

Committee Approves Gates at CIA

Senate Is Expected To Endorse 11-4 Vote On Bush's Nominee

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By George Lardner Jr.
Washington Post Staff Writer

The Senate intelligence committee voted 11 to 4 yesterday to recommend Robert M. Gates's confirmation as the next director of central intelligence.

The decision sends the long-delayed nomination to the Senate floor, where administration strategists and Senate supporters of Gates expect approval by a comfortable margin later this month unless, as one lawmaker put it, "something new comes in over the transom."

Enough senators had publicly pledged their support of Gates before the vote to make the committee's approval a sure thing, but his backers were still anxious to the end because of uncertainty about the influential vote of Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.). Nunn voted in favor of Gates, but also expressed "serious reservations" about putting Gates in charge of the CIA and the rest of the U.S. intelligence community. Nunn said he was worried "primarily about the signal being sent to the men and women in the intelligence community about how you get to the top in this town."

Nunn also warned that he might change his mind before the floor vote unless he gets "satisfactory" answers to certain questions he has put to the CIA. The senator refused through a spokesman to elaborate.

Yesterday's divided vote boiled down to differences over how credible Gates is, how able he will be to lead the agency in view of the bruised sentiments he left there in the 1980s and how willing he will be to stand up to President Bush, whom he has served since 1989 as deputy national security adviser.

Gates's supporters argued that

while he had made mistakes in the past, he has learned his lessons and been candid and forthright with the Senate committee. They said the most serious charges against Gates, questioning his integrity and management skills, had not been proven. And they maintained that what the CIA needs most now is a knowledgeable intelligence professional who will not require "on-the-job training."

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Opponents contended that Gates has a record of currying favor with his superiors and would not change now. They assailed his stated inability to recall what he was told by CIA colleagues in the mid-1980s about the then-secret diversion to the contra rebels in Nicaragua of profits from U.S. arms sales to Iran. And they criticized as evasive, misleading and too clever his denials of accusations that he slanted intelligence to suit his political beliefs and those of his superiors.

In addition to Nunn, Democrats David L. Boren (Okla.), the committee chairman, Alan Cranston (Calif.) and John Glenn (Ohio) joined the committee's seven Republicans in voting for Gates.

Four other Democrats—Bill Bradley (N.J.), Dennis DeConcini (Ariz.), Ernest F. Hollings (S.C.) and Howard M. Metzenbaum (Ohio)—opposed the nomination.

Administration officials said it was the best outcome they could have gotten after three weeks of tense and often testy public hearings. At the same time, the formal split on a candidate for CIA director was unprecedented in the committee's 14-year history of handling such nominations.

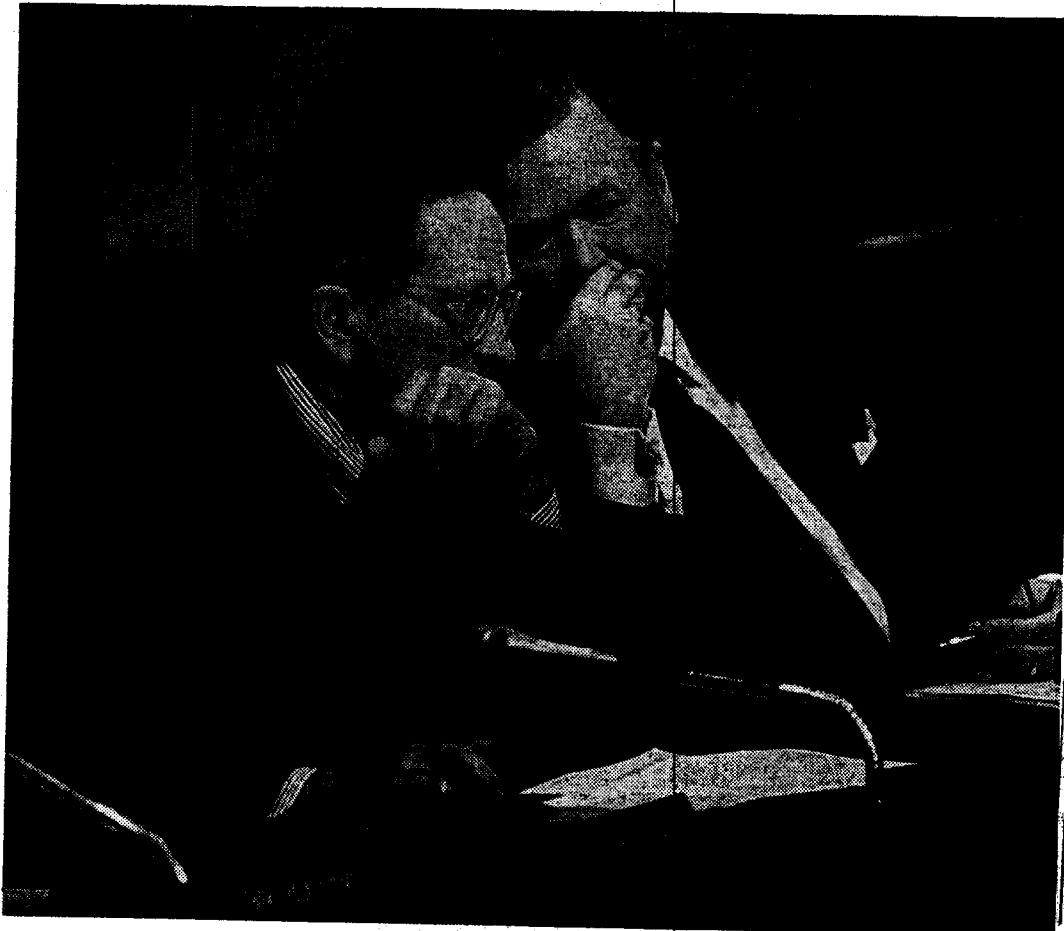
All previous nominations that have been put to a vote—Stansfield Turner, William J. Casey and William H. Webster—have received the committee's unanimous endorsement. In 1987, when first nominated to head the CIA by President Reagan, Gates avoided a vote and withdrew his name after his answers about the Iran-contra affair proved unsatisfactory to committee

members.

The hearings on Gates's second nomination began in mid-September with questions again about his role in the Iran-contra scandal, which he blunted with a contrite apology for not having been more inquisitive at the time. The senators then turned to detailed allegations that he had slanted intelligence reports and suppressed dissent as a high-ranking CIA official under Casey.

Boren and the committee's vice chairman, Sen. Frank Murkowski (R-Alaska), said yesterday they felt Gates, a CIA career officer, could provide the leadership needed to lead the intelligence community

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Committee Chairman Boren, right, and Sen. Nunn, who expressed "serious reservations" about Gates heading the CIA.

BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

through a painful, post-Cold War reorganization that lies ahead. They said they did not think the evidence produced at the hearings sustained charges that Gates had systematically attempted to slant CIA intelligence reports to suit the Reagan administration's hard-line views of the Soviet Union.

"There were simply too many papers and estimates which he encouraged or allowed to be published which challenged the views of Director Casey or President Reagan to sustain a sweeping indictment," Boren said.

At the same time, Boren praised "the courageous [CIA] analysts," many still anonymous, who cooperated with the committee in its

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—Sen. Ernest F. Hollings

inquiry. He vowed to intervene on their behalf "at the slightest hint of retribution."

Murkowski conceded that Gates had an abrasive management style that left lasting bruises at the CIA, but said he has matured since then. "The question is not whether he did everything right in the early 1980s," Murkowski argued. "The question is whether he has grown and learned. . . . I believe the answer is clearly yes."

Hollings disagreed sharply, citing the apprehensions that Nunn, Boren and others had just expressed.

"Anyone listening can tell this is a bad appointment when it has to be explained, when the best of minds says he has serious reservations . . . when the chairman says he promises to take action against the nominee if he doesn't do right," Hollings protested. He argued that "at right this minute, the Central Intelligence Agency has got cancer,"

inflicted by Casey who "resented anybody around the agency that didn't conform."

The sickness, Hollings said, is evident in a long string of intelligence failures on Afghanistan, Iran, Angola, Ethiopia and, most recently, on Iraq's nuclear weapons program which "had to be exposed to us by a defector."

Boren predicted that Gates would be a strong supporter of congressional oversight of the intelligence community, ready to argue with Bush himself if necessary, but Hollings doubted that the CIA under Gates will produce a single briefing to Congress "that's contrary to Bush policy."

Sen. Warren B. Rudman (R-N.H.) also said he was convinced Gates was "no lap dog to this administration" and struck out at CIA employees who, he said, had "tried to influence members of this committee and staff through a variety of mechanisms and techniques which I find astounding." Rudman told reporters later that he was talking about individuals who were for Gates as well as against him.

Bradley summed up his view of Gates in scathing terms, calling him "a man who apologizes for undeniable mistakes, who recalls possible mistakes only when questioned repeatedly in public, refuses to recall or forgets unproven mistakes, admits newly proven mistakes, and finally, who promises to prevent any more serious mistakes."

The nomination is not likely to come up for debate on the Senate floor until late next week at the earliest. White House spokesman Roman Popadiuk said "we are confident and optimistic" about the outcome, adding he was sure efforts would be made to accommodate Nunn.

Nunn, who administration strategists say could make the difference between a 60-vote and an 80-vote majority for Gates, did not spell out "the signal" he thought approving the nomination would send. But informed sources said Nunn was impressed during the hearings by the testimony of former CIA official Thomas Polgar, who charged that Gates's confirmation would tell others: "Feel free to mislead the Senate, senators forget quickly. . . . Your sins will be forgiven, and if the independent counsel doesn't get you, promotion will follow."