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Inside report

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Helms strikes back

AN angry Sen. Jesse Helms, counterattacking veiled charges that his office may have leaked secrets about U.S. espionage in Chile, yesterday sent a private letter to Attorney General Edwin Meese Friday requesting "an FBI investigation of the CIA and the National Security Agency to determine whether" he and his staff were "under surveillance" during his recent trip to Chile.

Helms' staff, not the senator himself, is the target of the probe involving secret intercepts in Chile. He has accused Assistant Secretary of State Elliott Abrams of leaking the charge "in the dead of night" to anti-Helms senators. In his letter to Meese, Helms said his "concern lies with the possibility that the CIA and other intelligence organizations may be unlawfully invading the privacy of senators, including me."

Helms wrote Meese that he had "absolutely nothing to hide." The right-wing Republican leader is considering retaliation against what he regards as CIA complicity in the campaign against his staff by holding up Senate action on the CIA's authorization bill, now ready for passage.