

Gates Cited White House Line on Iran

CIA Nominee Admits Incorrect Testimony In 1987 Hearing

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Concluding his testimony at hearings on his nomination to be CIA director, Robert M. Gates said yesterday that he gave incorrect testimony four years ago in defense of the Reagan administration's secret arms sales to Iran "because that's what the administration was saying at the time and I repeated it."

Gates told a closed session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee in January 1987 that the threat of Soviet inroads in Iran was one of the major reasons for the Reagan administration's decision to sell arms to Iran. But Gates told the Senate intelligence committee yesterday that he is now convinced "the primary motive for the opening to Iran was to get the hostages out."

The committee ended three weeks of sometimes volatile public hearings after a final round of questioning Gates about his veracity, independence, plans for streamlining the U.S. intelligence community and detailed attempt to refute charges that he had politicized the CIA's intelligence directorate as a high-ranking agency official from 1982 to 1989.

Committee Chairman David L. Boren (D-Okla.) ordered a thorough staff review of the 20-point rebuttal Gates read to the committee Thursday. Sens. Howard M. Metzenbaum (D-Ohio) and Dennis DeConcini (D-Ariz.) challenged several of Gates's explanations.

"You did it well, to present those 20 points as you did, but I'm not

sure that the record supports it," Metzenbaum told Gates. Metzenbaum, who has been Gates's most tenacious interrogator, cited as an example charges by former CIA analyst Jennifer L. Glau demans that Gates had politicized a study of Soviet influence on state terrorism by Syria, Libya and Iran.

Metzenbaum said there were four basic points underlying her complaint, which Gates had claimed was false. But in fact, Metzenbaum told Gates that in his rebuttal, "you admitted to two of the four points, dodged the third and at least had some role in the fourth."

Gates protested that he had not been paying attention to what Glau demans said, but only to a wider charge on the same subject that had been leveled against him by his most outspoken accuser, former

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senior CIA Soviet analyst Melvin A. Goodman.

Boren said after the hearing that he too wants to make a close comparison of all the testimony and documents before deciding how to vote. At the outset of the session and again in a news conference, Boren insisted that he has not made up his mind, but he praised Gates openly for his firm support of congressional oversight of the intelligence community both as a CIA official and, since 1989, as President Bush's deputy national security adviser.

Calling Gates the strongest voice in the White House for legislative reforms in the intelligence field, Boren said that in his experience, Gates "was not one to salute and say yes to the president. . . . I have observed him really take on not only [White House Chief of Staff John H.] Sununu and [White House counsel C.] Boyden Gray but the president's preconceptions on a subject."

Boren said he decided to laud Gates publicly on that score because of a sharp attack on the nominee late Thursday by Sen. Ernest F. Hollings

(D-S.C.). In announcing that he plans to vote against Gates, Hollings told him: "You did too good a job for [the late CIA director] Bill Casey and it's felt keenly out [at CIA] . . . and that crowd over there [at the White House]—Sununu, the president and everybody else—thinks they own you."

Notwithstanding his praise and past support of Gates, Boren laid out the factors he said would influence his vote, including "the veracity not only of Mr. Gates, but the other witnesses as well" over whether Gates slanted intelligence reports at the CIA to suit the hard-line views of Casey and the Reagan White House. Additionally, Boren said, he would consider whether Gates has matured enough since 1987, when Gates was first nominated to head the CIA but later withdrew amid questions about his role in the Iran-contra scandal.

"You have to determine whether or not what we have seen represents real personal growth or doesn't," Boren said. "Is he telling us what we want to hear or does it represent real personal growth?"

Committee members, Boren added, have to decide whether the massive changes in store for the U.S. intelligence community can best be handled by a career intelligence analyst like Gates or a skillful executive from outside the intelligence community.

"There's going to be a lot of painful transitions, so you have to ask yourself: Is it better at this point in time to bring in an outsider . . . or someone with long experience, albeit with some scars," Boren said.

Boren concluded by saying that to effect a genuine, legislative reorganization of the intelligence community and deal with the post-Cold War world, the new director "has to have the respect and confidence of President Bush."

Administration strategists seemed confident at the end of the public sessions that Gates will win approval by the 15-member committee on Oct. 18 when the panel is scheduled to vote. When the hearings began in mid-September, some of the seven Republican members anticipated a 13 to 2 vote for confirmation, but the

charges that Gates twisted intelligence analyses have eroded his support.

Now there may be at least four Democratic votes against Gates: Sens. Metzenbaum, Hollings, DeConcini and Bill Bradley (D-N.J.). Sen. Sam Nunn (D-Ga.) said Thursday he had switched from favorable to undecided. Public opposition by Nunn could influence other committee Democrats.

At the White House, Bush said yesterday that "I totally dismiss" charges that Gates had "cooked" intelligence estimates. "I know Bob Gates, and I know he would never cook the estimates," Bush said.

At yesterday's hearing, Gates revised accounts he had given Congress and the Tower Review Board five years ago about the origins of the covert sales of U.S. arms to Iran, saying he knows much more now than he did then.

The turnabout on his view of the scandal came in response to questions by Bradley that dealt first with a controversial May 7, 1985, intelligence report on Iran. It said that the Soviets were prepared to take advantage of any disruption in the regime of Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini and suggested that the wisest course for the United States would be to permit West European nations to ship arms to Iran despite a U.S. arms embargo and a companion U.S. program discouraging other countries from sending munitions to Tehran.

That idea was then embodied in a May 30, 1985, special national intelligence estimate [SNIE], which Gates reviewed and approved as the CIA's deputy director for intelligence. Disclosed publicly in early 1987, the SNIE was used to counter critics who were accusing the administration of trading arms for hostages in violation of stated U.S. policy. The paper depicted arms sales as a means of opening up a political dialogue with Iran and made no mention of gaining the release of hostages.

In December 1986, Gates told the Senate intelligence committee that the intelligence report made "no mention . . . whatsoever of any kind of arms deal with Iran," only that "the most promise was trying to build influence in Iran through third parties in the West."

He also testified that he had "agreed in principle with the notion

of an overture to the Iranians and trying to establish some channel of communications with the Iranians."

It was the first of several hearings in which Gates voiced his support for the initiative.

At a closed session of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee on Jan. 21, 1987, Gates testified that the threat of Soviet inroads, expressed in both the May 1985 intelligence report and the SNIE, "was in fact one of the animating factors in the administration's decision to sell arms to the Iranians."

Yesterday he denied that was the case. "I don't think the estimate had any impact" on the White House decision, he told Bradley. "These guys," Gates said, referring to Reagan's National Security Council (NSC) staff, "were not making policy based on what U.S. intelligence was providing them."

Instead, he said, "I think the NSC was getting information about developments in Iran from another source than U.S. intelligence." He later identified that source as Israel, "a country that was interested in continuing to sell weapons to Iran" and contended there were moderate politicians in Iran with whom the United States could deal.

Pressed about why he testified as he did in 1987 before the Foreign Relations Committee, he replied: "That was because that's what the administration was saying at that time and I repeated it."

Bradley: "So you were basically speaking the administration's line, basically?"

Gates: "Well, I was reporting on what the administration policy was. I was saying—I was addressing what their motive had been. Quoting them as to their motive seems reasonable."

Asked what he now thinks the real rationale was, Gates said: "I think the

ed' White House Stand on Iran in 1987



BY RAY LUSTIG—THE WASHINGTON POST

Chairman David Boren lauds nominee Gates for supporting intelligence reform.

primary motive for the opening to Iran, as I look back on it and I have to admit that I know more now than I did three or four or five years ago, but I believe the primary motive was to get the hostages out and that the other considerations were secondary."

When Gates testified at his 1987 confirmation hearing as Reagan's nominee to be CIA director, he told a different story. At that time, Gates said: "I thought that the initiative to establish dialogue with the Iranians made sense. . . . I also believed, cynical as it may sound, that the idea of an exchange of bona fides [the term used for selling arms to Tehran] leading to that dialogue had merit as well."

Nunn reminded Gates of how often Casey manipulated intelligence at NSC meetings to support a policy line. Gates acknowledged that Casey often colored intelligence when he talked about it and, on occasion, aides had to revise his testimony to Congress.

"Did you ever go to the president

and say, 'Watch out—the boss means well, but he goes to far,'” Nunn asked.

“No sir,” Gates replied. “And I don’t think either one of my predecessors did either.”

Both of Casey’s former deputy directors—Bobby Ray Inman and John McMahon—resigned after relatively short terms as No. 2 at the CIA.

Nunn also raised questions about the unusual organizational structure of the U.S. intelligence community, suggesting this may be an important reason for the intelligence failures of recent decades. He criticized the long-standing practice of making intelligence estimates a “consensus” product despite differing views among civilian and military intelligence agencies.

“Why squeeze everybody into one tube?” Nunn asked.

“Senator Nunn, I couldn’t agree with you more,” Gates replied, adding that possible changes in the estimative process would be among his first priorities if confirmed.

Gates said he expects there will be “big personnel and resource decisions” that will be jarring for many employees. Vowing to be “sensitive to people, their concerns, fears and futures,” Gates pledged to engage agency managers in plotting the changes “to ensure that all of the agency family have a role and a stake in the shaping of this new future.” He said the last major CIA reorganization he helped implement in 1982 may have caused much of the current alienation toward him in the agency.

Gates, who first went to work at the CIA in 1966, closed his testimony by thanking Bush for nominating him and appealing to the committee and the Senate “to return me once again to the agency I love and to which I dedicated my life a long time ago.”