

Gates to Face Questions On Integrity, Judgment

CIA Nominee Still Seen as Ambiguous Figure

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In October 1989, Robert M. Gates, the president's deputy adviser for national security affairs, wrote a draft of a speech that was highly pessimistic about Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev's chances of achieving genuine reform in his country.

"There are very real limits to the democratization intended by Gorbachev No opposition party will be tolerated Gorbachev is inviting chaos Elections were rigged Every element of political reform seems to have been designed to increase Gorbachev's personal power," Gates said in a 29-page draft of the speech, which was never delivered or released after Secretary of State James A. Baker III, who was arguing much the opposite, got it killed.

Today, as Gates appears before Congress seeking confirmation as director of central intelligence, the controversy over his strong views and other aspects of his years in government has not gone away. The speech was to have been his

most forceful condemnation of Gorbachev after a career of studying Soviet affairs. It was shortly after he had left the CIA, where he had revamped the way the agency analyzes world events.

Now, as Gates seeks the top CIA job at a time of enormous change, he must fend off criticism that he misjudged events in the Soviet Union and that the CIA's failure to foresee the Soviet collapse has been among its greatest shortcomings.

"I say Bob Gates has got to come out and say that the estimates of the CIA on the Soviet Union were just all wrong," said Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan (D-N.Y.), former vice chairman of the intelligence committee and one who has tentatively endorsed Gates. "If he can't do that, then he won't be able to get the outfit back together for what comes next."

Gates, 47, has held national security jobs for 25 years, bouncing back and forth between the CIA and the National Security Council. He has been an effective deputy to a variety of top officials of widely varied political stripes.

See GATES, A6, Col. 1

GATES, From A1

But many people interviewed in recent weeks said they are left with questions about this veteran intelligence expert: What does Gates really believe? How strong are his character and integrity? Can he be an honest broker of information, or will he allow his personal views to get in the way of his objectivity? What about his ties to William J. Casey, the late director of central intelligence whom Gates served as deputy in 1986 and 1987?

As prominent as Gates has been in recent administrations, many still regard him as an ambiguous figure.

For example, he is described by friends and co-workers as a man who is cautious but also tenacious and driven, with tremendous power of concentration and an ability to distill vast amounts of information. He will read a 20-page paper, "remember it, and also what was *between* the lines," said one former colleague.

Yet others have trouble reconciling that portrait with Gate's professed ignorance of the Iran-contra affair.

Gates said he knew little of the secret arms sales to Iran and subsequent diversion to the contra rebels in Nicaragua of profits from those sales. He has contended that the operation, which was run by then-National Security Council aide Oliver L. North, was concealed from him, and has maintained that position in the face of new allegations this summer that top CIA officials around him had known of the illegal diversion and withheld information about it from Congress.

"Did he look the other way? He has the burden of showing that he did *not* know," said Rep. Lee Hamilton (D-Ind.), co-chairman of a 1987 Iran-contra probe.

Gates has made clear he supports congressional oversight of the CIA, and has built a close relationship with the chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, David L. Boren (D-Okla.). Yet he seems inescapably

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linked to the legacy of Casey, who disdained the oversight process and misled the intelligence panels about CIA activities.

"What people worry about," said one intelligence officer, "is that Gates is the son of Casey, and that if we make him the director, what will spring forth is not the self-effacing intellectual that he purports to be but in fact the reincarnation of William Casey. You have to begin with the self-evident truth: Casey picked Gates, and he picked Gates because he saw in Gates something he wanted."

It is unclear what Gates really thinks of Casey's performance as director. In 1987, when Gates first appeared before Congress trying to win confirmation as director of central intelligence after Casey's death in May of that year, he said the nation owed Casey a debt of gratitude for serving "his country long and with distinction." Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.) asked Gates if he would vote for Casey if Casey were up for reappointment, and Gates replied, "Yes sir, I would."

Yet seven months later, after Gates had withdrawn his nomination, he said something to a Washington reporter that he has not said publicly. "Casey was in contempt of Congress from day one," Gates said, according to notes of the conversation with the reporter, who asked not to be identified.

From the time Gates's name was withdrawn from consideration as CIA chief in 1987 amid the growing controversy over the Iran-contra affair, he has spent four years rebuilding his reputation with Congress. When Bush nominated Gates in May, he said Gates's performance as a White House adviser had been exemplary, citing his role in the Persian Gulf War and the Panama invasion. Gates "performed with wisdom and precision in laying out the options for presidential action," Bush said.

In addition, Gates took on such leadership tasks as chairing the "dep-

uties committee" of the National Security Council. National security adviser Brent Scowcroft said yesterday on ABC's "This Week With David Brinkley" that Gates's White House experience makes him "uniquely qualified to go back to CIA and say: 'Look, you guys aren't doing it right. This is what the president needs to know, not this.' He has a broad perspective that I think is unusual and perhaps almost unique for directors of central intelligence."

Retired admiral Bobby Ray Inman, head of the president's Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board, said, "In the world that looms in front of us, with the just unbelievable pace of change, the job cries out for strong analytical skills and a disciplined mind. He is the man for the job at this time."

Gates also has support from John McMahon, a former key agency official and Casey deputy who is

reported to have quit the CIA in part because he disagreed with Casey's handling of the Iran-contra affair. McMahon said he is satisfied by Gates's explanation of his actions in Iran-contra. "I think that Bob reacted when he had enough information to suggest that something ought to be done. I'm a supporter of Gates," McMahon said.

Others are not so sure.

"The issue is his veracity and his judgment," said Thomas Polgar, a 30-year CIA veteran who retired in 1981 and later worked for Congress's Iran-contra probes. "Is this a man who under fire can be trusted to tell the truth? Is this a man who, when the circumstances seem to be against it, will remember his obligations and the demands of integrity?"

"If he says he was out of the loop, he is not telling the truth. I know the record and, believe me, I'll cite it," said Polgar, who has been invited to testify at the hearings this week.

Mitchell Rogovin, special CIA counsel under director William E. Colby, said, "He may have been the

best, but he's damaged goods at this point."

Gates, born in Kansas, received a doctorate in Russian and Soviet history from Georgetown University. He began to form strong views about the inadequacy of the agency's analytical work after becoming a CIA analyst in 1966 and after being detailed to the NSC in the mid-1970s where he was exposed to the policy-making side of government.

"He was aware of the shortcomings," said David Aaron, for whom Gates worked at the NSC during the Carter administration. "He and I used to sit around and fantasize about why couldn't we get half the people from Time or Newsweek and have them put out the NID [National Intelligence Daily]—and have no intelligence people involved at all."

Once in 1977, Aaron said, NSC officials were concerned about rising Islamic fundamentalism in Turkey, and Aaron asked Gates for a CIA paper on the subject. Gates inquired of the agency several times, getting

nothing back. Finally, he learned no one had studied the issue.

"He thought it was appalling," Aaron recalled, "and he was more appalled because he wasn't sure that they would even go out and find out about it."

In 1979, Gates returned to the CIA, and rose quickly, becoming head of all agency analysis and later the intelligence estimates. In April 1986, he became Casey's deputy.

During this time he demanded more rigorous reports from analysts and held them accountable for their predictions. He felt analysis should be less wishy-washy, more controversial. "We ought to be right up close to the policymaker and know his worries," he said in an interview. He also believed policymakers should be educated about the limits of intelligence: "They want to know what Gorbachev will do tomorrow and who will replace him. In the Soviet Union in some cases, they don't know the answers themselves."

Throughout the 1980s, Gates re-

See GATES, A7, Col. 1

GATES, From A6

maintained a harsh critic of Gorbachev, who he believed was out to maintain the Communist monopoly and enhance his own power. A draft of the censored 1989 speech, a copy of which was obtained by The Washington Post, was consistent with his earlier statements. Gates critics say he was slow to recognize the importance of the changes under Gorbachev. Supporters say he was being cautious. Gates himself once said, "Intelligence looks at the world through a unique and gloomy prism. Indeed, it has been said that when an intelligence officer smells flowers, he looks around for a coffin."

There were allegations that Casey tried to tailor or distort analyses to fit a political agenda. Senate investigators are examining similar allegations against Gates.

Gates has rejected such assertions. He has written that "cooking" analyses would "transgress the single deepest ethical and cultural principle of the CIA."

Nonetheless, Gates's record is unclear.

For example, on Sept. 20, 1983, then deputy director for intelligence, Gates went before a congressional panel and said CIA analysts had come to realize they had been overestimating Soviet military spending. Later, a friend, Raymond Garthoff, a retired State Department Soviet specialist, observed to Gates that the new agency estimates contradicted the

public posture of the Reagan administration, which was hyping the Soviet threat.

Gates "told me very proudly that he had made the decision himself to go ahead, without checking with anyone higher up. This was analysis, and they would simply present it," Garthoff recalled.

Yet three years later, as deputy CIA head, Gates spoke to the World Affairs Council in San Francisco, and described in great detail Soviet space defense capabilities, calling them "ominous" and "significant."

In that case Gates "definitely loaded it in the direction of supporting the administration's position on SDI," said a source familiar with the speech and the classified data upon which it was based. He said Gates was "silent about other aspects of intelligence that ran counter to his position. That was a selective use of intelligence."

The Casey-Gates era clearly was a period of demoralization for some analysts.

Gates's supporters say such discontent comes from analysts who had trouble adapting to Gates's more rigorous approach. However, just as Gates must demonstrate he was out of the Iran-contra loop, he may also have to distance himself from Casey's alleged interference with CIA analytical work.