

## He Supported Covert Actions

# CIA Job Leaves Bush Open to Iran, Noriega Questions

By DOYLE McMANUS, Times Staff Writer

WASHINGTON—Eight years ago, when George Bush made his first run for the Republican presidential nomination, Bush-for-President bumper stickers suddenly appeared on desks and doors at the CIA's sprawling headquarters in suburban Virginia.

A former agency official recalled his surprise at seeing one of the blue-and-white stickers on a secretary's typewriter in the office of CIA Director Stansfield (Turner) because it was an implicit gesture of disloyalty toward both Turner and his President, Jimmy Carter.

"They liked George a lot," said Ray Cline, a former intelligence officer. "Everybody out there still speaks highly of him."

Bush's popularity testifies to his success, as CIA director more than a decade ago, in restoring morale in America's intelligence service—and to his conviction that the United States must be willing to use covert action to defend its national interests.

But Bush's support for covert action, both as director of central intelligence under President Gerald R. Ford and as vice president under President Reagan, has left him open to the charge that he is blind to the abuses that can result when the government undertakes secret operations.

Democratic presidential candidate Michael S. Dukakis has accused Bush, his Republican opponent, of closing his eyes to improper actions in the Administration's secret sales of weapons to Iran and in the CIA's relationship with Panamanian strongman Manuel A. Noriega, indicted by the United States earlier this year on drug-trafficking charges.

Bush's role in both of those affairs remains unclear. He supported the secret arms sales to Iran but insists that he never understood that they had turned into a swap of weapons for U.S. hostages. And there is no evidence that he knew about White House aide Oliver L. North's diversion of Iranian arms sales profits to Nicaragua's rebels.

In the case of Panama, Bush met with Noriega both as director of central intelligence and as vice president. But he maintains that he never knew about the mounting evidence that the dictator was protecting major drug traffickers, and there is no evidence that he played any direct part in maintaining secret ties with Noriega.

### Rarely Questioned Operations

By the same token, according to current and former government officials, Bush has rarely raised questions about intelligence operations that have sometimes troubled others.

"The reason they had a great love for George Bush [at the CIA] was that he let them do whatever they wanted," Turner, who succeeded Bush as director of central intelligence, has charged. "He came in and said: 'What do you want to do?' And then he said: 'OK, go ahead and do it.'"

A retired senior CIA official who served under Bush dismissed Turner's charge as exaggerated but agreed that Bush was more interested in revitalizing the agency's operations than in putting restrictions on them.

"Covert action" "is something George Bush feels comfortable with," said this former official, who asked not to be identified. "He is a supporter of having that instrument of power available. . . . He will use it as it should be used—as a surgical instrument."

Bush served as director of central intelligence for only 12 months, from January, 1976, until Carter's inauguration in January, 1977. He inherited the CIA at its low point, immediately after a series of congressional investigations had exposed dozens of secret operations, including assassination plots against foreign leaders.

"I wear my directorship of that organization as a badge of honor," the vice president has said. "I think anybody realizes that, in a world as troubled as this, you need the best possible intelligence."

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Intelligence officials who served under Bush said he concentrated on rebuilding the agency's morale and establishing a relationship of trust with Congress. He initiated no major operations.

"You couldn't have much going on," recalled Jack Blake, then assistant CIA director for administration. "We had to report [new operations] to six different committees of Congress, and that was just unworkable."

### Sought to Aid Helms

Bush acted also to shield past agency operations from further exposure. He fought with Justice Department officials who were investigating an earlier CIA director, Richard M. Helms, on criminal charges of lying to Congress about covert actions in Chile.

Bush attempted to block Justice Department requests for CIA documents and testimony from agency officials related to Helms, according to White House documents. But President Ford ordered the investigation to proceed.

Helms, who had falsely denied that the CIA was aiding opposition groups in Chile, eventually pleaded no contest to two charges of failing to testify "fully, completely and accurately" to Congress.

Six years later, as vice president, Bush was the keynote speaker at a testimonial dinner for Helms, declaring his "respect and admiration" for his predecessor's work in building an intelligence agency "second to none." At the same time, he praised the agency for being "fastidious in respecting the law of the land."

Bush's year at the CIA included a first encounter with Noriega, who was then Panama's military intelligence chief—and, according to several former officials, a paid intelligence "asset" to the United States. Even then, there were charges that Noriega was involved in drug trafficking and internal corruption.

But, most troubling to some U.S. officials, was a case in which Noriega allegedly bribed American military personnel in Panama to provide him with highly secret transcripts and tapes of communications intercepted by the National Security Agency, the U.S. government's electronic surveillance agency.

According to several officials and Army documents recently obtained by the New York Times, National Security Agency Director Lew Allen Jr. asked Bush to support prosecution of the soldiers alleged-

ly involved, which could have exposed Noriega's role, but Bush refused. Allen, now director of the Jet Propulsion Laboratory in Pasadena, confirmed that he had met with Bush on the issue but refused to comment any further.

Turner said that, when he succeeded Bush as director of central intelligence, he acted to downgrade the agency's relationship with the Panamanian and stopped paying him for information.

"Whenever Bush was in office, Noriega was on the payroll," Turner said. After Turner took over, "we didn't pay him and we didn't meet with him." But he acknowledged that he had allowed the agency to continue its intelligence relationship with the Panamanian.

"You can't fault Bush for continuing to deal with Noriega; he was the chief of intelligence of a friendly foreign country," Turner said. "But my attitude was that he was a scoundrel, so we dealt with him from a distance. . . . We would give him the absolute minimum."

In 1983, Vice President Bush met again with Noriega, who had risen to chief of staff of Panama's armed forces. By then, officials said, evidence had begun to mount that the Panamanian was protecting drug-trafficking operations, assisting illegal transfers of U.S. technology to the Soviet bloc and even delivering intelligence about U.S. operations to Cuba.

### Noriega Called Liability

Norman A. Bailey, a senior staff member of the White House National Security Council, had written several memos earlier in 1983 warning that Noriega had turned into a liability.

"The Panama Defense Force was up to its ears in gunrunning," Bailey said. "We also discovered that Panama was a major channel for money laundering . . . most of which had to do with drugs."

Little was done about the problem, Bailey said. "There was not only indifference; somebody in the U.S. government was protecting Noriega," he charged.

But he said he did not fault Bush. "I never saw the vice president's name connected to anything on Panama," he noted. "It's entirely possible that he didn't know."

Bush has said he knew of "no hard evidence . . . that Mr. Noriega was involved in drugs" until shortly before two federal grand juries indicted Noriega in February of this year. "When the evidence was there, we indicted him, and we want to bring him to justice," he said in his Sept. 25 debate with Dukakis. "So call off all those pickets out there."

As vice president, Bush has spoken in favor of expanding U.S. covert operations against both terrorism and drug trafficking. And he has supported Reagan's drive to provide secret aid through the CIA to anti-Soviet guerrilla groups in Third World countries from Nicaragua to Afghanistan and Angola—the "Reagan Doctrine."

According to former National Security Council officials, Bush took a personal interest in efforts to aid the Nicaraguan Contras. North, who ran a secret effort to find foreign and private funding for the rebels, told associates that he considered Bush one of his main sponsors in the White House, "the minister for democracy in Central America."

And two members of Bush's staff, former CIA officer Donald P. Gregg and Army Col. Samuel J. Watson III, had dozens of contacts with North and others in the secret Contra-support operation. But Bush and his aides have consistently denied knowing what North was doing.

As for the Iran arms sales, White House records show that Bush attended more than a dozen meetings at which the deals were discussed.

At one of those, in January, 1986, Secretary of State George P. Shultz vigorously opposed the arms sales not only because he objected to doing business with Iran but because he did not want to bargain for American hostages, Shultz has said.

Bush has said that he does not recall hearing Shultz's objections and that he might have questioned the deals if he had only understood their purpose. It was 11 months later, the vice president has insisted, that he first realized that the arms sales had been designed to buy freedom for hostages.

After the sales turned into a scandal, Bush distanced himself from the policy, saying that "mistakes were made."