

ARTICLE APPEARED  
ON PAGE 1-BWASHINGTON TIMES  
5 August 1986

# Helms charges State's Abrams pushed leak story

By Bill Gertz  
THE WASHINGTON TIMES

Sen. Jesse Helms yesterday accused an assistant secretary of state of circulating reports that the North Carolina Republican or one of his aides leaked classified information to Chile.

"It was Elliott Abrams," Mr.

Helms charged in a hastily called press conference. "He crept up here in the dead of night and made these charges. ... I am saying Elliott Abrams committed a deliberate falsehood, knowing it to be false.

"Then he slips back to his little hole at the State Department and calls The New York Times and says, 'Hey, I got a big scoop for you.'

"This will die a silent death," Mr. Helms said. "The only result will be The New York Times and the State Department once again have managed to smear Jesse Helms. That's fine. I can take it."

News of the Chilean leaks first appeared in Sunday editions of The Times.

"First, the suggestion that I leaked the story to The New York Times is false and they can obviously confirm that," Mr. Abrams, assistant secretary of state for Latin American affairs, told United Press International yesterday. "Secondly, I made no false statement."

The FBI yesterday confirmed that

a "leak investigation," normally conducted by the FBI counterintelligence agents under the espionage statute that makes it a crime to disclose classified information, is under way.

"We are investigating, but as sensitive as this thing is, we are not saying anymore," said Steve Ramey, an FBI spokesman.

Justice Department sources, however, said the investigation had turned up no evidence that the conservative North Carolina Republican was involved in, or knew anything about, the disclosure.

The FBI investigation is focused on the Helms' staff, the sources said.

One Helms' aide, Christopher Manion, is under suspicion of passing the U.S. intelligence on Chilean human rights violations to the Chilean government, according to UPI.

Mr. Manion is the brother of Daniel Manion, who was recently confirmed as a federal judge during a bitter partisan battle in the Senate.

Christopher Manion, who serves as the representative of Mr. Helms on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, attended a confidential briefing at which sensitive information was disclosed that later made its way to the Chilean government, sources said.

Attempts to reach Christopher Manion last night were unsuccessful.

Mr. Helms, who has charged that the State Department bureaucracy is undermining President Reagan's foreign policy initiatives, visited the Chilean leader, Gen. Augusto Pinochet, last month.

While in Santiago, Mr. Helms publicly criticized Harry Barnes, the U.S. ambassador to Chile, for attending the funeral of a Chilean exile, who while on a visit to his homeland, was burned to death during anti-government protests.

Mr. Helms said the funeral was a pro-communist demonstration that was not attended by any Latin American ambassadors and included only



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the French and American ambassadors among the official representatives from the West.

A Helms' staff aide yesterday said three aides who accompanied the senator on the three-day Chilean visit early last month had not received classified intelligence briefings before the trip, nor were they given any information on Chile by the Senate Intelligence Committee.

Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman Dave Durenberger, Minnesota Republican, and Vice Chairman Patrick J. Leahy, Vermont Democrat, released a statement yesterday saying the committee had "received information" that a leak of classified information might have occurred and asked the Justice Department to investigate.

Mr. Helms criticized Mr. Durenberger's handling of the investigation, saying the committee referred the matter to the Justice Department without conducting a preliminary investigation to determine if the allegations were serious.

Mr. Helms also denounced the State Department for attempting to "silence" his criticism of its policies and political appointees with the leak charges, but said the tactic would have the opposite affect.