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Reagan names Gates to succeed Casey

Little 'cloak-and-dagger' on deputy chief's resume

By Bill Gertz
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Robert Michael Gates, President Reagan's nominee for CIA director, has a reputation as an intelligence bureaucrat with a wealth of knowledge about analysis but scant experience with clandestine operations — often considered the heart and soul of the spy business.

A career CIA analyst who specializes in Soviet affairs, Mr. Gates, 43, became acting director last month when William Casey underwent brain surgery to remove a cancerous tumor. Mr. Casey resigned yesterday.

The announcement of Mr. Gates' nomination drew praise from most intelligence experts, with the exception of some critics who felt he might derail Mr. Casey's large-scale covert action programs in support of anti-communist resistance movements.

David Atlee Phillips, a former CIA clandestine services officer, praised the Casey era for what he called "the revival" of both the agency's morale and the funds alloted for covert operations.

But Mr. Phillips said he believed Mr. Gates, who would be the first CIA analyst to become the agency's director, would not provide the same level of support for covert action.

"Since his background is devoid of all covert action experience, we will assume there will be very little of that in the last two years of the Reagan administration," Mr. Phillips said yesterday.

Born in Wichita, Kan., Mr. Gates attended the College of William and Mary and Indiana University. He earned a doctorate from Georgetown University. He joined the CIA in 1966 and then spent three years in the Air Force before becoming a CIA analyst.

In 1971 he joined the U.S. SALT negotiating team as an intelligence adviser, and in 1973 became the CIA's assistant national intelligence officer for strategic programs.

He was detailed by the agency to the National Security Council during the Nixon and Ford administrations and later became an executive assistant to Carter administration National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski.

Mr. Brzezinski, now with the Center for Strategic and International Studies, described Mr. Gates as "a shrewd, experienced professional" who advocated close cooperation between the White House and CIA.

"One of the things he always stressed to me was that the CIA and National Security Council should be natural allies," Mr. Brzezinski said. "I think that analysis will serve him well as DCI."

Former Carter era CIA Director Adm. Stansfield Turner, who chose Mr. Gates as a policy adviser, said the director-designate would have a hard time repairing the agency's poor relations with congressional oversight committees following the Iran arms deal controversy.

"I think the president was right to put someone in there who is fully familiar with what went on," Adm. Turner said. "He's imaginative and he helped me originate many of the innovative things I tried to do for the CIA."

Adm. Turner has been criticized by some former CIA officials for summarily dismissing hundreds of the agency's most experienced clandestine services operators.

Mr. Gates was chosen by Mr. Casey to be an executive assistant in 1981, but later returned to his post as the top intelligence analyst on the Soviet Union.

He became CIA deputy director for intelligence in 1982 and assumed the No. 2 post at the agency last summer.

During confirmation hearings, Mr. Gates supported the administration's large-scale paramilitary programs but noted the agency was responsible only for implementing such programs.

"It [covert action] is a decision made by the National Security Council, and CIA is an instrument by which it is implemented," Mr. Gates told the Senate Intelligence Committee. "And I believe that when that decision is made, the CIA has an obligation to implement it as effectively and as efficiently as possible."

Intelligence sources said suggestions for covert action programs often began with plans developed by the CIA's operations directorate.

One intelligence source, who declined to be identified, said the nomination of Mr. Gates was a sign that agency enthusiasm for covert action has ended.

"The agency will be very, very hesitant to engage in anything with a flap potential unless they have someone like Casey willing to take the heat," the source said. "He was willing to give things a whirl, but I don't think anybody sees Gates that way.

"If I were a covert action operative," the source continued, "I would think about early retirement, or not working very hard until someone is in there who will support the programs."

Another source said the nomination did not have the support of clandestine services branch officials, although a CIA official said Mr. Gates had the backing of CIA Deputy Director for Operations Clair E. George.

Former CIA Deputy Director Bobby Ray Inman disagreed and said Mr. Gates was "absolutely the best appointment the president could make."

"He is the first director of central intelligence from the analytical side," Mr. Inman said. "But I'm comfortable he will call on the depth of competence from inside DDO [operations directorate] to operate it and operate it efficiently."

Senate Intelligence Committee member Sen. Chic Hecht, Nevada Republican, said he would not expect Mr. Reagan to have nominated Mr. Gates without Mr. Casey's full support.

"Bob Gates has big shoes to fill," said Mr. Hecht, who praised Mr. Casey for "rebuilding" the CIA. "He has got a top staff of people at the CIA that he can rely on."

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