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Chorus grows for removal of Casey

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By Damon Thompson
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The future of CIA Director William Casey, who has never enjoyed great popularity with Congress, could be in increasing jeopardy as investigators find evidence that his agency played a more important role than earlier believed in arms shipments to Iran.

Lawmakers have begun calling for Mr. Casey's resignation in the wake of new reports on the CIA's participation in the shipments as well the transfer of proceeds from the Iranian sale to support the Nicaraguan resistance.

"With Casey, there's a general impression that he held the knowledge and was heavily involved," said Rep. Robert G. Torrecelli, New Jersey Democrat, who yesterday joined the ranks of those seeking Mr. Casey's resignation.

"For a secret organization to be effective, people must have the highest confidence in the head of that organization," said Mr. Torricelli, a member of the House Foreign Affairs Committee. "Mr. Casey has lost that confidence."

Congress was not informed of the Iran shipments or any role the CIA played in them until after an Iranian official revealed details last month.

Mr. Casey contended a secret "finding" signed by President Reagan on Jan. 17 forbade him from informing Congress at the time. Since then, the administration has said Mr. Casey and the CIA were not deeply involved in the deals. Mr. Casey testified Nov. 21 that his agency played only a peripheral role.

Since then, however, a number of revelations have cast doubt on such assertions.

The Los Angeles Times recently reported that Mr. Casey ordered the agency to provide "logistic" support for U.S.-Israeli shipments to Iran in November 1985.

In his Nov. 21 testimony, Mr. Casey told House and Senate intelligence committees that John N. McMahon, the agency's deputy director for operations at the time of the shipment, approved it without his knowledge. But the Los Angeles Times, quoting unidentified sources, reported Mr. Casey has since admitted giving his approval.

According to other reports, the proceeds that went to the Contras were "co-mingled" with U.S. and Saudi funds to aid the Afghan resistance in a CIA-run Swiss bank account.

According to one account, the funds were placed there temporarily by a low- or mid-level CIA employee.

CIA spokesman George Lauder denied the report Wednesday, saying just $12 million of the arms-sales proceeds — the amount owed the Pentagon — were funneled through the account.

In still another new development, The Wall Street Journal yesterday reported that the CIA used Zaire, which gets military equipment from both the United States and Israel, as a staging ground for shipments of weapons to Iran.

Sen. Joseph Biden, Delaware Democrat, on Wednesday called for the resignations of Mr. Casey and White House Chief of Staff Donald Regan.

"I believe that Casey and the chief of staff will serve the president best by no longer serving him," Mr. Biden told the National League of Cities in San Antonio.

A day earlier, a noted Republican — Sen. Richard Lugar, outgoing chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said Mr. Reagan should fire Mr. Casey.

"There are a lot of Republicans who have never been enthusiastic about Bill Casey," one GOP congressional source said yesterday.

"He's done a good job of rebuilding our infrastructure in our intelligence community, but congressional relations has never been one of his strong points," said the source. "I don't think you'll find a whole lot of Republicans or Democrats coming to his defense."

Mr. Torricelli, a long-time foe of the Reagan administration's policy toward the Marxist Sandinista government of Nicaragua, said Mr. Casey provoked congressional ire in 1984 through two incidents — the CIA-supervised mining of Nicaraguan ports and its approval of a training manual that appeared to advocate killing and kidnapping Sandinista officials.

"People who show disregard for the law do not tend to violate it only once," Mr. Torricelli said. "Under Bill Casey, there has been a consistent disregard for the laws of our country."

But one Democratic committee staff director said it may yet be too early to count Mr. Casey out.

"He's got his critics up here and people calling for his hide," said the staffer. "But he's smart, and he's been around a while.

"The real question is going to be whether the president calls for his hide, and I'm not sure we're to that point yet," he said.

Bill Gertz contributed to this report

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