

Monolith or Bickering Analysts?

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Hearings Peel Back

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The collapse of the Soviet threat may have deprived the CIA of its major analytic target this summer, but the final days last week of Robert M. Gates's stormy confirmation hearings to become CIA director gave agency analysts another riveting target to focus on.

They watched intently as the televised hearings exposed bitter disagreements over how to analyze the Soviet Union and whether intelligence reports in the 1980s were slanted to political ends. They worried about how such a public airing of the agency's internal disputes would affect morale. They wondered about the organizational changes Gates said he plans to make if confirmed.

"There's just no work getting done out there," said an intelligence officer outside the CIA who described endless telephone calls from friends inside agency headquarters in Langley, Va., who were keeping an eye on broadcasts of the Senate hearings and could not stop talking about the latest charges and countercharges involving the nominee.

With the often conflicting testimony providing an unprecedented public look at the inner workings of the agency's analytic branch, members of the intelligence committee worried about the effect of the proceedings on the agency. "I'm concerned about the damage we've done to the American intelligence system with these hearings," Sen. Warren B. Rudman (R-N.H.), a strong Gates supporter, remarked testily during a break last week.

Others viewed the hearings as beneficial for the CIA in the long run. The agency has been "demythologized," said Sen. Slade Gorton (R-Wash.), another Gates backer. "The CIA is quite evidently not the monolith we were led to believe, aimed at a single goal, a thousand minds working as one in deepest secrecy." Rather, the agency has been shown to resemble hundreds of other bureaucracies with which we "are all too familiar," Gordon said.

Interviews with experts indicate little disagreement about the task ahead for the U.S. intelligence community. William E. Colby, who ran

the CIA in the mid-1970s during highly charged congressional hearings into agency practices, said there will have to be "a considerable amount of effort put into rebuilding morale, to make the commitment again to objectivity, and to end some of the petty feuding that created some of this."

Richard M. Helms, another director from that era, said, "I think it's a mistake to start wringing out towels on this. . . . Agency people are obviously going to be of two minds about this, whether it will be cathartic or whether it will be just baleful. . . . Those who think they'll gain will be happy; those who think they'll lose will be unhappy."

Because agency employees are barred from talking to the press, it is difficult to gauge with much specificity how the hearings have played at the CIA. But retired officers and current members of the intelligence community who have regular contact with the CIA said the three weeks of public testimony that ended Friday were a hot topic inside the agency, particularly the appearances by the several analysts who described the intense polarization in the office of Soviet analysis and alleged that Gates imposed his hard-line views.

"The CIA is such a secret place that everyone within the agency is fascinated seeing it on television—this sort of broad look from the outside, that people on the inside sometimes don't even get," said former national intelligence officer Graham E. Fuller, who testified in support of Gates. Noting the compartmenting of information that usually occurs in the intelligence community, Fuller added: "I'm sure that all kinds of people working in African analysis never knew there was this theological battle royale raging in another corri-

CIA's Veneer

dor."

CIA spokesman Mark Mansfield acknowledged that the proceedings were widely followed in the agency, though he said not to distraction. "We are certainly not oblivious to the criticism of the agency. We read the newspaper and watch the TV news like everyone else.

"But," Mansfield added, "we've also heard a number of senators make a point of commenting on the talent, dedication, and courage of the people who are here, and we've taken note of that. Here at the agency we've learned how to roll with the punches and get on with our work."

One fear expressed by Soviet analysts at the CIA who oppose Gates's nomination is retribution if he returns to the agency. Mansfield rejected this possibility, but Sen. David L. Boren (D-Okla.), chairman of the intelligence committee, felt compelled to raise the issue after a report on ABC's "Nightline" last Thursday that some anti-Gates witnesses from the CIA possibly had been intimidated. According to the broadcast, two CIA analysts—John Hibbits and Carolyn Ekedahl—told colleagues that after delivering sworn written testimony critical of

Gates, they were "told that their careers are over."

A Nightline spokeswoman said the information came "from someone who had been warned not to come on our broadcast." But after the committee checked this with Hibbits and Ekedahl, Boren said the report was untrue and told reporters he had assured Ekedahl he would not tolerate any punitive action against her or anyone else who came forward to the Congress.

There was also concern from agency personnel about Rudman's charges of "McCarthyism, pure and simple" to describe three former analysts who had testified critically without, in Rudman's view, the evidence to back their charges. Said Harold P. Ford, one of those witnesses, in defense of his appearance: "I testified in good faith. I tried to be gentlemanly throughout. I expected

to be treated with courtesy. I was not. I note that Senator Rudman is a member of the ethics committee. That's not my kind of ethics."

Among those said to be most astonished that in the final week of the hearings, the strongest opposition to Gates's nomination appeared to come from the intelligence branch were operations officers who had always assumed their directorate was "the target and the enemy of Bob Gates," according to a retired station chief.

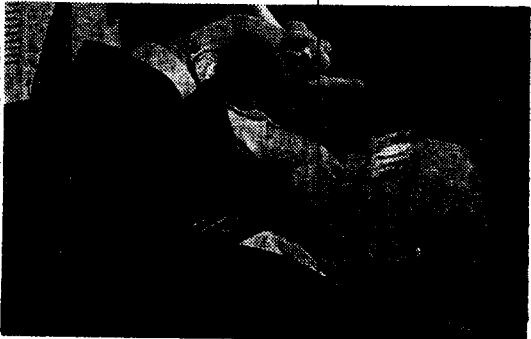
"As it turns out," the officer said, if Gates is "going to be done in, it will be done by the directorate of intelligence," which is the branch Gates come from.

Perhaps the most lasting effect of the hearings will be on how policymakers and many other Americans view the CIA. Said one intelligence officer:

"There has been this presumption that somewhere in Washington there was a cache of secrets that only the president and a few of his chosen minions could gaze upon, and that if only all of us could have looked at, we too would have traded arms for hostages, or supported [Soviet President Mikhail] Gorbachev and stifled

[Russian Federation President Boris] Yeltsin. Now we have looked into the heart—into the soul—of CIA and we have found it is replete with petty jealousies, and they don't always know more, and so much of it is based on intuitive thinking and guessimation.

"Never again can a CIA director walk up in front of the intelligence committee and say, 'Here's a secret estimate' and have somebody take it at face value, and give him \$600 million and say, 'Go play in Afghanistan.'"



SEN. WARREN B. RUDMAN
... worried about "damage" to CIA