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South Africa

Gates, Nominee to Head CIA, Is Facing New Senate Queries, Especially on Libya

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WASHINGTON—Robert Gates, President Reagan's nominee to head the Central Intelligence Agency, faces new questions from the Senate Intelligence Committee—particularly in connection with his role in shaping U.S. policy toward Libya.

Committee Chairman David Boren said no decision will be made on the appointment of Mr. Gates, currently the CIA's acting director, until after a closed-door hearing next Wednesday. But unless the nominee regains some momentum soon, his nomination appears in peril.

Mr. Gates already has faced criticism stemming from the Iran-Contra affair. Now, separate questions have arisen about his role in shaping U.S. policy toward the regime of Libya's leader, Moammar Gadhafi.

Mr. Gates was named acting director after former Director William Casey resigned. He had served as deputy director since last year, and before that he served more than four years as deputy director for intelligence.

Lawmakers are concerned that Mr. Gates acquiesced while Mr. Casey helped promote administration policies by circulating reports about Mr. Gadhafi that weren't fully substantiated. They also want to question Mr. Gates about his role in re-

ported efforts by the administration in 1985 and 1986 to prod Egypt to take military action against Libya.

Early last year, President Reagan approved a secret directive under which U.S. forces would support Egypt in the event of a "preemptive" attack on Libya. Published reports have suggested Mr. Gates promoted this policy as the author of a July 1985 internal memo that spoke of the opportunity to redraw the "map of North Africa."

Through a spokesman, Mr. Gates disputed those suggestions. But unless he can answer concerns in the Senate, his appointment is in serious jeopardy. "This nomination is in serious trouble," said a Senate Republican aide, who had been more optimistic about the nominee's prospects a few days before. "The swing is now against Gates."

The bipartisan leadership of the Senate select committee assigned to investigate the Iran-Contra affair has proposed delaying action on Mr. Gates's nomination. Sen. Warren Rudman (R., N.H.), the panel's ranking Republican, said there was no need to wait until August, when the committee is scheduled to complete its work. But he said that a postponement until at least early spring is advisable to allow the panel time to compile more information.

Sen. William Cohen, vice chairman of the Intelligence Committee, said neither he

nor Mr. Boren wants to delay action on Mr. Gates's nomination until the Senate's Iran-Contra investigation is complete. "Neither Boren nor myself (wants) to leave him twisting in the wind," said the Maine Republican.

A presidential commission headed by former Texas Sen. John Tower is scheduled to release a voluminous report on the Iran-Contra affair this morning.

Mr. Casey appears to have taken the lead within the CIA on the administration's policy in Central America. ABC News reported last night that the former CIA director sought help from South Africa for the Nicaraguan Contras at a time when Congress banned U.S. arms assistance to them.

The report cited a trip by Mr. Casey to South Africa in early 1985, and it said that Southern Air Transport, a Miami-based freight carrier linked to the private supply network for the Contras, had used planes leased from a South African carrier to ferry arms to the insurgents.

The CIA denied that Mr. Casey solicited military assistance from South Africa. And an attorney for Southern Air last night said that the airline's leasing of the South African aircraft was a commercial transaction separate from any involvement the carrier had with the Contras.