

Crimes of '80s, crises of '90s stalk George Bush

by Jeffrey Steinberg

September 1991 may very well prove to be the most trying month so far in George Bush's long career in politics.

Following his month-long vacation, the President returned to Washington after Labor Day to face a string of tough confirmation fights with the Senate, the prospect of new criminal indictments against top CIA people for Iran-Contra illegalities, a probe into the "October Surprise" scandal, and mounting pressure to deal with the economic and financial depression at home. On top of that long-standing agenda, Bush now faces a possible head-on confrontation with the Israeli government and the powerful Zionist Lobby over the timing of a \$10 billion loan guarantee program for Israel's absorption of Soviet Jews, at the same time that he must formulate a policy for dealing with the tumultuous changes in the former Soviet Union.

Things got off to a nasty start for Bush on Sept. 6, when Iran-Contra special prosecutor Lawrence Walsh's grand jury handed down a 10-count perjury and obstruction of justice indictment against Clair George, the Reagan-era CIA director of operations. The George indictment came largely as the result of an earlier indictment and plea agreement by another top CIA officer, Alan Fiers, who has been cooperating with Walsh since early July. When Fiers's plea deal with Walsh was made public, the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence immediately postponed its confirmation hearings for CIA director-designate Robert Gates. Those hearings are scheduled to begin Sept. 16, with Fiers already on the witness list.

The heavy indictment against Clair George, who was the CIA's representative on the White House "208 Committee" which administered the Reagan covert action program globally under the direction of then-Vice President Bush, has prompted speculation that further indictments are imminent against Duane (Dewey) Claridge and Donald Gregg. Clarid-

ge headed CIA covert operations in the Western Hemisphere up until his retirement several years ago. Gregg, the present U.S. ambassador to South Korea, was George Bush's chief national security deputy in the VP's office throughout the Iran-Contra epoch.

A perjury or obstruction of justice indictment against Gregg would directly raise the issue of George Bush's personal role in the Iran-Contra scandal and its coverup. As *EIR* alone has reported, Bush was the head of the Special Situation Group (SSG) and the Crisis Pre-Planning Group (CPPG) during the Reagan administration. These two units, set up in 1982 by a presidential National Security Decision Directive, placed Bush personally in charge of all administration covert operations.

What Gates knew

The confirmation hearings of Robert Gates are certain to bring out the same issues raised by the new Walsh indictment. Gates has come under attack from congressional Democrats as well as intelligence community professionals. The Democrats, led by Sen. Bill Bradley (N.J.), are expected to grill Gates on his involvement in the Iran-Contra affair. Bradley is also expected to tear into the Bush White House as well as the CIA for its "softness" toward the communist regime in Moscow and its total lack of support for independence movements in the republics, especially the Baltics.

While Gates has denied that he knew about the Iran-Contra weapons diversion program prior to October 1986, witnesses, including Fiers, are expected to present contrary evidence. What's more, as one former CIA analyst emphasized to *EIR*, Gates was the acting Director of Central Intelligence for months, while DCI William Casey was in the hospital during 1986-87, at the time that the agency was engaging in a massive coverup of its role in the Iran-Contra debacle. The recent indictments against Fiers and George center on

false testimony that they delivered before congressional hearings and federal grand juries while Gates was acting DCI. So, regardless of what Gates knew or didn't know prior to the October 1986 Irangate revelations, the issue of his role in the coverup could be sufficiently embarrassing to either jettison his confirmation or prompt him to withdraw his nomination.

Opposition to Gates from within the CIA itself is also expected to take a serious toll on the nominee's chances of being confirmed. Gates has been accused of rewriting CIA intelligence reports to bring them in line with White House policies. In a highly unusual development, a number of CIA active duty officers have come forward to offer anti-Gates information to the Senate committee. "They've come out of the trenches screaming," one congressman told the *Los Angeles Times* of Aug. 2.

President Bush called a series of White House meetings on Sept. 11 to line up GOP senators behind Gates. According to one Washington source, Bush is obsessively committed to ramming the Gates confirmation through as a unanimous voice vote of the entire Senate, and has vowed revenge against any Democrats or Republicans who cross him. Bush, according to this source, considers the Gates appointment key to salvaging the collapsing vision of his "new world order."

If the confirmation hearings of Supreme Court nominee Clarence Thomas are any barometer of Senate willingness to comply with the President's wishes, the Gates hearings will be a knock-down, drag-out battle. For three days, a parade of Democratic senators on the Judiciary Committee grilled Thomas on a variety of liberal issues, especially abortion. Noticeably absent from the liberal Democrats' charge has been any mention of the draconian police-state rulings recently issued by the Rehnquist Court. Apparently many of the so-called liberals on the Senate Judiciary Committee are themselves gung-ho over the smashing of the constitutional protections by the current Supreme Court.

Democratic presidential candidate Lyndon LaRouche has defined opposition to the Rehnquist Court majority on the police-state issues as the litmus test for qualification for a post on the Court.

A brawl with Israel?

In the midst of the Walsh prosecutions and the Thomas and Gates hearings, President Bush now also finds himself caught up in a tense battle with Israel's Prime Minister Yitzhak Shamir over the timing of Israel's request for \$10 billion in housing loan guarantees from the U.S. government. In a Sept. 11 letter to members of Congress, Bush asked for a 120-day delay in taking up the Israeli loan guarantees. The Bush move is widely understood to be a pressure tactic to force Shamir's cooperation in staging a Middle East peace conference sometime in October. At minimum, the peace conference is seen by Bush as an excellent opportunity to score another public relations "victory" in foreign policy

matters, at a point that the domestic economic collapse is becoming more and more of a campaign issue.

Shamir, for his part, is believed to be fully committed to continued Israeli settlement of the Occupied Territories and to the eventual full annexation of those territories, even if it means the mass expulsion of Palestinian residents across the river into Jordan. Bush's Arab Gulf war "partners" are reportedly becoming increasingly disenchanted with the President, and are looking at the loan guarantee fight as an important sign as to where the U.S. administration really will line up on the Middle East situation.

Bush is reportedly hypersensitive about the potential blowback of this issue in the Arab world, particularly in the Persian Gulf, where the Pentagon is in the process of negotiating a series of permanent U.S. basing agreements that would give the United States (and Britain) a tight military control over the Middle East oil supply.

Prime Minister Shamir charged on Sept. 10 that the Bush administration had promised Israel the \$10 million in loan guarantees as part of the payoff for Israel's non-involvement in the Gulf war. Sources close to the administration say that Secretary of State James Baker had indeed made that pledge at the time.

However, President Bush angrily denied the promise, telling White House reporters that "I've seen comments from abroad that I don't particularly appreciate. . . . We're the United States of America and we have a leadership role around the world that has to be fulfilled. And I'm calling the shots in this question."

Bush's demand for the 120-day delay was immediately countered by a bipartisan Senate amendment introduced by Robert Kasten (R-Wisc.) and Daniel Inouye (D-Hawaii), demanding that Congress act on the issue within 60 days of the formal request by Israel. That request was made the first week in September by Israel's ambassador in a meeting with Secretary of State Baker.

According to congressional sources, at a Sept. 11 Oval Office meeting between President Bush and 20 top GOP congressmen, not one lawmaker backed Bush's request for the delay. Baker was scheduled to arrive in Tel Aviv on Sept. 16 to confer with Shamir and other Israeli officials to avert a full-blown confrontation between the two long-standing allies.

Stress and strain

White House sources have acknowledged to a small circle of associates that the stresses of these political fire fights are taking their toll on the President, who is suffering from high blood pressure, on top of his other medical problems. For the moment, the best thing that George Bush has going for himself is the complete vacuum of a serious visible Democratic candidate for President, with the sole exception of Lyndon LaRouche, currently a political prisoner of Bush himself. And that is hardly the basis for George Bush to sleep well at night.