

Back Channels

The Intelligence Community

Post 12/3/99

CIA's Chile Coup: Document Demand Eased

By VERNON LOEB
Washington Post Staff Writer

Back in May, Rep. Maurice D. Hinchey (D-N.Y.) had little trouble persuading his colleagues to support a legislative provision requiring the CIA to submit a report to Congress on all agency activities in Chile related to the military coup that brought Gen. Augusto Pinochet to power in 1973.

"I think that after the passage of all this time, it is appropriate that the United States Congress and the people of the United States and the people of the world understand . . . the specific events which took place in Chile," Hinchey said on the House floor.

His amendment, approved by voice vote as part of the Fiscal 2000 Intelligence Authorization Act, required the Central Intelligence Agency to file a report on covert operations in Chile within 120 days and attach to it "copies of unedited documents in the possession of any . . . element of the intelligence community with respect to such events."

But the Hinchey amendment that emerged last month from a House-Senate conference committee, beyond extending the CIA's due date from four to nine months, deleted the requirement that all unedited documents on Chile be included.

The conferees substituted non-binding report language stating that they expect Congress to be given access to Chile documents now being searched by two ongoing reviews: one by the Justice Department for a Spanish court prosecuting Pinochet and the other by the National Security Council as part of a special declassification initiative ordered by President Clinton in February.

Peter Kornbluh, a researcher and Chile expert at the nonprofit National Security Archive, said the conferees "hijacked" the Hinchey amendment by deleting just one sentence requiring the delivery of unedited CIA documents, thus subjecting the provision of any of the documents to Congress to the vagaries of both reviews, which to date have produced little on CIA covert operations. "The original intent was clearly watered down," Kornbluh said.

BUREAUCRACY AT THE CIA: A little over a year ago, when Director of Central Intelligence George J. Tenet unveiled a new "strategic direction" for the CIA, he lamented, in a speech to the troops out at Langley, the agency's penchant for unnecessary bureaucracy.

"It is unacceptable that it recently took 67 days for an exceptional approval to recruit an asset to

reach my desk," Tenet said. "It is unacceptable that it takes an average of eight months to bring on a new hire. And it's outrageous that when you're laid low with the flu, you've got to get a written letter from your doctor if you're gone three days or more."

What's changed since then?

The requirement for doctor's notes, reminiscent of elementary school, "went out the window almost immediately," CIA spokesman Mark Mansfield said. And the eight-month hiring cycle has been reduced to six, even as a major recruiting effort is bringing in more new hires than the CIA has seen in at least a decade.

As for the time it takes to provide "exceptional approval" to recruit an asset, one senior intelligence official explained that 67 days was an anomaly, even back in the bad old bureaucratic days. But in any event, the official explained, new procedures have been put in place so that "exceptional approvals" are now done at much lower levels.

"Exceptional approval" is required when there are indications that an asset capable of providing valuable intelligence may have been involved in illicit activities.



WILSON'S LEGAL CRUSADE: After he pried loose enough information through the Freedom of Information Act to challenge his 1983 arms smuggling conviction, former CIA officer Edwin P. Wilson's latest legal crusade involves his attempt to get federal officials to return 118 government documents confiscated in September from his cell at the Allenwood federal penitentiary in Pennsylvania.

Those documents show that prosecutors knowingly used misleading testimony at his trial. They also persuaded U.S. District Judge Lynn Hughes in Houston, where the trial took place, to appoint a lawyer to draft Wilson's appeal, which Hughes is expected to rule on next year.

Wilson, convicted of conspiring to sell 20 tons of high explosives to Libya, wants his documents back to begin preparing a second appeal, of a 1982 conviction for smuggling guns to Libya. If he can get both convictions overturned on grounds of prosecutorial misconduct, he figures, he would be eligible for parole on a third conviction, having already served more than two-thirds of a sentence he received for conspiring to kill federal prosecutors.

Vernon Loeb's e-mail address is
loebv@washpost.com.