

Spy vs. Spy at the CIA

Bitter testimony at the Gates hearings exposes a cold war within the agency

Combative, articulate and hard-driving, Robert M. Gates emerged from three weeks of confirmation hearings before the Senate Intelligence Committee last week with a likely chance of becoming the next director of U.S. central intelligence—but the CIA, the agency he professed to love, will probably never be the same. The Gates hearings, in fact, revealed the supposedly pristine process of intelligence analysis as little more than a back-alley brawl—a game of spy versus spy that was possibly more intense, and certainly more confusing, than the CIA's interminable struggle with the shadowy forces of the KGB. "I have grave misgivings about our intelligence [analysis]," said Democratic Sen. Ernest Hollings. "We've flunked Afghanistan. We've flunked Iran. We have flunked Angola ... Ethiopia ... Iraq, Kuwait. We have flunked ... the fall of the [Berlin] wall."

Hollings, who announced his intention to vote against Gates's nomination, was probably guilty of colorful exaggeration. But there was no disputing that the CIA's directorate of intelligence—the "white," or nonoperational branch of the agency—had lost much of its luster as a haven for dispassionate and scholarly expertise in the pursuit of America's national-security goals. Instead, the agency's army of analysts were depicted, in Gates's own words, as "close-minded, smug, arrogant" and prone to "flabby, complacent thinking and questionable assumptions." The analysts themselves, in turn, accused Gates of playing a pivotal role in the ideological tangle wars that racked the agency during the 1980s, and some claimed that he had committed the cardinal sin for a career intelligence man—suppressing or slanting the secret analysis and subverting the agency's intellectual integrity. "Gates's role ... was to corrupt the process and the ethics of intelligence," charged Melvin Goodman, a former division chief in the CIA's Office of Soviet Analysis. "He was [the late William J.] Casey's filter ... he pandered to Casey's agenda."

Casey, Ronald Reagan's CIA director and the alleged mastermind of the Iran-contra affair, was the real target for many of those who testified last week. One agency veteran, Graham Fuller, a Gates backer,



MARTIN SIMON—SABA

Was the secret analysis slanted? Gates (above) at hearings, witnesses Goodman (left) and MacEachin



JEFFREY MARKOWITZ—SYGMA



MARTIN SIMON—SABA

told the committee that Casey's hard-line views on the Soviet threat in the 1980s created a "counterculture" among rank-and-file Soviet analysts who seemed to "bend over backwards" to compensate for Casey's bias. The dispute over intelligence estimates also was fueled by "clashes of egos," according to Douglas MacEachin, another Gates supporter at the agency.

Nevertheless Gates, who served as Casey's deputy until 1986, was excoriated as an imperious, abrasive boss who at least indirectly intimidated analysts into making their judgments conform to Casey's. Goodman, who was ousted as a division

chief in Soviet affairs in a shake-up Gates went along with, was clearly the most vociferous critic. He accused Gates of slanting a 1985 intelligence report so as to justify shipping arms to Iran—a crucial component in the Iran-contra conspiracy. Goodman said Gates inflated estimates of the Soviet Union's ability to influence the Iranian government and exaggerated the possibility that moderate elements in Teheran were seeking rapprochement with the United States. "It may mean that when President Reagan said he thought he was dealing with a moderate Iranian faction with interest in dealing with the United States, he was acting on the basis of false CIA analysis," Goodman said.

'But feeling': He also charged that Gates personally rewrote a 1985 CIA report on the attempted assassination of Pope John Paul II to support Casey's belief that Moscow was behind the shooting. That theory—promoted in a book by journalist Claire Sterling—apparently fed Casey's taste for conspiracy

theories linking the KGB to events almost everywhere. In fact, however, CIA experts were skeptical that the KGB had been involved in the bungled assassination attempt. An agency review panel later found "serious shortcomings" in the 1985 report, charging that analysts had censored their work and slanted the report to suit Casey's "strong gut feeling that the Soviets were involved."

World events: The worst of it, from Gates's point of view, came when a highly respected agency veteran named Harold Ford testified against his nomination. Ford, who still serves as a consultant to the CIA, had planned to testify in support of Gates. But after reviewing the internal documents collected by the Senate committee and consulting other CIA officers, Ford said he had concluded that Gates's management tactics had "gone beyond professional bounds and clearly constitute a skewing of intelligence." World events, Ford continued, "have proved that the Soviets have for some years been definitely lessening their commitments in Asia, Africa and Latin America, thus validating the earlier judgments that [the CIA Soviet-affairs analysts] made, not those that Bob Gates and his supporters did."

Armed with his own set of documents, Gates walked into the committee room Thursday morning fighting mad. He produced a detailed, 20-point rebuttal of the charges against him, and he implied that his critics were simply malcontents who mistook professional editing of their work for political pressure. He produced affidavits from two CIA analysts who insisted that he had been an "agnostic" on the question of Soviet involvement in the papal assassination attempt and said he did not rewrite the CIA paper on the shooting. He also denied slanting intelligence estimates on Iran, adding that "this allegation—that I allowed a president to get CIA disinformation—is a particularly reckless and pernicious charge."

Gates admitted that he could be a brutal editor of analytical papers and that he routinely wrote scathing comments on their quality. He conceded that he was also a ruthless manager, joking that if his nomination were a popularity contest, "I

sure as hell wouldn't win one at CIA." But he said that his tough-guy management tactics were only an attempt to enforce a "sweeping reorganization" of the CIA's intelligence directorate begun by his predecessor. That reorganization caused "great disruption and a lot of unhappiness on the part of a lot of analysts who found their familiar worlds and surroundings turned upside down," Gates said, recalling that he had bluntly warned an audience of analysts that many top U.S. policymakers had complained of the poor quality of the CIA's analytic work for years.

Gates's rebuttal, coupled with his prom-



J. L. ATLAN—SYGMA

Getting It Wrong

Casey and a legacy of disputed calls (clockwise from below): pro-democracy rally in Moscow, assassination attempt on Pope John Paul II, Khomeini supporters in Iran



OLIVIER REBOT



SIPA



FABIAN—SYGMA

ises to foster the spirit of dissent and objectivity within the agency, appeared to head off the avalanche of criticism that had threatened his nomination earlier in the week. Committee Republicans, mindful of the fact that Gates had been forced to withdraw his nomination as CIA director in 1987 because of questions about his role in the Iran-contra scandal, formed a protective wall around him. GOP Sen. Warren Rudman, who has acted as Gates's defense attorney during the hearings, accused Goodman and other critics of character assassination and "McCarthyism, pure and simple." At the White House, George Bush dismissed the "outrageous assertion" that Gates had slanted intelligence for political reasons and said he had "total confidence" in Gates as "a very honest man [and] a thoroughgoing professional."

Casey's ghost: The bottom line on Gates's future won't be known for weeks, when the Intelligence Committee, followed by the Senate, votes the nomination up or down. Since both the committee and the Senate are under Democratic control, election-year politics is likely to play a part. But so will Gates's performance during his years with the CIA—and so, probably, will Casey's ghost. Senate Intelligence Committee chairman David Boren, who has tried to blunt Democratic attacks against Gates, last week gave the nominee high marks for cooperating with congressional overseers. He said Gates told his committee "things I guarantee you we would never have had hints about when Mr. Casey was in charge."

That was the good part—but as Boren went on to say, Gates still symbolizes one of the most difficult periods in CIA history to many in the intelligence community. While he has convinced many in Congress that he had no real knowledge of Casey's machinations during Iran-contra, Gates has a well-deserved reputation for taking a hard line on the Soviet Union. That could make him the wrong man for a post-cold-war era. Even worse, as last week's hearings suggested, the legacy of bitterness and distrust within the agency may yet prevent him from pulling the CIA together.

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