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Helms charges CIA, State trying to destabilize Chile

By Bill Gertz
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Sen. Jesse Helms yesterday renewed his attacks on the State Department and CIA, charging both agencies with waging a "massive campaign of disinformation" to destabilize Chile.

"What disturbs me about the disinformation campaign is the readiness of the State Department, the CIA and the media to side with the Marxists and the totalitarians," the North Carolina Republican said in a prepared speech for delivery in the Senate. "There is no lie too improbable, no distortion too great, no smear campaign too dirty for the State Department and the media to embrace."

Earlier this week, Mr. Helms charged that Elliott Abrams, assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, was behind a request by the Senate Intelligence Committee that the FBI probe the leak of classified information about U.S. intelligence-gathering to the Chilean government.

A staffer on Mr. Helms' Senate Foreign Relations subcommittee, Chris Manion, and an unidentified member of Mr. Helms' staff are suspects in the investigation, congressional sources said yesterday.

"I am deeply concerned about the massive campaign of disinformation which is being coordinated against the people of Chile, who yearn for an orderly transition to democracy," Mr. Helms said. "A coalition of the media, the Marxists and the State Department is seeking to destabilize the transition to full-fledged democracy in Chile."

State Department spokesman Greg Lagana dismissed Mr. Helms' charges as false.

"Our policy is to support a transition to democracy, but obviously the

Chileans have to find a way to work that out," Mr. Lagana said in an interview.

He said the State Department opposes all groups, Marxist or other, that advocate violent change.

"The charge that we are somehow supporting communism is just not true — there's nothing to support it," he said. "We have condemned those groups that wouldn't renounce violence, specifically groups on the left that wouldn't renounce violence. Far from supporting the communists, we believe strongly that forswearing violence is a sine qua non for democracy."

In the 20-page speech, Mr. Helms said the Chilean people desire a "fully functioning representative democracy," one that will not "slide back into a totalitarian regime such as they experienced under Allende."

Mr. Helms said that a Chilean research center found that only 2 percent of the Chilean people felt human rights "was a major problem."

He said that Harry Barnes, the U.S. ambassador to Chile, and Mr. Abrams "are trying to cater to that 2 percent with their support of the violent communist left — at the expense of the democratic opposition and the parties that support President Pinochet."

Mr. Helms criticized Mr. Barnes for attending a July funeral of Rodrigo Rojas, a 19-year-old Chilean-born U.S. resident who died of burns suffered during anti-government protests.

"The policy of President Reagan is to promote the democratic transition on an orderly schedule," Mr. Helms said. "The policy of Ambassador Barnes is to disrupt the orderly transition, to promote the totalitarian left that Chileans once threw off just in the nick of time, and to defame the government that rescued Chile from the clutches of international socialism."