

# Gates Says CIA To Be More Open And Responsive

He indicates willingness to declassify  
some documents on JFK assassination

By George Lardner Jr.  
Washington Post

Washington

CIA Director Robert Gates announced broad measures yesterday that he said will introduce a new era of openness at the intelligence agency, including a willingness to declassify secret files on the assassination of President John F. Kennedy as well as other historical documents.

Declaring "a real shift on CIA's part toward greater openness and sense of public responsibility," Gates also promised more interviews with CIA officials, greater responsiveness by the agency to media inquiries and expanded agency contacts with colleges and universities.

Speaking in Tulsa to the Oklahoma Press Association, Gates said he recognized that his topic, "CIA Openness," was a seemingly contradictory figure of speech, like "bureaucratic efficiency" and "government frugality." But he said he is determined to open up new lines of communication with the public, the media, the academic world and within the compartmented corridors of the CIA itself.

The drive is part of a move to adapt the CIA and the rest of the U.S. intelligence community to a post-Cold War world where the "enemy" will be more elusive and where public support in a time of shrinking budgets could be crucial.

However, Gates made clear yesterday that there are still substantial limits to how open the CIA will be. In the case of the Kennedy assassination, for instance, the CIA director said that a congressional hold imposed years ago by the

House Assassinations Committee, as well as other restrictions, prevent the agency from releasing on its own many of its records. The CIA has been contesting litigation filed under the Freedom of Information Act to open up its JFK files, reportedly consisting of close to 300,000 pages.

Although Gates said the CIA "will cooperate fully and willingly in any government-wide effort to declassify these documents," some JFK researchers expressed skepticism and challenged his claim that the agency could not act on its own.

Acting on recommendations of a special task force on openness, Gates also said senior CIA officials will be available for interviews and the agency's Office of Public Affairs would provide more background briefings for the media "as

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## PLAN FOR CIA OPENNESS

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opportunities arise," according to a text of his remarks provided in Washington.

Additionally, Gates said he is beefing up the CIA's "historical review unit" to include 15 full-time positions. The unit will be transferred to an agency think tank called the Center for the Study of Intelligence, "where there will be a bias toward declassification of historical documents," he said.

The historical review unit was set up in 1985 as part of a successful CIA lobbying effort to put operational and technical security files beyond the reach of the Freedom of Information Act. Except for declassifying "a very limited volume" of documents from the CIA's history staff files, the results of the unit "have been quite meager," Gates conceded.

He said the enlarged staff will review for declassification all documents more than 30 years old, except operational and technical security files, and all national intelligence estimates on the Soviet Union more than 10 years old. Some reviewers will focus on selected subjects, such as the 1961 Bay of Pigs and the 1962 Cuban Missile Crisis.

It still may be difficult to change what Gates acknowledged

was a deep-set penchant for secrecy at an agency where "for many years, armed guards and physical barriers separated some parts of CIA from others."

Asked, for instance, for a copy of the report of the task force on openness, agency spokesman Peter Earnest yesterday declined to provide it, saying it was "an internal document" and portions were classified.

Gates said he was transferring "custody of all documents CIA possesses" about the Kennedy assassination to the expanded historical unit, including many belonging to other agencies.

Washington attorney James Lesar, president of the nonprofit Assassination Archives and Research Center who has been suing for the JFK files, said he hopes Gates' announcement was "not just a public relations gesture."

Of the roughly 300,000 pages at issue, Lesar said, only a few thousand are under the authority of the House Assassinations Committee. The CIA, he said, is still withholding many important documents of its own, dealing with subjects such as Lee Harvey Oswald's visit to Mexico City in 1963 a few weeks before Kennedy was killed and Oswald was charged with the murder.