

Webster Steps Down as CIA Director

By Ann Devroy
Washington Post Staff Writer

William H. Webster, who took over the Central Intelligence Agency four years ago with a vow to restore a reputation that had been tarnished by the Iran-contra scandal, has resigned as CIA director, President Bush announced yesterday.

Bush said he has not yet chosen a successor. But in response to a question, he praised a possible Webster replacement, deputy national security adviser Robert M. Gates. "I haven't considered successors yet, but a worthy man, Gates, we all have great respect for him," Bush said at a White House news briefing.

Gates, who served as deputy CIA director under William J. Casey, was President Ronald Reagan's first choice to head the agency after Casey's death in 1987. He was forced to withdraw his nomination because of confirmation problems connected with his own involvement in the Iran-contra scandal, and Webster was selected.

Administration officials said that besides Gates, other possible successors were Robert M. Kimmitt, undersecretary of state; Richard J. Kerr, deputy CIA director; Bobby Inman, former deputy CIA director and former director of the National Security Agency; and Sen. Warren B. Rudman (R-N.H.), a former prosecutor and former attorney general of New Hampshire. James Lilley, a career CIA official now finishing a term as ambassador to China, was long considered a possible Webster

replacement but is no longer mentioned, one senior official said.

Bush "is keeping his own counsel on this. He has candidates you have never heard of," another senior official said, noting the president's delight in keeping secrets and his personal interest in the CIA, where he once served as director.

Bush praised Webster's tenure at the agency, including the quality of intelligence during the Persian Gulf War. Others in the administration had expressed strong dissatisfaction with intelligence gathering during the war, as well as during the invasion of Panama in December 1989.

The president also made clear that Webster's successor will serve, as did Webster, as adviser on intelligence but will not be a policymaker. Webster, Bush said, had followed the guidelines he set down that the CIA "would have the single mission of providing intelligence to the policymakers of this government . . . and that is a very important point, intelligence, not trying to shape policy."

The new director will face congressional efforts to hold the CIA more publicly accountable, and to restructure the relationships among the nation's various intelligence-gathering agencies. Sen. John Glenn (D-Ohio) introduced legislation yesterday that would require confirmation by the Senate not only of the CIA director but also of the five deputy directors and the agency's general counsel.

Senior Bush aides had said during the transition in 1988 that the president-elect planned to put his own man into the CIA slot and several were approached, including Gen. Colin L. Powell, then national security adviser to Reagan and now chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. But Bush decided to stick with Webster, although senior officials have suggested repeatedly over the past two years that the president and other top policymakers had grown dissatisfied with Webster's performance.

One senior official said yesterday that Webster was not directly pushed out of the agency but "there are ways of letting someone know his resignation will be accepted, and one of those ways is the drip-drop of complaint" that had made its way into the press throughout Webster's tenure.

The Washington Post A1
The New York Times _____
The Washington Times _____
The Wall Street Journal _____
The Christian Science Monitor _____
New York Daily News _____
USA Today _____
The Chicago Tribune _____

Date 9 May 1991



CONTINUED

Webster, standing beside Bush at the announcement, said, "There's never an easy time to go . . . it seemed to me that this version of funds from that enterprise to the Nicaraguan contras, but also on his overall knowledge of the affair as it began and continued."

Gates has spent more than 20 years at the CIA, leaving to serve on the National Security Council staff in 1974-79. Returning to the agency, he rose quickly under Casey when two other deputies resigned in unhappiness over what they considered as questionable activities by Casey. Several sources said that Gates, in his current post as deputy national security adviser to the president, frequently had bypassed Webster to bring lower-ranking CIA officials into the White House to brief Bush.

Among the problems the 1987 Gates nomination encountered were questions about his supervision of Casey's testimony during the Iran-contra affair, which was found to be deceptive and misleading by some members of Congress. Other Iran-contra testimony had indicated that Gates was warned in early 1986, long before it became public, of the possible illegal diversion to the contras of money from arms sales to Iran. Gates told senators he recalled no such early warning.

Gates, said to have the support of national security adviser Brent Scowcroft to replace Webster, has campaigned to repair his relations in Congress and with opinion-makers. He has begun making television appearances and routinely meets with the press to explain and defend administration policy. Several senators contacted yesterday said they could support Gates now, but one who played a key role in his derailment in 1987, Sen. Arlen Specter (R-Pa.), was noncommittal.

Asked if he could support Gates now, Specter said, "I am not prepared to answer that question . . . I have had the files [from the first nomination period] pulled and I am reviewing them."

A senior administration official said it is the White House view that Gates would win confirmation. "He has made a great effort to redeem himself," said one official. But a GOP strategist involved in the first Gates nomination said, "I can't believe that the president would want Gates that badly that he would give the Democrats an opening" to probe again Bush's role in the Iran-contra affair.

CONTINUED

8.



President Bush shakes hands with Webster, who was picked to restore CIA's image after Iran-contra affair four years ago. ASSOCIATED PRESS

9.