

ROBERT M. GATES
... sees internal feud surface

An Opening To the Heart Of the Process

By Charles R. Babcock
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The Senate hearings on the nomination of a new CIA director have expanded beyond the specific qualifications of Robert M. Gates for the job, mushrooming into a debate about the balance, completeness and credibility of the intelligence assessment process that is at the heart of the CIA's mandate.

A parade of former CIA analysts has traded charges over whether Gates tailored intelligence reports to suit the Reagan administration's anti-Soviet views during the 1980s when he served as chief analyst and then deputy director of the agency.

In doing so, they have surfaced a long simmering internal feud over ideological mindsets, and introduced the public to the arcane steps through which secret intelligence assessments are drafted, debated, revised and delivered to policymakers.

Douglas MacEachin, a senior CIA official and Gates supporter, described two warring camps in the CIA's analytical branch that have tended to accuse each other of letting personal bias color their intelligence reports. Those with
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hard-line views about the Soviets, he said, were called "ideological knuckle-draggers"; those with softer views were labeled "com-symp," or communist sympathizers.

Conflicts were especially sharp in assessing Soviet actions in and intentions toward such Third World countries as Iran, Afghanistan and Nicaragua, several witnesses said, and Director William J. Casey's own conservative views appeared to heighten the sense of polarization. "Because of the strongly felt Casey position, I am afraid a counterculture seems to have sprung up among the [Soviet] analysts . . . [who] seemed to bend over backwards to compensate," Graham E. Fuller, a senior official in the mid-1980s, told the Senate panel this week.

The name calling has had more significance than academic bickering because of its potential effect on intelligence products. As Sen. David L. Boren (D-Okla.), chairman of the Senate intelligence committee, put it: "If the analysis of intelligence information is slanted or misrepresented . . . then what use are all the resources, costing over the years billions of dollars," committed to collecting intelligence?

The CIA, after all, was set up in 1947 to prevent another Pearl Harbor by objectively analyzing intelligence collected by the military and the State Department without institutional biases. "The director of the CIA is supposed to keep the game honest," said Richard M. Helms, who held the job during the turbulent years of the Vietnam War.

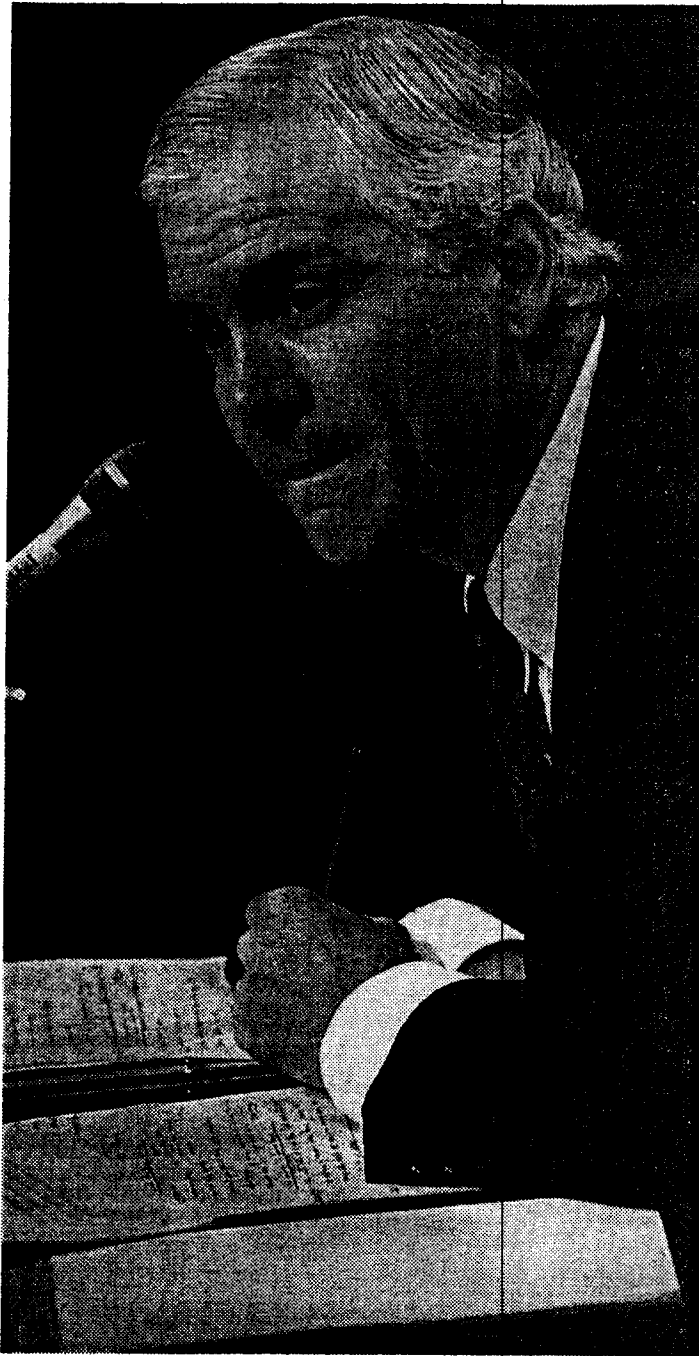
Gates, in defending himself yesterday from charges that he doctored intelligence, reiterated his dedication to the sanctity of balanced, unbiased analysis. He said that, if confirmed, he would take several steps to rid the agency of the perception of politicization.

He recalled the turbulence in the intelligence directorate a decade ago that was caused by a major reorganization—from functional to geographic areas—shortly before he became its chief in 1982. The mandate Casey gave him then was to make the directorate's reports more timely and relevant.

Gates quoted from what he called his "blunt speech" delivered three days after taking the job, in which he said, "I am obligated to tell you that

from the standpoint of many of those for whom you write, our work has long been inadequate and still is not often held in high esteem." Too often, he indicated, agency analysts had misjudged Soviet intentions, noting that in the 1970s the CIA missed the likelihood and significance of Soviet interventions in Angola, Ethiopia, and especially Afghanistan.

The major products of the analytical branch have been the "intelligence assessments" it publishes and the national intelligence estimates (NIEs) that are coordinated by national intelligence officers (NIOs) with other agencies such



BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

At hearing yesterday, nominee Robert M. Gates defends his record at the CIA.

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as the Pentagon, State Department and the code-breaking National Security Agency.

National estimates range from an annual product on Soviet strategic forces to what are called "special estimates" on any topic of interest to policymakers. The controversial 1985 estimate warning about possible Soviet inroads in Iran, a document that White House aides later used to try to justify selling arms to Iran, was such a special estimate (SNIE).

There are currently 11 national intelligence officers on the National Intelligence Council (NIC). They cover six geographic regions as well as economics, Soviet forces, warning, and a category called science, technology and proliferation.

Estimates are reviewed and approved by the National Foreign Intelligence Board (NFIB), made up of the CIA director and the heads of the other intelligence agencies. Only then are the estimates, representing the best guess of the intelligence community, sent to the White House and other policymakers, sometimes with footnotes of dissent.

When the Reagan administration took office in 1981, Casey argued for and won huge budget hikes for the agency, increasing the number of analysts and the number of estimates. His strong

anti-Soviet views led to many of the politicization charges that Gates is dealing with now.

A week after Casey died in 1987, Richard J. Kerr, another Gates supporter who then was the acting deputy director, wrote a memo recommending changes in the estimating process to ensure its "integrity and objectivity." He said at the Gates hearings that he was concerned about the 1985 Iran estimate and an earlier one on Mexico, which Casey tried to influence.

CIA spokesman Mark Mansfield said that several of Kerr's suggestions have been addressed. For instance, Kerr said "we are clearly doing too many estimates." The agency now produces about 30 NIEs and SNIEs a year, down markedly from the 60 to 80 it was doing three years ago, Mansfield said. In addition, Mansfield noted, the directorate of intelligence produces each year about 1,000 hard cover intelligence assessments, research papers and other documents.

Kerr also complained in the memo that NIOs should not draft estimates they are charged with coordinating. Now, they rarely, if ever, do so, Mansfield said.

As the internal disputes aired at the hearings have shown, the murkier the evidence the more likely there will be disagreement and charges of slanting. "The less hard facts you have, the more difficult it is to make an estimate," Helms said.

Fuller noted during his testimony: "In the estimative business . . . we are always talking . . . about intuitions, judgments, gut feelings and experience. We're writing estimates precisely because we do not know and there will never be enough evidence to enable us to be sure.

"Analysts love to say that it's 'too early' to make a judgment. But the policymaker has to make a judgment—and right now, dammit. What are we analysts paid for anyway, they will say. If the evidence was clear of course, we wouldn't need an estimate."

Concerns at the CIA about slanted intelligence persist. John Helgerson, the current deputy director for intelligence, recognized the problem in an internal June 14 memo on the topic of "politicization." He reminded his employees "that we in the DI [directorate of intelligence] do not sanction and will not tolerate deliberate distortion of our intelligence products to match anyone's preconceived views. Clearly, that would be anathema to our mission. . . ."