

# Ex-CIA Agents Said to Complain

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The only two CIA operatives forced to leave the agency in the wake of the Iran-contra affair have told friends and associates they believe they were made scapegoats for more senior agency officials who wanted to protect their own careers.

James L. Adkins and Joseph Fernandez, both of whom worked with the Nicaraguan contras in Central America in the mid-1980s, are said to be particularly concerned about the nomination of White House deputy national security adviser Robert M. Gates to be the new CIA director.

Adkins believes Gates, who was acting director at the time he and Fernandez were first suspended from the CIA in 1987, is a "superb analyst," according to a source close to Adkins. But Gates "is not the guy to run the agency at this time," the source added, because he "did not do the decent, honorable thing and stand up for his men."

In a private letter to a member of Congress after his forced retirement, Adkins wrote, "I was one of the sacrificial lambs . . . identified by my superiors in Washington as the man they were going to throw overboard to placate Congress for the purpose of protecting themselves."

Adkins, a 20-year CIA veteran who now works for a security firm in Florida, has authorized the release of the letter with the approach of Gates's confirmation hearings, scheduled to begin Monday.

Fernandez and Adkins also are said to be resentful that they were left to fend for themselves, including paying for their own legal fees while they were under investigation by Independent Counsel Lawrence E. Walsh, while more senior associates who are now subjects or targets of Walsh's investigation are being aided financially by a network

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## of Being Scapegoats

## in Iran-Contra

of CIA and former CIA officials.

Among those for whom money is being collected are former Latin American division chief Jerry Gruner, former counterterrorism chief Duane "Dewey" Clarridge, and Clair E. George, former chief of all covert operations.

George was indicted Friday on 10 counts, including making false statements to Congress, based in part on his alleged knowledge of the secret U.S. effort to resupply the contras despite congressional prohibitions. The indictment came after Alan D. Fiers, who headed the CIA Central American Task Force, pleaded guilty in July to withholding

information from Congress, including his knowledge of assistance to the contras. Gruner and Clarridge also are under investigation by Walsh.

George, Gruner, Clarridge and Fiers all were direct superiors of Fernandez and Adkins and played roles in their ousters, sources said.

David K. Whipple, executive director of the Association of Former Intelligence Officers, said he did not know why a fund was not started for Adkins and Fernandez, but one factor "probably" was "a degree of involvement" with the contras by the two "that was not present" in the case of George and others.

Both men have maintained that they were carrying out agency policy with the knowledge of their bosses. Rather than supporting them, a source close to both said, "when the heat was turned up, they [the agency leadership] threw them out. . . . They were abandoned as political liabilities."

Adkins became CIA base commander in Honduras in January 1986. Recruited because of his record as station chief in Bolivia and the Dominican Republic and his paramilitary experience in Vietnam, he at first refused the assignment because it would bring him in conflict with a congressional ban against aiding the contras, the Nicaraguan rebel army fighting against the Sandinistas from large bases inside Honduras.

He was urged to take the job by then-White House aide Oliver L. North—with whom he had worked on counterterrorism matters—and by Clarridge, George and Fiers.

Although Congress had barred direct U.S. military assistance to the contras, legislative language approved in late 1985 was interpreted by the agency as permitting the gathering of intelligence for the



**ROBERT M. GATES**

... his hearings are to begin Monday

contras fighting inside Nicaragua, as well as providing them with humanitarian aid, training and secure communications.

In Honduras, Adkins was in charge of 50 agency paramilitary personnel who provided these services to the contras. According to a source familiar with the Honduras operation, Adkins had CIA personnel at each contra base in Honduras to keep track of rebel activities and supplies. He operated a fleet of CIA helicopters and aircraft to deliver non-lethal supplies, supervised training in communications security and his electronic-intelligence experts listened in on the Nicaraguan military.

At the same time, however, North was operating an ostensibly separate, secret operation to provide the contras with arms and munitions that Congress had prohibited the U.S. government to supply.

At the contra bases, Adkins and his men often shared space with pilots and crews of the North resup-

ply operation and spoke with them regularly. Adkins has contended that he had no contact with North, but that he regularly reported his relations with North's agents to his superiors, who knew about and approved his Honduras activities—despite repeated claims in Washington by Gates and others that the CIA did not know who North's people were.

When news stories were published in the midst of the Iran-contra affair, which profits from secret arms sales to Iran were diverted to aid the contras, saying that an Adkins subordinate had aided in an arms supply flight, CIA officials refused public comment. Pressed by Congress, agency officials ordered an inquiry by the CIA inspector general. They reported back that the actions by CIA personnel in Honduras—led by Adkins—were “unauthorized.”

Meanwhile Fernandez, who became CIA station chief in Costa Rica in 1984, helped North's resupply efforts in 1985 and 1986. Agency officials knew as early as Oct. 18, 1986, that Fernandez's name had been compromised by North's operatives. On Jan. 10, after his name had appeared in the press, Fernandez was interviewed by the CIA inspector general about his activities. Three days later, Gates told the chairmen of congressional in-

telligence committees that Fernandez had violated agency guidelines.

But it was not until two weeks after that—after Fernandez had acknowledged his contacts with North's agents to the Tower Review Board investigating the affair—that the CIA moved to suspend him.

On Jan. 22, Gates chaired a top-level CIA meeting where the decision was made to put Fernandez on administrative leave. Three weeks later, Gates—during confirmation hearings on his nomination by Ronald Reagan to head the CIA—told the Senate intelligence committee that he had been informed Fernandez “may have misled” the inspector general.

Despite Gates's insistence that he knew nothing of his subordinates' activities, and that he had informed Congress immediately upon learning of them, he withdrew his nomination after some senators said they would not vote to approve him until the Iran-contra investigations were concluded.

Neither Fernandez nor Adkins believed that the administrative leave they were placed on in early 1987 would lead to more than reprimands or some other public rebuke, sources said. The pattern had been set two years earlier when five CIA operatives, including Fernandez, were reprimanded for their

roles in compiling a contra assassination handbook” that drew congressional criticism and generated an inquiry by the inspector general. After the controversy died down, then-CIA Director William J. Casey promoted all five.

In addition, within weeks after the Iran-contra affair first became public in November 1986, Casey traveled to Central America and awarded Fernandez a medal and Adkins's unit a meritorious service award.

But by December 1987—seven months after Casey's death—the climate under new CIA Director William H. Webster had changed. Adkins and Fernandez were told by the agency that they could resign voluntarily or be fired. Both resigned.

Clarridge and Fiers were given reprimands and took normal retirement the following year. George was permitted to retire with no rebuke. Gruner still works for the CIA.

Fernandez—who was granted immunity by Congress for his testimony—was indicted by Walsh in 1988, but the charges were dropped after the government refused to declassify documents necessary for his defense. Adkins has refused to testify before Congress or Walsh without a grant of immunity from prosecution.