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Kissinger's 1976 Cable Sheds More Light on 'Operation Condor'

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On the morning of Sept. 21, 1976, former Chilean foreign minister Orlando Letelier and two young colleagues drove to work in the scenic Washington neighborhood known as Embassy Row. As Letelier's Chevrolet Chevelle passed the residency of the Chilean ambassador and rounded Sheridan Circle, a bomb placed under the driver's seat by agents of the Chilean secret police detonated. Letelier, a vocal critic of Chilean dictator Augusto Pinochet, died at the scene. His 26-year-old colleague, Ronni Karpen Moffitt, bled to death from a shard of metal that struck her jugular vein. Her husband, Michael Moffitt, was blown out the back window of the vehicle and survived.

Now, [a newly declassified cable](#) from then-Secretary of State Henry Kissinger sheds more light on the action, and lack of action, taken by the U.S. government in the days leading up to that act of international terrorism in the capital city of the United States.

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Five days before the Letelier-Moffitt assassination, Kissinger called off a planned warning to Pinochet and other South American military leaders against orchestrating "a series of international murders" of their opponents around the globe.

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The secretary "has instructed that no further action be taken on this matter," stated a September 16, 1976 cable sent from Africa, where Kissinger was traveling, to his Assistant Secretary of State for Inter-American affairs, Harry Shlaudeman back in Washington. Using identical language, Shlaudeman passed on these instructions four days later to his deputy to be transmitted to U.S. ambassadors in Chile, Argentina and Uruguay.

That communication was obtained by The [National Security Archive](#), a public interest research center specializing in the Freedom of Information Act and declassified documentation on U.S. foreign policy. The document and others previously obtained under the FOIA by the Archive have reopened a 34-year-old controversy about what Kissinger's office and the CIA knew about "Operation Condor" -- a clandestine rendition and assassination program among the Latin American military regimes led by Pinochet's Chile.

The Kissinger communique, for the first time, ties the former secretary of state to a decision to withdraw a warning to Chile and its co-conspirators against international political assassination. But the documents offer few clues that would explain why Kissinger called off diplomatic pressure that, if delivered in a timely fashion, might have deterred the Washington, D.C., car bombing.

An inquiry to Kissinger's spokesperson was not answered.

An August 30, 1976 memoranda from Shlaudeman titled "Operation Condor," advised Kissinger: "...what we are trying to head off is a series of international murders that could do serious damage to the international status and reputation of the countries involved," including Argentina, Uruguay, Paraguay and Brazil. The CIA had earlier told Kissinger's office of "disturbing developments" in [Condor's] operational attitudes," which included identifying, locating, and "hitting" leaders of the opposition to certain governments in South America.

Letelier was among the most effective opponents of Pinochet, who seized power in Chile during a bloody military coup on Sept. 11, 1973. A former economist at the Inter-American Development Bank, Letelier had served as socialist president Salvador Allende's first ambassador to Washington, D.C.; he had also held the post of foreign minister, and at the time of the coup, was minister of defense -- Pinochet's boss. Living in exile in Washington, Letelier led an international campaign to ostracize the Pinochet regime for its gross violation of human rights and assault on Chile's democratic institutions.

The CIA's alert set in motion efforts by senior State Department officials to deliver a demarche -- diplomatic-speak for an official policy message of disapproval -- signed by Kissinger to express "our deep concern" over "plans for the assassination of subversives, politicians, and prominent figures both within the national borders of certain Southern Cone countries and abroad."

But some of the U.S. ambassadors, at least, were reluctant to pass the word to their hosts. The U.S. ambassador to Uruguay, Ernest Siracusa, had resisted delivering the demarche against Condor assassinations to that country's ruling generals for fear that his life would be endangered, and wanted

further instructions, according to a Shlaudeman memo. The U.S. Ambassador to Chile, David Popper, also balked. "[G]iven Pinochet's sensitivities," Popper cabled, "he might well take as an insult any inference that he was connected with such assassination plots."

After receiving Kissinger's "no further action" orders, on Sept. 20, Shlaudeman directed his deputy, William Luers, to "instruct the [U.S.] ambassadors to take no further action noting that there have been no reports in some weeks indicating an intention to activate the Condor scheme."

In fact, Condor's latest scheme had already been activated. Less than 24 hours later, Letelier and Moffitt were killed within earshot of the State Department.

Only in the aftermath of that attack did the CIA meet with Col. Manuel Contreras, head of DINA, the Chilean secret police, regarding U.S. concerns about Operation Condor assassination plots.

In a memo to Kissinger, Shlaudeman wrote that Contreras had denied that "Operation Condor has any other purpose than the exchange of intelligence." He told his boss that passing U.S. concerns to the head of Chile's secret police "seems to me sufficient action for the time being. The Chileans are the prime movers in Operation Condor."

The memo contains no reference to any discussion with Contreras about the deaths of Letelier and Moffitt.

In March 1978, the FBI identified Michael Townley, an American who was working for DINA, as the man who had placed the bomb under Letelier's car; in April the Chileans were forced to turn him over to U.S. authorities. In return for a plea bargain of less than seven years in prison, Townley provided evidence against Contreras as responsible for giving the orders for the Letelier assassination. On the second anniversary of the terrorist attack, the U.S. demanded his extradition, but the Pinochet regime refused to turn him over. In November 1993, three years after Pinochet left power, a Chilean court found Contreras guilty of the Letelier-Moffitt murders.

Contreras served seven years in a specially constructed prison for this crime.

Peter Kornbluh directs the Chile Documentation Project of The National Security Archive. He is the author of "The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability."

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dumbasademocrat

10:51AM Apr 10th 2010

Thats diplomacy folks !!!!

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poot

3:38PM Apr 10th 2010

Hasn't this pretty much always been a given?

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janef

8:49PM Apr 10th 2010

That has nothing to do with diplomacy. No wonder some people don't understand the need for such a powerful and skilled tool.

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sagittalgop

11:30AM Apr 10th 2010

WOW i was 15 WHEN THIS HAPPEN just FOUND OUT IN THE LOCKER ROOM in GYM it was to large - to small or to fat BY A FUTURE REPUBLICAN whoes WEALTHY FAMILY TOLD HIM HE WAS PERFECT and PASED IT ON DOWN THE LINE then WE HAD CHANGE

RATE THIS COMMENT: (-59)

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rohlemeyer

12:45PM Apr 10th 2010

I don't understand what you're trying to say.

RATE THIS COMMENT: (36)

madmax

2:05PM Apr 10th 2010

sagittalgop

11:30AM Apr 10th 2010

Just say "no" to drugs.

RATE THIS COMMENT: ★★★★★ (26)



stevef123811

3:01PM Apr 10th 2010

So, sagitta, your post indicates you're what now 7 yrs old?

RATE THIS COMMENT: ★★★★★ (17)



Gobble D. Gook

3:20PM Apr 10th 2010

Babbling rantings of a lonely man reliving his highlights as a pre pubescent fifteen year old hanging out in the locker room.

RATE THIS COMMENT: ★★★★★ (13)



sfronek653

3:29PM Apr 10th 2010

And they say republicans can't spell? LOL Go back to elementary school! Also, all of you "dems" need to stop the name calling.....just a bunch of bullies that need to be taught some manners!

RATE THIS COMMENT: ★★★★★ (9)

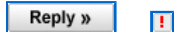


Old Engineer

1:16PM Apr 10th 2010

Any fresh developments in the Tutankhamen case? Was it Bush's fault, after all?

RATE THIS COMMENT: ★★★★★ (12)



Eric

1:36PM Apr 10th 2010

Of course it was...the awfulness of the Bush administration broke the space-time continuum...


RATE THIS COMMENT: ★★★★★ (13)



tarqthedog

3:38PM Apr 10th 2010

Actually, it was the fault of the Duke lacrosse team.


RATE THIS COMMENT: ★★★★★ (17)



Tex

4:18PM Apr 10th 2010

Yes, an x-ray of the mummy reveals an ancient pretzel, lodged firmly in the throat area.

RATE THIS COMMENT: ★★★★★ (15)



Raymond

4:24PM Apr 10th 2010

Why not? Liberals blame the Earthquake in Chile on Bush!!!! "Everything is Bush's Fault!" I wish Liberals would start to take some responsibility, but I wouldn't expect that! The needs their Parents to do that for them!

RATE THIS COMMENT: ★★★★★ (5)



D.B. Cooper

4:48PM Apr 10th 2010

Bush made me do it.

RATE THIS COMMENT:   ★★★★★ (9)**hairhofla**

10:58PM Apr 10th 2010

I thought Bush WAS D.B. Cooper

RATE THIS COMMENT:   ★☆☆☆☆ (0)**kat**

2:13AM Apr 11th 2010

I got an idea here Old Engineer, everything goes wrong, just say its the Bush Factor! LOL and when we want to curse, dont, just say "Pelosi!"

RATE THIS COMMENT:   ★★★★★☆ (3)**Powderfinger boy**



1:36PM Apr 10th 2010

in case you were wondering whether or not Kissinger is a criminal, now you know--he is. you'd have to be pretty naive to find this surprising.

RATE THIS COMMENT:   ★★★★★ (23)[Reply »](#)**judiandsteveg**



4:23PM Apr 10th 2010

What I am getting from this article, is not that anyone knew who or when someone would be killed, but just a failure to warn another government not to kill someone. I am sure there is more to the story that isnt in the article, but can we even be sure that if he told the Chilean government not to kill anyone they would have listened? It is my understanding that Augusto Pinochet was a despicable violent person, so in reality a warning might have just inflamed him to kill more people for all we know. It doesnt say anywhere in the article that Kissinger knew Letelier was a target and when or how he would be murdered.

RATE THIS COMMENT:   ★★★★★ (11)**tommytortugam**

1:49PM Apr 10th 2010

He has to be one of the worst war criminals of the past 100 years. He is simply evil.

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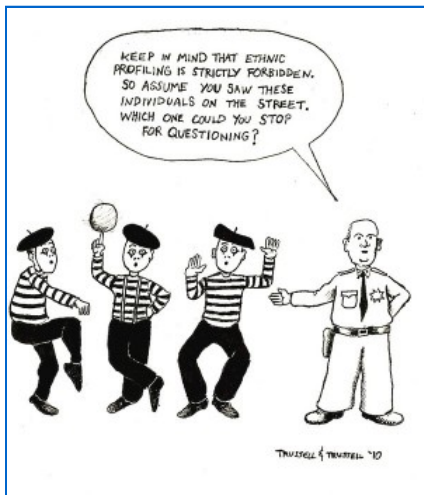
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