

Plots Report Draws Attention to Helms

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 25—The Senate Select Intelligence Committee's report on assassination plots inspired by the Central Intelligence Agency against foreign leaders has served to refocus attention on the record compiled by Richard M. Helms, now the American Ambassador to Iran, during much of his 26-year career with the agency.

The principal finding concerning Mr. Helms in the committee's long report, released last week, was that he had failed, while a Deputy Director of the C.I.A., to inform agency and White House superiors of efforts to kill Prime Minister Fidel Castro of Cuba, something the Senate panel termed a "grave error in judgment."

Ron Nessen, the Presidential press secretary, said following the report's release that President Ford had seen nothing in its findings that would cause him to reconsider Mr. Helms's continued service as Ambassador. A State Department spokesman said today that he had seen no indication of any such reconsideration either.

Mr. Helms served for seven years as Director of Central Intelligence, the agency's top post, before being named Ambassador in 1972.

The Rockefeller Commission, set up by President Ford earlier this year to inquire into the C.I.A.'s domestic activities, criticized Mr. Helms in its report last June for "poor judgment" in destroying tape recordings and documents that might have related to the Watergate scandals.

The commission said the destruction was ordered after Mr. Helms had received a request from Senator Mike Mansfield of Montana, the majority leader, to retain in agency files all materials of possible relevance to the Watergate case.

Some of the C.I.A.'s activities, including domestic surveillance and the assassination plots, are under study by Justice Department prosecutors, who are also, according to department officials, examining for possible perjury some of Mr. Helms's testimony during his February 1973 confirmation hearings for the Ambassadorial post he now holds.

Mr. Helms told the Senate Foreign Relations Committee during those hearings that the C.I.A. had never attempted to overthrow the Chilean Government of President Salvador Allende Gossens or passed money



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Richard M. Helms

to political opponents of the Marxist leader.

Testimony About Hunt

Mr. Helms also told the committee that E. Howard Hunt Jr., one of the convicted Watergate conspirators, had not maintained a relationship with the C.I.A. after Mr. Hunt's retirement as a C.I.A. officer in 1970.

Mr. Helms also said, in answer to a question, that he could not recall whether during his tenure as director, the C.I.A. had been asked to become involved in an interagency effort to share intelligence relating to the anti-Vietnam war movement in the United States.

"I don't recall whether we were asked," Mr. Helms testified, "but we were not involved, because it seemed to me that this was a clear violation of what our charter was." The National Security Act of 1947, which established the C.I.A., prohibits any domestic police or surveillance functions by the agency.

Justice Department lawyers are understood to be comparing those statements by Mr. Helms with subsequent evidence that Mr. Hunt received unwitting assistance from the C.I.A. in the 1971 burglary of the California office of Daniel Ellsberg's psychiatrist; that the C.I.A. spent upwards of \$10

million in an effort to overthrow the Allende Government, and that the C.I.A., under Mr. Helms, was involved in the surveillance of domestic dissidents and in formulating the Nixon Administration's abortive Huston plan for broadened domestic surveillance.

'No Law Against Lying'

One well-placed Justice Department source, asked about its investigation of the evidence published in the Senate panel's assassination report, indicated that no determination on the illegality of such plots had yet been made, and that in Mr. Helms's particular case there was "no law against lying" to one's superiors in Government.

The source predicted, however, that Mr. Helms would eventually "have to answer" for some aspects of his conduct.

The Justice Department is understood to be reluctant to proceed with any prosecutions stemming from the alleged C.I.A. activities until lawyers there obtain copies of the testimony and evidence collected by the Senate intelligence committee, something that, committee sources have suggested, may not be forthcoming.

One committee aide said today, however, that the panel did intend to turn over to the department for investigation some of the conflicts in the testimony produced by its inquiry.

A spokesman at the American Embassy in Teheran said last week that Mr. Helms would have "no comment" on the findings made in the assassination report, which included the following:

¶ That Mr. Helms, following the unsuccessful Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba in April 1961, ordered the reactivation of an effort, involving American underworld figures, to kill Mr. Castro that had been initiated in conjunction with the invasion. Mr. Helms, the panel said, did not tell John McCone, then the Director of Central Intelligence, that the assassination effort had been renewed. Mr. Helms was then Deputy Director for plans.

¶ That Mr. Helms never stepped forward to correct the record when he learned in 1962 that Robert F. Kennedy, then the Attorney General, had been misled into believing that the plots against Mr. Castro's life had ended after the Bay of Pigs invasion, and that when

Mr. McCone was informed by Mr. Helms the following year of the Bay of Pigs assassination plot, he was not told of the subsequent effort in 1962.

¶ That Mr. Helms authorized a C.I.A. subordinate to approach a prospective Cuban assassin in 1963 and represent

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himself as Mr. Kennedy's personal representative, although the Attorney General's approval "to speak his name" in such a fashion had not been sought.

The Senate report also said that Mr. Helms had failed to inform the Warren Commission, which investigated the murder of President Kennedy, of the plots on Mr. Castro's life because the "precise question" had not been asked.

After Mr. Helms became the C.I.A. chief in 1966, the report said, he told Dean Rusk, then the Secretary of State, that a Cuban C.I.A. operative who had expressed a desire to kill Mr. Castro, and to whom the agency had offered an assassination device, had not been part of an assassination plot.

Finally, when President Johnson asked in 1967 for a complete report on the C.I.A.'s involvement in attempts on Mr. Castro's life, Mr. Helms briefed the President orally on an internal agency report on the matter but did not mention at least one such plot that had taken place during Mr. Johnson's Presidency.

Although Mr. Helms's testimony during his confirmation hearings in 1973 were the only statements thus far reported to be under examination by the Justice Department for a potential perjury charge, public records show that the Ambassador has apparently been less than candid with Congress on other occasions.

In May 1973, for example, Mr. Helms, recalled from Teheran to answer questions about the C.I.A.'s involvement in the burglary of Dr. Ellsberg's psychiatrist, told a House armed services subcommittee that the C.I.A. had no authority or capability to place under surveillance newsmen to whom sensitive national security information had been leaked.

The C.I.A. later acknowledged, however, that it had placed five reporters who had been the beneficiaries of such leaks under surveillance in 1971 and 1972.