

The Once And Future Spy Mission

*For Gates, CIA Sits
At a Critical Juncture*

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When confirmation hearings began in September for Robert M. Gates to be CIA director, Senate intelligence committee Chairman David L. Boren (D-Okla.) called the process "an opportunity to begin a valuable public debate about the future of American intelligence . . . to redefine the very mission of intelligence in the new world which we face." But controversies about Gates's past have dominated the confirmation process, shoving aside discussion of the CIA's future.

Gates himself told the Senate panel that "the old verities that have guided this country's national security policy for 45 years, and thus its intelligence service, have disappeared in an historical instant." The challenges now facing the CIA and U.S. intelligence, he added, are not just in places like the Soviet Union and Europe but in "the very idea of change, the idea that, for years to come, change and uncertainty will dominate international life, that the unthinkable and the not-even-thought-about will be commonplace."

Gates, if confirmed as expected by the Senate Tuesday, assumes leadership of the intelligence community at a precarious and uncertain moment. The CIA has been accused of missing almost every key event of recent times, from Iraq's invasion of Kuwait to the collapse of Soviet communism. Some operations officers recently have been charged with trying to cover up the CIA's role in the Iran-contra affair, and other agency officials are under attack for their handling of intelligence related to the BCCI banking scandal. CIA analysts, by various accounts, have produced a blizzard of studies, estimates, and assessments that have gone largely

unread because either they are politicized and ideological, or wishy-washy and irrelevant.

As recently as last week, acting CIA Director Richard J. Kerr took the extraordinary step of quoting from a classified CIA assessment of the Soviet situation in a letter to the New York Times to refute a critical editorial—and now widespread notion—that the CIA has been wrong too many times.

On top of all of that, the collapse of America's chief adversary in the world has produced a deep soul searching, a looking inward in the intelligence community. "It's a difficult time, but perhaps more so because everyone who is deeply involved in strategic issues has lost his bearings," one veteran analyst said. According to a former intelligence officer: "The agency right now is in large measure in search of a mission. It is seeking first to determine how to reorganize itself, what its priorities are going to be, where it will devote its resources, and who are the enemies of the United States?"

There is general agreement that in addressing these questions, Gates will have to do more with less.

For a long time, the classified intelligence community budget, which is estimated to be around \$30 billion a year and is secreted mostly in the huge defense budget, enjoyed something akin to sacred status. It grew, during the massive defense buildup of the early 1980s, at a faster rate than the military, and was shielded in more recent times of retrenchment, officials said.

But with even more precipitous declines in military spending expected, "it's a question of how much the intelligence function can be protected," said Henry S. Rowen, a former Pentagon and agency official.

Hints of the debate to come arose in mid-October when the Senate passed an intelligence authorization bill for fiscal 1992. The bill contained "major cuts" in the White House request, according to floor remarks by Frank Murkowski (R-Alaska), vice chairman of the Senate intelligence panel.

Not only is funding for intelli-

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gence affected, but also what remains needs to be reallocated in view of the diminished Soviet capability, which in the past has consumed as much as 60 percent of the CIA's resources.

"Because of the monolithic Soviet threat, the agency operated almost with a single *Zeitgeist*, became so narrowly focused on all things Soviet, that it did not have to justify resources flowing in support of that, whether it was Afghanistan, the contras, or \$300 million satellites," said a veteran intelligence officer with experience in operations directed at the Soviet Union.

"Suddenly, because that control is broken, everything is up for grabs. A whole series of new power centers are going to emerge and a lot of disparate forces are going to be contending for resources, prominence, roles, and the agency clearly is going to be in tumult," the officer said.

Kerr, in a recent speech to retired intelligence officers, suggested life was simpler when the Soviet threat was greater. "We had an enemy that we understood," he said. Now, he and others suggest, the agency faces a country-by-country reassessment of American interests, a task complicated by the emergence of ethnic and indigenous strife in areas once gripped by East-West tension.

Said former CIA director Richard M. Helms: "When you look at what's happening in the Soviet Union and certain parts of Africa, the seething in the Middle East, the shifts in Europe from day to day, you see kaleidoscopic change happening in a time frame that, for an analyst, is very hard work with."

The CIA has internal task forces looking at everything from the future of covert action to counterintelligence, from how to better exploit the information explosion to improving economic intelligence.

Calls for better clandestine human intelligence collection have come most recently after revelations that Iraqi President Saddam Hussein's nuclear advances went largely undetected by expensive U.S. satellite technology. "This Iraqi thing shows how badly you need real spies," said former CIA director William E. Colby.

At the same time, where satellites once could help measure Soviet military capabilities by counting tanks leaving a factory or observing the deployment of a new weapon, the changing Soviet picture suggests Gates will have to find new ways, both clandestine and overt, to keep up with events.

"Before, an analyst who didn't know the language at all but was

wonderfully skilled at looking at pictures, provided you with the most critical knowledge you needed if you were looking at indications and warnings," said retired Adm. Bobby R. Inman, a former director of the National Security Agency.

Today, with unprecedented access to the Soviet people and a thirst for knowledge about the economies and politics of the republics, "a totally different set of skills" is required, Inman said. "You need bright observers on the scene, who can see and talk and understand the language and the culture."

That may not be simple for agency operatives still steeped in the tradecraft of the Cold War. "CIA case officers are trained in recruiting agents, planting bugs and photographing documents," former CIA director Stansfield Turner wrote in the journal *Foreign Affairs* this fall. "To ask them to go out and sense public attitudes is almost like asking a fighter pilot to leave his supersonic jet and become a crop duster in a propeller-driven biplane."

In seeking to influence events, the agency will have to "walk that fine line with emerging democracies between interference and assistance," said Rep. Porter J. Goss (R-Fla.), the only former CIA clandestine officer known to be serving in Congress.

Other areas expected to receive greater emphasis will be the international drug trade and spread of weapons in the Third World. In September, the CIA opened an interagency coordination center on weapons proliferation. Paramilitary activity, on the other hand, traditionally used to counter Soviet activity in the Third World, will decline sharply, Gates has said.

As Gates redefines how the CIA carries out its mission, he is likely to preside over the broadest reorganization of the intelligence community since the CIA was founded in 1947. Studies are underway by the Pentagon, the agencies and the congressional intelligence panels. As the Senate intelligence committee launched hearings on the subject last March, Boren said, "With the end of the Cold War and changing intelligence requirements and priorities, we must now ask ourselves, 'What are we getting for our money?'"