POLITICAL DYNAMICS OF US IMPERIALISM
CHAPTER TEN

‘NOT ABOUT TO LOSE CHILE’:¹
DEMOCRATIC SOCIALISM CONFRONTS THE IMPERIAL STATE

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The US response to democratic socialist rule in Chile between 1970 and 1973 must be placed within the context of its global and regional policy imperatives. Since the late 1940, the US had been locked in a worldwide political, economic and ideological conflict with the Soviet Union. When Richard Nixon entered the White House in January 1969, he confronted a number of interrelated global problems that threatened America’s position as the world’s dominant power: how to end the war in Vietnam—whose costs had weakened America’s ability to compete economically on the world stage with powerful capitalist allies in Europe and Asia; how to maintain the postwar policy of ‘containment’ of the Soviet Union and China, especially given that the former was now a military superpower; and how to confront a resurgent nationalism in the Third World.

The President and his National Security Council (NSC) Adviser Henry Kissinger quickly concluded that if America was to maintain a stable global order and its status as the global hegemon, and solve these various challenges, it had to devise an alternative, more cost effective means of ‘containing communism’ and pursuing US Cold War foreign policy objectives into the 1970s. The outcome of their thinking was the idea of détente, based on developing a new relationship with the two most powerful communist states. The strategic objective was to gain the participation of the Soviet Union and China in a new international system the White House was intent on constructing, based on the notion of ‘linkage’ politics, that would commit all participants to ensuring global stability: in return for applying their perceived influence with

¹ All footnoted documents are declassified under US Freedom of Information Act. ‘Truman had lost China, Kennedy had lost Cuba. Nixon was not about to lose Chile.’ CIA Director Richard Helms quoted in Munoz (2008: 67).