

Pinochet in Intensive Care After Heart Attack

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SANTIAGO, Chile, Dec. 3 -- Gen. Augusto Pinochet, a former military dictator accused of killing and torturing thousands of people, underwent emergency angioplasty and was placed in intensive care after suffering a heart attack Sunday morning, his family and doctors said.

Pinochet, 91, was expected to be monitored for the next 24 to 48 hours to see whether a bypass was necessary. Doctors have called that procedure extremely risky and were seeking to avoid it.

"He is stable but of course serious," said Juan Ignacio Vergara, a doctor at the military hospital where Pinochet was taken.

Pinochet, who ruled Chile from 1973 to 1990, has multiple health problems, including diabetes, and has suffered several strokes over the past six years.

Pinochet was under house arrest at his home in an upscale Santiago neighborhood when a family member called for an ambulance. Special judicial permission was granted to transfer Pinochet to the hospital.

Pinochet's son Marco Antonio Pinochet said the doctors performed surgery "to virtually save him from death. He's bad, very bad."

Pinochet's supporters gathered outside the hospital with placards reading "Immortal" and with dated pictures of him in uniform.

Pinochet faces multiple investigations for his role in the deaths and disappearances of 3,000 Chilean civilians during his rule. The most recent charges against him emanate from a secret military mission known as "The Caravan of Death," in which a helicopter hit squad traveled throughout Chile executing political prisoners.

"We've never seen him in such conditions," said Luis Cortes Villa, one of Pinochet's closest allies. He recounted that in the last week, Pinochet told his inner circle that he thought he was dying. "He said, 'I am in the final phase of my life.' "

Chilean President Michelle Bachelet, a socialist who was arrested and tortured by security forces during Pinochet's rule, made no immediate comment.