

CIA to open many files, including JFK assassination, if declassified

WASHINGTON (AP) — CIA Director Robert Gates promised yesterday to open secret agency files on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy if Congress and the administration decide to declassify such records.

"CIA will not be found lagging in any broader government effort to review and declassify these documents," said Gates, whose agency is believed to have as many as 300,000 pages on the case.

"There is no indication the CIA had any part in the assassination of President Kennedy. The declassification of documents I think will help persuade people of that," Gates said in remarks to the Oklahoma Press Association in Tulsa.

Gates' comments could make it easier for Congress to answer growing calls for the release of

thousands of sealed documents relating to the 1963 assassination. Debate about the killing was stirred by last December's release of a film by director Oliver Stone contending Kennedy was the victim of a shadowy government conspiracy, primarily by the Pentagon and CIA.

The CIA director said the agency has been kept from any action on its own to open the Kennedy files by privacy regulations and the fact that many of the documents it holds belong to others.

Gates said that in tandem with other government moves toward releasing such documents and in keeping with his new openness policy, all CIA documents about the Kennedy assassination will be

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transferred to a historical review unit that will examine these and other agency files.

He said the unit would act with a "bias toward declassification" but indicated that some documents might still be withheld.

Gates did not say how many documents were involved. But the agency told a Washington district court 10 years ago that it had made about 300,000 pages available to a congressional committee that investigated the assassination.

Rep. Louis Stokes, who was chairman of that panel, is preparing a resolution in conjunction with Sen.

David Boren, D-Okla., chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, calling for release of the files. The FBI, which supplied many of the documents, has indicated some reluctance to go along.

More broadly, Gates said he was trying to make the activities of the Central Intelligence Agency more public "to help people understand better what CIA does and how we do it."

There is concern within the CIA that with the demise of the Soviet Union the agency's mission and estimated \$30 billion budget could be called into question.

Gates outlined a range of steps toward more openness — not just disclosure of whatever secret Kenne-

dy documents the agency has — following recommendations by a task force he established after assuming office last November.

Besides declassifying old documents, the plan calls for giving more speeches and briefings, publishing more information about the agency's history and mission and sponsoring university seminars.

Gates said he would expand the unit responsible for reviewing historic documents, creating 15 new positions to staff it despite the personnel cuts in all intelligence agencies.

The CIA has over the years made public about 11,000 documents related to the assassination.

The historic unit will review all documents more than 30 years old, Gates said, including several events of particular interest to historians — such as the 1954 coup in Guatemala which the United States was widely believed to have sponsored, the Bay of Pigs and the 1962 Cuban missile crisis.

Likely to be of additional interest is

the proposed declassification of National Intelligence Estimates about the former Soviet Union conducted 10 years ago or more.

This could provide valuable insight into U.S. thinking about the Soviet military threat — in light of what has emerged about its strength since the empire crumbled last year.