

Soviet break-up may hit CIA

WASHINGTON, Sept. 16 (AP).

THE CIA is at crossroads. The demise of the Soviet Union has deprived the agency of the heart of its mission for the past 40 years and the congressional budget axe is poised to cut its resources.

The crisis is compounded by a void in the agency's leadership as a result of renewed doubts about the role of senior officials, including the CIA director-designate, Mr Robert Gates, in the Iran-Contra affair.

The agency will likely drop its cloak and sheath is dagger, but officials insist the intelligence community is far from being post-Cold War surplus.

Just as the CIA was born in response to Japan's catastrophic surprise attack on Pearl Harbour 50 years ago, the argument goes, so now intelligence is a vital element to U.S. defence.

"The challenges ahead of U.S. in a world of instability, in a world of real confusion and realignment, are much greater in many ways than... when he had a single, rather straightforward enemy to look at" the acting CIA director Mr Richard Kerr said.

Mr Gates, or whoever is confirmed for the job, will face the mammoth task of revamping the direction of the intelligence community and he'll have a lot less money to do it with.

At best, officials estimate, the budgets of the CIA and more than a dozen of its sister intelligence agencies will be cut by 15 per cent. But it's likely the cuts will be far larger.

The reversal in the fortunes of the intelligence budgets following a 1980s growth of as much as 200 per

cent.

About 30 per cent of the intelligence community's \$ 30 billion estimated budget has until now been devoted to gathering and analysing intelligence on the Soviet Union, officials say.

That figure probably will be cut by as much as 50 per cent over the next five years, said a senior intelligence official who spoke on condition of anonymity.

With the dissolution of the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact and drastic reductions anticipated in the size of the Soviet armed forces, the need for military intelligence was substantially less, the official said.

Already, the defence department has begun to consolidate some of its intelligence organisations to weed out duplication and redundancies, officials said.

And the CIA has transferred about one-third of its military analysts from the Soviet section, the senior official said.

Some of them have gone to work on a project being given increased priority in the intelligence community, a newly created centre, based at CIA headquarters, to track the spread of nuclear, chemical and biological weapons in the third world.

As a result of the disappearing competition from the Soviet Union, the CIA also is reducing its budget for covert activities in support of anti-communist guerillas, officials say. An agreement reached this week in Moscow, for example, would end a decade of CIA weapons supplies to guerillas in Afghanistan.

Despite the decline in import-

ance of military information, U.S. decision-makers still will require political intelligence on developments around the world. More so, say CIA officials, because the world will grow increasingly violent with conflicts expected among the breakway Soviet republics and among the nations of West Asia, and Africa.

Overall, the changing world order hasn't generated much debate about the role of U.S. intelligence.