

Ford Asks Senate to Bar Release of Death Plot Data

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WASHINGTON, Nov. 2— President Ford and the Department of Justice are moving to keep details of United States involvement in assassination plots against foreign leaders from being made public by the Senate or in a court case here.

A spokesman for the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence said today that late Friday each member of the committee received a "strongly worded" letter signed by President Ford urging the member not to make public the committee's forthcoming report on the Central Intelligence Agency's involvement in plots to kill foreign leaders. The spokesman declined to make the letter public and said that the committee had called for a meeting tomorrow to discuss it.

A spokesman for the White House said it would not re-

lease the President's letter unless asked to by the committee. A White House source said that the three-and-one-half-page letter set forth "in great detail" the reasons President Ford believed the publication of the report would harm national security.

Senator Frank Church, the committee chairman, immediately rejected Ford's plea. "I am convinced the President Ford wants to suppress the committee's report on assassination and keep it concealed from the American people," the Idaho Democrat said in a statement. "They have a right to know what their Government has done."

"The President himself asked the committee to investigate these charges. For months he has known of the committee's intent to publish its findings in

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form of a special report." The statement added that Mr. Church would oppose Mr. Ford's plea in committee debate.

Also late Friday, in a case brought by the American Civil Liberties Union, the Department of Justice filed affidavits opposing efforts to make public Government documents on foreign assassination plots.

The Government affidavits disclosed for the first time that the C.I.A. and the State Department had discovered 62 documents on political assassinations spanning the terms of three Presidents.

In one series of "dispatches," according to the affidavit, is a communication from the C.I.A. dated "22 November-1963" and classified secret. That is the date President Kennedy was assassinated in Dallas. The communication is one of eight "dispatches" that a C.I.A. official said in the affidavit should not be made public because they "concern a sensitive covert operation."

Ever since the investigation of C.I.A. plots began, there has been a growing question of whether United States activities might in some way be connected with the shooting of President Kennedy. The dispatch on that date appeared to be connected with the activities of Lee Harvey Oswald, who the Warren Commission concluded was the assassin.

The C.I.A. also opposed the publication of a dispatch dated Oct. 11, 1963, which intelligence officers have said was the date the C.I.A. advised the Federal Bureau of Investigation that Oswald was in Mexico City.

The entire list of 62 documents indicated that planning of political assassinations, possibly the plot against Prime Minister Fidel Castro of Cuba, began as early as March 9, 1960, and apparently was discussed at the "first meeting of an agency task force." This was nearly a year before President Eisenhower left office and

President Kennedy came in. There are also numerous documents dated around the time of the Bay of Pigs aborted invasion of Cuba, in April 1961 and the murder of the Dominican Republic dictator, Rafael Trujillo Molina, on May 31, 1961.

Request for information

The assassination documents have been sought under the Freedom of Information Act by Robert L. Borosage, director of the Center for National Security Studies, a Washington research group. The Civil Liberties Union is handling the case for Mr. Borosage.

Richard L. Thornburgh, Assistant Attorney General in charge of the Criminal Division, said in an affidavit that disclosure of the documents would "substantially harm" a criminal investigation begun by his office at the request of the President after the completion of the Rockefeller Commission inquiry on the C.I.A. He also opposed publication on the ground that it would deprive persons of a right to a fair trial because of pretrial publicity and would constitute "an unwarranted invasion of personal privacy of many individuals."

Eloise Page, a senior C.I.A. official in the covert operations field, said in an affidavit that "the disclosure of these documents would result in exceptionally grave damage to the national security because to officially acknowledge these plans would disrupt foreign relations vitally affecting national security."

The latter point has been an overriding consideration in the handling of the entire assassination matter by the Senate committee. Senator Church and his colleagues have avoided holding public hearings on the subject because they agreed with the Administration that the spectacle might harm the United States image abroad.

The committee also agreed to submit a draft of its final report to the various intelligence agencies, not for editing, but so the intelligence officials could point out sections that might disclose sources and methods. This was done last month and presumably the President's letter was the result of these reviews.

It was preceded last week by positions taken by Administration officials that Mr. Church construed as a hardening of Mr. Ford's posture against the entire investigation. He said at the time that he had had an earlier letter from Philip W. Bucher, Presidential counsel, that he believed was an effort to halt the publication of the report.