

Bureaucrat Totenkopf

2010. Acrylic on canvas, 36 x 36"

By
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When Donald Rumsfeld was fired as Secretary of Defense under George W. Bush, Robert Gates was brought in as an old hand, an accepted bureaucrat from former administrations, 'the man who [would] help overhaul President Bush's Iraq policies.'¹ He would breeze through confirmation hearings as "polite and personable" and "enjoy influential protectors on both sides of the aisle."²

However, what was not discussed was Robert Gates' actual history as a bureaucrat.

The real Robert Gates goes back to the Nixon administration. In 1966 Gates entered the CIA career training program. Though it wasn't long before Gates realized that the agency was dominated by World War II and Office of Strategic Services (OSS) veterans and therefore chances to climb the ladder to the top were slim, "unless you were plugged in with political connections."³ Therefore, young Bob Gates found a path. He complained about the lack of advancement to CIA colleague "John T. Smith, whose father was Gerard Smith, [President] Nixon's chief arms control negotiator." That landed Gates an introduction to the elder Smith. A short time later, Gates "was assigned as a CIA analyst to the arms control delegation."⁴

During the Ford administration Gates served on the staff of the National Security Council. He then went on to serve in the Carter Administration as a Soviet affairs specialist under National Security Adviser Zbigniew Brzezinski. Shortly after taking office, Carter approved covert operations smuggling tens of thousands of Korans and radical Islamic literature into Soviet Central Asia to incite religious discontent.⁵

In the fall of 1978, in the mountains of eastern Afghanistan, the United States planned and armed a civil war with the help of Pakistan, Iran and China, and supported by Saudi Arabia and Egypt. It would be "more than a year before Soviet combat troops set foot in Afghanistan."⁶

The following spring, 1979, "with arms and agitators paid for by the CIA and Pakistani intelligence a radical Islamic uprising" took place in western Afghanistan which "led to the slaughter of thousands" including over "200 Russian military and civilian advisers and their families." The Soviets, however, refused to use their military to enter the fray, and conducted telephone conversations with Afghan leaders so the US could intercept the calls, to make it clear to the West that the Soviets were not interested in getting into a military conflict. Yet, "Gates, Brzezinski and Carter were having none of it in what had become a deliberate plot to "suck" the Russians into Afghanistan."⁷

Brzezinski and Gates had now created "a new foreign policy for the United States and put it into action in secret with few co-authors and no parallel. By the time they and their co-conspirators are through," Afghanistan will descend into a destroyed nation-state where "one and a half million" will die, millions will be homeless, and for more the twenty-five years Afghanistan would be a continuous catastrophe.⁸

When Ronald Reagan became President, he chose William Casey to head the CIA. Casey was a mumbling old man and hardcore anti-communist, who had been Reagan's campaign manager, worked in the OSS during World War II, and was former head of the Security and Exchange Commission under President Nixon. Casey had

made his fortune as a business lawyer and publisher of business manuals such as *How to Raise Money to Make Money*, and *How to Build and Preserve Executive Wealth*, low-budget publications that were found in drugstore magazines racks in the 1960s.⁹

When Casey took over the CIA, he and an assistant “had sifted through some personnel files in search of a chief doorkeeper, paper-sorter, facilitator and executive assistant for Casey.” Robert M. Gates, national-intelligence officer for the Soviet Union, who reported to the Director of Central Intelligence, was selected. Gates, a short, gray haired man of 37 with a bright smile and extensive White House experience was the man Casey wanted.¹⁰

Casey liked the unorthodox notion that Gates thought the CIA was too concerned about controversy, too academic, and believed “[c]ontroversy and pressure brought intelligence analysts closer to the policy makers. Intelligence people had to understand the worries of the policy-maker.”¹¹

In 1981 Casey makes Gates head of his executive staff. In 1982, Gates is appointed deputy director for the Intelligence Directorate and tells analysts under him that he wants their “best estimates” and starts to maintain “a ‘scorecard’ of favored analysts that influence promotions.”¹²

Casey requests a National Intelligence Estimate from Gates on “Soviet support for international terrorism” and “support for leftists in Central America.” One analyst called it the beginning of “slanted studies all over the place.”¹³

In late 1982, Gates reports that “leftist rebels in El Salvador depend ‘largely’ on Sandinista arms, citing as evidence a Nicaraguan customs officer who allowed a Volkswagen allegedly carrying such arms to cross into Honduras.” One senior officer for Latin America called the report laughable.¹⁴

In 1983, Gates is named chairman of the National Intelligence Council by Casey, and will oversee preparations of all National Intelligence Estimates. Gates now eliminates NIE footnotes of dissent from Pentagon and State Department analysts.¹⁵

In a December 1984 memo to Casey Gates claims that the Soviets and Cubans were “turning Nicaragua into an armed camp with military forces far beyond its defensive needs and in a position to intimidate and coerce its neighbors.” He labels Nicaragua a “Marxist-Leninist” regime that the United States should be “willing to take all necessary measures (short of military invasion) to bring down that regime.” In 1983-84, the CIA had planted mines in the Nicaraguan harbor.¹⁶

Gates argues that the Contra rebels “will not survive” without aid from the United States. He also recommends a break in relations with Managua, sanctions, quarantine and “recognize a government-in-exile. Then ‘air strikes to destroy a considerable portion of Nicaragua’s military buildup.’” He says, “it’s time ‘to stop fooling ourselves.’” However, in his memoir, Gates claims, “For reason I never fully comprehended, Bill Casey became obsessed with Central America.”¹⁷

Gates was Casey’s “closest deputy, privy to every covert action, and commonly went beyond his nominal role as head of “analysis” in directly recommending policies and actions or ordering and shaping intelligence studies to support whatever policy Casey wanted.”¹⁸

In 1983, 241 U.S. Marines were killed in a bombing of the Beirut Airport in Lebanon. The Marines were part of a peacekeeping force in Lebanon after the 1982 Israeli invasion of the country. It was later learned that the Israelis had advanced warning of the Marine barracks bombing, but raised no alarms to stop it. Yet no one ever knew who carried out the bombing of the barracks.¹⁹

However, Casey, looking for a way to avenge the bombing, and relying on Saudi and Israeli intelligence, targeted Shi'ite cleric Mohammad Hussein Fadallah, who was known for heated sermons about social justice and national independence. Reagan and Casey feared that Fadallah was connected to Shi'ite Iran. However, informed observers and scholars knew that Fadallah was a "voice against Iranian dictates" – Iran even suspected Fadallah of pro-American leanings.²⁰

Though the CIA knew the information on Fadallah was suspect or even false, they carried out a car bombing outside his home in March 1985, killing eighty-one people, men, woman, and children, and wounding 200. Fadallah was not at his apartment – he had stopped to speak to an old woman on the street, which delayed his return home. One of the main figures in the decision to carry out the bombing was Robert Gates, now a self-styled Middle East expert who at the time was Deputy Director for Intelligence.²¹

Afterwards, when Gates was confronted by two analysts about his lack of action on warnings they gave him about the coming bombing in Lebanon, Gates said, "We are not here to pick a fight with the boss. I'm not particularly concerned about some set-to in Lebanon."²²

Also in the early 1980s, when Ronald Reagan was busy playing-off Iran and Iraq against each other in an eight year war, witnesses in the Middle East claim Gates was involved with a secret initiative to sell cluster bombs and chemicals for weapons to Saddam Hussein.²³

After Reagan pulls out of Lebanon in 1984, William Buckley, the CIA's Beirut station chief is kidnapped, and will die a year later. Weeks after the kidnapping, Reagan sets up a secret task force to undertake trading arms for hostages, which will become the Iran-Contra scandal.²⁴

At a National Security Council meeting in August 1985 there is discussion of illegally selling US missiles to Iran through Israel. The Israeli inventory would then be restocked by the Reagan administration.²⁵

In October 1985 a CIA intelligence officer "tells Gates of suspicions that funds are being illegally diverted from some unknown source to the Nicaraguan Contras." Gates is promoted in April 1986 by Casey to deputy director. Later that year Congress begins the Iran-Contra investigation. By the end of the year, Casey has a brain tumor and resigns in January 1987 (and will die shortly after). Reagan picks Gates to be the new director. At his February confirmation hearings, Gates gets pounded with questions about Iran-Contra, and "his implausible claim" that "he had no incriminating knowledge of, or part in, [weapons for hostages] scheme." In March, Reagan withdraws Gates for consideration to the CIA's top job.²⁶

In 1993 evidence surfaced from Russia's Supreme Soviet that in 1980 William Casey, while running Ronald Reagan's presidential campaign against Jimmy Carter, secretly met with representatives of the Iranian government three times, in Paris and Madrid, to discuss delaying the release of American hostages held in Iran until after the November election. The Russians said the participants at the Paris meeting included, "R[obert] Gates, at the time a staffer of the National Security Council in the administration of Jimmy Carter, and former CIA director George Bush." The event became know as the October Surprise.²⁷

Though Gates lost a chance to be director, he would stay in position as deputy under new director William Webster, a scandal-free placeholder to ride out the Reagan administration, and into the early George H.W. Bush regime. In the first Bush White

House, Gates took a position on the National Security Council working under Brent Scowcroft. William Webster retired in 1991 and George H.W. Bush and Oklahoma Democrat David Boren were able to get Gates confirmed as director of the CIA.²⁸

Gates remained at head of the CIA under conservative Democrat Bill Clinton, and there would be one more disaster related to Bob Gates; Black Hawk down in Somalia, where American soldiers were gunned down by warlord-backed gangs who had been on the CIA payroll.²⁹

Bob Gates retired in 1993 under a string of revelations from past and present: the Russian intelligence report connecting him to the 1980 October Surprise; his involvement with selling arms to Saddam Hussein in the 1980s; an inspector general's report of hyperbole in analysis under Gates; and finally, the uncovering of Aldrich Ames and Edward Lee Howard, Soviet moles inside the CIA.³⁰

Many former and current intelligence personnel "believe Gates is essentially a 'chameleon'" adapting to the political environment of the time. "His mild-mannered style also has led powerful mentors to see what they wish to see in him."³¹

Lastly, and even more revealing is the fact that Gates had never experienced any foreign countries or cultures first hand. Though a supposed "Soviet" expert, he had never even been to Moscow until 1989, nor Iraq or Afghanistan until 2006-2007, but was a self-styled Middle East expert.³² Yet, career bureaucrat Robert Gates left in his wake over the decades a trail of death, destruction, and chaos. Therefore, it's only appropriate that his lapel pin would be the totenkopf - death's head.

Notes

1. *Gates confirmed as secretary of defense*, by Anne Plummer Flaherty, Associated Press, December 6, 2006.
2. *The Danger of Keeping Robert Gates*, by Robert Parry, Consortiumnews.com, November 13, 2008.
3. Bob Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987*, (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1987), p 102.
4. Ibid.
5. *The Gates Inheritance, Part 3, The world that Bob made*, by Roger Morris, Asia Times Online, Atimes.com, June 27, 2007
6. Ibid.
7. Ibid.
8. Ibid.
9. Ibid.
10. Woodward, *Veil: The Secret Wars of the CIA 1981-1987*, p 102.
11. Ibid. p. 102-103
12. *The Gates Inheritance, Part 3*.
13. Ibid.
14. Ibid.
15. Ibid.
16. *Why Trust Robert Gates on Iraq*, by Robert Parry, Consortiumnews.com, November 27, 2006.
17. *The Gates Inheritance, Part 3*.
18. Ibid.
19. Ibid.
20. Ibid.

21. Ibid.
22. Ibid.
23. *The Danger of Keeping Robert Gates.*
24. *The Gates Inheritance, Part 3.*
25. Ibid.
26. Ibid.
27. *The Russian Report*, by Robert Parry, The Consortium, Consortiumnews.com, December 11, 1995.
28. *The Gates Inheritance, Part 3.*
29. Ibid.
30. Ibid.
31. *Why Trust Robert Gates on Iraq.*
32. *The Gates Inheritance, Part 2, Great games and famous victories*, by Roger Morris, Asia Times Online, Atimes.com, June 26, 2007.