

CIA Defender Quotes Cables For Hands-off on Chile Coup

By Austin Scott

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The man who ran Central Intelligence Agency activities in Chile during the overthrow and death of President Salvador Allende said yesterday that he sent out two cables ordering CIA agents to "cut off contacts with people who are planning coups" nearly five months before Allende was toppled.

David Atlee Phillips told a news conference he did so because, as he noted in the first cable he sent on May 8, 1973: "It has begun to look as if there is more and more chance for a coup."

Phillips said some of the agents wired back to ask how, if they severed such ties, they were to carry out what Phillips said was a major intelligence task—giving the U.S. government advance warning of any major change in a foreign government. Phillips said he replied in a May 23 cable:

"This one is a little different, because it looks like there will be a coup. You are not to be in touch with the coup plotters."

There were no CIA agents in the groups that overthrew Allende on Sept. 11, 1973, Phillips said. Asked if the CIA had advanced knowledge of the coup, he said:

"We did. We knew it was going to take place about 30 times before it did take place." But despite the rumors that were sweeping Santiago in the months before the Allende overthrow, as the time for the successful coup approached, Phillips said, "... It is true that we had stronger information than ever before that it probably would have taken place, and it did."

Asked if the CIA tried to warn Allende, Phillips said, "No we did not warn him, we didn't prevent it, because we had no way to be sure."

Until recently, Phillips was the CIA's chief of Latin American operations, with 25 years as a key spy behind him, most of it in Latin America and the Caribbean, including Cuba and the Dominican Republic.

Yesterday he called a news conference to launch the first day of his newly chosen career, that of a defender of the CIA working outside the agency. Phillips said he resigned from the CIA to form an association of retired intelligence officers to try to "put the current controversy about CIA into reasonable perspective."

Asked how people could be sure his new role is not just another CIA operation, Phillips said, "I suppose the only people who are really going to know it's not an operation are my wife, those who know Bill Colby [CIA Director William E. Colby] and those who know me intimately."