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AN INDEPENDENT NEWSPAPER

## Back to Robert Gates

**E**SSENTIALLY, the Gates hearings pick up where Robert Gates, Mr. Bush's choice as his intelligence chief, left them on Oct. 3 with his 20-point refutation of politicization charges brought by CIA analysts who worked for him in the 1980s. Since then, senators on the Intelligence Committee have been poring over a vast amount of data, and some of their reflections presumably will be aired before they vote on the nomination today. Committee approval was ensured yesterday when Chairman David Boren (D-Okla.) confirmed that he will join the seven Republicans in voting for Mr. Gates. The nominee, he explained, carries Casey-era "baggage" but is able, fills a need for instant readiness and is proven in openness to congressional oversight.

This was the time—at a pivotal historical and bureaucratic moment—for hearings on a new director to focus on the heretofore concealed process of analyzing intelligence. It put an extra burden on Mr. Gates but, from the public's vantage point, a useful one. He managed to dispose, mostly by assurances of greater attentiveness and of close congressional consultation, of charges that he had missed early Iran-contra stirrings. These charges had led us to conclude when he was nominated before that he was not the right man for that moment. His time in the Bush White House has no doubt enlarged his understanding of the intelligence consumer's needs

and the relationship of policy to intelligence. Still, in his confirmation hearings, questions have continued to be raised—questions requiring answers—concerning his record of intelligence management and whether he is strong and independent enough for the top job now.

Mr. Gates quelled many but not all of the doubts in his forceful statement of Oct. 3, although he skipped past some allegations of slanting intelligence to policy. Was he responsible, for instance, for promoting a dubious view of Iran that served Iran-contra purposes (point 16)? Was he dismayingly slow to detect changes brewing in the Soviet Union, his scholarly specialty (point 20)? Questions such as these suggest that the reviews of the Gates record conducted in the Intelligence Committee should be examined in the coming full Senate debate.

It is as relevant as it is rare that a sharp debate of Mr. Gates's fitness has been going on not just in the Senate but among CIA analysts who know his work and style. The nomination has generated argument not only over testimony and expertise, politicization and independence, but also over whether Mr. Gates can gain the confidence of the workforce he is meant to lead. All this will get serious further discussion in the Intelligence Committee today. But more is needed. It still requires further close scrutiny on the floor.