

Soviet Upheaval Injects Urgency Into U.S. Debate On Intelligence

C.I.A. Lacks Permanent Chief at a Critical Time

By ELAINE SCIOLINO
Special to The New York Times

WASHINGTON, Sept. 1 — The dissolution of the Soviet Union and the humiliating purge of the K.G.B. have injected new urgency into the painful debate over the role of the American intelligence services in a world where the Communist competition has left the playing field.

Even before the tumult that began in Moscow last month, Congress was forcing the Central Intelligence Agency and the military intelligence agencies to rethink some of their priorities — and even their budgets — to adjust to a declining Soviet military threat.

But at this crucial juncture in history, the world's only superpower is without a chief spymaster.

Gates Confirmation Uncertain

William H. Webster ended his tenure as the Director of Central Intelligence today, and Robert M. Gates, the President's nominee to replace him, may not survive grueling Senate confirmation hearings later this month because of questions surrounding Mr. Gates's role in the Iran-contra affair.

Senior intelligence officials concede that they are merely trying to keep up with the flood of events rather than forge a new mission, now that they no longer have to worry about defeating Communism. But they also remain resistant to any reorganization of the American intelligence agencies that would curtail their responsibilities and bring deep budget cuts.

Richard Kerr, who becomes Acting

Director of Central Intelligence on Monday, argues that the instability and uncertainty unleashed by the crisis in Moscow have created new challenges that increase the United States' demand for intelligence gathering and analysis.

"While we may have to live with less because of the reality of our own economic situation and drawdowns in the military, the kinds of problems we face

Continued on Page 7, Column 1

Blocked due to copyright.
See full page image or
microfilm.

Markowitz/Sygma
Robert M. Gates faces grueling
Senate confirmation hearings.

Soviet Upheaval Adds Urgency to the Debate Over U.S. Intelligence

Continued From Page 1

require more information and more analysis, not less," Mr. Kerr said in an interview in his office at C.I.A. headquarters in McLean, Va. "Uncertainty about the Soviet Union and the republics is greater now than it was 15 years ago when you had a relatively stable, unchanging Soviet Union. From an intelligence point of view, that very instability demands a lot more work."

Mr. Kerr's comments appeared to be a pre-emptive move to counter proposals for reductions in the nation's \$30 billion intelligence budget when Congress reconvenes next week. A career intelligence officer, who as Deputy Director for Intelligence served directly under Mr. Gates when he was the No. 2 C.I.A. official, Mr. Kerr may be taking the same stance that Mr. Gates will defend in his hearings. Senator David L. Boren, the Oklahoma Democrat who heads the Senate Intelligence Committee that will question Mr. Gates, has already stated that he expects the nominee to come up with a creative new approach to American intelligence in the next decade.

Adjusting to Soviet Changes

Mr. Kerr insists that the agency has already adjusted resources and reassigned personnel to deal with the unfolding drama in what was once the Soviet Union, and he says the C.I.A. will continue to do so as needed. The agency has also created task forces to study such issues as the future of covert action and counterintelligence needs and

to review the agency's training programs. Since the upheaval in Eastern Europe that began in 1989, more than one-third of the military analysts in the Soviet division have been moved to other areas of the agency.

Long before the crisis in Moscow there were calls by critics and the Congressional committees that oversee intelligence for more comprehensive reform of the intelligence services. The services include not only the C.I.A., which accounts for less than 15 percent of the total intelligence budget, but also an array of military intelligence agencies, among them the National Security Agency, which is responsible for signal interception; the Defense Intelligence Agency, the analytical arm of the Pentagon, and the National Reconnaissance Office, which collects data by satellite.

Proposals for Revamping C.I.A.

The most radical proposal came early this year from Senator Daniel Patrick Moynihan, the New York Democrat, who offered a bill to disband the C.I.A. and put the Secretary of State in charge of the country's intelligence activities. He argued that with the collapse of the Warsaw Pact the C.I.A. "seems mostly concerned with finding new work." Although the bill received little attention when it was introduced, it will help set the terms of the debate.

Proposals under consideration in both the Senate and House committees that oversee intelligence would strip the C.I.A. director of responsibility over the entire United States intelligence-gathering effort and turn that role over to an intelligence czar. Such proposals are likely to gain more support as perhaps the only way to shake bureaucratic resistance to dramatic reform.

Less sweeping is a bid by Senator Boren to eliminate duplication in the civilian and military intelligence agencies and to focus on new areas of concern like economic intelligence and regional conflicts.

Against Radical Change

As part of the argument against making radical changes in the C.I.A., Mr. Kerr and other current and former officials contend that the full-scale reorganization of the K.G.B., the agency's principal cold-war foe, has not affected its first directorate, which handles foreign intelligence, or its second directorate, which deals with counterintelligence. Those activities are the two main areas of responsibility for the C.I.A.

But Mr. Kerr says that the status of the K.G.B. has little to do with the future of the C.I.A.

"Our objectives and our concerns are not connected to the K.G.B.'s fate," he said. "Our concerns are the issues of the future course of the Soviet Union and their implications for the United States. The K.G.B. was just one minor element of that."

But the Soviet crisis seems to have deepened the C.I.A.'s need for both a mandate and a leader.

Mr. Webster earned a reputation as an able caretaker who helped restore public trust in American intelligence but who never defined a dynamic new vision for the agencies that he has headed since his predecessor, William J. Casey, died in 1987. A Senate rejection of the nomination of Mr. Gates

At a critical juncture, the superpower lacks a spymaster.

would mean that the agency would be left rudderless for weeks, and more likely months, until another nominee could be confirmed.

The C.I.A.'s operations directorate whose spies conduct covert activities around the world, is searching for a new mission as the explosion of public information about its one-time arch-enemy makes the collection of secrets less important.

"The fundamental problem of the C.I.A. is not flying planes and listening in," said Morton I. Abramowitz, the new president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace and formerly the State Department's most senior intelligence officer.

"It's analytical," Mr. Abramowitz said. "There has to be a conscious effort to improve the quality of analysis

and to maintain and nurture people who understand the countries and societies we are dealing with."

Complicating the C.I.A.'s problems is the specter of new indictments of current and former officials for their role in the Iran-contra affair, which has corroded morale in the agency.

"What has rather upset some people in the agency," said Richard M. Helms, a former C.I.A. director, "is the way the prosecution has found scapegoats for other people's decisions. You now have people in the agency who are not going to take any chances. They are going to have a lawyer in their hip pocket every place they go."

Supporters of Mr. Gates, an expert on the Soviet Union, say the Soviet breakup has enhanced his chances for confirmation. In the first two years of the Bush Administration, Mr. Gates was the member of the policy-making team who was most pessimistic about President Mikhail S. Gorbachev's chances of fundamentally remaking the Soviet Union, and Mr. Gates's supporters say that many of his predictions about Soviet affairs have been proved correct.

But Mr. Gates's opponents point out that in various statements he predicted that Mr. Gorbachev would probably fail and the Soviet Union would then become an even more dangerous threat to the United States. In a speech in October 1988, for example, Mr. Gates said, "Whether Gorbachev succeeds or fails or just survives, a still long competition and struggle with the Soviet Union lies before us."

If Mr. Gates still believes those words, his critics say, he would be the wrong person to chart the bold new course for America's intelligence.