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# No. 2 man at CIA quits under attack

By Bill Gertz  
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John N. McMahon, the No. 2 man at the CIA, has resigned as deputy director of the agency and will be replaced by Robert Gates, the White House announced yesterday.

"I don't think there's anything sinister about it," said David Holliday, a spokesman for the Senate Intelligence Committee, which was notified of the resignation Monday.

"I think it was his choice and as far as the committee is concerned, he wasn't kicked out or cashiered for some great indiscretion," Mr. Holliday said.

A 35-year CIA veteran, Mr. McMahon, 56, has been under public attack from conservative groups that say he opposes covert military aid to Afghanistan, Mr. Holliday said.

Other intelligence sources said Mr. McMahon, whose resignation is effective March 29, stepped down for personal reasons.

Mr. McMahon also ran athwart of National Security Council officials by opposing a CIA plan to strengthen its internal counterespionage controls with an overseas counterintelligence program, according to an ad-

ministration intelligence source.

Mr. Holliday said the committee has not yet scheduled hearings on the nomination of Mr. Gates, now the CIA deputy director for intelligence and formerly a Carter administration national security official. Mr. Reagan has approved the Gates nomination and it is expected to be sent to Congress shortly, the White House said.

A CIA spokesman declined to comment on the resignation.

A senior administration official, who declined to be named, said Mr. McMahon had become "extremely testy" over public criticism that he had mishandled the administration's multimillion dollar program of covert military aid to Afghan guerrillas.

White House dissatisfaction with Mr. McMahon had reached White House chief of Staff Donald Regan who since last November has re-

ceived more than 10,000 letters from conservatives opposing Mr. McMahon on the Afghan aid issue, the official said.

Another administration intelligence source said Mr. McMahon resigned in a policy dispute over covert aid to Afghanistan and Nicaragua. He opposed the clandestine services plans because he said they could not be sustained properly with political and financial support, the source said.

In part, the McMahon controversy resulted from reports that in a 1980 memo he had opposed administration plans to supply covert military aid to Afghanistan guerrillas opposing the Soviet invasion in late 1979.

Last fall, Mr. McMahon traveled to Afghanistan for a week-long visit to Mujahideen rebel training camps, said the official who added that the trip had been taxing physically for the deputy director.

The official described Mr. McMahon as "a textbook purist" on intelligence policy who favored the use of secret intelligence collection, but who opposed covert action as too risky since its exposure could jeopardize U.S. agents and efforts by the intelligence community to secure

adequate funds from Congress.

At a recent public meeting, Mr. McMahon took exception with a question over whether he had opposed or mishandled the Afghan aid program.

"I've been one of the biggest supporters of aid to Afghanistan," Mr. McMahon said. Pressed for details, he said "I can't discuss it because it's a covert program."

Mr. McMahon could not be reached yesterday for comment on the resignation.

Last October, two conservative groups held a press conference and called for Mr. McMahon's ouster over the Afghan aid controversy.

The Federation for American-Afghan Action and Free the Eagle, charged that Mr. McMahon had failed to ensure that an estimated \$342 million in military aid authorized by Congress since 1981 was getting through to the Afghan guerrillas.

They charged that corruption among Afghan officials prevented more than two-thirds of the weapons deliveries to reach the rebels and that the weapons were militarily ineffective.

Andrew Eiva, director of the Federation for American-Afghan Action, said yesterday that Mr. McMahon had opposed covert aid to Afghan guerrillas since 1980. He charged that Mr. McMahon twice attempted to block congressional legislation on military aid to the rebels.

"Even before McMahon's role surfaced there was an awareness in the land that something was rotten with regard to our Afghan policy," Mr. Eiva said yesterday. "The rhetoric is there, the money is there, the congressional support is there, but the effective aid and delivery was not there," he said. "There was a major breakdown and McMahon provided a lightning rod for criticism."

A senior administration intelligence official defended Mr. McMahon's role in the Afghan aid program and said the criticism resulted from CIA-inspired efforts to mask the agency's role in supplying arms. The CIA told Afghan rebel leaders to state publicly that few arms were reaching the Afghans in order to mask U.S. involvement, the official said.

Staff writer Mary Belcher contributed to this story.

