

ARTICLE APPEARED
ON PAGE A-1WASHINGTON POST
9 OCTOBER 1976

CIA Aiding Investigation of Letelier

By Stephen J. Lynton
and Timothy S. Robinson
Washington Post Staff Writers

Central Intelligence Agency director George Bush has met with key Justice Department officials to aid in the federal investigation of the bombing death of former Chilean Ambassador Orlando Letelier here last month, according to reliable sources.

The CIA director conferred Monday with Assistant Attorney General J. Stanley Pottinger and Assistant U.S. Attorney Eugene M. Propper, who is coordinating the investigation, a source close to the investigation said.

Although few details of their discussion could be ascertained yesterday, the meeting was the first indication that the investigation into Letelier's death has involved participation of officials at the highest levels of the CIA and the Justice Department. The investigation itself is now being conducted largely by the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

The CIA's role in the wide-ranging investigation poses sensitive ethical and legal questions, according to officials close to the probe. The CIA was involved in efforts to overthrow the Chilean regime of the late President Salvador Allende, in which Letelier was a high official. In addition, the investigation may turn up sensitive information that the CIA may want to keep secret for "national security" reasons, these officials say.

The CIA, moreover, operates under a charter and other federal regulations that restrict its domestic activities. In February, President Ford issued new "guidelines" for U.S. intelligence operations. They included a broad prohibition against domestic intelligence gathering and spying as well as a series of exceptions to this limitations.

Letelier, who had been an outspoken critic of the present Chilean military junta, was killed Sept. 21 when a bomb exploded beneath his car as he drove through Sheridan Circle on Massachusetts Avenue's Embassy Row. Ronni K. Moffitt, 25, a passenger in his car, also died.

Letelier, 44, had served as Allende's foreign minister and minister of defense as well as ambassador to the U.S. He was imprisoned for 364 days by the military regime headed by Gen. Augusto Pinochet which overthrew Allende Sept. 11, 1973.

A charming and influential man with many friends on Capitol Hill, Letelier became the most prominent Chilean critic in the United States of the current Santiago regime.

Letelier and Mrs. Moffitt were on their way to the Institute for Policy Studies, a leftist "think tank" where both of them worked, when the bomb exploded. Mrs. Moffitt's husband, Michael, who was also

The meeting Monday of CIA and Justice Department officials was called to discuss what role the CIA should play in the Letelier investigation, reliable sources said. The decisions they reached could not be learned yesterday. According to one source, Bush promised that the CIA would cooperate in the investigation.

In addition to the meeting with Bush, it is also known that federal investigators have had detailed intelligence briefings and been given access to highly classified documents by CIA officials. The briefings and documents are reported to include accounts of activities by Chilean and other Latin American terrorist groups.

The CIA briefings have also apparently involved discussions of the current political atmosphere in Chile. The current Chilean regime has been denounced by its critics for alleged political repression, torture and imprisonment of its opponents. The CIA briefings—as well as briefings by State Department officials—are reported to have discounted these critical accounts of the Chilean government as distorted and exaggerated.

Assistant Attorney General Pottinger, who heads the Justice Department's civil rights division, does not have direct control over the investigation, according to government officials. In an unusual development, he is playing an indirect role in the probe, which officially falls under the Justice Department's criminal division.

Pottinger stepped into the investigation largely because of pressure from the Institute for Policy Studies, where Letelier worked, according to reliable sources. Members of the institute distrust the FBI, partly because the institute has in the past been one of the FBI's targets of investigation. Pottinger is now supervising the Justice Department's investigation of illegal break-ins and other improper acts by FBI officials.

Because of the institute's concern over the investigation, they are being represented by Michael E. Tigar, a lawyer. In an interview this week, Tigar said his aim was to help government agencies in the investigation and to protect institute officials from improper actions by government officials.

Despite the institute's skepticism about the FBI and CIA, Tigar expressed satisfaction with the investi-

gation
(FBI's
with
Propp
Pottin
The
killin
the vi

gation of Cuban and other Latin American exile groups, based in Miami, Fla., to a New York City hotel where some Chileans were found to have made a series of suspicious long-distance phone calls, according to various sources. Investigators are also reportedly making checks in some foreign nations.

The investigation now appears to focus on possible political motives for the bombing including assassination by rightwing Chilean or other Latin American groups. The investigators, however, have not ruled out other motives and are still checking into Letelier's personal and social life.

One group known to be under scrutiny by federal investigators is the Patria y Libertad group received \$38,500 from the CIA, through an unnamed third party, in the early 1970s "in an effort to create tension and a possible pretext for intervention by the Chilean military" against the Allende government.

Little reliable information has been made public about the nature of the bomb that killed Letelier. According to informed sources, analysis of the bomb by the FBI's laboratory has so far proved partly inconclusive, and further lab studies are under way.

The explosive is known to have been placed beneath the area of the driver's seat. The blast is believed by investigators to have been intended to kill the driver, rather than to destroy the entire car. The form of explosive used and the means by which it was detonated are as yet unclear. Investigators found the face of a watch or clock, according to informed sources, and have examined it to determine whether it was part of a timing device for the bomb. Some investigators have discounted this, terming it a false clue, but other sources say it is still under examination.

CONTINUED