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SUBJECT  Daniel Schorr Comments on Ethics of CIA Directors

NOAH ADAMS: NPR's Daniel Schorr has observed the careers of Central Intelligence Directors since Allen Dulles in 1953, and Mr. Schorr has these comments on the Gates proceedings.

DANIEL SCHORR: When the shadow world of intelligence meets the sunshine world of politics, the result is seldom satisfactory. For the CIA professional, a public hearing on Capitol Hill tends to be less an exercise in democracy than in damage control.

A dozen or so years ago, an earlier generation of senatorial inquisitors was shocked when former CIA Director Richard Helms told an untruth about the agency's involvement in Chile. Accused of perjury, Helms explained in court that he had not wanted to lie, but had sworn an oath to protect certain secrets.

When James J. Angleton, the former chief of counter-intelligence, was asked behind closed doors why his agency had retained lethal toxins that President Nixon had ordered destroyed, he said it was not his impression that a secret agency was supposed to live by the President's public proclamations.

And when Director William Colby went up on Capitol Hill to testify about CIA abuses, a senior aide advised him, "Just turn up your coat collar and don't say anything. Live it through." Because he didn't follow that advice, Colby has lost a lot of friends in the agency.

The Gates confirmation hearings have displayed once again the code of the shadow warrior, whose ethic is not making waves, not telling all he knows, and sometimes not knowing what

is best not to know.

As William Casey's deputy, Gates said, he left it to the Director to run the unorthodox activities, like Contra aid. He said he had actively shunned information, actively discouraged people from telling us things.

When Gates first got wind of diversion of Iranian arms money to the Contras, his first concern, typically, was operational security, all those disgruntled investors talking. And when Lieutenant Colonel Oliver North made a cryptic remark at lunch about Swiss accounts and the Contras, Gates said he became uneasy, but neither he nor Casey pursued it.

Spymasters are not scout masters. Intelligence careers are not advanced by inquisitiveness about high-level projects. We cannot count on public candor from professionals trained in reflexes of deception and ambiguity.

No other country puts its espionage chiefs through such a ritual. The senators demand accountability. Gates promises to be as accountable as the President will let him. And then, the ritual completed, the shadow world and the sunshine world go their separate ways.