

Chairman to Back Gates as CIA Chief

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The chairman of the Senate intelligence committee announced yesterday that he would vote to recommend the confirmation of Robert M. Gates as the next director of central intelligence, guaranteeing a majority vote for Gates when the committee meets today.

Sen. David L. Boren (D-Okla.), long considered a supporter of Gates, made it official in a mid-afternoon news conference, calling the career intelligence officer "well-equipped and well-qualified" for the post. The seven Republicans on the 15-member committee have been solidly behind Gates since May when President Bush nominated his deputy national security adviser to head the intelligence community.

The panel is scheduled to meet today at 9 a.m. and vote after what is likely to be several hours of speeches.

Boren said he felt the CIA and the rest of the U.S. intelligence community needs an experienced insider to guide it through a painful, post-Cold War reorganization that lies ahead. "If we're going to bring about the changes without unnecessary delay, without on-the-job training," he said, "we need someone from the inside . . . prepared to hit the ground running."

Boren said he was also convinced that Gates has "a total commitment" to the congressional oversight process and would continue to argue for it at the White House. The senator acknowledged that Gates has his failings and might even be "considered to be guilty of non-feasance" in failing to pursue early warning signs of the Iran-contra scandal before it broke in 1986. But he said he felt Gates, who held top-level jobs at the CIA in the 1980s, had learned his lesson on that score.

"Once burned, we're perhaps a little more afraid of the fire the next

time around," Boren said.

The eight Democrats on the Senate committee are divided on the nomination. In addition to Boren, Sen. Alan Cranston (D-Calif.), who had been undecided, also declared yesterday he would vote for Gates, noting that "reforms are needed in the CIA and I believe what Robert

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Gates has learned will make him a fine reformer."

But Sen. Bill Bradley (D-N.J.) announced he would vote against the nomination, saying the CIA needs "a new leader who has no association in any way with the abuses of power that took place" during the Reagan years and "someone who will look anew at the world, without the blinders of the past."

Among the other Democrats on the committee, Sens. Howard M. Metzenbaum of Ohio, Ernest F. Hollings of South Carolina and Dennis DeConcini of Arizona have been considered likely to oppose the nomination. Sens. Sam Nunn of Georgia and John Glenn of Ohio have appeared undecided.

While the confirmation hearings focused initially on Gates's role in the Reagan administration scandal that sent arms to Iran and diverted some of the profits to aiding the Nicaraguan contra rebels, they turned in the end on dramatic accusations by former agency analysts that challenged Gates's objectivity and integrity in overseeing intelligence reports. In preparation for today's vote, committee members this week received three bulging looseleaf binders prepared by the

staff and devoted almost entirely to allegations that Gates slanted intelligence to please his superiors, suppressed dissent and intimidated agency analysts with differing views.

Boren said he "did not find any clear pattern of politicization" in Gates's conduct after studying the materials.

The briefing books were organized along the lines of a 20-point rebuttal that Gates delivered forcefully on Oct. 3 to counter the politicization charges. According to committee staffers, the binders contain all the testimony and documentary evidence compiled on each of Gates's 20 points, plus a scattering of other reports that have come to the panel's attention since the close of public hearings two weeks ago.

In making his rebuttal, Gates told the committee his purpose was "to take direct issue with many of the allegations that have been made and refute them." Upon close reading, however, Gates's rebuttal turned out to be a mixed bag, effective in some cases, evasive or misleading on other points,

and silent on still other allegations that were made.

Instead of dealing with all the major allegations made by his critics at the hearings, Gates focused only on those made by his most outspoken opponent, former CIA Soviet analyst Melvin A. Goodman, who sometimes overstated his case. Gates did not address additional or differently stated issues raised by Harold Ford, a retired senior analyst who still does contract work for the agency, and Jennifer Glaudemans, a former junior analyst.

For example, Gates was silent on a charge by Glaudemans that in 1986, Gates ordered the intelligence directorate's Office of Soviet Analysis (SOVA) to submit a study on the proposition that Soviet aid to the Third World might be increasing but when told the figures were actually declining, "he threw [the report] away and said he didn't want to see it again." She said she was informed of this "by a person involved in the project."

One of the new items in the briefing books is a sworn statement from that person, Wayne Limberg, a 10-year CIA veteran who was chief of the SOVA branch that produced the study. According to individuals familiar with his account, Gates ordered the inch-thick report in March 1986 because then-CIA Director William J. Casey had a hunch that aid from Moscow, especially to Marxist regimes in rebel-torn countries like Angola, Nicaragua and Afghanistan, was on the rise.

The Soviet analysts checked it out, compiling a detailed rundown of Soviet economic and military aid over a five-year period, and concluded just the opposite: Soviet support was either stagnant or declining. According to one of the analysts who worked on the report, Gates made plain his displeasure after learning that it did not support Casey's suspicions.

Gates "threw it aside, literally," this former analyst said. "It never saw the light of day."

In his rebuttal, Gates did address charges by Goodman that he had blocked other memos suggesting Soviet retrenchment in the Third World, including a 1982 draft estimate that Goodman said Gates "killed." Gates told the committee that he was "only the deputy director for intelligence" in

1982 and "in no position bureaucratically to kill" a national intelligence estimate. But "on request," he said, "I read the draft and I offered my reaction."

Metzenbaum, Gates's most persistent questioner at the hearings, protested that Gates's response was misleading in that it failed "to convey the true flavor" of the four-page critique he wrote attacking the draft and falsely portrayed Gates as not "much of a player" on the issue.

"I don't think there was anything in that [20-point rebuttal] that suggested that I was saying I wasn't a player," Gates replied. "I simply said that bureaucratically—and I used that word specifically—I was in no position to kill" an intelligence estimate.

By contrast, Gates's rebuttal was effective in dealing with charges that he had personally rewritten the key judgments and summary of a controversial 1985 intelligence report entitled "Agca's Attempt to Kill the Pope: The Case for Soviet Involvement." The charges had come from Goodman who also accused Gates of misrepresenting the study in a transmittal letter to the White House and dropping a "scope note" that explained the assessment was one-sided.

Backed up by sworn statements from four CIA officials involved in the study, Gates denied rewriting the crucial segments or dropping the cautionary note. He said he had emphasized to them that he was "agnostic" on the issue even though Casey's belief that the Soviets were involved in the 1981 attempt to kill Pope John Paul II was well known within the CIA.

The CIA line manager on the project, Lance W. Haus, said he rewrote the key judgments and summary, dropped the "scope note" because it was "wishy-washy," and wrote the transmittal letter that Gates then signed and sent on to the White House. Haus said Gates reviewed all of this, but "at no point did Mr. Gates specify or suggest what our findings should be."

In his responses, Gates frequent-

ly reworded Goodman's accusations, a step that allowed him to deal selectively with some of the issues that had been raised and, at the same time, ignore others. At least five of his 20 points were directed at a single charge of manipulating intelligence to support the arms sales to Iran that some White House officials had in mind in the spring of 1985. The CIA issued an estimate that year warning of a potential for greater Soviet influence in Iran.

While Gates denied the estimate was manipulated to suit the White House, he also ignored a charge, pressed by both Ford and Glaudemans, that in testifying before Congress in early 1987, he continued to justify the arms sales on the basis of the 1985 intelligence estimate—though the agency had long since rejected it as erroneous.

Questioned about this at the hearings, Gates said he gave incorrect testimony "because that's what the administration was saying at the time and I repeated it."

Queried earlier in the hearings about numerous other aspects of the Iran-contra scandal, Gates pleaded a lack of recollection, particularly involving meetings with other agency officials who have testified they told Gates about the diversion of funds to the contra weeks before it was publicly revealed in November 1986.

"The forgetfulness of this brilliant officer, gifted with a photographic memory, does not instill confidence," Ford told the committee, explaining his own decision to speak out against the nomination.

"It's not because I have selective amnesia," Gates told the senators in reply. "It's that I did a major data dump when I left CIA [in 1989]. There was no reason to keep all that information in my mind."

Staff writer Charles R. Babcock and researchers Lucy Shackelford, Ralph Gaillard and Robert Thomason contributed to this report.