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ON PAGE A-1

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Helms at Center Of Controversy On Disclosures

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WASHINGTON, May 16 — Senator Jesse Helms found himself in the center of a controversy among his Senate colleagues today as he vehemently denied that he had disclosed information from the Senate Intelligence committee.

The North Carolina Republican, a leading Senate conservative and an advocate of strong military forces, was jointly rebuked by Senator Barry Goldwater of Arizona, the founder of the modern conservative movement in the Republican Party, and by Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan of New York, a Democrat with extensive experience in foreign affairs and intelligence matters.

They accused Mr. Helms of disclosing committee information about covert election aid the Central Intelligence Agency gave to José Napoleón Duarte, the President-elect of El Salvador.

Rebukers Are Challenged

Mr. Helms challenged Senators Goldwater, chairman of the intelligence committee, and Moynihan, the vice chairman, to substantiate their charges that he had violated the Senate rules by disclosing information obtained from the committee. The charges were made in a letter of rebuke, hand-delivered to the Senate majority and minority leaders. Mr. Helms said no one had spoken to him about the charges.

"It is a falsehood to suggest that I got one scintilla of information from the Senate intelligence committee," Mr. Helms said. "I got it from El Salvador."

"I have never leaked anything and I never will," he added.

He declined, however, to cite the specific source of the information because, he said, "I don't want anyone to get shot down there."

The Senator said his disclosure on the Senate floor last week of an agency briefing of the committee, concerning the C.I.A. role in the Salvadoran election, was based on information broadcast by a San Salvador radio station. Mr. Helms said he did not know the

name of the station, however. But committee members, angered by the revelations, said the speech was the first disclosure that the agency had a role in the Salvadoran elections.

Mr. Helms said he agreed with Mr. Goldwater and Mr. Moynihan that anyone who disclosed committee information "ought to be rebuked." He added that the disclosure of an "eyes only" letter rebuking him was an unauthorized leak, and he suggested that the leakers be subjected to disciplinary action by the Senate.

In their letter, Mr. Goldwater and Mr. Moynihan asked the Senate leaders to remind their colleagues that disclosure of confidential information violated Senate rules and was punishable by reprimand, censure or even expulsion. The letter, shown to the two leaders, is in the committee's safe. It was described by two senators as reflecting the unanimous view of committee members that the Senate rules had been broken by Mr. Helms.

Mr. Helms said disclosure of the rebuke damaged his campaign for reelection against Gov. James B. Hunt Jr., a Democrat, in military-conscious North Carolina. He said articles about the disclosure were displayed on the front pages of the major newspapers of the state, adding, "This set Hunt afire in North Carolina."

Several Refuse to Comment

Both Mr. Goldwater and Mr. Moynihan declined to comment, according to their aides. Similarly, Senator Howard H. Baker Jr., Republican of Tennessee, the majority leader, told reporters, "I really prefer not to comment on this."

But another member of the intelligence committee noted that, in addition, Mr. Helms referred to a committee briefing in his Senate floor speech last week. In his speech, he charged that the agency had provided "comprehensive across-the-board services," including money for precinct organizers, radio and television advertisements and computer voter registration.

Mr. Helms also said in the speech: "It is my understanding that not even the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence was informed of the funding of Duarte until last Thursday — the day after particulars I revealed in a speech on the Senate floor were made public. I do not know what went on at that meeting, but I have been given to understand that senators who heard the news declined to go to El Salvador as election observers because they did not want to be in the position of appearing

to approve what has transpired."

Committee members said that this speech was the first public disclosure of the agency's role in the elections, but Mr. Helms said this was the information that came from a Salvadoran radio station.

Helms Calls Others Guilty

The Senator said that other senators routinely violated the Senate rule against disclosure of classified information. "Time and time again I have come out of code-level briefings of the Foreign Relations Committee and seen other senators at the microphones, talking to the press," Mr. Helms said. "I always walk on by."

In a related development, a House-Senate conference delayed consideration of a Senate-approved proposal to provide \$61.7 million in military aid to El Salvador and \$21 million in covert aid to Nicaraguan rebels. The House, which had provided money for neither, was widely regarded as ready to yield on El Salvador but remain firm on Nicaragua.

"The House has voted twice to stop the war in Nicaragua," Representative Edward P. Boland, Democrat of Massachusetts and chairman of the intelligence committee, told the conferees. "This is not negotiable."

Senator Ted Stevens, Republican of Alaska and the majority whip, told the conferees: "There are still people out in the field right now, and the money is running out. We need some kind of winding-down money."

Mr. Boland replied: "There are sufficient funds now to wind it down, if they want to do it. They knew what the cap was. They could have reduced spending. But they didn't want to do it that way."