

2 March 1987

FILE ONLY

GATES MEETS BAKER AMID TALK CIA NOMINATION MIGHT BE WITHDRAWN
BY W. DALE NELSON
WASHINGTON

Robert M. Gates met with new White House chief of staff Howard H. Baker Jr. Monday amid increasing talk that Gates might withdraw from consideration to be CIA director as Tower commission criticisms eroded his support on Capitol Hill.

President Reagan's national security adviser, Frank C. Carlucci, also took part in the 30-minute meeting.

George Lauder, director of public affairs for the CIA, referred inquiries about the meeting to the White House, where spokesman Daniel Howard said there had been no change in the status of the nomination.

Before the meeting, Marlin Fitzwater, assistant to the president for press relations, said, "The president stands behind his nomination of Robert Gates to be CIA director. I have seen the stories about Robert Gates' consideration of this matter, but I don't have any direct knowledge of his position." "It's a matter for Robert Gates to decide," Fitzwater said. "The president made the nomination and he thinks it's a good one, and I won't have any comment on that." Monday was Baker's first day as chief of staff. He was chosen by Reagan on Friday to replace Donald T. Regan, whose handling of the Iran-Contra crisis was sharply criticized in the Tower report.

The Washington Post, citing administration and congressional sources it did not name, reported in Monday's editions that Gates had decided "without much prodding" to withdraw his name.

Senate Republican Leader Bob Dole, R-Kan., said Sunday that Gates' nomination "could be in some difficulty" if brought to a confirmation vote soon after the Tower report, and other senators have been even more negative about Gates' chances in the current climate.

David Holliday, a spokesman for Sen. David Boren, D-Okla., chairman of the Senate Intelligence Committee, said the panel, which is reviewing the nomination, had not been informed of any decision by Gates. Holliday said the committee had a meeting scheduled for Wednesday, but had not decided whether to call Gates, a member of the Tower commission or some other witness.

Holliday said that as recently as Friday Gates was sending the committee documents designed to mitigate concerns about his role in a 1985 plan for a joint U.S.-Egyptian invasion of Libya.

The committee spokesman said the material was presented as evidence that Gates had argued against such an invasion in discussions with William J. Casey, then director of the CIA. He said the committee members had not had time to read the material.

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Gates, 43, was picked to head the CIA after Casey resigned in December because of brain cancer.

Reagan's nominee, who held key CIA posts during the period that weapons were shipped secretly to Iran and money apparently was diverted to Contra rebels in Nicaragua, was quizzed about his involvement by members of the Senate Intelligence Committee.

The Tower panel, a three-member board headed by former Sen. John Tower, R-Texas, released a 300-page report last week that was sharply critical of the Reagan administration's handling of the Iran-Contra case.

Until February 1986, Gates was head of the CIA's analytical division, which performs research and produces intelligence reports.