

# Colonel's Death Gives Clues to Pinochet Arms Deals

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SANTIAGO, [Chile](#) — Chileans have learned to live with the political traumas bequeathed them by the dictatorship of Gen. [Augusto Pinochet](#), which ended in 1990 and left about 4,000 people dead or missing. But two years ago, they were surprised to discover that he had also amassed an illicit fortune.

The source of that wealth, estimated at \$28 million or more, was never clear. But Chilean officials say an investigation begun last year into the mysterious death of a high-ranking military officer, Col. Gerardo Huber, is providing important clues.

Colonel Huber's death was ruled a suicide after his body was found on the banks of a river here early in 1992, just as he was poised to testify in a case of a covert arms deal gone bad. That multimillion-dollar transaction was handled by what current government officials suspect was a syndicate that generated wealth for General Pinochet and his inner circle.

More than that, government officials say, the Huber case suggests that General Pinochet and his associates were willing to use the military intelligence service not only to eliminate political threats to their power — standard practice for them during the dictatorship — but also to protect the fortunes they were surreptitiously accumulating.

In March, the investigating judge, Claudio Pavez Ahumada, concluded that Colonel Huber was "neutralized" as part of a plot by the Chilean military to prevent arms deals and other "irregular operations" from becoming public.

Six high-ranking retired military officers, including a former chief of the intelligence service and another general, have been arrested and charged with "illicit association" in the case. Judge Pavez said that his inquiry had not ended, and that he aimed to discover who ordered Colonel Huber's execution and who carried it out.

He and other government officials investigating the case would not rule out that the trail could even lead to General Pinochet. Withered by age and disease at 90, the discredited former dictator still casts a shadow over the life of the nation, but has escaped prosecution in the 16 years since he left the presidency.

"This was clearly a homicide," Judge Pavez said in an interview here.

Court records, testimony and interviews with people involved in the case suggest that General Pinochet's role in arms deals is greater than he has admitted. So, too, some say, may be his knowledge of the circumstances surrounding Colonel Huber's death.

At the moment, the Huber case is one of four judicial inquiries under way here, all of which have touched on the question of illegal arms transactions and the possibility that they were one of the main sources of the former dictator's fortune.

Among the other matters being looked at, investigators said, are several that took place after General Pinochet stepped down as president in 1990. These were arms sales to Ecuador in the mid-1990's, in violation of regional treaties when Ecuador was briefly at war with Peru, and the purchase of 200 Leopard tanks from the Netherlands in 1998.

After leaving the presidency, General Pinochet stayed on as armed forces commander for eight more years, and as such sought to evade civilian control.

In November, he was indicted on charges of tax evasion and fraud in connection with his overseas holdings, at least \$8 million of which were placed with Riggs Bank in Washington. When one of the investigating judges questioned him in December about the arms sale and the bank account, General Pinochet said he could not recall relevant details.

A July 2004 [United States Senate](#) report, issued after the Senate's investigation into financial irregularities at Riggs, contains copies of documents that General Pinochet submitted to the bank to explain his deposits. In those records, General Pinochet acknowledges receiving "commissions, fees and honorarium for work performed on special projects (military affairs) outside of Chile."

His lawyer, Pablo Rodríguez, has sought to explain the money by describing it as payments taken from "reserve funds" available to General Pinochet as president and armed forces commander, as well as earnings from real estate ventures and donations from grateful businessmen.

But María Inés Horvitz Lennon, a lawyer who represents the Council for the Defense of the State, the Chilean government's legal watchdog body, said that did not explain all of the Pinochet fortune.