

For CIA, Hearings' Legacy Could Be A New Beginning or Deeper Schism

Gates's Testimony Arms Both His Supporters and Detractors

By Haynes Johnson
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As an advocate for himself, Robert M. Gates is strong, assured and contradictory. From his mouth comes evidence that could induce senators equally to confirm or reject him as next head of the Central Intelligence Agency.

That is why his confirmation hearings pose so anguishing a dilemma for senators judging him. As Sen. John Glenn (D-Ohio) put it yesterday while Gates returned to testify in his defense, the committee

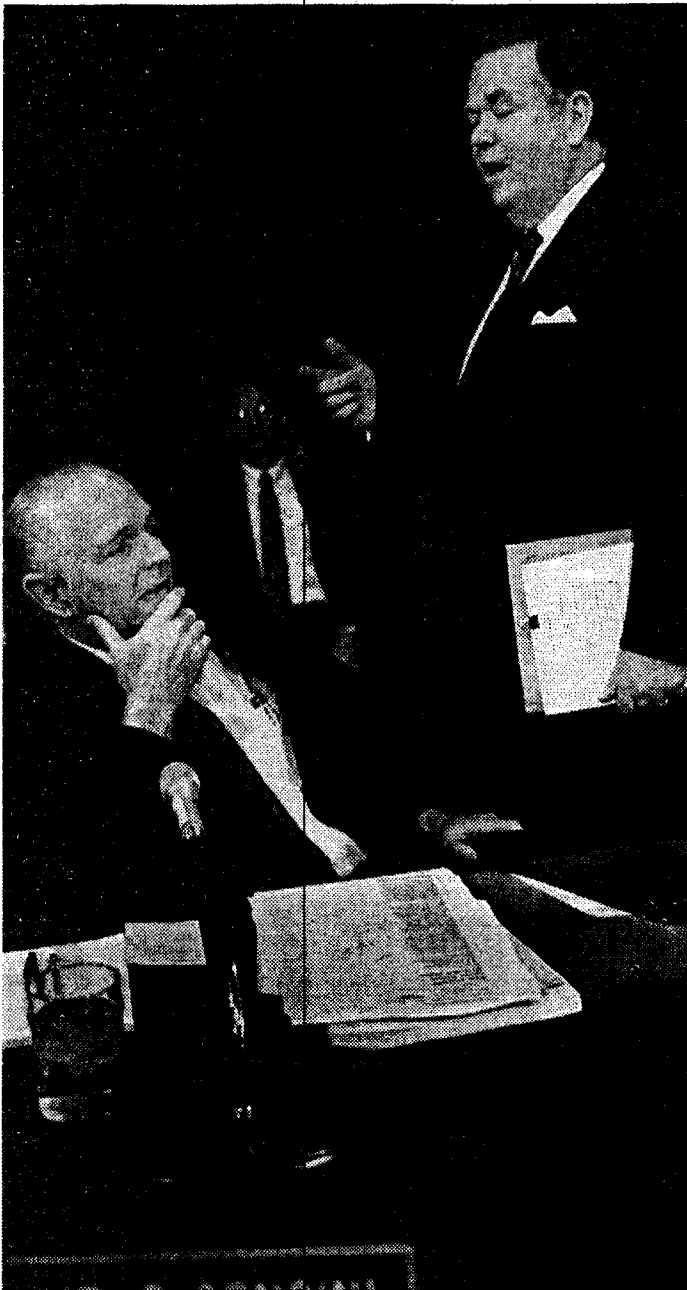
has heard such "diametrically opposed testimony, under oath, by a lot of people" that it might take a "lie detector here to find out what's going on."

The search for truth about Gates is not the only problem confronting members of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence. They also must act, as Vice Chairman Frank H. Murkowski (R-Alaska) said yesterday, like CIA analysts in reverse, "weighing evidence that's before them," trying to determine whether charges of CIA morale problems and politicization laid bare by the hearings are so pervasive that a CIA careerist could not effectively lead the agency.

When Gates got his chance to rebut serious charges from CIA analysts that have jeopardized his nomination, he took the offensive. All charges about politicizing the CIA in the Reagan years—suppressing dissent, manipulating personnel and demanding an ideological party line with disastrous foreign policy consequences—were totally false, he testified.

Not only were they false, he maintained, but also the product of a familiar and universal response from the permanent bureaucracy: a negative reaction to change promoted by strong new managers. The problems, in Gates's view,

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Ascertaining the truth isn't the sole task facing Sens. DeConcini, left, and Boren.

stemmed not from ideology run amok but from disgruntled intelligence analysts "unhappy about too much change from a comfortable, familiar past."

As Gates told it, he was the good guy, the new broom charged with improving performance. "I was appointed to change things," he said, "to improve quality, productivity and relevance, to make analysis more rigorous and intellectually tougher, to encourage alternative views, to rely less on assertion and to make more use of evidence and to be more open about the level of confidence in our sources and in our judgment."

Yet no sooner had Gates said that than he showed a side that critics might interpret as being browbeating or doctrinaire. In his defense, Gates read into the record his blistering speech to CIA analysts in January 1982, three days after he became head of the intelligence directorate. To Gates, this was prime evidence supporting his case. But it quickly became apparent that the speech also could be used against him.

In it, Gates blasted professional analysts for producing material "ir-

relevant or untimely or unfocused or both," for failing to "foresee important developments or events;" for "close-minded, smug, arrogant responses to legitimate questions and constructive criticism;" for "flabby, complacent thinking and questionable assumptions combined with an intolerance of others' views;" for "poor, verbose writing," and, among similar harsh fault-finding, for "a pronounced tendency to confuse objectivity and independence with avoidance of issues germane to the United States and policymakers."

No matter how Gates may have intended those words, the CIA bureaucrats could hardly have missed the message. Coursing throughout government in those early Reagan years was a new and strong ideology in which politicization and ideological conformity were at work, not only inside the CIA under Director William J. Casey but also in the Justice Department, in the "brat pack" of true believers who some believed politicized regulatory and other agencies.

This makes the committee's task infinitely more difficult. Members must decide whether Gates can repair internal damage after the divisive, demoralizing Casey-Reagan years or whether esprit and sense of mission would be better served by someone unconnected with that period.

Finally, they must decide whether to accept or reject views of two former CIA career officials, one of vast experience and wide respect, the other a junior analyst who walked away from the internal CIA "mess" in disgust and disappointment.

In the most eloquent statement of the hearings, Jennifer Glaudemans, 32, departed from her text to beg the senators to believe her and other witnesses. "I understand how easy it is to believe that analysts are too finicky, too egocentric, too whiny or too academic," she said. Believe too, she added: "Not only could we feel Mr. Gates's contempt, we could sense his party line."

To Harold P. Ford, 70, the agency's problems can be corrected but not by Gates, who is "part of the problem and not part of the solution." In the single most damaging remark about Gates, Ford added: "What is needed, in my personal view, is a director of national stature, and there are many such people in American life. I wish the president had nominated such a person."

In Gates, the senators have a career CIA analyst who would become the first director to rise from the analytic branch rather than the covert side that has created problems

for the agency. Yet the hearings have brought sharply into question Gates's analysis of key international events upon which U.S. policy was based in the 1980s.

In Gates, they also have someone close to a powerful president who has pledged a more cooperative relationship with the congressional oversight committee to which lies were told repeatedly during the Reagan years.

As he has promised under oath, Gates could become part of a new beginning between White House and Congress. Or, and this adds to the panel's dilemma, he could become, as his critics say, a director who would further divide the CIA as it grapples with the vastly changed world of the 1990s and beyond.