

Part 10/3/91

Looking for Gates's Poison Pen

Listening to the hearings, to the agonies, the fights, the constant clashes between the "whining" analysts and the "bullying" managers, you wonder why they bothered even to try to adhere to the motto of the CIA: "Seek ye the truth."

This after all, was the CIA of the Cold War, the halcyon days of Ronald Reagan, when there was a bonfire of the verities every time he opened his mouth. The CIA, using billions of dollars, thousands of PhDs, countless secret agents and who knows how many cloaks and daggers, assembled voluminous reports that the president may well have used as a doorstop. He probably cast them aside in favor of a snippet from the Reader's Digest.

It is George Bush's curious suggestion that Robert M. Gates, who served as deputy to then-CIA Director William J. Casey, should be put in charge of a process that some people in the agency think he corrupted, abused and violated.

The Republicans, of course, are sticking to the Ronald Reagan Rule of Confirmation: It is not up to the nominee to prove that he is qualified; his opponents must prove he is not.

Surely a look at the policies of the Reagan years would prove how "swerved" the intelligence was: Iran-contra, Nicaragua, the endless delay in recognizing that Mikhail Gorbachev was for real and that the Soviets were on the ropes—not the rise, as script-doctor Gates represented.

But the hearings have been cast so that without a picture of Gates with a pen in his hand actually crossing out or inserting words in a draft of an account, say, of the nonexistent KGB involvement in the plot to kill the pope, no one is supposed to vote against the nominee.

There is ample unclassified proof, in the finished product, to show that Gates cut the arms and legs of his analysts to fit into the Procrustean bed of Casey's worldview. The infamous May 1985 memo on Iran, with its heavy breathing about Soviet advances in the area, would be evidence enough. Its author, Graham E. Fuller, a small man with a full beard, came to defend Gates, but in the end only contributed a memorably understated portrait of Casey's slam-bang diplomatic approach—"his passion for involvement," Fuller delicately called it.

Several former employees of the company stepped out to blow the whistle and tell how Casey, not the truth, was master at Langley. Actually,

the struggles between holders of different perspectives on the truth were probably no worse than the rows between reporters and editors that occur daily in newsrooms. The difference is that Langley's judgments cost money and lives, and were tailored to the notions of policymakers who had already decided what they were going to do and just needed some pin-striped prose for cover.

One of the whistle-blowers, Melvin A. Goodman, a lean, bespectacled and pedantic former chief of the Soviet-Third World division, gave riveting testimony, but he was given to fatal digression and absence of data. Although glib enough to do himself in, he had made such a "dump" that he required discrediting.

Sen. Warren B. Rudman (R-N.H.), the Senate's premier prosecutor and enforcer of dubious nominations, stepped forward to do the job. He had eyed Goodman with a stare that would have unnerved an ax murderer all during Goodman's early testimony. Rudman attacked with ferocity, and Goodman, who kept adding charges instead of buttressing the ones he had already made, was soon helplessly floundering, although he never knew it. After Rudman had chewed him up, he was still clinging to the shreds of his claim that he spoke for other disillusioned analysts and demanded a blue-ribbon commission.

"This is not a murder case," said Sen. Ernest F. Hollings (D-S.C.) dryly after Rudman's histrionics had ceased.

The senators liked, and feared most, Harold P. Ford, an old CIA hand who had no bad experiences or bad blood with Gates but opposes the nomination because of what he learned from the hearings. Ford was quiet, dignified, fatherly, obviously free of agenda and malice. His main complaint was that Gates repeated his lies about the "swerved" Iran estimate.

Jennifer Glaudemans—whose bangs and soft brown eyes led the committee staff to call her "Bambi"—quit the CIA after losing numerous fights. In a gentle, quavering voice, she told about her excitement at being initiated into the temple of the spooks, her gradual realization that her best was not wanted. She told of Gates rejecting a paper because "it was inconsistent with U.S. policy." Glaudemans, unlike Goodman, backed every claim with facts.

But Bush, like Reagan, wants somebody who tells him what he wants to hear.