

SFChronicle
Senate Investigation

New Blast at Army Spies

Washington

A Senate investigating unit yesterday condemned what it called the Army's massive and unrestrained surveillance of civilians during the explosive climate of dissent in the late 1960s.

The Senate constitutional rights subcommittee said

the surveillance violated First Amendment rights of free speech and association and was not authorized by law.

Chairman Sam J. Ervin Jr. (Dem - N.C.) announced he is introducing, with 33 senators as co-sponsors, a bill to ban all monitoring of civilian political activities

by military agents.

In 1971 the Defense Department issued regulations prohibiting future surveillance of civilians and requiring the destruction of the fruits of prior surveillance.

But Ervin called for legislation by Congress, saying the department's regulations are not only subject to change but "to interpretation, enforcement, and exceptions by the military itself."

The subcommittee's report said the impetus for the surveillance apparently was the ghetto riots and mass demonstrations of the 1960s which had required the use of armed forces.

"The chief justice?

"The chief subjects of the surveillance were protest groups and demonstrators whose activities the Army attempted to relate to its civil disturbance mission. Little distinction was made between peaceful and non-peaceful groups," the report said.

The subcommittee said one of the underpinnings of the Army surveillance was "the conspiracy theory"

that the widespread disorders in the '60s could be traced to efforts by a defined group of political activists.

But its report said that "whatever the evidence then thought to support this theory, the presumed existence of a grand conspiracy again does not excuse or justify Army surveillance." The report went on to say "that no evidence has been found supporting the conspiracy theory."

The subcommittee said that at the height of the monitoring, the Army engaged over 1500 plainclothes agents to collect information that was placed in scores of data centers around the country.

Associated Press