

NEWSWEEK  
16 March 1987

# The CIA: A Straight Arrow for Director

## Can William Webster buff up a tarnished agency?

**F**irst there was William Casey, felled by a brain tumor just as the CIA began to be pulled into the deepening muck of the Iran-Nicaragua affair. Then there was Robert Gates, the boyishly handsome careerist whose nomination as CIA director lasted exactly 29 days. When questions about the agency's involvement in the scandal clouded his confirmation hearings, Gates loyally withdrew his name from the Senate's consideration. And last week, as Ronald Reagan scrambled to put the Iran affair behind him, the frazzled spooks at Langley, Va., were alerted to yet another change at the top. This time their leader-to-be was none other than FBI Director William H. Webster, 63, a sternly rectitudinous former federal judge who may be the straightest straight arrow in Washington.

Webster has one known vice—an inordinate affection for tennis. He has many virtues, the most pertinent of which is an unquestioned record for probity and discretion in the enforcement of the nation's laws. He is widely credited with having restored the FBI's morale and reputation in the aftermath of J. Edgar Hoover's 47½-year reign. Though accurate enough, that judgment may be unfair to former Director Clarence M. Kelley (1973-1978), who actually began the complex process of bringing the bureau and its 9,100 gumshoes into the modern era. It was Webster, however, who had the force of character to remove the bust of J. Edgar from the director's office, and it was Webster who, after nine years in the FBI's top job, won unanimous acclaim from Capitol Hill when his nomination to succeed Casey was announced last week. "A superb choice," said Sen. Patrick Leahy of Vermont, a member of the Senate Intelligence Committee and no fan of William Casey. "[I am] surprised and delighted," said Sen. Daniel Patrick Moynihan of



The judge in his FBI office: 'No question' who is in charge

New York. "He is a man of impeccable authority."

Webster was actually Reagan's second choice. The first was former Sen. John Tower of Texas, chairman of the presidential commission whose report on the Iran-Nicaragua affair had, among other things, created a whole new set of problems for the luckless Gates. The Tower commission faulted the CIA for not acting more forcefully to notify the president and Congress when the first rumors of a contra-funding diversion surfaced at the CIA last fall. Gates, who philosophically accepted that he had been "in the wrong place at the wrong time," wrote a four-page letter to

Sen. David Boren of Oklahoma, chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, in which he insisted he had done no wrong. But, he conceded in a letter asking the president to withdraw his nomination as CIA director, the questions about his conduct would inevitably lead to "a prolonged period of uncertainty [that] would be harmful" to the CIA and to national security.

Tower, intent on a European vacation and a new career in the private sector, turned the president down—and Reagan, who was planning to announce his latest CIA nominee before his Wednesday-night speech to the nation, placed an urgent call to Webster Tuesday morning. Webster convened his FBI aides, consulted some of the wise men in the intelligence community and talked to his three children. (His wife, Drusilla, died in 1984.) Then—after leaving the White House on tenterhooks through much of the afternoon—he called the president back shortly after 6 p.m. and accepted the job. His for-the-record comment, before a whirlwind photo-op at the White House, reflected both the hectic pace of the decision and his taciturn public persona. "Too much, too soon," he said with a smile.

**Shadow world:** Assuming that his Senate confirmation is assured, which now seems likely, Webster will take over later this spring as the nation's 14th director of central intelligence. The job in fact is much larger than running the CIA: the director has the responsibility of coordinating the intelligence "product" of 11 different agencies, including the CIA, the National Security Agency, the National Reconnaissance Office and the intelligence arms of all four military services. That means, at the very least, an enormous expansion in the scope of Webster's responsibilities and a sudden shift from the orderly ambit of U.S. law to the shadow world of international spycraft. "The CIA is not an institution of lawyers," growled one agency veteran. "For the troops here and abroad, it's going to be very puzzling." Gates, however, was more gracious—perhaps because he will stay on at the agency as Webster's deputy. "The overwhelming sentiment on the part of [the CIA's] senior management," he told NEWSWEEK, "was... pleasure at his appointment."

Webster's track record at the FBI is usu-

ally regarded as stellar—though it is not entirely unblemished. He firmly established his enforcement objectives, which were counterterrorism, counterespionage, organized crime, white-collar crime and government corruption. He brought more blacks, Hispanics and women into the ranks, and he established an ethos of unswerving devotion to both the letter and the spirit of the law. FBI surveillance of domestic radicals was reduced to a level that seemed to satisfy even the American Civil Liberties Union: at the same time, the bureau succeeded in breaking a number of spectacular espionage cases, such as the Walker family spy ring, under Webster's leadership.

Abscam, the FBI's sting operation against corrupt public officials, led to the convictions of a U.S. senator and six congressmen—and triggered a chorus of complaints on Capitol Hill about entrapment. Webster was politic enough not to persist in such investigations when the Abscam cases were wrapped up. But the bureau botched its surveillance of Edward Lee Howard, the first CIA man to defect to the Soviet Union, and it was slow to detect the treason of Richard Miller, the first FBI

man ever convicted of spying for the KGB.

Despite those difficulties, Webster's admirers are confident that he will quickly succeed in his new assignment. Jim Adams, who served as Webster's chief deputy at the FBI in 1978, described his old boss as a take-charge administrator who delegates authority, encourages dissent—and demands results. "He likes to have the system keep him informed of what's going on," Adams said. "He doesn't cut your head off if you make a mistake, but if you do anything to weaken the credibility of the institution, he's very tough." At the CIA, Adams says, "there will be no question in anybody's mind but that he's in charge." And if the CIA continues to mount "cowboy" covert ops in the future, Adams added, it will be because the new director wants it that way.

**Covert action:** Webster must nevertheless walk a very fine line in the months to come. For one thing, some members of the House and Senate are intensely interested in why he agreed to delay an investigation into weapons shipments to Central America by a charter airline with CIA connections; sources say Webster can testify that he protested the decision by Attorney General Edwin Meese III. More important, how-

ever, Webster will quickly find himself caught in the political undertow that once again surrounds the CIA. On one side are those, like Casey himself, who think the agency must continue to perform covert missions such as supporting the contra insurgency in Nicaragua. On the other side are those like Senator Boren, who wants "more selective use of covert action." Senator Leahy, for example, hopes Webster will "insist on scrupulously objective intelligence analysis . . . no matter what the true believers in the White House, the Pentagon or elsewhere may want to hear."

The controversy over the CIA's role in the Iran-Nicaragua affair, in short, is nothing less than a dispute between Congress and the president over the goals of U.S. foreign policy. Webster will soon be in the thick of it—but unlike Gates, he has plenty of experience in defending his actions on Capitol Hill. He also has a proven propensity for stubborn independence on policy issues—which may make him a tougher customer than either Congress or the Reagan administration had bargained for.

TOM MORGANTHAU with RICHARD SANDZA,  
ROBERT PARRY and ELEANOR CLIFT  
in Washington

## High Points and Low Points: Two Decades of CIA Directors



BRUCE HOERTEL

### William J. Casey

Jan. 1981-Jan. 1987

A veteran of the OSS who was Reagan's campaign manager in 1980, Casey doubled the CIA budget and beefed up its ana-

lytic capacity. His close access to the president enhanced the morale and posture of the agency. Besides building up the contras, he ordered the mining of Nicaragua's harbors in 1984.



SUSAN T. McELHINNEY

### Adm. Stansfield Turner

March 1977-Jan. 1981

One of Jimmy Carter's classmates at the U.S. Naval Academy, Turner scaled back the agency, eliminat-

ing as many as 820 positions in human intelligence in favor of electronic intelligence-gathering capabilities. This hurt morale as well as the agency's image with its international counterparts.



IRA WYMAN

### George Bush

Jan. 1976-Jan. 1977

A loyal Republican who served as a congressman from Texas, who was appointed by Richard Nixon as U.S. representa-

tive to the United Nations and who chaired the Republican National Committee in 1972. Bush is credited with having improved staff morale while keeping the agency out of the news.



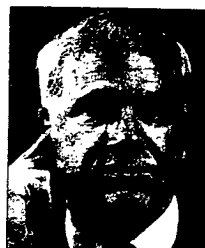
DOWNING-NEWSWEEK

### William E. Colby

Sept. 1973-Jan. 1976

After running Operation Phoenix in Vietnam—a project he admitted had involved some "illegal kill-

ing"—Colby headed the CIA during its most public period. His policy of full disclosure to Congress exposed years of clandestine CIA activities, the details of which shocked the public.



SUSAN T. McELHINNEY

### James R. Schlesinger

Feb. 1973-July 1973

Following stints as assistant director of the Office of Management and Budget and chairman of the Atomic Energy Commis-

sion, Schlesinger headed the CIA until Richard Nixon appointed him secretary of defense. He had begun to reorganize the agency, but his short tenure prevented completion of the task.



SUSAN T. McELHINNEY

### Richard M. Helms

June 1966-Feb. 1973

An OSS veteran and one of the CIA's founders, Helms was the first career spy to run the agency. He headed

the CIA through the peak years of U.S. involvement in Vietnam. He was prosecuted in 1977 for lying to Congress about the agency's involvement in Chile. He pleaded no contest.