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CIA Said to Hold Information On Helms, Pinochet Bugging

Alleged Leaks on Chile Trip Being Probed

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The Central Intelligence Agency has obtained electronic surveillance information on conversations between Sen. Jesse Helms (R-N.C.) and Chilean President Augusto Pinochet last July, Helms' staff and intelligence sources said yesterday.

The Justice Department is probing charges that Helms or a member of his staff leaked classified information to the Chilean government that enabled the Chileans to shut down a productive information-gathering channel. Helms has called the charges "a concoction" of State Department officials in retaliation for his criticisms of their conduct of foreign policy.

A Helms staff member said letters have been sent to Attorney General Edwin Meese III and Justice Department officials asking whether Helms or his staff members have been the target of "electronic surveillance" during his July 9-13 visit to Chile or here at their homes or offices.

While surveillance of Pinochet and any of his conversations would be legal under U.S. law, surveillance here would be illegal without an advance judicial finding that national security was at stake or that a criminal probe was warranted.

Other letters went from Helms to CIA Director William J. Casey and Secretary of State George P. Shultz asking for copies of all intelligence reports they received on Helms' trip to Chile, the staff member said.

"Certain things we have been told lead us to believe that a number of our meetings [in Chile] were bugged . . . the Pinochet meeting among others," the staff member said. Another staff member said Helms is certain there had been "eavesdropping," but that it might have been conducted by the Chilean intelligence services and then passed to the CIA.

A knowledgeable senator confirmed that intelligence data on the conversation exists, but said it is inconclusive on whether Helms passed confidential information to Pinochet. "Jesse should have known enough to take Pinochet for a walk in the woods instead of talking inside," the senator said.

Helms has also written to Senate Intelligence Committee Chairman David F. Durenberger (R-Minn.), asking if he and committee vice chairman Patrick J. Leahy (D-Vt.) followed correct procedures in asking for the Justice Department probe on the strength of a State Department allegation, without convening the full committee.

"We haven't gotten satisfactory responses from anybody," the first Helms aide said.

Helms and other conservatives have long been at loggerheads with the CIA and the State Department for what they regard as overly complacent evaluations of Soviet military strength and for minimizing the danger of communist takeovers in many nations, including Chile.

Helms said in an interview that the State Department and the CIA have launched a joint "smear campaign" against him because he is "working to expose what they're up to."

"I don't like their agenda of kicking our friends in the teeth around the world and cozying up to the emissaries of the Soviet Union," he said. "They would like nothing better than to silence or discredit this senator."

He said his North Carolina constituents have reacted "overwhelmingly in my favor . . . They said, 'Hang in there, Jesse, and to hell with the State Department.'"

According to several sources, a report in The New York Times yes-

terday that Helms had succeeded in pushing secret legislation through the Senate to curb CIA authority is incorrect. The sources said Helms last week told Durenberger he had 30 amendments he wanted to offer from the Senate floor to Durenberger's bill authorizing funds for the CIA and the rest of the intelligence community. Several would have severely curbed CIA authority in relation to the Defense Intelligence Agency, which has traditionally seen the Soviet threat as more severe than has the CIA, in line with conservative thinking.

One would have barred the DIA from coordinating its yearly "Soviet Military Power" report with the CIA and another would have set up an independent 15-member panel, known as a "B-team," to review CIA findings on Soviet capacities, treaty adherence, disinformation efforts and other areas in which conservatives find CIA reports lacking.

In order to speed the bill's passage, Durenberger had his committee staff negotiate with Helms' staff on the amendments Monday and Tuesday. Sources involved in the talks said the staffs reduced the amendments to two: one asking the CIA to probe charges of drug and gun trafficking and human-rights violations by the Panamanian government, which later passed the Senate, 53 to 46, and a classified annex to the bill requesting "competitive analysis" reports on 32 subjects.

Neither the "B-team" nor the prohibition on DIA-CIA collaboration survived the staff talks, the sources agreed. However, CIA Director William J. Casey "was still upset" by the classified annex provision, they said.

Helms' staff members and committee officials disagreed on the impact of that provision, but would not disclose its content. In his speech before the Senate voted Wednesday, Helms said he had been assured that the 32 reports would be prepared with "appropriate competitive analysis," and one of his staff members said that meant the DIA could put out its Soviet assessment without CIA clearance.

"The idea was to give the DIA more authority in military intelligence, and we think that purpose was served," the aide said.

A committee official disagreed. "The CIA still gets to define 'appropriate competitive analysis' . . . any GS2 with a crayon can produce those reports by pushing a computer button. Nothing has changed."