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PROGRAM Morning Edition STATION WAMU Radio  
 NPR Network

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SUBJECT Helms Investigation/Chile

DAVID MOLPUS: National Public Radio has learned new details of allegations that Republican Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, or his staff disclosed U.S. intelligence information to the Chilean government. The alleged leak involved information about the death in Santiago of Rodrigo Rojas, a Chilean born U.S resident.

Witnesses say Rojas was set on fire and burned to death by members of the Chilean Arms Forces.

NPR's Jim Angle has our report.

JIM ANGLE: An administration source told NPR that an official of the Chilean government has confirmed to U.S. officials that Chile learned of U.S. intelligence information on Rojas' death from Helms or a member of his staff.

The Chilean official told the U.S. Embassy in Santiago that Chilean officials received a call from Helms describing the information that had been obtained by the Central Intelligence Agency. But the source cautioned that it was not clear whether the call came from Helms himself, or someone representing Helms.

The center of a current FBI investigation is Christopher Manion, an aide to Helms on the Senate Foreign Relations staff. According to a knowledgeable Administration source, who spoke on the condition he not be identified, Helms saw a reference to the Rojas death in the National Intelligence Daily, a roundup of intelligence information distributed largely within the Administration. As the chairman of the Subcommittee on Western Hemisphere Affairs, Helms has access to intelligence information on

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Latin America.

After seeing a reference to the Rojas death, Helms' office requested and received a briefing from the Central Intelligence Agency. Christopher Manion was the individual who received that briefing.

In it, Manion learned that the CIA had obtained the results of an internal investigation by the Chilean government into Rojas' death. That report, according to the Administration official, concluded that Rojas had be quote, "deliberately killed by the army". ~~The CIA obtained the results of the internal investigation, not from interceptive communications as earlier reported but from the source in the Chilean government. And the CIA initially opposed the investigation of Helms' office said an official, out of fear that the publicity could only harm the source of the information.~~ But that investigation is going forward at the request of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence, which arranged the CIA briefing for Helms' office. And officials have said the alleged leak is threatening the CIA sources and methods for gathering intelligence on Chile.

Helms has been sharply critical of the Administration's statements on Chile, and that the U.S. ambassador's attendance at the funeral for Rojas. The Chilean government has officially denied the charges that Rojas was set on fire by the army but one officer is under investigation for not getting Rojas to a hospital.

An administration official said the internal investigation by Chilean authorities confirmed witnesses' accounts that the army had set Rojas and his companion on fire, and the source said the highest levels of the Chilean government know the conclusions of the report, including the Commander-in-Chief of the Army and President Pinochet, himself.

Senator Helms has vigorously denied that he or anyone on his staff disclosed any intelligence information to the Chileans. And he has accused Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams of making false and malicious allegations. Abrams told the Washington Post through a spokesman, that there was no indication that Helms was personally responsible for any breach of security or even that he was aware of it, but that said Abrams is way you investigate.

I'm Jim Angle in Washington.