capability of their armed forces is concerned for the future.' Officials from the Pentagon and State Department testified that US weapons sales played a vital role in maintaining a balance of power in South America. Properly calibrated military aid and arms sales, went the argument, gave Washington indispensable political leverage over recipient nations, lessened the likelihood of local conflicts and preserved the United States' position as the pre-eminent supplier of weapons to Latin America in the face of European competition. As Thomas Stern, an official in the State Department, remarked: 'An [arms] embargo is a very dangerous and I believe counterproductive action.'²⁶

During the debate on military aid to Chile, an influential faction of lawmakers questioned the prior logic of provisioning military aid to overseas dictatorships, citing moral and practical reasons. Representative Patsy Mink said: 'Our Vietnam experience taught us there that unlimited military assistance provided no security whatsoever where the government had lost the respect and cooperation of its people. Military assistance instead helped to isolate the government from the effective voice of the people.'²⁷ Senator Alan Cranston was more categorical: 'There are no lasting military advantages to be gained by supporting governments which must rely on torture and imprisonment of their own citizens to stay in power ... Such governments are unreliable, unsteady foundations on which to base the security of our alliances.'²⁸ For Cranston, US aid to authoritarian regimes cost taxpayers billions of dollars and actually weakened the nation's security. Representative Donald Fraser remarked that 'a government which is committing repressive acts against its people should not be entitled to American arms'. In 1974 the Defense Department informed Congress of Chile's intention to purchase at least 16 F-5E Tiger jets. Fraser said to his colleagues: 'As members of Congress we run the risk of being accomplices in these repressive acts if these arms become the instruments of oppression.'²⁹

Michael J. Harrington, a Democratic representative from Massachusetts, rejected the State Department's position that a conditional cutback of security assistance linked to improvements in human rights represented the best

²⁶ US Senate, Foreign Relations Committee, *Hearings, Foreign Assistance Authorization Arms Sales Issues*, 94th Congress, 1st Session (17 June 1975), pp. 141–6.

²⁷ CR, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, p. 39175 (11 Dec. 1974).

²⁸ CR, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, p. 33514 (2 Oct. 1974).

²⁹ CR, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, p. 16234 (22 May 1974).

approach to influencing Santiago positively: 'Only if we terminate our military aid to Chile will the junta know we mean to stand behind our calls for internal reform.' Harrington also disputed the notion that US military aid maintained a regional balance of power in South America, rather casually dismissing the idea that Chile faced discernible external security threats. Military aid, he said, merely strengthened the junta's capacity to repress its own people.³⁰ In truth, Chile's order for supersonic jets had everything to do with external security considerations. Peru's acquisition of 12 Mirage fighter jets had created an imbalance of air power, but even more ominous were the 250 Soviet T-55 battle tanks purchased in 1974, followed by an order for 36 SU-22 fighter-bombers in 1976.³¹ Santiago viewed these orders with understandable apprehension. They did not represent mere upgrades of ageing military equipment; Peru would enjoy a distinct strategic advantage over its neighbours following delivery.

In the first half of 1974 it came to light that Richard Nixon had ordered the CIA to prevent Chile's democratically elected president from taking power. Senator James Abourezk summed up his view of the revelation: 'Our image, particularly in Latin America, has been hurt most recently by the disclosures that the CIA was deeply involved in fostering internal discord within Chile throughout the term of Salvador Allende.'³² Furthermore, the CIA director, Richard Helms, had deliberately misled Congress about the nature of US involvement in Chile. The bombshell had a significant impact on US politics, and the 'new internationalists' seized the issue to advance their agenda.³³ In September, Representative Elizabeth Holtzman introduced a hurried amendment to block funds from being expended to undermine or destabilise foreign governments. She reasoned that neither the president nor the CIA had constitutional authority to declare war on, or attempt to overthrow, a foreign government.³⁴ Holtzman's amendment failed by a vote of 101 to 291, but the House and Senate each went on to establish select committees to investigate illegal activities by the CIA and FBI. In 1975 Senator Frank Church chaired a subcommittee that would produce a lengthy report on illegal conduct and

³⁰ CR, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, p. 26448 (1 Aug. 1974).

³¹ Figures for both countries are available in Michael Brzoska and Thomas Olson, *Arms Transfers to the Third World, 1971-85* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1987), pp. 158-60, 234-7. For a Chilean perspective on the Peruvian arms build-up, see Patricia Arancibia Clavel and Isabel de la Maza Cave, *Matthei: mi testimonio* (Santiago: La Tercera and Mondadori, 2003), pp. 193-5.

³² CR, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, p. 33251 (1 Oct. 1974).

³³ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, pp. 228-30.

³⁴ CR, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, p. 32441 (24 Sept. 1974). A Democratic senator, John Hughes, also introduced an amendment to halt the expenditure of monies destined for covert CIA operations. Like Holtzman's effort, the Hughes Amendment failed, but it added momentum to the new internationalists' cause in Congress.

abuse by the CIA and FBI, including plots to assassinate or overthrow foreign leaders.³⁵ The widely publicised report prompted critics to charge that the CIA's operational methods and capacity for effective action had been compromised. In Chile the pro-regime press described these developments as the product of showboating Democratic politicians who erroneously believed that the CIA had installed the junta.³⁶

The Church Report marks a turning point. Thereafter, Congress assumed a permanent role in monitoring the nation's domestic and foreign intelligence agencies; furthermore, knowledge of US efforts to subvert Chilean democracy fed a conviction that Congress bore moral responsibility to moderate the junta and influence a return to civilian rule. In December 1975 Senator Gary Hart commented on the Senate staff report on CIA involvement in Chile, saying: 'The reports show that the CIA penetrated virtually every sector of Chilean society, including labor unions, the media, peasant and student groups. The CIA funded political parties and candidates. It was involved not only in presidential elections, but congressional, municipal, and by-elections as well.'³⁷ Hart's casting of the CIA as an all-powerful institution capable of penetrating every aspect of Chilean society, and by implication exerting real control over it, reflects a certain imperial arrogance. Chile's complex internal politics had actually proven remarkably difficult to manipulate, and US archives reveal the extent to which members of the US intelligence community misdiagnosed realities and misunderstood the motivations of Chilean actors.³⁸ The CIA *failed* to prevent Allende from coming to power in 1970, and it never acquired assets among the country's military commanders. From 1971 to 1973 the agency mostly passed money to Allende's opposition and speculated on the meaning of domestic developments. Senator Hart, however, spoke as if the US government could simply overwhelm the domestic institutions of a targeted country through clandestine operations or punitive sanctions.

The debate over the CIA also reflects the breakdown of consensus about how to wage the Cold War. US involvement in Vietnam had cost lives and treasure while doing harm to Washington's interests in South-East Asia. Senator Ted Kennedy, among others, believed that promoting human rights and good-faith political agreements in Latin America would shore up US 'soft' power and build strong, lasting regional alliances. At the same time, the new internationalists never managed to build a durable foreign policy consensus;

³⁵ US Senate, *Covert Action in Chile, 1963–1973* (the Church Report), available at <http://foia.state.gov/Reports/ChurchReport.asp>.

³⁶ 'El caso de la CIA en Chile', *Ercilla*, 25 Sept. 1974.

³⁷ CR, 94th Congress, 1st Session, p. 39869 (11 Dec. 1975).

³⁸ For a historically balanced evaluation of Chile's relationship to external forces in the twentieth century and the limits of US power, see Joaquín Fernando, 'The Persistence of a Myth: Chile in the Hurricane of the Cold War', *Estudios Públicos*, 92 (2003), pp. 287–312.

their agenda came up against substantial resistance in the 1970s.³⁹ Moreover, the election of Ronald Reagan as president in 1980 heralded a more orthodox view of the Cold War. In Chile, the Pinochet regime looked with a degree of bewilderment on domestic politics in the United States. Colonel Herbert Orellana observed that Soviet leaders did not face critics at the highest echelons of power who wished to make the state's national security instruments more transparent. The problem with US society, wrote Orellana, was that 'since the late sixties and especially after Watergate, its consensus about national security has eroded'.⁴⁰

Terminating Military Aid to Chile

In 1974 the Nixon administration requested US\$ 85 million in bilateral aid to Chile (for the 1975 fiscal year), with over US\$ 20 million for military sales credits. In the run-up to the vote, Edward Kennedy filled the Congressional Record with press accounts and international reports of human rights violations in Chile. Senator Kennedy refused to let the human rights issue be put aside or lost in a theoretical debate about the possibility of the United States losing political influence in Chile. On 1 October, the US Senate voted 47 to 41 to terminate security assistance.

The vote was close, though. Gale McGee, a Democratic senator from Wisconsin, agreed that human rights had to form one part of US foreign policy, but he expressed misgivings about circumscribing the executive's tools to relax or tighten pressure on Chile's junta in accord with US interests and unfolding contingencies. McGee also raised two other concerns: sanctions might aggravate an arms imbalance in South America, and they might prove counter-productive with respect to the goal of restoring democratic government. 'We are not going to change the inner workings of Chile, overnight, even with this act', he argued. 'What we may do, as a consequence, is harden the position of the group that is now in power and seeking to survive, and delay still longer the process of constitutional change.'⁴¹

The driving logic behind policy changes towards Chile and other dictatorships was fairly simple: Congress should not subsidise repressive states. But the termination of military assistance also raised new questions. What did the US government stand to lose or gain from cutting off military aid to Chile? Would it expedite a transition to democracy or compel the junta to

³⁹ See Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*; and Natasha Zaretsky, 'Restraint or Retreat? The Debate over the Panama Canal Treaties and U. S. Nationalism after Vietnam', *Diplomatic History*, 35: 3 (2011), pp. 535–62.

⁴⁰ Colonel Herbert Orellana Herrera, 'La comunidad de inteligencia de los Estados Unidos de Norteamérica', *Memorial del Ejército de Chile*, 405 (1980), p. 15.

⁴¹ CR, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 33253–4 (1 Oct. 1974).

respect human rights? Could vital US security interests, such as the peace and stability of South America, be affected? Senator Strom Thurmond insisted that a total ban on military assistance would deprive the US government of political and ideological influence over the Chilean military and poison a long-standing relationship that spanned decades.⁴²

Few countries embodied the acrimonious tug of war between the executive and legislative branches as did Chile. In the Oval Office, President Gerald Ford spoke of changes to US foreign aid made in the House of Representatives as signalling the ascendance of 'a new generation of wildass Democrats'. 'In the name of human rights', said Henry Kissinger, 'they will undermine national security.' Kissinger believed that cutting off arms to Chile while Peru continued to receive Soviet assistance would surely cause Chile's military government to fall: 'They are lousy, but we just can't do things like this.'⁴³ The Ford administration saw regional peace and US credibility towards an ally as being at stake. In a subsequent meeting, Kissinger said to Ford: 'The Chilean aid cut is disastrous. I want us to do everything possible to get arms for Chile. They can buy commercially but Defense says they won't sell if there is any DOD [Department of Defense] component.'⁴⁴ In other words, Chile could buy from private defence contractors, on a cash basis, so long as the department stayed out of the transactions.

Closing the Loopholes, 1975-6

In 1975 the Ford administration requested no security assistance for Chile. However, it approved multiple weapons sales to Santiago and granted generous aid for food, fertiliser and farm equipment. The White House also supported Santiago's efforts to secure major World Bank loans. Thus critics saw the White House as playing a double game in order to compensate the junta for its loss of military aid with other forms of assistance that could free up state revenue for commercial arms purchases. In the House of Representatives Michael Harrington explained that US\$ 91 million in bilateral aid had been dispensed to Chile in 1975, a figure twice what had been furnished to the next-largest recipient of US aid in Latin America. The Ford administration, therefore, was continuing to embrace the Chilean government in spite of congressional concerns.⁴⁵ Only by denying the president authority to approve foreign military sales to Chile, said Harrington, would Congress send a

⁴² CR, 93rd Congress, 2nd Session, p. 38139 (4 Dec. 1974).

⁴³ 'Memorandum of Conversation', National Security Adviser's Memoranda of Conversation Collection, 12-3-1974, Gerald F. Ford Presidential Library (GFPL), available at www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0314/1552867.pdf.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 12-20-1974.

⁴⁵ CR, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 1021-2 (26 Jan. 1976).

forceful message to both the executive branch and the junta. On 18 February 1976 Ted Kennedy explained to his colleagues that the Ford administration had ignored the voice of Congress by issuing licences for direct military sales in excess of US\$ 15 million over the first six months after the termination of military aid to Chile. 'Now it is time to close all the loopholes and halt all weapons traffic', he stated.⁴⁶ Kennedy reiterated his conviction that the United States had a special responsibility when it came to Chile.

The seriousness of the amendment was not lost on anyone. It represented a total ban on arms transfers to Chile, not just the termination of military aid. In the words of Robert David Johnson, it 'demonstrated the starkly different foreign policy principles at play in mid-1970s Washington'.⁴⁷ Indeed, lawmakers took markedly different assumptions – what political scientists term realism and idealism – into their foreign policy deliberations. A Democratic senator, Hubert Humphrey, remarked that the Kennedy Amendment was severe and unprecedented, but justified. Why should the United States supply arms to 'a handful of thugs, who shot their way into power'? Boiling down the matter to a 'friend or foe' logic, Strom Thurmond countered: 'Why should we deny selling these people military equipment? They have been friendly to the US. They are not in a category with the USSR.' A Republican senator, Barry Goldwater, added, 'Here we are, with Members of this body having suggested better relations with Cuba, better relations – even business relations – with Red China, where millions were killed over there by dictators; continuing better business relations with the Soviets – Lord knows how many they have killed under a much worse form of government than Chile ever had.'⁴⁸

Willing to overlook the junta's transgressions, senators Barry Goldwater, Jesse Helms, James Buckley, Strom Thurmond and John Tower defended Chile as a victim of left-wing distortions and presented a countervailing perspective on Allende, the coup and the military government. In the era of détente these staunchly anti-communist senators saw a massive double standard at work. As Henry Kissinger improved relations with China and the Soviet Union, Congress pushed away a country that had overthrown a Marxist leader. Peru procured US\$ 1 billion in arms from the Soviet Union, but its chief rival could not access the US arms market.

Strom Thurmond drew attention to the implications of cutting Chile off, stating that 'The interruption of logistic support would be a serious blow to the Chilean armed forces.' He reminded his colleagues that Chile had incorporated large quantities of US military equipment into its defence

⁴⁶ CR, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, p. 3598 (18 Feb. 1976).

⁴⁷ Johnson, *Congress and the Cold War*, p. 228.

⁴⁸ CR, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, pp. 3600–2 (18 Feb. 1976).

structure under the assumption that the United States would continue to support its national defence capabilities; thus, the credibility of the United States towards a long-standing ally was at stake. He also predicted that an arms embargo would fail to produce a positive change. Rather, it would alienate a natural Cold War ally from Washington and prompt Chile to seek out new military suppliers.⁴⁹

Notwithstanding vociferous opposition from a group of conservative senators, the Kennedy Amendment passed by a vote of 48 to 39. It represented a victory for the international human rights movement and a new assertion of Congress's voice in US foreign policy. Ted Kennedy, architect of the legislation, had worked tirelessly to focus attention on human rights in Chile and force the junta to reckon with sanctions that could not be circumvented by a friendly executive. Immediately after the vote, Jesse Helms introduced an amendment giving the president authority to waive the arms embargo if he determined that Chile had made progress with respect to human rights. 'A waiver is a strong incentive to continue taking positive steps', Helms argued.⁵⁰ This line of reasoning was anathema to Kennedy, who stated: 'I am completely and wholeheartedly opposed to the concept of letting the executive make a unilateral decision and determination on when it will begin pumping arms back to Chile again.'⁵¹

John Tower pressed Hubert Humphrey to explain what the United States hoped to achieve by cutting off Chile's access to arms. Respect for human rights? A display of moral virtue? Did he think an arms embargo could exacerbate an asymmetry of military power in South America? Humphrey responded with two major points: firstly, the United States had every right to refuse arms to countries that it found morally repugnant, and secondly, the amendment set a positive precedent – from now on, the executive would have to justify aid to repressive regimes. Like other 'internationalist' senators he wanted to demonstrate the United States' commitment to democratic principles, the rule of law and standing on the side of the oppressed, not the oppressors. Domestic concerns such as placing a check on executive authority also clearly influenced his vote.

On 3 March 1976, the House of Representatives took up debate on the Foreign Assistance Bill (HR 11963). With respect to Chile the bill banned security assistance to Santiago, but it *preserved* Chile's access to US arms markets on a cash basis. Michael Harrington immediately introduced an amendment to halt arms traffic to Chile. Without such a ban, said George Brown, the 'sense of congress' would be a joke.⁵² The House, however, rejected Harrington's amendment by a vote of 139 to 266. John Buchanan denounced

⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 3609.

⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 3614.

⁵² CR, 94th Congress, 2nd Session, p. 5228 (3 Mar. 1976).

the bill as a draconian duplication of the Kennedy Amendment, which provided no incentive for the Chilean government to improve its human rights record. Furthermore, did it make sense to provide security assistance to Peru but not to Chile? 'We are not operating in a vacuum', Buchanan commented. 'We will upset the balance in that entire area if we adopt the Harrington Amendment.' One group of representatives observed that European countries might prove unreliable suppliers of weapons to Chile, rendering Santiago unable to deter Peruvian aggression. Others questioned the likelihood that the sanctions could do anything but drive Chile away from the US government.⁵³

Ultimately the reconciled version of the House and Senate bills would include the latter's much tougher provisions. Crucially, it cut off commercial military sales to Chile as well as concessionary assistance approved by the US president through institutions such as the Export-Import Bank. The House voted 258 to 146 to approve the conference report on 22 June and the law went into effect eight days later, making Chile ineligible to buy US arms until Congress certified that a pattern of human rights violations had ended. Pinochet and the junta balked at the prospect of accepting an international commission to evaluate the country's human rights situation, so it was clear that the embargo would, in all likelihood, remain in effect until the end of military rule.

The View from Santiago

La Enmienda Kennedy produced a defiant, nationalistic response in Santiago. By what right did these outsiders pretend to understand the nation's political circumstances? Military leaders felt that the entire free world, and especially the United States, owed their country a debt of gratitude for halting the advance of communism in South America. Instead, the Chilean government faced punitive sanctions and widespread censure, something Santiago chalked up to a left-wing propaganda campaign orchestrated to malign the junta and convince Western governments that egotistical military generals had subverted the will of Chile's population.

Military officers saw their country as the victim of a massive political attack coordinated and perpetrated by the international Left to mislead governments about what had actually transpired in Chile. Colonel Luis Ortiz called this 'the weapon Marxism employs on a global scale to undermine the systems of government it considers enemies'.⁵⁴ On the one hand, Soviet bloc countries

⁵³ *Ibid.*, pp. 5227–8.

⁵⁴ Colonel Luis Ortiz Lorenzo, 'Hablemos de psicopolítica', *Memorial del Ejército de Chile*, 398 (1978), p. 105.

used the United Nations to isolate Santiago with resolutions. On the other, Marxists in the democratic West, including thousands of Chilean exiles opposed to the junta, used their liberal freedoms to disseminate false ideas about Chile and influence the foreign policy of their respective governments. The problem, from this perspective, was that Western countries refused to employ the necessary censorship to protect themselves from Soviet disinformation campaigns or Marxist psychological penetration. Why else would the US Congress alienate a government that had prevented the birth of a Havana–Santiago axis?⁵⁵

Military journals described the West as having selectively applied a human rights policy that pushed away natural allies and showed little appreciation of South America's geo-strategic value to the free world. Chilean officers trumpeted their role as a bulwark against communist expansion, protecting the Straits of Magellan and patrolling sea lanes from Easter Island to Antarctica. The US embargo, they said, left Chile surrounded by hostile neighbours and less able to contribute to inter-American defence.⁵⁶ The release of Washington's military aid designations for 1978 elicited an immediate charge of hypocrisy. Officers observed that autocrats in Iran, Indonesia, South Korea and the Philippines – geopolitically vital regions of the world – continued to receive military aid despite failing to meet a uniform standard of respect for human rights. In other words, strategic criteria – *raison d'état* – determined US foreign aid, not lofty humanitarian considerations.⁵⁷ Furthermore, some US policy-makers denied the existence of tangible threats to Chile's national security; others claimed that Richard Nixon had effectively overthrown Salvador Allende's government. The latter perception irked the regime because it presumed Chilean affairs could be controlled by outside forces. Officers and regime supporters made clear that corrupt politicians and dangerous ideologies, not the United States, had caused the breakdown of the nation's respected democracy.⁵⁸

In official discourse, the armed forces had overthrown Salvador Allende to prevent a seditious Left from seizing total power and murdering its enemies with impunity. A junta member, Gustavo Leigh, stated: 'Chile accepts no lessons on the subject of human rights because this government came to power

⁵⁵ See 'Discurso pronunciado por el General Gustavo Leigh', *Revista de la Fuerza Aérea*, 138 (1976), pp. 2–5.

⁵⁶ Colonel Victor Chaves Dailhe, 'Carta abierta', *Memorial del Ejército de Chile*, 397 (1978), pp. 43–51; Hugo Llanos Mansilla, 'Los derechos humanos en la política exterior del presidente Carter, con referencia a América Latina', *Revista Marina*, 726 (1978), pp. 451–8.

⁵⁷ 'Noticiero', *Revista de la Marina*, 719 (1977), pp. 462–3.

⁵⁸ See 'Respuesta de M. Harrington y réplica de Pablo Aldunate: polémico debate sobre el proceso chileno', *Armas y Servicios*, 5 (1976), pp. 80–2; and Lieutenant Colonel Richard Neeb Gevert, 'Comentarios a "Militares Chilenos" de Frederick M. Nunn', *Memorial del Ejército de Chile*, 398 (1978), pp. 83–95.

precisely to preserve them.’⁵⁹ The seriousness of Chile’s internal threat, the junta said, justified emergency measures and repression; Fidel Castro routinely jailed and executed dissidents to protect his socialist revolution, so where was Washington’s equivalent condemnation of Cuba? Regime officials did not deny the existence of human rights violations so much as they highlighted the disproportionate international attention that Chile received compared with communist governments that routinely trampled human rights. Where was the world’s outrage at Pol Pot’s murderous rampages in Cambodia? Furthermore, officers asked what moral authority the United States had to lecture Chile on the subject of human rights. Quite a few of them had actually witnessed ugly institutionalised racism in the Jim Crow South during the 1950s and 1960s.⁶⁰

Regardless of how regime stalwarts may have seen things, Santiago’s international isolation cannot really be overstated. In December 1977 the United Nations General Assembly voted 96 to 14 to condemn Chile for human rights violations. Meanwhile, US–Chile relations reached their nadir as a result of the ‘Letelier affair’, which began in 1976 when Pinochet’s secret police brazenly assassinated a socialist and former Chilean diplomat, Orlando Letelier, in the heart of Washington, DC.⁶¹ Eventually FBI investigators amassed credible evidence demonstrating Chilean responsibility for the car bomb that killed Letelier, but Pinochet refused to let his people stand trial in the United States and Chile’s Supreme Court denied US requests for extradition. Walking a fine line between respect for another country’s sovereignty and an appropriate response to a case of international terrorism, the Carter administration responded with a round of political and economic sanctions in 1979, including a significant reduction of the US diplomatic mission in Santiago.⁶²

The Impact of Sanctions

It is reasonable to think that if world opinion had been a non-issue, the human rights situation in Chile could have been worse. International condemnation put the Pinochet regime on notice that the world was watching, and that human rights violations could have serious political

⁵⁹ General Gustavo Leigh, speech transcript, *Revista de la Fuerza Aérea*, 142 (1977), p. 2.

⁶⁰ See Arancibia and de la Maza, *Matthei: mi testimonio*, p. 110.

⁶¹ John Dinges and Saul Landau, *Assassination on Embassy Row* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980).

⁶² For a nuanced look at the Carter administration’s response, see Vanessa Walker, ‘At the End of Influence: The Letelier Assassination, Human Rights, and Rethinking Intervention in US–Latin American Relations’, *Journal of Contemporary History*, 46: 109 (2011), pp. 109–35.

consequences. At the same time, the Chilean government showed little inclination to change its internal security policies.⁶³ For a proud military, outside pressure tended to fortify a defiant attitude. The junta agreed that external criticism was unjust and illegitimate, and that it stemmed from a Marxist conspiracy.

US sanctions had no real impact on the effectiveness of Chile's internal security apparatus, but the country's external defence capabilities suffered greatly. Chile's air force and navy lost access to spare parts for essential hardware: warships and aircraft. The United States delivered the 18 F-5E jet fighters Chile had purchased before the legislation went into effect, but they arrived without the possibility of logistical support. Santiago's other main supplier of armaments, the United Kingdom, severed military aid in 1974 following the election of a Labour government, and halted future arms deals.⁶⁴ British dockers refused to handle Chilean cargo or release warships ordered by the Chilean government. Meanwhile, workers at a Rolls-Royce factory in Scotland declined to recondition engines for Chile's Hawker Hunter jets. Eventually, all of these weapons (frigates, submarines and jet engines) reached Chile, but their delivery was far from certain at first. In fact, it was not until Santiago's dispute with Buenos Aires escalated sharply that James Callaghan's government agreed to issue export licences for four jet engines in June 1978.⁶⁵ In August the engines disappeared from the factory floor, presumably with government assistance. In short, Chile had become a pariah state with insecure lines of military supply, a fact that reconfigured South America's security dynamics.

In the mid-1970s, historic suspicions, territorial disputes and competing geopolitical interests resurfaced dramatically in South America. Peru had obtained conventional superiority vis-à-vis its traditional rivals, Ecuador and Chile, which posed a basic question: why had Lima amassed so many more tanks than Chile? Was it to reclaim territories lost during the War of the Pacific (1879–84) or to press, by military means, for the favourable resolution of outstanding disputes? Mutual suspicion loomed over everything. When Peru's armed forces completed a series of joint exercises in the country's southernmost department, Santiago was greatly alarmed. What did these war games mean? Meanwhile, the US ambassador in Lima, Robert W. Dean, repeatedly tried to convince the head of Peru's military government, Juan Velasco Alvarado, that Washington sought to balance its aid and assistance to regional powers, to which Peru's dictator retorted: 'You are both feeding and

⁶³ Schoultz, *Human Rights and United States Policy*, pp. 349–50.

⁶⁴ See Michael D. Wilkinson, 'The Chile Solidarity Campaign and British Government Policy towards Chile, 1973–1990', *European Review of Latin American and Caribbean Studies*, 52 (June 1992), pp. 57–74.

⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

arming Chile.⁶⁶ In short, neither of the parties involved trusted each other, and Velasco, openly hostile to Chile's junta, did nothing to reduce bilateral tension before more moderate army generals removed him in 1975. Seen from Santiago, Peru's political instability reinforced a climate of uncertainty. Would hawkish generals eventually seize control and pursue a belligerent, revanchist agenda?⁶⁷

Against this political and military backdrop, in the words of Mary Helen Spooner, 'Chile lacked important defence equipment such as antitank and anti-aircraft weapons, and its few advantages lay in its defensive position and the superior organization and training of its military.'⁶⁸ Ironically, Chile had become weaker and more dependent on diplomacy to safeguard its borders under a military government. Without sufficient equipment, the Chilean army resorted to mining its borders while the navy scrambled to ready antiquated units for combat. The air force, utterly lacking adequate air defence systems, was the most exposed and vulnerable.

On 8 June 1976 Henry Kissinger met with Augusto Pinochet in Santiago. Kissinger thanked the dictator for overthrowing Allende, but he underlined that the human rights issue had impaired US–Chile relations and that the executive, while friendly, could not prevent Congress from restricting the sale of weaponry. Revealingly, most of the conversation dealt with Peru. Kissinger asked what Chile would do in the event of an emergency. Pinochet explained that the military was modifying older weapons and fixing junked units. He expected an unofficial pledge of US support, but the secretary of state was non-committal, saying that circumstances would determine the US position if the two rivals found themselves embroiled in a military conflict. Kissinger offered sympathy and encouragement but no promises. Surprised by the response, Pinochet invoked the East–West conflict. He reminded Kissinger that Soviet aid had tipped the strategic balance of forces in Peru's favour, saying: 'I am concerned very much by the Peruvian situation. Circumstances might produce aggression by Peru. Why are they buying tanks? They have heavy artillery, 155s ... Russia supports their people 100 per cent.' The Chilean delegation then tried to convince a dubious Kissinger that Cubans were operating in Peru as Soviet proxies.⁶⁹ One month later Chile's ambassador to the United States, Manuel Trucco, and Admiral José Merino, a member of the junta, met with Brent Scowcroft in the White House. Merino explained

⁶⁶ Walter, *Peru and the United States*, p. 291.

⁶⁷ See José Rodríguez Elizondo, *Chile–Perú: el siglo que vivimos en peligro* (Santiago: COPESA, 2005).

⁶⁸ Mary Helen Spooner, *Soldiers in a Narrow Land: The Pinochet Regime in Chile* (Los Angeles, CA: University of California Press, 1999), p. 112.

⁶⁹ 'Memorandum of Conversation', 6-8-76, Department of State, available at <http://www.gwu.edu/~nsarchiv/NSAEBB/NSAEBB212/19760608%20US-Chilean%20Relations.pdf>.

that Chile's navy could only acquire spare parts for deteriorating US equipment at great cost while the United States continued to supply Peru and Argentina.⁷⁰ Scowcroft expressed the Ford administration's willingness to help Chile locate spares from third parties, but the basic situation remained unchanged.

In December 1976 Chile identified Peruvian troops massing near the border with Ecuador. Was the mobilisation meant to secure Peru's northern frontier before launching an invasion of Chilean Tarapacá? Such a question might sound absurdly paranoid, but the imbalance of conventional forces made Peru's troop movements impossible to ignore.⁷¹ Lima took steps to defuse the situation, but the war scare underscored the mistrust and jitteriness of Peru's neighbours, who felt outmatched and unsure of Peru's intentions. One CIA report observed that 'Peru's immediate objectives, if it has any, probably could be met quickly and held by overwhelming force ... [although] it might not be able to sustain an offensive for more than 72 hours. In any case, we believe the chances are slight that Peru will launch an attack against Chile in 1977.'⁷² Of course, Santiago could not be smug about anything in the light of its military supply problems and severe diplomatic isolation. Augusto Pinochet's meeting with Jimmy Carter in September 1977 rehashed familiar themes. The Chilean dictator stressed Peru's arms build-up and tried to garner US support by exaggerating the number of Cuban advisers in Peru. For their part, Carter and US officials emphasised the human rights issue and its negative effect on US–Chilean relations.⁷³

Meanwhile, a disagreement between Chile and Argentina presented the distinct possibility of armed conflict. In 1971 the two countries had submitted their long-standing territorial dispute to binding international mediation, and in May 1977 a commission of jurists issued a decision supporting Chile's claim to sovereignty over islands in the Beagle Channel, including legal rights to resources inside the contested maritime area. Furious with the outcome, Argentina's junta rejected the decision and demanded new negotiations. Although the two governments had been sharing intelligence to coordinate the capture and assassination of each other's political enemies in Operation Condor, that period of cooperation, based on a perceived mutual threat from

⁷⁰ 'Memcon of Meeting with Admiral Jose Merino of Chile', 7-21-76, National Security Council, GFPL, available at www.fordlibrarymuseum.gov/library/document/0314/1553503.pdf. Scowcroft was President Ford's national security adviser at the time.

⁷¹ See Zbigniew Brzezinski to James Carter, 'Your Request for an Assessment of Peru's Military Threat and Appropriate US Response', 3-5-77, Jimmy Carter Presidential Library (JCPL), NLC-6-64-1-7-7.

⁷² CIA, 'Intelligence Memorandum, Peru: An Assessment of the Threat', 2-23-77, JCPL, NLC-6-64-1-8-6.

⁷³ 'Memorandum of Conversation, President Carter/President Pinochet Bilateral', 9-6-77, JCPL, Staff Material: Pastor, North/South Country Files, Box 9, Folder 2.

'internal subversion', was coming to a close.⁷⁴ By 1978 it had become clear that Buenos Aires would press, bilaterally, to define the disputed maritime boundary in a manner more favourable to the country's geopolitical objectives.⁷⁵ Admiral Emilio Massera, a hawkish member of Argentina's junta, began making provocative press statements about defending the nation's territorial integrity and demanding that Santiago should recognise the legitimacy of Argentine claims. Beginning in September 1978, a stream of worried cables began to flow back and forth between the US State Department and its South American embassies. In November Argentina deployed 10,000 troops to southern Patagonia while its navy and air force conducted well-publicised training exercises. Was Argentina just sabre-rattling? Unable to take chances, Chile's military leadership prepared for the possibility of war with Argentina even though the lion's share of Chile's air power and ground forces remained in the country's northern and central zones, oriented towards Peru.⁷⁶ The navy, by necessity, would be the principal protagonist in the event of a conflict.⁷⁷

Increasingly, the two countries appeared headed for confrontation. On 1 November, US Secretary of State Cyrus Vance wrote to selected embassies: 'Frankly, the reports on the situation are confusing and constantly changing.' In late November the US embassy in Buenos Aires reported to Washington that Argentina would occupy several uninhabited islets off the Beagle Channel if December's talks broke down and Chile refused to make concessions.⁷⁸ Chile, however, refused to meet Argentina's demand for control over an island as a precondition for future talks, and Pinochet communicated that aggression against inhabited Chilean islands would result in counter-attack. Hardliners in Argentina's government demanded decisive action from their president, General Jorge Videla, to establish Argentine sovereignty over some territory in the Beagle Channel; they felt that a military action would force Santiago to negotiate. As with Peru, the situation possessed a volatile quality arising from

⁷⁴ See John Dinges, *The Condor Years: How Pinochet and His Allies Brought Terror to Three Continents* (New York: New Press, 2005).

⁷⁵ See Jon Marco Church, 'La crisis del canal de Beagle', *Estudios Internacionales*, 41: 161 (2008), pp. 7–33.

⁷⁶ For first-hand Chilean accounts of the period, see Patricia Arancibia Clavel and Francisco Balart Paez, *Conversando con el General Julio Canessa Robert* (Santiago: Editorial Biblioteca Americana, 2006), pp. 253–67; and Arancibia and de la Maza, *Matthei: mi testimonio*, pp. 193–203, 284–94.

⁷⁷ Patricia Arancibia Clavel and Francisco Bulnes Serrano, *La Escuadra en Acción, 1978: el conflicto Chile-Argentina visto a través de sus protagonistas* (Santiago: Grijalbo, 2005).

⁷⁸ Cyrus Vance to selected embassies, 'Beagle Channel Situation Report', 11-1-1978, Department of State; Buenos Aires to State, 'Memcon of GOA Beagle Contingency Plans: Seizure of Unoccupied Territory', 11-24-1978, Department of State. I obtained these documents pertaining to the Beagle Channel dispute, and those cited in subsequent footnotes, through a Freedom of Information Act request in 2009.

political instability in Buenos Aires. Videla faced complex internal pressures and lacked full control over his government.⁷⁹ The United States hoped to set up a negotiated settlement through multilateral pressure or through a third party, possibly the King of Spain or the Vatican. While not eager to play the role of mediator, Pope John Paul II indicated a willingness to intervene if war appeared imminent.⁸⁰

In Washington, analysts watched nervously as events deteriorated. The US ambassador to Argentina, Raul Hector Castro, reported that the country's junta would initiate military operations against Chile sometime in mid-December. The armed forces' high command, he said, was determined to take decisive action to resolve a dispute perceived as vital to basic national interests.⁸¹ Furthermore, Castro worried that Argentina had become rhetorically committed to military action after a string of ultimatums. At the same time, Pinochet made it clear that Chile would repulse any aggression. He and the junta felt that compromise under the threat of force would set a dangerous precedent and harm Chile's position in future negotiations. On 14 December Jimmy Carter called Pinochet and Videla urging restraint. The State Department instructed its military contacts to re-impress upon Argentina's armed forces that using US defence articles in an action against Chile would result in the suspension of all Foreign Military Sales (FMS) deliveries.⁸² The moment of truth came on 22 December, when Argentina launched an operation to occupy islands in the disputed zone. Fortunately, foul weather delayed the attack's consummation and in the meantime Pope John Paul II sent his personal envoy to offer both governments mediation. Santiago accepted right away; after some deliberation, Buenos Aires did too. Here it is important to note that Chile's refusal to back down or be intimidated sent a clear message to Argentina's junta that a successful military action would not come cheaply.

Argentina's defeat in the Falklands/Malvinas War (1982) and Peru's serious internal problems during the 1980s effectively ended the threat of armed conflict in the Southern Cone. Following Argentina's transition to democracy, Santiago and Buenos Aires signed the Treaty of Peace and Friendship (1984),

⁷⁹ Mark Laudy, 'The Vatican Mediation of the Beagle Channel Dispute: Crisis Intervention and Forum Building', in Melanie C. Greenberg, John H. Barton and Margaret E. McGuinness (eds.), *Words over War: Mediation and Arbitration to Prevent Deadly Conflict* (Lanham, MD: Rowman & Littlefield, 2000), pp. 298–9; Church, 'La crisis del canal de Beagle', pp. 14–19.

⁸⁰ Buenos Aires to State, 'Beagle Channel: Possible Mediation Role by Pope', 12-5-1978, Department of State.

⁸¹ Raul Hector Castro to State, 'Subject Beagle Channel: Impending Military Hostilities', 12-7-78, Department of State.

⁸² Cyrus Vance to Buenos Aires, 'Subject: Beagle Channel Dispute', 12-16-1978, Department of State.

which established land and maritime boundaries in the Cape Horn region.⁸³ The Beagle Channel conflict was over, but the experience of preparing to defend the country with insufficient means left behind a significant historical legacy for the Chilean armed forces. It laid bare the country's external dependencies, prompted rapid growth in the domestic arms industry and deepened a conviction that the military had saved the country twice, in 1973 and in 1978. Máximo Venegas, a Chilean air force colonel, summed up his institution's perspective on how US sanctions affected the period:

It is necessary to bear in mind that the Kennedy Amendment came into effect precisely at the moment when the situation in the sub-region of the Southern Cone was acquiring strong sources of tension that had already manifested themselves in a near outbreak of war between Chile and Peru in 1975 and the first signs of the serious crisis with Argentina that unfolded in late 1978. In this international atmosphere, the first direct political effect of the amendment was precisely to aggravate tensions, to the extent that it meant a real reduction of the Chilean armed forces' military capabilities, especially the Air Force and the Navy's abilities to accomplish local deterrence in light of the region's geographical conditions. The amendment significantly increased the already notorious military inequality between Chile and any of its potential adversaries, with the exception of Bolivia. From this perspective, this initiative, instead of achieving its goal of political pressure, contributed to increased local tension, in apparent detriment of US interests in the Southern Cone.⁸⁴

An Impetus to Grow: The Kennedy Amendment and Chile's Defence Industry

The US arms embargo created powerful incentives for Chile's domestic defence industries. As General Julio Canessa said: 'Senator Ted Kennedy did us a great favour by forcing us to make do on our own.'⁸⁵ One air force general described the growth of the arms industry as having a 'trigger effect' on the self-sufficiency and technical sophistication of the entire armed forces.⁸⁶ Editors of the *Revista de la Fuerza Aérea* remarked that Chile's inability to acquire arms from the United States and European countries during the crisis with Argentina dramatised the urgent need 'to develop the national defence industry and progressively to diminish the excessive dependence on foreign suppliers'.⁸⁷ By 1982 Chile was manufacturing armoured vehicles, armour for planes, and naval landing craft. The army's munitions company, Fábricas y Maestranzas del Ejército de Chile (FAMAE), increased production of mortars, aircraft bombs, naval artillery, hand grenades, anti-tank mines and a

⁸³ Church, 'La crisis del canal Beagle', pp. 25–31.

⁸⁴ Colonel Máximo Venegas F., 'La brecha tecnológica con Estados Unidos y la defensa continental', *Minerva*, 14 (1987), p. 7.

⁸⁵ Arancibia and Balart, *Conversando con el General Julio Canessa Robert*, p. 264.

⁸⁶ Brigadier-General Caupolicán Boisset Mujica, 'La importancia de la investigación tecnológica para el desarrollo de la Fuerza Aérea de Chile', *Minerva*, 5 (1984).

⁸⁷ 'Industria bélica en Chile', *Revista de la Fuerza Aérea*, 160 (1982), p. 28.

variety of other implements of destruction. In the 1980s FAMA E completed the design of a sub-machine gun and multiple rocket launcher. The domestic arms industry became a source of pride. In 1987 the commander-in-chief of the air force, Fernando Matthei, observed that it had been a full ten years since Chile had imported a single bomb.⁸⁸

Chile's private sector took advantage of the new political climate. Carlos Cardoen, a US-educated metallurgical engineer with experience making explosives for Chile's mining sector, won state contracts to supply the Chilean army with armoured personnel carriers under a Swiss production licence. By the mid-1980s Cardoen Industries was manufacturing a wide assortment of munitions, including mines, rockets, grenades, torpedoes and, most famously, cluster bombs. Cardoen's success led to exporting, and during the Iran–Iraq War (1980–8) Cardoen Industries sold cluster bombs worth some US\$ 200 million to Saddam Hussein.⁸⁹ Regaled as a hero in military circles, Cardoen won fame as Chile's most successful arms producer.

Chile's state aircraft industry, Empresa Nacional de Aeronáutica de Chile (ENAE), reached a new level of technical development with the design, manufacture and export of a single-prop military trainer, the T-35 Pillán. Built with assistance from Piper Aircraft, a commercial US company unaffected by congressional restrictions, the Pillán replaced Chile's decrepit fleet of military trainers obtained under the MAP, which had become exceedingly difficult to repair following passage of the Kennedy Amendment. In the 1980s Chile proudly exported its aeronautical triumph to Spain and eventually to six other Latin American countries.⁹⁰

Despite these technical advances, Chile still had to rely on foreign countries for its most advanced hardware: tanks, submarines, jets and destroyers. In the mid-1970s this meant turning to Brazil, South Africa and Israel. In 1977 the Chilean navy acquired two missile-launching ships (SAAR 4) from Israel, which had demonstrated their combat effectiveness during the Yom Kippur War in 1973. The same year, Chilean naval engineers converted a German merchant vessel to supply and support the country's submarine fleet.⁹¹ In the 1980s Chile contracted Israel's aeronautical industry to help install radar systems and modernise the electrical components of the country's fighter jets,

⁸⁸ 'Discurso pronunciado por el Sr. Comandante en Jefe', *Minerva*, 12 (1987), p. 6.

⁸⁹ See Justin Hibbard, 'The Chilean Connection: Carlos Cardoen – Arms Dealer to Iraq, Former Friend of the US Government, and now Fugitive', *San Francisco Chronicle*, 2 Mar. 2003.

⁹⁰ 'Historia del Pillán: entrevista al Sr. Comandante en Jefe', *Revista de la Fuerza Aérea*, 161 (1982), pp. 22–7.

⁹¹ Carlos Tromben Corvalán, *La armada de Chile desde la alborada al sesquicentenario hasta el final del siglo XX* (Valparaíso: Imprenta de la Armada, 2001), pp. 1509–10; see also Carlos Tromben Corvalán, *Ingeniería naval, una especialidad centenaria* (Valparaíso: Imprenta de la Armada, 1989), p. 317.

but by then external lines of supply were opening up considerably.⁹² France sold Chile 20 Mirage jets in 1979, and the following year Margaret Thatcher restored full diplomatic relations with Santiago and then lifted the previous British arms embargo. Unlike her fellow conservative, Ronald Reagan, Thatcher could approve commercial arms deals without the interference of Parliament and in greater secrecy.⁹³

During the Falklands/Malvinas War, Pinochet supplied Thatcher's government with ground intelligence and authorised British use of Chilean airspace for reconnaissance missions. Pinochet also dispatched troops and submarines to the southern border with Argentina, forcing Buenos Aires to divert military resources away from the main conflict. Following Argentina's defeat, Thatcher rewarded Santiago with favourable access to Hawker Hunter jets, three Canberra PR-9 reconnaissance aircraft, long-range radar, anti-aircraft missiles and over-the-horizon intelligence-gathering equipment.⁹⁴ Now Pinochet had a powerful European ally from which to procure arms, lessening Santiago's political and military vulnerability. Moreover, Chile ceased to have a major external threat on its borders following the return of democracy to Argentina in 1983. The cumulative effect of these circumstances was to increase Pinochet's confidence on the international stage.

Pinochet and Washington during the Transition to Democracy, 1983–8

The year 1979 witnessed several unexpected events unfolding across the globe. The Soviet Union invaded Afghanistan to prop up a Marxist government in Kabul, Nicaragua's Sandinistas overthrew the Somoza regime, and popular demonstrations forced Iran's shah to abdicate. In each case, the outcome represented a blow to US interests. The Iranian Revolution proved openly hostile to the United States and the Sandinista triumph represented a victory for the radical Left in Central America. These events convinced one group of observers that Jimmy Carter's foreign policy, with its emphasis on human rights and liberal internationalism, had failed. Jeane Kirkpatrick, notably, argued that the United States had to work with friendly

⁹² Andrés Pérez-Cotapos D. and Francisco Poblete B., *Alas de Chile: aeronaves de la Fuerza Aérea, 1913–2006* (Santiago: Ediciones Santillana, 2005), p. 104; see also Israel Shahak, *Israel armó las dictaduras en América Latina* (Buenos Aires: Editorial Canaán, 2007).

⁹³ Mark Phythian, "Batting for Britain": British Arms Sales in the Thatcher Years', *Crime, Law and Social Change*, 26: 3 (1996/7), pp. 278–81.

⁹⁴ Paolo Tripodi, 'General Matthei's Revelation and Chile's Role during the Falklands War: A New Perspective on the Conflict in the South Atlantic', *Journal of Strategic Studies*, 26: 4 (2003), pp. 108–23; see also Sir Lawrence Freedman, *The Official History of the Falklands Campaign*, vol. 2: *War and Diplomacy* (London: Routledge, 2005), pp. 390–9.

authoritarian regimes to advance US strategic interests and prevent future setbacks.⁹⁵

Following the election of Ronald Reagan in 1980, Kirkpatrick's ideas achieved ascendancy. Reagan appointed Kirkpatrick as US ambassador to the United Nations and returned to Nixon's policy of supporting anti-communist dictators across Latin America. Regional trends, however, prompted the Reagan administration to alter course. Once democracy had returned to Argentina, Brazil and Uruguay between 1983 and 1985, US officials began pressuring Pinochet for a peaceful transition to civilian rule. To be sure, this development reinforced the dictator's perception of Washington as unpredictable and inconsistent. As one Chilean officer put it: 'US policy towards Latin America changes course constantly. It's like a pendulum that swings from one extreme to another.'⁹⁶ Yet Chile's internal politics had changed too. A severe economic crisis had undermined the regime's legitimacy, and in 1983 a broad segment of the Chilean population defied the dictatorship during multiple nationwide protests that called for an immediate transition to civilian rule.

One might think that renewed civic protest would bode well for a US role in Chile's affairs, but as the assistant secretary for western hemisphere affairs, Langhorne Motley, wrote to Washington in 1983: 'Our ability to decisively influence the course of events in Chile is limited. Overall diplomatic leverage is weak. Our connections to the opposition are improving but are not strong ... The military sphere is critical but we cannot get to them in the absence of FMS, normal training assistance, and the [Congress] certification issue.'⁹⁷ As the years wore on, Chilean dissidents discovered a hard fact – despite ongoing political mobilisations and a national majority favouring democracy, the dictatorship retained a firm bastion of supporters (roughly 40 per cent of the population) and, crucially, the armed forces' loyalty. A political stalemate ensued; the government had enough hard and soft power to survive strong domestic and external pressures.⁹⁸ It should also be noted that the armed forces believed that their own departure from power had to occur within the established constitutional structure. Anything less would be tantamount to surrender, an outcome unacceptable to a proud military that regarded itself as historically undefeated.

⁹⁵ Jeane Kirkpatrick, 'Dictatorships and Double Standards', *Commentary*, 68: 5 (1979), pp. 34–45.

⁹⁶ Colonel Hernán Verdejo Rojas, 'La política exterior norteamericana', *Minerva*, 13 (1987), p. 22.

⁹⁷ Motley to Eagleburger, 'Chile Policy Memo', 9-23-83, Department of State, available at <http://foia.state.gov/documents/StateChile3/000094DB.pdf>.

⁹⁸ See Steve J. Stern, *Battling for Hearts and Minds: Memory Struggles in Pinochet's Chile, 1973–1988* (Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 2006), pp. 528–9.

By the end of 1984 US observers agreed that Pinochet's perpetuation in power was likely to foster armed resistance and radicalise Chile's moderate political opposition. Rather than an anti-communist bulwark, the ageing dictator appeared to be more of an impediment to long-term stability.⁹⁹ Yet there was also inter-agency agreement about the constrained nature of US options. Over the next three years US officials pressured Pinochet to leave power in accord with the 1980 Constitution, but by then Pinochet knew he could ignore Washington's threats, advice and pleadings. The experience of confronting so many crises and outside pressures had revealed the limits of US power; Santiago knew how to navigate the international landscape as a pariah state.

Here it is important to underline that the US government no longer provided military assistance or sold arms to Chile. Thus it had fewer mechanisms to influence a military government. With respect to leveraging financial institutions such as the World Bank and International Monetary Fund, Washington had to tread carefully. US policy-makers wanted to strengthen the political centre in Chile, but withholding loans or refusing to refinance Chile's debt held the possibility of generating economic instability that would favour 'anti-systemic' forces such as the Communist Party. In 1985 the US embassy in Santiago informed State Department officials that 'a democratic transition is impossible without the acquiescence of the military because only they could change Pinochet's mind or remove him from power'. In light of this assessment, the embassy urged Washington lawmakers to change legislation to permit 'regular military-to-military contacts'.¹⁰⁰ In 1986 a strategy paper by Elliott Abrams and Harry G. Barnes repeated earlier conclusions: Pinochet was determined to remain in power, and his ability to do so depended on continued support from the armed forces. Abrams and Barnes wrote to Secretary of State George Shultz with the following assessment: 'Given that Pinochet is the obstacle, he must be persuaded to change or be removed. The only viable approach is to convince the Chilean military that its institutional interests are jeopardized by continued unconditional support for Pinochet. To do this we need to be able to communicate more easily and effectively with the military.'¹⁰¹

⁹⁹ Motley to Dam, 'U. S. Policy Toward Chile', 11-23-84, Department of State, available at <http://foia.state.gov/documents/StateChile3/000063BB.pdf>. See also Motley to Deputy Secretary, 'U. S. Policy Toward Chile', 12-20-1984, Department of State, available at <http://foia.state.gov/documents/StateChile3/000094BE.pdf>.

¹⁰⁰ Santiago to State, 'The Military Leadership-Mission, Political Views and Inter-Service Relations', 4-29-85, Department of State, available at <http://foia.state.gov/documents/StateChile3/00006823.pdf>.

¹⁰¹ Santiago to State, 'Strategy Paper', Department of State, 7-8-86, available at <http://foia.state.gov/documents/StateChile3/00006C22.pdf>.

The impression one gets from these strategy papers is not confidence but impotence. The State Department feared that using economic leverage against Pinochet would destabilise Chile and precipitate a climate of instability favouring radical leftists.¹⁰² In the absence of security assistance and training programmes Washington had few means by which to communicate with Chile's armed forces, which continued to support the regime loyally. Clandestine methods of penetrating Chile's highly disciplined armed forces had never proved effective, and Pinochet, always the master strategist, limited the armed forces' institutional contact with any politically suspect outsiders.

Ultimately, the institutional structure that Pinochet had created proved to be his undoing. The 1980 Constitution called for a plebiscite to determine whether or not a candidate picked by the government would remain in power for another eight years. In 1988, civil society, along with members of the junta, forced Pinochet to accept a free and fair election that saw 56 per cent of the population vote against the dictator's perpetuation in power, setting up a peaceful transition to civilian rule.¹⁰³ Washington's role in the unfolding political drama, provisioning moral and material support to democratic actors in Chile, did not shape the eventual outcome meaningfully.

Conclusions

The US arms embargo of the Pinochet regime speaks to changes in Washington and in the world system during the 1970s. As the Vietnam War and Watergate scandal weakened US presidents, Congress forcefully asserted its voice in matters of foreign policy. Meanwhile, well-organised groups committed to the defence of human rights mobilised in response to a wave of violent anti-communist repression across South America. All of these factors converged to produce a major change in US policy towards Santiago.

From 1974 to 1976 Chile figured prominently in a congressional debate about the CIA, presidential authority, and US security assistance to repressive governments. During this time a broad segment of lawmakers agreed, in theory, that foreign governments showing contempt for human rights did not deserve unfettered access to US weaponry. During the previous two decades US presidents had enjoyed broad leeway to dispense arms to allies and direct the nation's foreign policy. The CIA, during this time, operated at the behest of the president. That all changed in the mid-1970s as Congress began to exert

¹⁰² See Morris Morley and Chris McGillion, 'Soldiering On: The Reagan Administration and Redemocratization in Chile, 1983–1986', *Bulletin of Latin American Research*, 25: 1 (2006), pp. 1–22.

¹⁰³ Carlos Huneeus, *The Pinochet Regime* (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner, 2007), pp. 395–429; Robert Barros, *Constitutionalism and Dictatorship: Pinochet, the Junta, and the 1980 Constitution* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2002).

greater control over foreign aid appropriations and oversee the country's intelligence community. Yet a new foreign policy consensus proved elusive. Some lawmakers continued to regard close relationships with anti-communist dictators as sound national security strategy. Others felt that Congress had unwisely constrained the president's ability to conduct the nation's affairs in a timely, nimble fashion – in effect, micromanaging the executive's foreign policy.

The Kennedy Amendment had diverse effects in South America. It stimulated the rapid growth of Chile's defence industries and forced Santiago to reckon with its political and military dependence on Washington. In an era of rising regional tension the arms embargo aggravated an imbalance of military power that favoured Chile's traditional rivals, Peru and Argentina, and this imbalance appears to have emboldened Argentina's junta to press for an immediate resolution of the Beagle Channel dispute, despite the potential for armed conflict. In dramatic fashion, the embargo heightened Santiago's military and political vulnerability as two overlapping processes converged: arms proliferation in South America, and the United States' declining ability to influence the region's nationalistic military regimes.

In the second half of the twentieth century the United States restricted arms transfers to Latin America in pursuit of hemispheric goals or to exert political pressure on individual countries. From one perspective the Kennedy Amendment can be said to have revealed the limits of US power; the legislation failed to expedite a transition to civilian government, and Washington lost a valuable bargaining chip in its bilateral relations with a military government. For a resourceful political figure like Pinochet and a proud military like Chile's, their capacity to weather so many crises, sanctions and external threats contributed to a sense of strength and agility. In this sense the Kennedy Amendment may have helped to consolidate a regime over which Washington had less influence. At the same time, the embargo demonstrated the serious political consequences that human rights violations could have. It signalled to regional dictatorships and Pinochet's domestic opposition that US policy had actually changed. For the first time in the Cold War, the US Congress applied sanctions with real teeth to an anti-communist government because it had abused human rights.

Spanish and Portuguese abstracts

Spanish abstract. En 1976 el Congreso de los Estados Unidos detuvo la venta de armas a Chile. Este artículo examina el debate en el Congreso sobre la venta de armas a Chile y las consecuencias políticas y militares de tal acción. Los estudios recientes en gran medida han desestimado el embargo y sus implicaciones para las dinámicas de seguridad regional en Sudamérica. Inicialmente, las sanciones norteamericanas incrementaron el aislamiento diplomático de Chile y su vulnerabilidad militar, lo

que elevaba las posibilidades de un conflicto regional. Sin embargo, la capacidad de Chile para superar los efectos del embargo incrementaría con el tiempo la independencia de Augusto Pinochet frente a Washington. Cuando la administración Reagan empezó a presionar para una transición a la democracia, le faltaron dos instrumentos clave para influir sobre el gobierno militar: la venta de armas y la asistencia para seguridad.

Spanish keywords: relaciones Estados Unidos–Latinoamérica, Pinochet, Guerra Fría, venta de armas, Chile

Portuguese abstract. Em 1976 o congresso dos Estados Unidos encerrou as vendas de armamentos ao Chile. Este artigo analisa o debate no congresso acerca da venda de armas ao Chile e as consequências políticas e militares desta ação. Estudos recentes têm em grande parte ignorado o embargo e suas implicações sobre as dinâmicas regionais de segurança na América do Sul. Inicialmente, sanções americanas aumentaram o isolamento diplomático e vulnerabilidade militar chilena, tornando um conflito regional mais provável de acontecer. No entanto, a capacidade do Chile em superar os efeitos do embargo eventualmente aumentou a independência de Augusto Pinochet perante Washington. Quando a administração Reagan começou a incentivar uma transição para a democracia, faltaram-na dois instrumentos-chave para influenciar um governo militar: vendas de armamentos e assistência à segurança.

Portuguese keywords: relações EUA–América Latina, Pinochet, Guerra Fria, vendas de armamentos, Chile