

Democrats drop opposition to CIA nominee: another capitulation to Bush

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Democratic Party leaders have made it clear they will not make a serious issue of the appointment of Porter Goss to head the Central Intelligence Agency. President Bush announced August 10 that he had selected the Republican congressman and former CIA case officer, who has headed the House Intelligence Committee for the last seven years. The nomination must be confirmed by the Senate.

Congressional Democrats have unceremoniously abandoned their threats to block Goss's appointment, issued a month ago after his name was leaked to the media as the leading candidate to replace George Tenet. Democratic presidential candidate John Kerry issued a statement calling for "fair, bipartisan and expeditious confirmation hearings" on the nomination—language that is tantamount to an endorsement.

At the time of Tenet's resignation, which took effect July 11, Senator John D. Rockefeller IV, the ranking Democrat on the Senate Intelligence Committee, said he would oppose the nomination of Goss. He said the longtime Republican congressman was too partisan a figure to head the intelligence agency.

But Rockefeller downplayed this stance this week, calling the nomination "a mistake," but not suggesting it should be rejected. He said only, "Porter Goss will need to answer tough questions about his record and his position on reform, including questions on the independence of the leader of the intelligence community."

Senator Dianne Feinstein of California predicted a lengthy hearing on the nomination and said Goss would face criticism for his lack of management experience, his background as a Republican loyalist, and his initial opposition to the appointment of the independent commission to investigate the September 11 terrorist attacks. But none of these issues was a "deal breaker," she told the *Los Angeles Times*. Senator Charles Schumer of New York said he would vote for Goss if the Bush White House agreed to adopt all the recommendations of the 9/11 commission on the restructuring of the US intelligence apparatus.

Democratic presidential nominee John Kerry urged that Congress focus on implementing the recommendations of the 9/11 commission rather than wage a protracted battle over the Goss nomination. He expressed hope that Goss would back the commission's plan to create a national intelligence director with centralized authority over all US intelligence agencies, including the CIA. Both Kerry and his running mate John Edwards will vote on the Goss nomination when it comes to the floor of the Senate.

The CIA, as a key institution of the US national security apparatus, is usually presented in official bourgeois mythology as politically neutral, or even "above politics." No sitting congressman has ever previously been nominated to head the agency. Bush's father had been a congressman and chairman of the Republican National Committee before he was named to head the CIA in 1976, but he was not then an active partisan, having taken the position of US representative in Beijing.

Much of the media criticism of the CIA over the past two years has centered on charges that the agency was too subservient to the political

wishes of the Bush White House—most notoriously, in presenting estimates of Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and ties to terrorist organizations which turned out to be completely false. Given that context, the nomination of a longtime Republican congressman, who as recently as a month ago gave a speech denouncing Kerry for being soft on terrorism and national security, has the character of a political provocation.

The Democrats have the power to block the nomination by means of a filibuster, since 60 out of 100 senators must support ending debate and forcing a vote, and the Republicans have only a narrow 51-48 margin in the Senate, with one independent who generally votes with the Democrats. Nearly a dozen Bush judicial nominations have been blocked in this way, as well as several appointments to executive branch positions. But leading congressional Democrats said there would be no effort to block a vote on the Goss nomination, claiming that such a fight was not worth the effort, since a Kerry victory in the November election would give him the opportunity to replace Goss with his own CIA director.

There were suggestions that Bush was seeking to instigate a conflict over the Goss nomination that would provide ammunition for the presidential election campaign, allowing the Republicans to claim that Democrats were undermining national security and leaving the country defenseless by blocking a vote on a new CIA director.

The *Washington Post* reported: "Senate Democrats said they would not fall into a trap like the one Bush set before the midterm elections of 2002, when he used his opponents' objections to his version of a Department of Homeland Security to paint them as soft on defense." The *New York Times* cited similar calculations in the Kerry campaign: "Democrats close to Mr. Kerry said in interviews that they were in something of a bind, because they did not want to appear to be blocking the nomination."

Left unstated was a more chilling possibility: that the Bush administration would seek to blame its political opponents for any new terrorist attacks in the pre-election period.

As with the war in Iraq, the Democrats hope to profit politically from the widespread popular distrust of the Bush administration, without actually opposing the White House themselves. The concern here goes beyond the calculations of short-term political advantage, however.

Kerry, Democratic Senate leader Tom Daschle, and the rest of the party leadership aim to reassure the ruling elite that the Democratic Party serves two indispensable functions: as a political safety valve, providing the illusion of an anti-Bush campaign to appease public opinion, and as a reliable alternative for the financial aristocracy, which can be trusted to take over and administer the affairs of state if the Bush administration appears exhausted.

Goss is typical of those recruited into the CIA in the 1950s and early 1960s, largely drawn from upper-class circles, especially in New England. Goss himself was born to a socially prominent Connecticut family and educated at Hotchkiss prep school before attending Yale—like Bush and Kerry. He enlisted in the CIA in 1962.

He spent the rest of the decade as an officer in the CIA clandestine

service. This was the heyday of CIA-backed coups, assassinations and collusion with military and fascist regimes. Goss was fluent in French and Spanish, and was initially assigned to Miami, then to postings in the Caribbean.

He has always declined to provide details of his career, but he was assigned to Haiti and the Dominican Republic—the first ruled by the grisly US-backed regime of Francois (Papa Doc) Duvalier, the second by the military strongman Rafael Trujillo, whose assassination led ultimately to a revolutionary crisis and the occupation of the country by US troops in 1965.

Later in his CIA career, Goss moved to London and carried out undisclosed assignments in Europe. While still shrouded in official secrecy, the nature of his work can be inferred from his linguistic skills. Goss was a fluent reader of Greek—he majored in ancient Greek at Yale—and he is likely to have been associated with CIA undercover operations in Greece, which contributed to the seizure of power by Greek colonels in a 1967 coup that established a brutal torture regime.

This inference conforms to what Goss himself has suggested about his service at the agency. After the nomination was made public, filmmaker Michael Moore released an outtake of an interview with Goss, not used in his movie *Fahrenheit 9/11*, in which Goss laid stress on his language skills, declaring that he would not be recruited as a CIA agent today because he does not know languages that are now relevant, such as Arabic.

Goss left the CIA in 1971 after suffering a sudden and debilitating infection that left him unable to continue clandestine overseas work. He settled in southwest Florida, near Naples, opened a local newspaper with several former CIA colleagues, and quickly became a multimillionaire in real estate. He launched a political career in the Republican Party, winning a mayoral position. He was appointed to a vacant county office in 1982 by then-governor Bob Graham, a Democrat. In 1988, he was elected to a safe Republican congressional seat.

As a congressman, Goss compiled a typically rightwing voting record. He had 100 percent ratings from the US Chamber of Commerce and the Christian Coalition, with a rating of only 7 (out of 100) from the American Civil Liberties Union and zero from the liberal Americans for Democratic Action. He voted to impeach Clinton, to approve all three of Bush's tax cuts, to drill for oil in the Alaskan wildlife reserve, to provide federal funds to religious organizations, and to ban late-term abortions. He also voted for the war in Iraq.

His selection in 1997 as chairman of the House Intelligence Committee was a remarkable example of the fox being assigned to guard the henhouse. The intelligence committees were set up in the mid-1970s, after the exposure of illegal CIA domestic spying and assassination plots, to strengthen congressional oversight. With Goss's appointment, a former CIA agent was given effective control over the funding and monitoring of the actions of the intelligence agency. The Republican congressional leadership even waived rules that limit service on the committee to six years—established to prevent members from becoming too close to the CIA—so that Goss could continue as chairman of the panel.

Goss was among the handful of congressional leaders evacuated to an “undisclosed secure location” as the September 11 terrorist attacks unfolded. At the moment the first hijacked planes struck the twin towers of the World Trade Center, Goss was having breakfast in Washington with General Mahmud Ahmed, chief of Pakistan's intelligence agency, ISI, the most powerful sponsor of the Taliban regime in Afghanistan. The ISI is believed to have tipped off Osama bin Laden before US cruise missile strikes on his training camps in 1998, and there have been allegations of links to the 9/11 attacks themselves.

By Goss's own account, he was not discussing bin Laden or terrorism with General Ahmed, but India-Pakistan relations. According to the 9/11 commission's report, the House Intelligence Committee under Goss's

chairmanship held only two hearings on terrorism before September 11, far fewer than any other congressional panel with jurisdiction in that area. His nomination is thus not the result of any special prescience on the subject of counterterrorism. It is more likely a consequence of his particularly close relationship with Vice President Dick Cheney.

Since 9/11, Goss has worked assiduously to protect both the CIA and the Bush administration from being held accountable for the failure of the government to heed pre-9/11 warnings of an impending attack on American soil, and the false claims about Iraqi weapons of mass destruction and collaboration between Saddam Hussein and Al Qaeda.

He co-chaired, along with his former political sponsor, Senator Graham, the joint congressional investigation into the 9/11 terrorist attacks, an exercise in foot-dragging and coverup which, among other things, failed to mention the notorious August 6, 2001 President's Daily Brief—a memorandum from the CIA to Bush five weeks before September 11, which bore the title, “Bin Laden Determined to Strike in US.”

In the course of this probe, Goss sought a Justice Department investigation of his own joint committee, after a leak to the media of some information supplied to the committee by the Bush administration. Goss was responding to demands from Cheney.

As a result, at the same time the committee was supposedly probing FBI mishandling of reports on the danger of terrorists attending US flight schools, the FBI was investigating the mishandling of government documents, even demanding lie detector tests for members of Congress. This perversion of the committee's mandate amounted to a form of political blackmail against any congressmen or senators who might be inclined to press for a serious investigation of the 9/11 attacks.

The report issued by the congressional joint committee was so flagrant a whitewash that the families of victims of the attacks successfully lobbied for the appointment of an independent panel in 2002. Goss adamantly opposed the new panel, until the Bush administration reversed its position and agreed to accept it. Now he will be charged with carrying out whatever recommendations of the 9/11 panel the White House chooses to implement.



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