Two new documents declassified by the United States show the key role played by the owner of El Mercurio, Agustín Edwards, in the preparation of the Coup d’état. One of them reveals that then-President Nixon met Edwards at the White House on September 15, 1970, just hours before he ordered the CIA to intervene in Chile. The second document tells of an, until now, unknown meeting between Edwards and CIA officials in which he...
reported the demands of the Chilean military willing to participate in the plot. Both records were included in the new version of the book "Pinochet declassified" by Peter Kornbluh, updated and relaunched this week to commemorate the 50th anniversary of the coup.

At 09:15 on Tuesday, September 15, 1970, only 11 days after the election of Salvador Allende, Agustín Edwards entered the Oval Office to talk with the then President of the United States, Richard Nixon. In the afternoon of that same day, the president issued the orders for the CIA to begin operations against Allende. The appointment between Nixon and the deceased owner of *El Mercurio* was not registered in the official agenda of the White House, so it was not known until now. But, it did appear in the "President's Internal Agenda" (see that document here).

This official document extracted from the "internal agenda", recently declassified by the United States, was included in the updated version of the book "*Pinochet declassified. The secret files of the United States on Chile*". The volume, first released in 2003, was written by Peter Kornbluh, director of the National Security Archive, a non-profit organization that seeks to declassify official US documents.

Until today, it was known that Agustín Edwards Eastman -who died in 2017- met with the top chief of the CIA, Richard Helms, in September 1970, to request the support of the United States for a military action that would prevent Allende from assuming the government. It was also known that *El Mercurio* received financing from the CIA in the 1970s and that this agency used it as a means of propaganda to destabilize the Popular Unity. What was not known is that Edwards met at the White House with the then president of the United States, Richard Nixon, just a few hours before the president issued his first orders for the CIA intervention in Chile.

Now a document has also been declassified that reveals that the Chilean businessman, in addition to meeting with Helms, held a meeting with CIA officials in which he provided information on Chilean soldiers willing to participate in the conspiracy. In that appointment, Edwards also conveyed the demands made by these soldiers to commit themselves to the plot.

Peter Kornbluh is the person who knows best the US files on Chile. For decades he has systematized and published them, as they are being declassified. Thanks to this work, the intervention of the Nixon government and the CIA against the Popular Unity government is known in detail. His work was condensed in the book that he published in 2003, for the 30th anniversary of the coup d'état, and which is now being relaunched by the new label "A day in the life", from editorial Catalonia, directed by journalists Andrea Insunza and Javier Ortega. And in this new version, specially prepared for the commemoration of the 50th anniversary of the coup, new features continue to appear.

**BREAKFAST AT THE WHITE HOUSE**
At 08:00 on that September 15, Agustín Edwards had breakfast for an hour at the White House. He did it together with the then National Security adviser, Henry Kissinger; Pepsi-Cola CEO Don Kendall, and Attorney General John Mitchell. Edwards's agenda flowed at the highest level to prevent Allende's assumption of the Presidency of Chile. Kendall, who was hosting Edwards at his home, was a friend and one of Nixon's top donors.

Edwards and his hosts operated with a sense of urgency. Eleven days earlier, Salvador Allende had won the presidential elections by a narrow margin, supported by a leftist coalition, and had to be ratified in October by a Congress then divided into three thirds (right, DC and left). The fear of the North Americans was that Chile would be a new threat to their control of the continent in the middle of the Cold War. Cuba had been the first warning bell. Edwards was not willing to allow it either.

Kornbluh's book tells that on the night of Monday, September 14, Kissinger coordinated by telephone, with the person in charge of Nixon's agenda, the appointment between the owner of El Mercurio and the president of the United States.

The meeting was held at 09:15 the following day. According to what is told in Kornbluh's text, it was Kissinger who got up from breakfast and made Edwards enter, "surreptitiously", into the Oval Office. More than 50 years after that episode, there are no details about what they talked about. When Minister Mario Carroza questioned Edwards in 2013 as a witness in a case that investigated the instigators of the military coup, the businessman said he "does not remember" his meeting with the president of the United States.

After receiving Edwards in the Oval Office, Nixon met with Kissinger, and according to the president's internal agenda, shortly before 10:00 a.m. he also received Gerhard Schröeder, leader of the German CDU who until 1969 had been Minister of Defense of his country.

A few hours later, Nixon gave the order for the CIA to intervene so that Allende did not reach La Moneda and, if that failed, to overthrow him. It was then that he uttered the phrase that would go down in history: "Make the economy scream (in Chile)." It was the CIA director himself, Richard Helms, who recounted that on September 15 the decision was made to start the machine against Allende. He did it in a secret session of the United States Senate that investigated the operations of the CIA in Chile. "The president called this meeting (on September 15, in which he gave orders to carry out a coup) due to the presence of Edwards in Washington," Helms said, according to Peter Kornbluh's book.

When Kissinger set up the meeting between Edwards and Nixon, he had fresh information in his possession. On Monday, September 14, he had met with the owner of El Mercurio and that same day he met with the director of the CIA, Richard Helms. Declassified
transcripts of Kissinger's phone conversations, obtained by the National Security Archive, reveal that Kissinger called Helms to say, "Edwards is here."

Traces remained of that meeting with the head of the CIA. A memo from the US security agency, titled “Conversation on the Chilean political situation”, contains the details of that first date. This document was published by CIPER in 2014 (see the report “Agustin Edwards' new appointment report with the CIA chief reveals his key role in the Coup”). In that meeting, Edwards gave names of Chilean soldiers who could support a military action against Salvador Allende. He also carried out an analysis on which political leaders could favor a military intervention. About the then President Eduardo Frei Montalva he said: “He is indecisive, always hesitating, always waiting for 'someone else to take the first step' (…), he will probably chicken out at the last minute”.

That was not the only appointment between Edwards and CIA executives. The National Security Archive has just declassified another report that accounts for a meeting attended by the Chilean businessman on September 18, 1970. While the national holidays were being celebrated in Chile, Edwards was conspiring in the United States.

![Richard Nixon](image)

**THE CIA ACTIVATES ITS PLAN**

The memo that Richard Helms sent to Henry Kissinger detailing his first meeting with Edwards on September 14 includes the following note: "Further discussions and a more comprehensive briefing with (Edwards) are ongoing at this moment". And it was true.
The declassified report on that second appointment does not detail who was the counterpart of the Chilean businessman. But unlike other such documents, most of the information is not tarnished. That memo includes a note: “This is a report of our second series of discussions with (Edwards). The only other copy of this report outside the Agency has been sent to the Attorney General."

“Following the conversations of September 14, 1970”, is how the CIA report on the meeting with Edwards on September 18 begins. In its first paragraphs, it indicates that the then owner of El Mercurio expanded the information on key military actors and their willingness to participate in an action against Allende.

Regarding General Camilo Valenzuela, Edwards provided operational information: head of the Plaza in Santiago, he does not command troops, unless a State of Emergency is declared and, in that case, he becomes the military chief in the entire metropolitan area.

Four days earlier, on September 14, Edwards had told the CIA that before traveling he had spoken personally with Valenzuela, and that Valenzuela had told him that to prevent Allende from reaching La Moneda, he would take actions "on his own." He also conveyed concerns of General Valenzuela “and some key naval officers”: if the Chilean government was overthrown, would the new government receive recognition from the United States? Would the Chilean Armed Forces receive logistical support for an action against the government?

Between Edwards's first and second meetings with the CIA, the United States activated its war machine. According to the book "The conspiracy, the thousand and one days of the coup", by the journalist and former director of CIPER, Mónica González, on September 16, 1970, the memorandum "Genesis of the Fulbelt Project" was issued. That day Richard Helms called a secret meeting with the participation of senior US military leaders. The available budget was US$10 million. The idea was to instigate a coup before Allende assumed the Presidency. The colonel who was entrusted with the mission, Paul M. Wimert, contacted two Chilean soldiers: Camilo Valenzuela and Roberto Viaux.

On October 22, 1970, two days before Congress proclaimed Allende President, the plan was carried out: a commando of ultra-right youth assassinated René Schneider, the then Commander-in-Chief of the Army. The weapons (three machine guns, ammunition, grenades and tear gas) entered Chile by diplomatic bag.

A little over a month earlier, in his second meeting with the CIA, Agustín Edwards had delivered his assessment of Roberto Viaux.

“Although Viaux's ambitions and erratic statements have somewhat diminished his support, (Edwards) believes that Viaux's strong demagogic appeal and influence among NCOs likely offsets the infiltration of leftist influence into the strategic Santiago NCO
School. The key question is whether Viaux would settle for nothing more than a role as a member of a team undertaking military action when his strong predilection is to lead”, paraphrases the meeting report.

Edwards also stated that the two key men in a military action were Viaux and Carlos Prats, then the second in command of the Army. Regarding Prats, the CIA report notes what Edwards said: “He described Prats as cautious, calculating, highly ambitious and highly capable. He is well regarded by almost all army officers and possesses the qualities that other officers lack to become a rallying point for action. However, like others who speak highly of Prats, (Edwards) seems to have no clear idea of this general’s political attitudes.” He also added that relations between Prats and Viaux were not good: "Of particular importance, (Edwards) noted is the long-standing feud between Viaux and Prats.”.

Considering the crime that would take place a month later, among the most relevant points in the report of Edwards' second meeting with the CIA are the data on Schneider that the owner of El Mercurio provided:

"(Edwards) said very little about this officer except to indicate that he did not believe that Schneider would take any part in a possible action against Allende’s assumption of the Presidency and that if he were appointed defense minister, as has been rumored, he would be a 'real mess.'"

After Schneider's assassination there was no coup. Although the plan considered that the military command in Santiago would be assumed by General Camilo Valenzuela, as Edwards had advanced to the CIA on September 18, that did not happen.

General Viaux recounted what happened in an interview that includes the book "La conjura". Once Schneider was eliminated, General Camilo Valenzuela, Admiral Tirado, and Carabineros General Vicente Huerta were to take action. Why didn't they? Viaux responds: “I think out of fear. General Valenzuela was appointed head of the Plaza with a curfew, he was the highest authority, with all the forces under his command and with the planning ready to act. I tried to talk to him, it was impossible.”

Regarding Carabineros General Vicente Huerta, Edwards also gave positive references to the CIA: “The commander of the Carabineros, General Vicente Huerta Celis, could count on the support of his troops and probably also with the majority of his officers (…). Huerta and General Valenzuela get along well and share many similar views.”

Edwards emphasized the commitment that the Carabineros would have had in the coup: “He reiterated his belief that the national police, the largest uniformed force and probably the best trained and best armed in Chile, would certainly join any movement against Allende. They have come under intense pressure from extreme leftists without being given the go-ahead to deal with them vigorously,” the report states.
But Agustín Edwards did not only bring insights from the generals to the CIA. He also put on the table a list of requests from the military who were conspiring against Allende.

**THE MILITARY ASK FOR GUARANTEES**

“(Edwards) warned that Armed Forces leaders are unlikely to take action without several clear and specific guarantees, primarily from the United States, because they fear that they and their families will pay a heavy price if they act and do not receive immediate assistance. , decisive and substantial”, indicates the CIA report on the meeting of September 18, 1970. And then it details the demands set forth by Edwards:

“These guarantees would have to include:

a) immediate logistical support consisting of weapons, ammunition, transport, communications equipment and fuel;

b) immediate and possibly massive financial support from abroad;

c) assurances that they would not be abandoned or ostracized by the same powerful US critics who denounce Greece’s military government”.

At that time Greece was governed by a military junta, in a period that was called the "dictatorship of the colonels", which was strongly resisted by the international community.

Edwards also conveyed that "Chilean military leaders would want strong guarantees of support from Chilean civilians and indications from political leaders that the military’s action reflects the attitudes of civilians." And he rejected the possibility of direct military support from another country: "No Chilean, military or civilian, would consider (tarjado)’s offer of military support as a motivating factor to act against the prospect of a Marxist government. If offered, such an endorsement could have exactly the opposite effect."

The report ends with Edwards' appreciation of some political leaders. That is when he again expressed his objections to the leadership of then-President Frei Montalva: "He reiterated his belief that President Frei will not act to trigger military action to prevent an Allende government, and said that he felt that the president could even thank face the fait accompli of a military coup and be relieved to be thrown out of the country."
"EDWARDS UNDERMINED DEMOCRACY"

CIPER spoke with Peter Kornbluh, the National Security Archive researcher who has systematized the declassified information in the United States about Chile. In addition to the relaunch of his book, Chilevisión is preparing a documentary series with the secrets kept by the US archives on the intervention of that country in Chile from before Allende's election, in 1970, and up to 1988.

-According to your experience investigating the intervention of the United States in Chile before and during the Popular Unity, was Agustín Edwards the Chilean who pushed the most for an intervention against the Allende government?

– More than any other Chilean, military or civilian, Agustín Edwards was the earliest, forceful, and effective proponent of US intervention to undermine his own country’s democratic institutions and constitutional processes. Just days after Allende's election, Edwards was the first high-profile Chilean to go to the US embassy and demand action to prevent the president-elect from entering La Moneda. When he didn't get the answer he wanted from the US ambassador, he flew to Washington. He is the only Chilean, military or civilian, known to come face to face with CIA director Richard Helms. And he is the only Chilean, military or civilian, who now records history, who met in the Oval Office with the President of the United States.

Kornbluh adds that “declassified summaries of his conversations with the CIA during that trip reveal that Edwards is the most important informant when the Nixon administration was preparing to intervene covertly in Chile. And more than just a high-level informant,
Edwards and his newspaper chain became key assets in US efforts to foment chaos in Chile and create a coup climate.

“CIA documents identify *El Mercurio* as 'a megaphone' for the opposition to Allende. The CIA credited its covert propaganda program and payments to Edwards' newspaper with helping "set the stage for the military coup of September 11, 1973." After the coup, these payments continued as CIA support for *El Mercurio* so that it would help the Pinochet regime consolidate its dictatorship, hiding the repression and presenting the new regime as a 'positive light.'

-**In your book you say that the CIA was evaluating interventions to prevent Allende from assuming power. Was Edwards' actions decisive for adopting that position?**

– Just six hours after meeting with Edwards, President Richard Nixon personally ordered the CIA to "scream the economy" in Chile and block Allende's inauguration. The same CIA director later testified in the Senate special committee (the Church committee) that he thought Nixon's orders were triggered by Edwards' presence in Washington. Clearly, Edwards's influence affected Nixon's imperial decision to engage the covert power of the United States to alter the future of Chile.

**Are there documents that reveal whether Edwards' relationship with the CIA directors and the United States government extended beyond the 1973 military coup?**

– Yes, the CIA requested additional funds for *El Mercurio* after the coup, to justify it and favorably incline Chilean public opinion towards the new military regime. That document is cited in the book. The secret payments continued until June 1974.