

Defense in Letelier Case Puts Questions to Bush

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SANTIAGO, Chile, Jan. 28—The Chilean courts have asked to question President Bush over allegations that the CIA, and not the Chilean secret police, organized the murders in Washington in 1976 of Chilean ex-foreign minister and exile leader Orlando Letelier and his U.S. colleague, Ronni Moffitt.

Dispatch of the request was approved by the Chilean Supreme Court late Monday at the request of lawyers defending Gen. Manuel Contreras and Brig. Pedro Espinoza, respectively head and operations chief of the DINA, the secret police set up after the military coup led by Gen. Augusto Pinochet in 1973. The two men were indicted in Washington in 1978 and specially appointed Supreme Court Judge Adolfo Banados is now investigating them here.

The request goes to Bush as CIA head at the time of the murders—which came when a bomb attached to Letelier's car exploded as he drove through Sheridan Circle. Contreras and Espinoza claim these murders and others were carried out by CIA agents infiltrated into the DINA to discredit Pinochet's government.

Among information sought from Bush is whether he knew of a meeting in the Dominican Republic in 1976, where alleged CIA-linked Cuban exiles are said to have planned the attacks, and whether the U.S.-born DINA agent who planted the bomb, Michael Townley, was also a CIA agent.

Bush is also asked why a photograph of a false Paraguayan passport used by Townley to apply for a U.S. visa at the embassy in Asuncion was only handed over to U.S. investigators some two years after the crime. The allegation is that this was to protect the supposed double agent, Townley.

Townley, Chilean DINA agent Armando Fernandez Larios and several Cubans were convicted in Washington. In 1978, the Chilean Supreme Court handed Townley over to the U.S. courts, but later twice refused requests for the two police chiefs' extradition.

The court reopened the investigation after it was transferred from the military to the civilian courts in the wake of Chile's 1990 return to democracy.

Prosecution lawyers dismiss the request as a delaying tactic by the two men's lawyers.