

Gates Has History of Manipulating Intelligence

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Robert Gates, the former director of the CIA during the presidency of George H.W. Bush who was tapped Tuesday by the president to replace Donald Rumsfeld as Secretary of Defense, is part of Texas's good ol' boy network. He may be best known for playing a role in arming Iraq's former dictator Saddam Hussein with American-made weapons in the country's war against Iran in the 1980s.

Gates, who currently is president of Texas A&M University, came under intense fire during confirmation hearings in the early 1990s for being unaware of the explosive situation in Iraq in the 1980s, and the demise of the Soviet republic.

Gates joined the CIA in 1966, and spent eight years there as an analyst before moving over to the National Security Council in 1974. He returned to the CIA in 1980, and a year later was appointed by Ronald Reagan to serve as deputy director for intelligence. Five years later, he was named deputy director for the agency, the number two post in the agency. In 1989, he was appointed deputy director of the National Security Council and in 1991, when the first Bush administration was in office, he was named director of the spy shop.

During contentious Senate confirmation hearings in October 1991 - which are bound to come up again - Gates's role in cooking intelligence information during the Iran-Contra scandal was revealed. It was during those hearings that senators found out about a December 2, 1986, 10-page classified memo written by Thomas Barksdale, the CIA analyst for Iran. That memo claimed that covert arms sales to the country demonstrated "a perversion of the intelligence process" that is staggering in its proportions.

The Barksdale memo was used by Gates's detractors to prove he played an active role in slanting intelligence information during his tenure at the agency under Reagan. Eerily reminiscent of the way CIA analysts were treated by Vice President Dick Cheney during the run-up to the Iraq war three years ago, when agents were forced to provide the Bush administration with intelligence showing Iraq was a nuclear threat, Barksdale said he and other Iran analysts "were never consulted or asked to provide an intelligence input to the covert actions and secret contacts that have occurred."

Barksdale added that Gates was the pipeline for providing "exclusive reports to the White House," intelligence that was "at odds with the overwhelming bulk of intelligence reporting, both from U.S. sources and foreign intelligence services."

In testimony before the Senate on October 1, 1991, Harold P. Ford, former vice chairman of the National Intelligence Council, described an aspect of Gates's personality that mirrors many of the top officials in the Bush administration today.

“Bob Gates has often depended too much on his own individual analytic judgments and has ignored or scorned the views of others whose assessments did not accord with his own. This would be okay if he were uniquely all-seeing. He has not been ...” Ford said.

At the hearing, other CIA analysts said Gates forced them to twist intelligence to exaggerate the threat posed by the former Soviet Union. Analysts alleged a report approved by Gates overstated Soviet influence in Iran that specifically led the late President Ronald Reagan into making policy decisions that turned into the Iran-Contra scandal.

Jennifer Glaudemans, a former CIA analyst, said at the 1991 Gates confirmation hearings that she and her colleagues at the CIA believed “Mr Gates and his influence have led to a prostitution of [Soviet] analysis.”

Melvin Goodman, Glaudemans’s former boss at the CIA, also said that under Gates, the CIA was “trying to provide the intelligence analysis ... that would support the operational decision to sell arms to Iran.”

Gates testified at his confirmation hearing in October 1991 that he was aware the United States was selling arms to Iran in exchange for hostages. But he denied that he had any knowledge that Oliver North, the former National Security aide, was diverting money from arms sales to Iran to secretly aid the Nicaraguan contras.

But White House memos released at the time showed that North and John Poindexter, the national security adviser at the time, engaged in classified briefings with Gates on numerous occasions about Iran-Contra. Poindexter testified that he discussed the situation with Gates, but Gates said at his Senate confirmation hearings he had “no recollection” about those conversations.

Alan Fiers, a former CIA officer who served as an agency liaison along with North and met weekly with Gates, testified at Gates’s confirmation hearings that he discussed specific details of the covert operation with Gates.

“Bob Gates understood the universe, understood the structure, understood that there was an operational - that there was a support operation being run out of the White House,” and “that Ollie North was the quarterback,” Fiers said at Gates’s confirmation hearing in 1991. “I had no reason to think he had great detail, but I do think there was a baseline knowledge there.”

If confirmed, Gates would arguably be overseeing a war that removed a dictator he personally helped to prop up. Tom Harkin, a senator from Iowa, described Gates’s role in intelligence sharing operations with Iraq during a time when the United States helped arm Saddam Hussein in Iraq’s war against Iran.

“I also have doubts and questions about Mr. Gates’s role in the secret intelligence sharing operation with Iraq,” Harkin said during Gates’s confirmation hearings on November 7, 1991. “Robert Gates served as assistant to the director of the CIA in 1981 and as deputy director for intelligence from 1982 to 1986. In that capacity, he helped develop options in dealing with the Iran-Iraq war, which eventually evolved into a secret intelligence liaison relationship with Saddam Hussein’s Iraq. Gates was in charge of the directorate that prepared the intelligence information that was passed on to Iraq. He testified that he was also an active participant in the operation during 1986. The secret intelligence sharing

operation with Iraq was not only a highly questionable and possibly illegal operation, but also may have jeopardized American lives and our national interests. The photo reconnaissance, highly sensitive electronic eavesdropping, and narrative texts provided to Saddam may not only have helped him in Iraq's war against Iran, but also in the recent gulf war."

Jason Leopold is a former Los Angeles bureau chief for Dow Jones Newswire. He has written over 2,000 stories on the California energy crisis and received the Dow Jones Journalist of the Year Award in 2001 for his coverage on the issue as well as a Project Censored award in 2004. Leopold also reported extensively on Enron's downfall and was the first journalist to land an interview with former Enron president Jeffrey Skilling following Enron's bankruptcy filing in December 2001. Leopold has appeared on CNBC and National Public Radio as an expert on energy policy and has also been the keynote speaker at more than two dozen energy industry conferences around the country.

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