

U.S. gives documents to Chilean President Bachelet on 40th anniversary

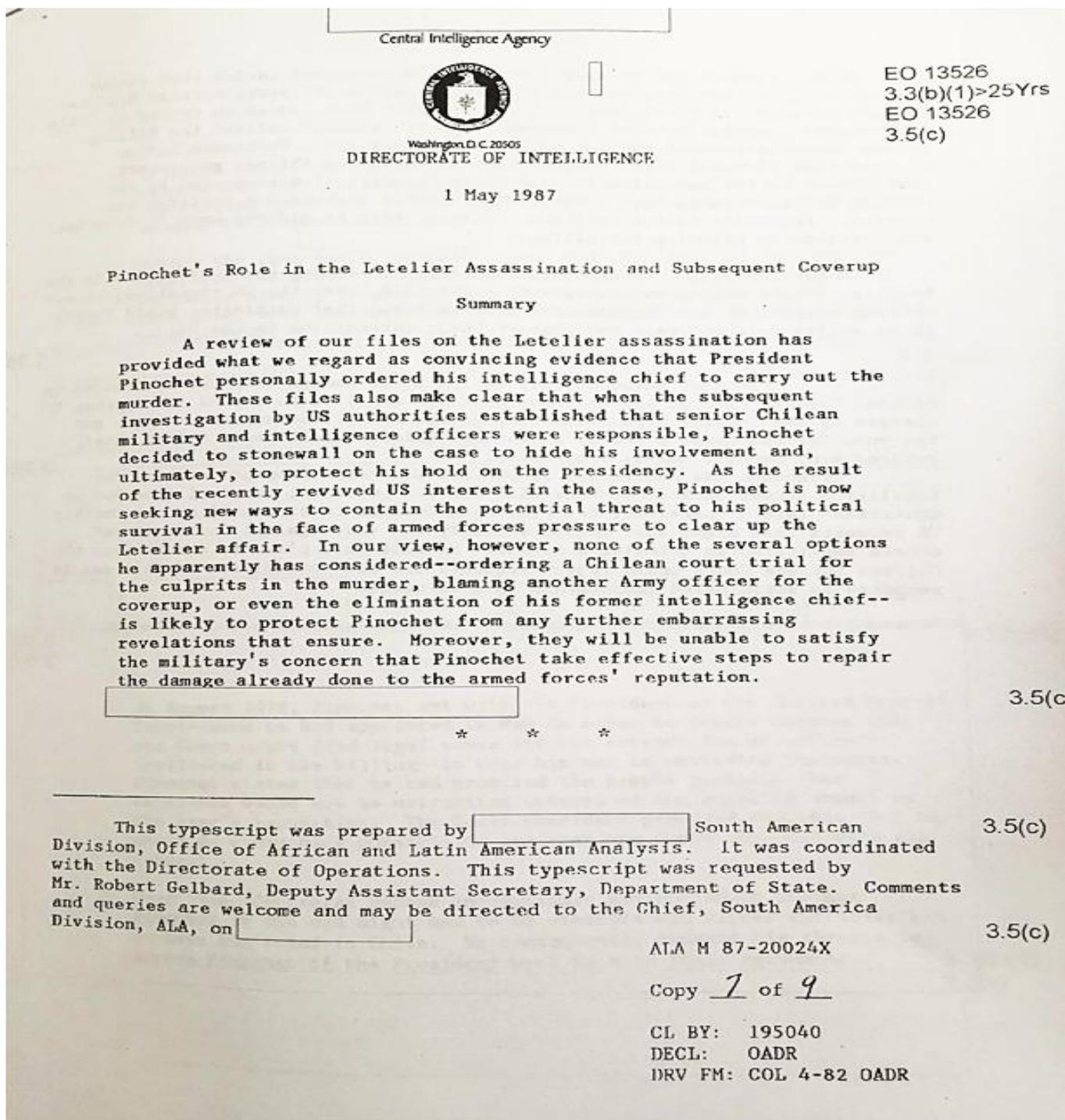
National Security Archive Applauds Declassification of CIA Intelligence Assessment and Other Records on the Letelier-Moffitt Assassinations

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Edited by Peter Kornbluh

For further information, contact : Peter Kornbluh: 202-374-7281 or peter.kornbluh@gmail.com



Copy of CIA special intelligence assessment on Pinochet's role in Letelier and Moffitt assassinations presented to Chilean President Bachelet on September 23, 2016. (Photo by Peter Kornbluh)



Letelier-Moffitt Memorial, Sheridan Circle, Washington, D.C. (Photo credit: Peter Kornbluh)

Washington D.C., September 23, 2016 – A CIA special intelligence assessment in 1987 concluded that Chilean General Augusto Pinochet ordered an “act of state terrorism” on the streets of Washington, D.C., that took the lives of former Chilean diplomat Orlando Letelier, and his 25-year-old colleague, Ronni Moffitt, forty years ago this week. “A review of our files on the Letelier assassination,” the CIA reported, “has provided what we regard as convincing evidence that President Pinochet personally ordered his intelligence chief to carry out the murder.” The assessment added that Pinochet later “decided to stonewall on the case to hide his involvement and, ultimately, to protect his hold on the presidency.”

The CIA report, along with other documents, were handed over to Chilean President Michelle Bachelet by Deputy Secretary of State Heather Higginbottom during a somber 40th anniversary commemoration today at Sheridan Circle – site of the car bomb assassinations in 1976 – and are being posted here by the National Security Archive.

Two top U.S officials shared the CIA’s assessment with President Ronald Reagan as part of an effort to lobby him to terminate support for the Pinochet regime. Among the formerly secret records revealed today was a previously unknown October 1987 White House briefing paper for Reagan prepared by his NSC adviser, Frank Carlucci, in which Carlucci advises the president: “The situation in regard to Chile is as complicated as we face anywhere.”

“This CIA evaluation has come to be considered the Holy Grail of the Letelier-Moffitt case,” according to Peter Kornbluh who directs the Archive’s Chile Documentation Project. “Since

direct evidence from Pinochet's secret police files disappeared long ago, like so many of his victims, the CIA's detailed assessment is the most compelling evidence we are ever likely to have." Kornbluh added, "With this gesture of declassification diplomacy, the Obama administration has finally provided the missing link in the paper trail of evidence that leads to Pinochet's doorstep."

The release of the documents completes a two-phase diplomatic effort by the Obama administration to locate and release still-secret records on General Pinochet's role in the car bombing. The Justice Department had identified the intelligence records as evidence during a formal FBI investigation into Pinochet's guilt 16 years ago, after the former dictator was arrested in London for human rights crimes. In January 2015, the Bachelet government requested that the documents be turned over to Chile.



Declassified diplomacy: the diskette of U.S. documents given to President Bachelet by the State Department today, September 23, 2016.

Last October, Secretary of State John Kerry traveled to the Chilean capital, Santiago, and personally provided to Bachelet a computer disk of 282 documents on Pinochet and the Letelier-Moffitt assassinations. Among them was a dramatic October 6, 1987, memorandum to Reagan from Secretary of State George Shultz citing the CIA's conclusions as part of his effort to convince the president to cut U.S. ties to Pinochet and press for the return of democracy in Chile.

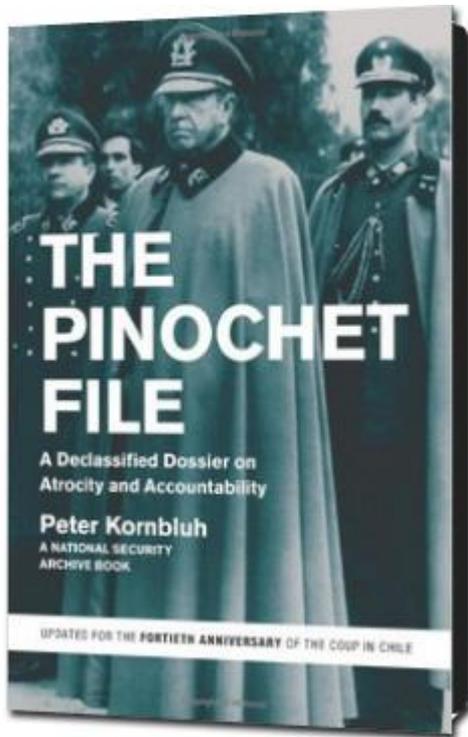
“The CIA has never before drawn and presented its conclusion that such strong evidence exists of his [Pinochet’s] leadership role in this act of terrorism,” Shultz informed the president. “It is not clear whether we can or would want to consider indicting Pinochet,” the secretary of state wrote to Reagan. “Nevertheless, this is a blatant example of a chief of state’s direct involvement in an act of state terrorism, one that is particularly disturbing both because it occurred in our capital and since his government is generally considered to be friendly.”

The National Security Archive today applauded the release of the documentation as “a triumph for declassified diplomacy.” Kornbluh characterized the CIA report, along with the Shultz and Carlucci memos to Reagan, as “fundamental evidence for the verdict of history on Pinochet and his regime.”

But the Archive said it would continue to pursue the declassification of the full investigative file compiled by the Justice Department and the FBI during its investigation into Pinochet in April and May 2000. The FBI reportedly concluded that there was enough circumstantial evidence to indict Pinochet as the mastermind of the car bombing, but the incoming administration of George W. Bush failed to pursue the case. Kornbluh called on the FBI “to release their investigative record on Augusto Pinochet to complete the Obama administration’s special declassification project on Chile.”

Letelier, a former minister in the Allende government and ambassador to Washington, along with his associate at the Institute for Policy Studies, Ronni Moffitt, were killed as they drove to work down Massachusetts Avenue in Washington D.C. Moffitt’s husband, Michael, was the sole survivor of the bombing.

The Archive today posted the CIA assessment, and the Carlucci memo to Reagan; and reposted the Shultz memo ([see Electronic Briefing Book No. 532](#)). In an essay (below) Kornbluh explains the background of the Letelier-Moffitt case documents, and the lengthy behind-the-scenes effort to obtain their declassification and release.



[The Pinochet File: A Declassified Dossier on Atrocity and Accountability](#)

By Peter Kornbluh, New Press (September 11, 2013)

READ THE DOCUMENTS

[1. CIA, “Pinochet’s Role in the Letelier Assassination and Subsequent Coverup,” Intelligence Assessment, May 1, 1987.](#)

At the request of Secretary of State George Shultz, the CIA reviewed its intelligence cables and reports on General Augusto Pinochet’s role in the September 21, 1976, car bombing assassination of Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt in Washington D.C. Beginning in mid-1978, the agency reported on information supplied by high-level informants close to Pinochet and to his secret police chief, Manuel Contreras. The informants provided detailed information on the relationship between Contreras and Pinochet as well as Pinochet’s personal role in covering up his responsibility for the assassination. The assessment concludes that Pinochet “personally ordered” the assassination, and then sought to cover it up, even considering killing Contreras to silence the one person who could implicate him.

[2. White House, Frank C. Carlucci Memorandum to the President, “Chile,” Secret, undated, circa 1987.](#)

National Security Adviser Frank Carlucci transmits the CIA assessment to President Reagan. In his cover memo he reminds the president that the secretary of state has already written to him about Chile, noting that Shultz believes “our relationship with Chile will be ‘extremely difficult’ over the next 12-18 months.” Carlucci adds that Shultz has pointed to “two negative developments” – Pinochet’s apparent plans to “succeed himself as President by manipulating Chile’s constitutional system” and the Letelier assassination. Carlucci then

offers his own personal view: “The situation in regard to Chile is as complicated as we face anywhere.”

3. DOS, “Pinochet and the Letelier-Moffitt Murders: Implications for US Policy,” SECRET, Memorandum for the President, October 6, 1987. (reposted)

In an effort to convince President Reagan that the time has come to terminate U.S. support for the Pinochet regime, Secretary of State Shultz reports that the CIA has “convincing evidence” that Pinochet “personally ordered” the assassination of Orlando Letelier in Washington. “The CIA's conclusions and our own judgments as to Pinochet's direct involvement must affect ... our overall policy towards Chile,” he advises the president. “What we now know about Pinochet's role in these assassinations is of the greatest seriousness and adds further impetus to the need to work toward complete democratization of Chile.”

The Pinochet File : U.S. Declassifies Missing Documents in The Letelier-Moffitt Case

Finally, the Verdict of History on Pinochet's Role in an Act of Terrorism

By Peter Kornbluh

(Originally posted October 8, 2015)

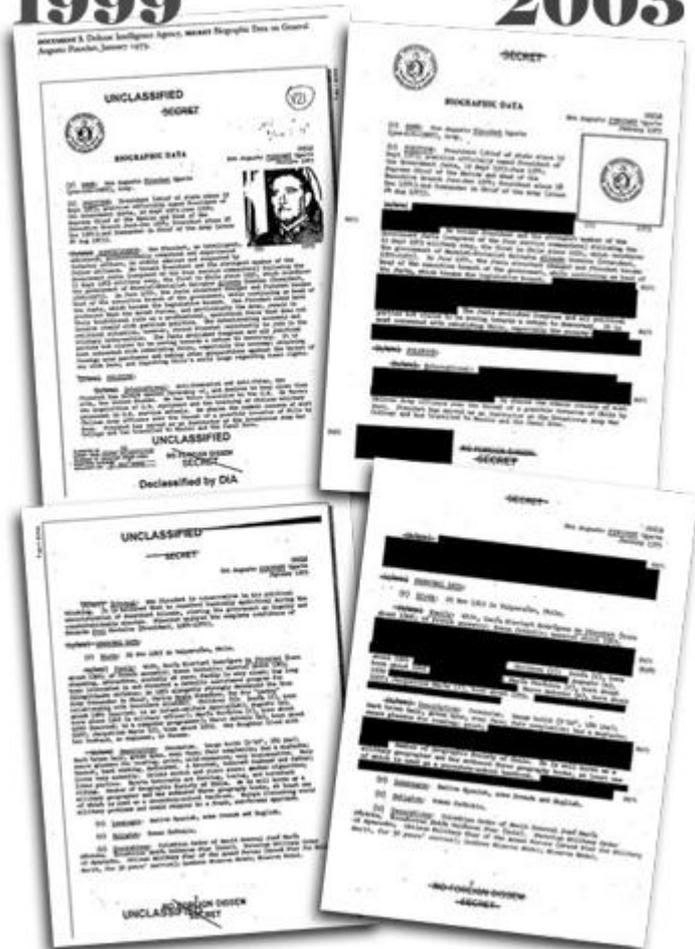
When the U.S. Secretary of State John Kerry met with President Bachelet on Monday, October 5, he engaged in an important act of what I call “declassified diplomacy.” He gave her a pen drive on which was stored 1000 pages of once TOP SECRET U.S. national security documents relating to Pinochet’s role in an act of terrorism in the capital city of the United States—the 1976 assassination by car bomb of Orlando Letelier and his colleague, Ronni Karpen Moffitt.

In a rather extraordinary act of diplomatic collaboration both the Chilean foreign ministry and the U.S. Department of State are posting them on their websites for all U.S. and Chilean citizens, and indeed the entire world community, to read and evaluate.

These records are among the most sensitive and secret in the holdings of the CIA, FBI, Defense and State Departments, because they shed light on the worst pre-9/11 act of international terrorism in Washington D.C. Had these documents been declassified at the time they were written in the aftermath of the car-bombing, they might have resulted in the indictment of the dictator himself.

1999

2003



The Defense Intelligence Agency biographic documents on General Augusto Pinochet, censored different ways by different declassification officers.

Indeed, in a now declassified report to President Ronald Reagan, titled “Pinochet and the Letelier-Moffitt Murders: Implications for US Policy,” his own secretary of state George Shultz wondered whether Pinochet should be indicted in the U.S. for the car-bomb assassinations. The CIA had “convincing evidence,” Shultz reported to the president, that Pinochet had “personally ordered” his secret police chief, Manuel Contreras, to assassinate Orlando Letelier in Washington D.C. Shultz called Pinochet’s role in the car-bombing “a blatant example of a chief of state’s direct involvement in an act of state terrorism, one that is particularly disturbing both because it occurred in our capital and since his government is generally considered to be friendly.”

Pinochet managed to escape legal accountability as an international terrorist. But almost 40 years after that heinous crime, this form of documentary evidence remains vital for the verdict of history on his role.

The genesis of this unique collection dates back to the time of General Pinochet’s arrest in London in 1998, when the families and key agencies in Washington, including the Institute for Policy Studies where Letelier and Moffitt worked and my organization--the National Security Archive--pressed the Clinton Administration to re-open a formal investigation into Pinochet’s personal role in the car-bombing assassination of Orlando Letelier and Ronni Karpen Moffitt, and his efforts to hide his regime’s culpability. Our argument to the Clinton

White House was that the United States had stronger legal reason to prosecute Pinochet than did Spain, and that he should be extradited to Washington to stand trial for the murders of Letelier and Moffitt.

U.S. Attorney General Janet Reno actually approved an FBI/Justice Department inquiry; indeed, in April/May 2000 a team of U.S. government investigators were in Santiago working with the Chilean PDI on this case. They eventually concluded, in a still secret report, that Pinochet should be indicted. But by that time, Clinton had come to the end of his tenure and George W. Bush had been elected. The Bush administration refused to pursue the prosecution of Pinochet, even after a major terrorist attack on September 11, 2001, made the fight against terrorism the President's number one priority.

The investigation into Pinochet's role had one unforeseen consequence: it resulted in important documents being withheld from the Clinton Administration's special declassification project on Chile. That project resulted in the centralization, review, and declassification of 23,000 CIA, State Department, Defense Department, White House and FBI records. Among those documents were hundreds of records implicating Pinochet personally in the Letelier-Moffitt assassinations. But instead of being released along with the thousands of other records, these documents were withheld as potential evidence for the investigation.

An internal report on the special declassification obtained by my office states: "some 250 documents related to the Letelier/Moffitt case will be withheld for further review by DOJ prosecutors as part of a renewed effort to investigate the case."

For the sake of truth and justice, these 250 documents tying Pinochet to an act of international terrorism in Washington D.C. were among the most important in the secret archives of the United States. After Pinochet died, my organization, the National Security Archive, attempted to obtain the declassification of these records, without success.

It has taken until now for all the stars to align to make this important declassification possible. With the reelection of Michelle Bachelet, Chile had key diplomats, among them Canciller Heraldo Munoz, and Ambassador Juan Gabriel Valdes (who was working with Orlando Letelier in Washington D.C. at the time of his assassination) who had a personal commitment to this advancing the cause of justice in this atrocity. Inside the Obama administration were key policy makers who understood the value of "declassified diplomacy"—for the families of the victims, for the appropriate use of U.S. documentation to advance the cause of human rights, and for the simple sake of history. They proved to be very receptive to a formal initiative earlier this year (with the strategic support of the National Security Archive) to obtain this documentation.

Secretary Kerry's trip to Santiago this week provided an opportunity to turn over the records that have been recovered so far to the Chilean government and make them public.

More documents relating to Augusto Pinochet that will be made available to Chile in the near future. Moreover, this positive and successful effort at "declassified diplomacy" also

creates a useful and important precedent for the future release of still-secret U.S. documents relating to cases that remain judicially unresolved: among them the case of disappeared U.S. citizen Boris Weisfeiler, the death of former president Eduardo Frei, as well as the origins and activities of Operation Condor which facilitated the assassination of Orlando Letelier and Ronni Moffitt.

Pinochet will never stand trial for this atrocity and the thousands of others he committed. But this special declassification on the Letelier-Moffitt case dramatically demonstrates how important U.S. government documents can be—in the court of history where the ultimate public verdict can be rendered.

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