President Ronald Reagan
Oral History Project

Briefing Materials

William H. Webster
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William H. Webster Timeline
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1980

November  Ronald Reagan is elected president on the 4th.

A senior Reagan aide reports on the 19th that Reagan will retain Judge William H. Webster as Director of the Federal Bureau of Investigation. (Washington Post, 11/20/1980) Webster had left his post on the U.S. Court of Appeals in 1978 to serve as Director of the FBI during the Carter Administration.

1981

January  Webster reportedly recommends that two prosecutors and five bureau agents be disciplined for leaking information to the press concerning the Bureau’s Abscam operation, in which agents posed as Arab sheiks and offered politicians cash for favors. The operation led to charges being brought against a U.S. Senator, six House members, three Philadelphia city councilmen and other local public officials. (New York Times, 01/13/1981; Washington Post, 01/15/1981)

Reagan is inaugurated on the 20th.

March  The U.S. government agrees to pay $10,000 in damages to each of five persons whose rights had been violated during the FBI’s investigation of the Weather Underground in the 1970s. (New York Times, 04/16/1981)

Reagan reportedly opposes changes in intelligence regulations that would allow for domestic spying by the CIA after a Carter Administration memo on the issue is leaked to the press. (New York Times, 3/18/1981)

John Hinckley attempts to assassinate Reagan on the 30th.

April  Webster cautions against overreaction to Hinckley’s assassination attempt as many call for the relaxation of controls on the domestic gathering and dissemination of intelligence on Americans.

Two FBI agents convicted of authorizing illegal break-ins in the 1970s are pardoned. (Washington Post, 4/16/1981)

Webster announces that four of the 25 cases of missing or murdered Atlanta children have been “substantially solved” and that the FBI has a suspect in 12 to 16 of the other cases. The cases date back to July 1979. (New York Times,
July  
As concern over crime in the U.S. continues to mount, Webster cautions that the FBI should play no direct role in combating “street crime” that is traditionally left to local and state authorities. Webster cites kidnapping, hijacking, skyjacking, terrorism, bank robbery and the apprehension of dangerous fugitives as clear Federal responsibilities. Webster and the narcotics task force are also considering whether the FBI ought to take over the fight against illicit drugs. (*New York Times*, 07/07/1981)

December  
The Justice Department announces on the 1st that it will not appoint a special prosecutor to investigate National Security Advisor Richard Allen’s receipt of $1,000 in gifts from Japanese journalists and that the FBI will continue its investigation of the matter. Allegations are also raised concerning the propriety of telephone contact made between Webster and Allen during the investigation. (*New York Times*, 11/26/1981; *Washington Post*, 12/02/1981)

1982  
January  
The Administration announces that William Clark will replace Allen as National Security Advisor. (*Washington Post*, 1/6/1982)

Webster announces in an ABC interview that reports of a Libyan “hit squad” operating in the U.S. have not been confirmed but that the FBI nonetheless has taken appropriate investigative steps.

Attorney General William French Smith announces that Webster will be given authority over both the FBI and the Drug Enforcement Administration (DEA) in the war against drugs. Though the DEA will continue to take the lead in the war against drugs, the director of the DEA will now report to Smith through Webster. Earlier proposals to merge the two agencies reportedly have been abandoned, though Smith and the Justice Department later characterize the move as a merging of the two organizations. Both the DEA and FBI challenge the characterization, insisting that only resources have been merged. (*New York Times*, 02/01/1981; *Washington Post*, 02/16/1985)

April  
Webster is called before a House Judiciary subcommittee to defend the FBI’s Abscam investigation. Some congressmen question whether the FBI had paid adequate attention to the protection of individual rights and civil liberties. (*Washington Post*, 04/30/1982)

June  
Senator Orrin Hatch announces that the Senate Labor Committee will conduct an investigation of the FBI’s investigation of then-Labor Secretary-nominee Raymond Donovan during his confirmation hearings. (*Washington Post*, 06/12/1982)

December  
Webster defends FBI “sting” operations before a congressional committee against law suits filed by people alleging that their civil rights had been violated.
Webster concedes, though, that some mistakes were inevitable and in those cases the people should be compensated. (*New York Times*, 12/06/1982)

*The Los Angeles Times* reports that the Senate committee investigating Abscam has concluded that the Bureau’s operation was necessary but poorly supervised and documented. (*Los Angeles Times*, 12/05/1982)

**1983**

*January*  
Webster and Smith express guarded optimism before the Senate Judiciary Committee on the 27th regarding the Administration’s war on drug trafficking and organized crime. (*New York Times*, 01/28/1983)

*March*  

Reagan signs National Security Decision Directive 84 directing the FBI to drop its requirement that the use of lie-detectors to conduct leak-hunts be related to criminal prosecution. (*New York Times*, 11/24/1983) However, Reagan agrees to suspend key components of the directive the following February after its implementation is blocked by Congress. (*Washington Post*, 02/16/1984)

*April*  
Smith announces that crime rates according to FBI Crime Index figures are down across the country. (*Washington Post*, 04/23/1983)

Webster announces that more than 900 of the 3,000 Soviet bloc diplomats in the U.S. have been identified as trained intelligence agents. At least 62 Soviet diplomats, officials and journalists have been expelled so far in 1983, compared with 49 expelled in all of 1982 and 27 in 1981. (*Financial Times*, 04/26/1983)

*May*  

*July*  
The FBI is called in to investigate when confidential briefing papers from President Carter’s 1980 campaign are discovered in the files of Reagan’s campaign officials in the archives of the Hoover Institution at Stanford University. (*Washington Post*, 7/9/1983; *New York Times*, 11/17/1983)

*November*  
Reagan orders a Justice Department investigation into news leaks from top administration officials out of concern that the leaks had jeopardized the personal safety and diplomatic efforts of Robert C. McFarlane, the former Middle East special envoy. (*Washington Post*, 11/24/1983)

**1984**

*January*  
On the 19th, Smith announces he will resign as Attorney General. The
Administration announces the nomination of Edwin Meese as Attorney General on the 23rd. When Meese’s nomination runs into trouble, Smith agrees to stay on as Attorney General until his successor is confirmed. (Washington Post, 01/23/1984)

**February** The Reagan Administration reportedly debates how to respond to recent terrorist attacks abroad. Webster says in an interview that he opposes the proposal to take retaliatory measures through covert operations. “Our revulsion at inhuman and utterly reprehensible acts of violence must never cause this nation to depart from the principles that have made it the hope of freedom and justice throughout the world... These arguments were advanced in Vietnam and have caused us problems ever since. We’re big enough and strong enough to play by our own rules. We cannot do things that in later, more sober times will appear reprehensible.” (Washington Post, 02/12/1984)

**March** Webster says he backs a joint federal-state task force aimed at cracking down on “boiler room” precious metals fraud in South Florida involving mineral-rights leases on land managed by the Interior Department. (New York Times, 03/24/1984)

**May** Webster and Secretary of State George Shultz meet with Los Angeles Olympic Organizing Committee President Peter Ueberroth to discuss the Olympics and help Ueberroth prepare for an emergency meeting in Lausanne, Switzerland. (Washington Post, 05/16/1984)

On the 14th, a federal judge orders an independent counsel to investigate how the 1980 Reagan campaign had obtained briefing papers from the Carter White House. (Washington Post, 5/15/1984)

**August** Smith charges on the 7th that the Soviet KGB has forged and sent threatening letters purportedly from the Ku Klux Klan to roughly twenty Asian and African countries planning to take part in the 1984 Olympic Games. (New York Times, 08/07/1984)

**October** The FBI arrests Special Agent Richard Miller for selling classified documents to the Soviet Union, marking the first time the FBI has arrested one of its own agents for espionage. (Financial Times, 10/04/1984)

**December** Webster resists calls for the FBI to join the investigation of the recent string of abortion clinic bombings on the grounds that the lack of a group or conspiratorial connection prevents the FBI from classifying the attacks as terrorist. (Christian Science Monitor, 12/28/1984)

**1985**

**February** A joint investigation comprising Justice, local and state officials leads to the indictment of nine leading mafia members by a federal grand jury in New York on a
series of charges including conspiracy to commit murder. (*Washington Post*, 03/11/1985)

The Senate confirms Meese as Attorney General on the 23rd.

**April**

Webster defends the FBI’s use of interviews to debrief travelers returning from Nicaragua before a House Judiciary subcommittee. (*New York Times*, 04/22/1985)

**May**

Meese and Webster announce the arrests of 125 members of Hell’s Angels and similar groups in a national campaign on drug trafficking. (*The Guardian*, 5/03/1985)

Meese announces that training for DEA agents will be shifted to the FBI Academy in Quantico the following year, reportedly moving the agency a step closer to a possible merger with the FBI. (*Washington Post*, 05/25/85)

**July**

The Justice Department announces that it might ask news organizations to adopt a voluntary code of restraint in reporting terrorist incidents. (*New York Times*, 07/18/1985)

**October**

After U.S. warplanes force an Egyptian airliner carrying the suspected mastermind of the Achille Lauro hijacking to land in Italy, Webster warns that pro-Palestine groups in the United States have “threatened various kinds of retaliation. There are sympathetic organizations over here that I think will be followed very closely in order to minimize the risk of retaliation.” (*Toronto Star*, 10/13/1985)

The Justice Department unseals arrest warrants charging three Lebanese Shiites with the hijacking of a TWA airliner to Beirut last June. The Reagan Administration also posts a $250,000 reward for information leading to their conviction. (*Washington Post*, 10/18/1985)

**December**

Webster announces on the 1st that the FBI has opened a substantial number of spy investigations because of information provided by turnabout Soviet defector Vitaly Yurchenko. (*Toronto Star*, 12/02/1985)

Webster says that the recent fire at the headquarters of the Arab-American Anti-Discrimination Committee in D.C. could be the result of arson by the militant Jewish Defense League. (*New York Times*, 12/15/1985) The FBI is ordered to investigate the bombing, as well as an August bombing of the organization’s offices in Boston. The FBI is already investigating a similar October bombing in Santa Ana. (*Los Angeles Times*, 12/06/1985)

Webster says in a speech that increasingly aggressive espionage activities by hostile nations are more of a threat to national security than terrorism, as Reagan orders thousands of government personnel and contractors with access to secrets to submit to lie-detector tests.
1986

February  The Justice Department spends $400,000 to set up a 24-hour command center that officials say will improve their response to hijacking, terrorist attacks and other emergencies. (*Washington Post*, 2/14/1986)

April  U.S. planes bomb Libya on the 13th in retaliation for sponsorship of terrorism.

Meese and Webster meet with cabinet ministers from countries of the European Community on the 25th as the U.S. and EC agree to step up their exchange of information on terrorism. (*New York Times*, 04/25/1986)

May  Webster warns against overreacting to the threat of terrorism in the U.S., arguing that Americans “must not give terrorists a victory on the cheap.” Webster’s comments come a day after the U.S. and its allies sign a declaration in Tokyo calling for “determined, tenacious, discreet, and patient action combining national measures with international cooperation” in the fight against terrorism. (*Christian Science Monitor*, 05/07/1986)

In an abrupt reversal of the Administration’s position, Meese tells the Mexican Attorney General that sharp criticism by U.S. officials of public corruption and drug trafficking in Mexico does not reflect the feelings of the Reagan Administration. (*Washington Post*, 5/24/1986)

Meese and Webster meet with British Home Secretary Douglas Hurd on the 28th and 29th to further discuss U.S.-EC cooperation in fighting terrorism. (*The Guardian*, 05/29/1986)

June  American intelligence analyst Jonathan Jay Pollard pleads guilty to spying for Israel. Webster reportedly complains that Israeli cooperation in the Pollard case was “selective.” (*Washington Post*, 06/08/1986)

On the 11th, Webster orders the FBI and DEA to carry out a mandatory drug testing program for their agents who investigate illegal drug trafficking and for all applicants who want to become agents. (*Los Angeles Times*, 06/11/1986)

The FBI arrests Soviet Colonel Vladimir Izmaylov, the senior air attache and military intelligence officer at the Soviet embassy in Washington. The arrest is made at a suburban “dead drop” as Izmaylov attempts to purchase a harmless batch of American secrets for $41,000. Izmaylov is promptly declared *persona non grata*. (*The Guardian*, 06/21/1986)

July  The FBI reports that elements of the Jewish Defense League were probably responsible for the bombing that killed Arab rights leader Alex M. Odeh last October in Santa Ana, as well as three other related bombings. However, the report stops
short of making final attribution of the bombings to any one group. (Los Angeles Times, 07/03/1986)

**August**  
Webster rejects Mexican charges that U.S. drug enforcement agents have been operating illegally in Mexico, stating that the U.S. agents are there by invitation of the Mexican Government as part of a cooperative effort.

**October**  
Webster writes a memo for his file on the 31st about an order given by Meese to the Criminal Division chief, Stephen Trott, to suspend the investigation of a private plane shot down in Nicaragua for ten days. Webster writes that the reason given for the delay was the need to protect on-going hostage negotiations. (New York Times, 12/18/1986)

**November**  
First reports of Iran-contra affair appear on 6th.

Meese informs Webster during a meeting on the 21st that Reagan has instructed Meese to look into the sale of arms to Iran. Webster offers to help but Meese declines, as the two do not yet see any indication of illegal activities. (Cannon, President Reagan: The Role of a Lifetime)

Meese informs the White House press corps at a press conference on the 25th that $10 to $30 million from the already controversial sale of U.S. arms to Iran had found its way to the Nicaraguan contras. Meese states flatly that, despite the operation’s apparent origins at the National Security Council, Reagan had had no knowledge of the illegal diversion of funds. (Washington Post, 11/26/1986) National Security Advisor John Poindexter resigns the same day.

**December**  
The Reagan Administration announces on the 2nd that Meese will relinquish control of the Iran-contra investigation to an independent counsel. Webster says that it is his understanding that the FBI will continue its investigation but will now report its findings to the independent counsel instead of Meese. Reagan also creates the Tower Commission to study NSC staff procedures. (Washington Post, 12/05/1986)

Webster tells reporters at a breakfast meeting on the 4th that an FBI investigation has found no evidence supporting press reports that White House officials might have destroyed key documents to cover up facts relating to the Iran-contra scandal. Webster also reports that the FBI has found no evidence that Meese had played an improper role in the scandal. Some question whether Meese should have disqualified himself from a preliminary departmental review because he had knowledge of the secret arms shipment to Iran and had given his legal advice to the President. The press also asks why it took Meese four days from the time he first discovered evidence of illegal activity on November 22nd to call the FBI in to investigate. Webster also announces he will delay his decision to leave the FBI to return to private practice because of the importance and scope of the Iran-contra investigation. (Washington Post, 12/05/1986; Christian Science Monitor, 12/05/1986)
The Senate announces the formation of a select committee on the 4th to investigate Iran-contra. The announcement was widely expected following calls for the formation of such a committee by Reagan and Senator Dole. The House is also expected to form a similar committee to parallel the Senate’s investigation. (The Guardian, 12/05/1986)

The FBI announces that it will investigate the Justice Department’s October request that the FBI delay its probe into the downed-private plane in Nicaragua. The new FBI investigation is separate from its investigation of Iran-contra already underway. (Toronto Star, 12/18/1996)

Webster tells reporters that the FBI has found no indication that a recent string of break-ins to the offices of groups critical of U.S. policy in Central America are part of an orchestrated campaign. Most recently, intruders forced entry into the offices of the International Center for Development Policy on November 29th. (Christian Science Monitor, 12/16/1986)

Lawrence Walsh is named special prosecutor to investigate Iran-contra on the 19th.

Webster reportedly orders the FBI to proceed warily and with precautions in its investigation of Iran-contra to help ensure that the agency maintains an independent, nonpartisan role in the investigation. (New York Times, 12/29/1986)

1987

February

William Casey announces his resignation as Director of Central Intelligence (DCI) on the 2nd after undergoing surgery for brain cancer in December. Reagan nominates Deputy Director of Central Intelligence Robert Gates to succeed Casey as DCI.

Reagan issues an executive order combining all of the government’s anti-drug programs under one Cabinet-level board. The power of the National Drug Policy Board, chaired by Meese, is expanded to cover programs then operated by the Department of Health and Human Services. (Washington Post, 2/4/1987)

The Tower Commission releases its report on the 26th on Iran-contra scandal. The report finds that Reagan had no knowledge of the diversion of funds to the contras.

March

Gates withdraws his name from consideration as DCI on the 2nd as questions surrounding his role in Iran-contra continue to linger.

Reagan nominates Webster as DCI on the 3rd.

Reagan publicly accepts responsibility for the Iran-contra affair on the 4th but admits no criminal wrong-doing. (New York Times, 03/05/1987)

April

During Webster’s confirmation hearing before the Senate Intelligence Committee, he
concedes that he may have been “negligible” in failing to pursue early hints of possible criminal violations by North in connection with the Iran-Contra scandal. Webster gives unequivocal backing to Congress’s powers of oversight on intelligence matters and says he would resign if a president refused to accept his advice on the need for notification. The oversight issue has become controversial in the wake of disclosures that Reagan failed for at least eleven months to notify Congress of secret arms sales to Iran. (New York Times, 04/09/1987) The committee unanimously endorses Webster’s nomination as DCI on May 1st.

May

Iran-contra hearings begin on the 5th.

After the U.S. receives reports that China has sold at least 20 Silkworm missiles to Iran, the Reagan Administration reportedly debates behind closed doors the question of preemptive strikes. (Washington Post, 06/07/1987)

The U.S. warship Stark is hit by an Iraqi missile in the Persian Gulf on the 17th.

The Senate confirms Webster as DCI on the 19th by a vote of 94-1. The lone dissenting vote is cast by Senator Harry Reid of Nevada, who charges that the FBI had used heavy-handed tactics under Webster’s watch. (Reuters, 05/20/1987)

Webster is sworn in as Reagan’s DCI on the 26th.

June

Webster reportedly ends the suspension of the Costa Rican station chief over his role in supplying the Nicaraguan rebels. (New York Times, 06/23/1987)

Webster warns at a meeting of the National Security Planning Group on the 16th that the U.S. re-flagging mission in the Persian Gulf will likely prompt Iranian attacks on U.S. flagged vessels in an attempt to reverse the U.S. reflagging decision. (Shultz, Turmoil and Triumph, 929)

July

The first Kuwaiti tankers are re-flagged under the U.S. flag. (Wall Street Journal, 07/21/1987)

Webster presents an intelligence report to the National Security Planning Group on the dangers facing U.S. naval operations in the Persian Gulf. (Newsweek, 10/12/1987)

A CIA spokeswoman announces on the 20th that Webster will abide by his previously stated plans to make no decisions on personnel changes before the inquiries into the Iran-contra affair are completed. The Los Angeles Times had reported two-days before that Webster had told leaders of the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence that he planned to replace Clair George, the head of the Central Intelligence Agency’s clandestine service, and one of his senior deputies, Duane Clarridge, because of their involvement in Iran-contra. (New York Times, 07/20/1987)

A White House spokesman announces on the 21st that Webster will begin meeting
every two weeks with the President.

Reagan nominates U.S. District Court Judge William Sessions on the 24th to succeed Webster as Director of the FBI. Sessions takes office in November.

**August**

Nicaragua, Costa Rica, Honduras, Guatemala, and El Salvador reach a peace plan agreement in Guatemala.

Webster issues a personal statement to address doubts concerning the reliability and objectivity of intelligence analysis. “Important estimates,” he said, “are now fully addressed at senior levels throughout the intelligence community, and divergent points of view are disclosed in the finished product. The reports are furnished without any regard to whether they support a particular policy line and they may not be altered for that purpose.” (*New York Times*, 08/31/1987)

A coup attempt in the Philippines fails on 28th.

**September**

U.S. helicopters fire on Iranian ships laying mines in Persian Gulf on 21st.

U.S. and Soviet officials announce that arms control talks held in D.C. have yielded an “agreement in principle to conclude a treaty” eliminating all INF missiles and that Reagan and Gorbachev will hold a summit meeting in Washington in the fall. Shevardnadze also privately informs U.S. officials that Soviet forces will be withdrawn from Afghanistan. (Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 987; Oberdorfer, *From the Cold War to a New Era*, 245)

**October**

Webster announces that the CIA is assigning more experienced officers to handle defectors from the Soviet KGB and its allied spy agencies following the highly publicized “re-defection” of Vitaly Yurchenko in 1985. (*Christian Science Monitor*, 10/09/1987)


**November**

Webster and CIA Soviet analysts brief Shultz on internal developments within the Soviet Union that might have influenced Gorbachev’s behavior during Shultz’s recent Moscow trip. They suggest that Gorbachev is coming under attack from both sides on reform. (Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 1002)

**December**

Reagan and Gorbachev sign the INF treaty on the 8th at the Washington summit meeting, which bans nuclear delivery systems with a range between three-hundred and three-thousand kilometers. The treaty includes an unprecedented system for independent verification by both countries.
January  The Center for Constitutional Rights reports that FBI documents obtained under the Freedom of Information Act reveal that the FBI conducted widespread surveillance operations of groups opposed to the Reagan Administration’s policy in Central America between 1981 and 1985. The center is particularly critical of the FBI’s March 1983-June 1985 surveillance of the Committee in Support of the People of El Salvador (CISPES) for launching investigations on the basis of political beliefs and violating constitutional rights. Current FBI Director William Sessions denies that Webster’s FBI mounted any “massive surveillance campaign” against political dissidents but does acknowledge that some excesses might have occurred. (New York Times, 02/06/1988) The House subcommittee on civil and constitutional rights sets hearings for February 18th. The charges come shortly after the Justice Department and the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission find that Donald Rochan, an African-American FBI agent, had been harassed by his white colleagues. (New York Times, 5/15/1988; Newsday, 1/28/1988)

February A U.S. federal grand jury indicts Panamanian strongman Manuel Noriega on drug charges on 4th.

The CIA announces on the 26th that Alan Fiers, chief of the agency’s Central American Task Force, is resigning effective March 4th. Fiers was one of several CIA officials involved in the Iran-contra affair who had been reprimanded the previous year. (Newsday, 02/27/1988)

March Nicaragua Sandinistas and Contras sign a cease-fire agreement on the 23rd. Webster meets with Gates and Powell to discuss the cease-fire on the 24th. Webster and Gates believe that the Contras have obtained a decent deal considering that U.S. aid has been cut-off. Powell is more pessimistic. (Gates, From the Shadows, 430)

April An agreement for Soviet troop withdrawal from Afghanistan is signed on the 14th.

U.S. naval ships destroy two Iranian off-shore oil platforms in retaliation for damage caused to a U.S. frigate in the Gulf the week before by an Iranian mine. The reprisal sets off a string of Iranian attacks and U.S. counter-strikes in which Iran suffers heavy losses to its navy. The fighting ends a six-month lull in direct U.S.-Iranian confrontations. Reagan orders the U.S. Navy to expand its duties in the Gulf to include the protection of neutral merchant ships that request help when attacked. (Weinberger, Fighting for Peace, 424-425; Wall Street Journal, 04/19/1988; New York Times, 04/23/1988)

At a lunch meeting with Webster, Gates, and Dick Kerr on the 28th, Shultz argues that the CIA should not be overly cautious in its assessment of Soviet economic reform, warning it “should not underestimate the impact of simply stopping doing dumb things and the leavening effect of that on an economy.” (Gates, From the Shadows, 446)
May
Webster warns Reagan in a meeting on the 20\textsuperscript{th} that the Colombian bank under consideration to serve as custodian for Panamanian funds in the proposal negotiated with Noriega “is one of the dirtiest” banks in the region. Bush breaks with Reagan for the first time and strongly argues against Reagan’s willingness to negotiate with Noriega to secure Noriega’s removal from power. Webster reads off the long list of charges against the Colombian bank under consideration during a heated debate in the Oval Office the following day. (Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 1069)

The U.S. Senate ratifies the INF treaty on the 27\textsuperscript{th}.

Reagan and Gorbachev attend the Moscow summit.

July
The USS Vincennes mistakenly shoots down a civilian Iranian airliner over Gulf waters on the 3\textsuperscript{rd}.

August
Iran and Iraq agree to an armistice ending their eight-year conflict.

Webster and Gates travel to Dukakis’ Boston home at Reagan’s request on the 26\textsuperscript{th} to provide a worldwide intelligence briefing. (Gates, *From the Shadows*, 451)

September
Sessions admits before the Senate Select Committee on Intelligence on the 14\textsuperscript{th} that the FBI’s investigation of CISPES was “flawed” and had “clear deficiencies” but also adds that Webster was not to blame. Sessions goes on to discipline six officials in middle- and lower-level management positions. (*New York Times*, 09/17/1988; *Christian Science Monitor*, 09/15/1988)

November
Bush wins the presidential election on the 8\textsuperscript{th}.

Webster gives an intelligence briefing on the 15\textsuperscript{th} to Chancellor Kohl of West Germany at meeting with Shultz and Powell on the development of Libya’s chemical weapons plant. (Shultz, *Turmoil and Triumph*, 244)

Webster argues in speech before the Yale Political Union that, “the Soviet Union’s military capability, its efforts to increase global influence and its aggressive intelligence activities are still serious threats to United States interests... [The Soviet Union] is and will continue to be the primary focus of our intelligence collection and analysis... Mr. Gorbachev’s efforts to reform his country have not fundamentally altered these truths.” (*Daily Telegraph*, 11/18/1988)

December
Bush announces on the 6\textsuperscript{th} that Webster will stay on as DCI in his Administration. As Bush’s DCI, Webster attends the President’s daily 8 a.m. intelligence briefings at least once or twice a week. (Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*)

Gorbachev gives an important speech at the United Nations announcing the Soviet Union’s intent to unilaterally withdraw 500,000 troops and 10,000 tanks from
Eastern Europe and implement a fourteen percent reduction in military spending.

1989

January

THE BUSH ADMINISTRATION

Bush is inaugurated president on the 20th.

February
Webster attends meeting in the Oval Office on the 6th where Darman’s efforts to seek dramatic cuts in the defense budget are blocked. (Darman, Who’s in Control, 224)

Webster testifies before a Senate committee on the 9th that Iraq, Syria and Iran are stockpiling a variety of chemical warfare agents. (London Times, 02/10/1989)
Webster also testifies before the Senate that Iraq has the largest chemical weapons program in the world. (Jentleson, Reagan, Bush, and Saddam, 1982-1990, 106)

April
Webster reports that the U.S. has received “very tentative overtures” from Moscow to establish joint CIA-KGB efforts to fight terrorism. (New York Times, 04/07/1989)

Webster warns senior policymakers in late April that it is “far from certain that Gorbachev will be able to control the [reform] process he has set in motion” and that his policies “could unleash centrifugal forces that will pull the Soviet Union apart or create such serious tensions among nationalities that the ensuing social and political chaos will undermine Gorbachev’s reforms.” Webster further warns that conservative backlash in the Soviet Union could trigger a coup attempt. (Gates, From the Shadows, 511)

May
Noriega claims victory for his candidate in a highly suspect presidential election on the 7th. Bush charges that the elections were marred by “massive irregularities.”

Gorbachev surprises Baker with dramatic unilateral arms cuts at a meeting in Moscow on 10th.

Bush unveils his CFE proposal at a NATO summit in Brussels on the 28th.

June
Chinese troops crush a demonstration in Tiananmen Square on the 4th.

August
Webster travels to Kennebunkport to attend a national drug strategy meeting with Bush on the 29th.

September
Webster signals in a speech to the World Affairs Council in Los Angeles that the U.S. intelligence community will begin to shift its strategic focus towards global economic issues. (The Guardian, 09/21/1989)
October

Bush issues NSD-26 on the 2nd based on a preliminary review concluded the previous April, which calls for the U.S. to increase economic and political ties with Iraq.

A coup attempt by rebel soldiers against Panamanian military strongman Noriega fails on the 3rd.

Webster argues in favor of giving intelligence operatives more leeway to assist coup plotters in an interview with The New York Times, but stops short of fully challenging the thirteen-year-old policy against involvement in assassinations. The White House subsequently endorses Webster’s calls. Webster makes a similar argument before the Senate Intelligence Committee, suggesting that Noriega would have been ousted from power had the current interpretation of the ban not tied the Administration’s hands during the coup. (Parmet, George Bush: The Life of a Lone Star Yankee, 414)

Bush announces he still has full confidence in Webster following reports that the White House was unhappy with the CIA’s performance during the Panamanian coup.

November

The Berlin Wall falls as East Germany allows free travel to West Berlin and West Germany on the 9th.

December

Bush orders U.S. warplanes to provide indirect support for President Aquino against a coup in Philippines on the 1st.

In preparation for the Malta summit on the 2nd, Webster prepares for the President two CIA views on Gorbachev’s prospects for economic reform. In addition to Blackwell’s more optimistic National Intelligence Estimate, Webster presents Kolt and Hodnett’s more skeptical “alternative view” suggesting that Gorbachev’s half-way reforms are the worst of all possible worlds – “all pain and no gain” – and that the Administration should consider shifting support to Yeltsin. (Beschloss and Talbott, At the Highest Levels)

After Panama’s National Assembly names Noriega “maximum leader” and declares Panama to be in a “state of war” with the U.S. on the 15th, an off-duty U.S. soldier is killed in Panama on the 16th. The U.S. invades on the 20th. Noriega surrenders to U.S. forces on January 3rd.

1990

January

Webster testifies before the Senate Armed Services Committee that “Western dependence on Persian Gulf oil will rise dramatically” in the next few years, with the Gulf share of U.S. oil supplies rising from ten percent in 1989 to “roughly 25 percent” in a few years. (Christian Science Monitor, 01/25/1990)
February

The U.S., England, France, Soviet Union, East and West Germany announce the adoption of the Two-plus-Four formula on the 14th in Ottawa.

Sandinista leader Ortega is defeated in the Nicaraguan presidential election on 25th.

March

Webster and Cheney provide differing estimates of the threat posed by the Soviet Union in testimony before separate congressional committees on the 1st. (USA Today, 03/09/1990) Webster testifies that the Soviet Union would continue to pose no serious threat to the U.S. in the foreseeable future even should Gorbachev fall from power. (Campbell and Rockman, The Bush Presidency: First Appraisals, 103) He also testifies that changes in the Soviet Union and Eastern Europe “were probably already irreversible in several critical respects.” (Wirls, Buildup: The Politics of Defense in the Reagan Era, 219) Cheney, meanwhile, holds that the Soviet Union still continues to pose a significant threat.

Gorbachev threatens economic sanctions after Lithuania issues a declaration of independence.

April

Saddam Hussein threatens on the 2nd, “By God, we will make fire eat up half of Israel” if Iraq should be attacked.

May

Bush and Gorbachev attend a summit in D.C. on 31st where Gorbachev concedes that the question of German membership in NATO should be left to the German people. Bush and Gorbachev sign trade and weapons agreement on June 1st.

June

Shevardnadze reportedly reverses an earlier understanding with the U.S. and demands changes in NATO’s structure at a Two-plus-Four meeting in Berlin on the 22nd. The European Strategy Steering Group, an interdepartmental group designed to review NATO strategy amidst German unification, is tasked with the responsibility of drafting the needed changes. (Zelikow, Germany Unified and Europe Transformed.)

July

Webster briefs Bush on the 24th on the dangers posed by Saddam Hussein in the Persian Gulf region. Later that day, the U.S. announces that it will conduct naval exercises with the United Arab Emirates. (Freedman and Karsh, The Gulf Conflict 1990-91, 51)

U.S. Ambassador April Glaspie meets with Saddam Hussein on the 25th.

August

Iraqi forces invade Kuwait on the 2nd. Webster meets with John Kelly of State and the head of Saudi intelligence in D.C. to discuss whether Iraqi forces will stop at the Saudi border. (Freedman and Karsh, The Gulf Conflict 1990-91, 86) Webster travels with Bush later that day for a pre-scheduled trip to meet with Thatcher in Colorado.

Webster reports at an NSC meeting in D.C. on the 3rd that the CIA estimates that there are over 100,000 Iraqi troops in Kuwait. (Quayle, Standing Firm, 205)
Webster is skeptical that Hussein will withdraw from Kuwait within a couple of days as promised and warns of grave consequences should Iraq be able to hold onto Kuwait. (Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 322-323)

Baker, who is traveling in Mongolia at time of the invasion, leaves for Moscow where he secures a joint U.S.-Soviet statement on the 3rd condemning the invasion and calling for an embargo.

The NSC meets at Camp David on the 4th and discusses military options. Webster reports that Saudi Arabia is extremely vulnerable to an Iraqi attack. Bush decides that the first imperative is to protect Saudi Arabia from an Iraqi invasion. (Quayle, *Standing Firm*, 206)

Upon Bush’s return from Camp David on the 5th, he declares that Iraq’s actions “will not stand.” (Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 334) Bush sends Cheney to Saudi Arabia that same day to discuss the deployment of U.S. troops with King Fahd. After Saudi Arabia agrees to accept troops on the 6th, Bush begins deployment on the 7th and announces the move on the 8th.

King Hussein of Jordan meets with Bush at Kennebunkport on the 16th to discuss his meeting with Saddam Hussein on the 13th.

An Iraqi oil tanker heading for Yemen refuses to yield to U.S. warning shots on the 20th. Baker gains Soviet support for a UN resolution explicitly authorizing the enforcement of the embargo by military means on the 24th. The Security Council adopts the resolution 13-0 on the 25th.

**September**

Bush and Gorbachev issue a second joint-Gulf statement at a summit meeting in Finland on the 9th.

The CIA concludes that economic sanctions would be unable to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait “in the short or medium term.” (Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict 1990-91*, 196)

As Iraq continues its military buildup in Kuwait, Webster warns in a speech to the Foreign Policy Association in New York on the 18th that Palestinian terrorists working with “an elaborate network” of Iraqi operatives could easily attack international targets, adding that Iraq currently has the largest stockpile of chemical weapons in the world. (*Newsday*, 09/19/1990)

**October**

The U.S., Soviets, English and French sign agreement on the expiration of rights in Germany on the 1st. Germany is unified on the 3rd.

Congress overwhelmingly votes on the 2nd to support Bush’s handling of the situation in the Persian Gulf.
Commenting on Iraq’s nuclear program to the National Council of World Affairs Organizations on the 25th, Webster argues that the Administration would have “no real confidence that the area would ever be secure again’ unless Saddam were “disassociated from his weapons of mass destruction.” (Freedman and Karsh, The Gulf Conflict 1990-91, 220; USA Today, 10/26/1990)

**November**

Bush announces on 8th that the U.S. will increase its forces in the Gulf to 400,000.

Webster visits Hungary, Czechoslovakia, and Poland.

The U.S. and Soviets sign the CFE agreement on the 19th at a CSCE meeting in Paris.

The Security Council adopts Resolution 678 on the 29th authorizing the use of “all necessary means” to expel Iraqi forces from Kuwait should Iraq fail to withdraw by January 15th.

Bush announces on the 30th that he will invite Iraqi Foreign Minister Tariq Aziz to D.C. on December 10th and offers to send Baker to Baghdad at a mutually convenient time between December 15th and January 15th.

**December**

Webster testifies before Congress that “there is no assurance or guarantee that economic hardships will compel Saddam to change his policies or lead to internal unrest that would threaten his regime.” (Freedman and Karsh, The Gulf Conflict 1990-91, 196-197) Webster also tells reporters that Hussein will likely remain in Kuwait until Iraq is “in peril of imminent military attack.” (Washington Post, 12/15/1990)

**1991**

**January**

To help build support in Congress for the Gulf War resolution, Les Aspin releases a letter from Webster warning that “the ability of Iraqi ground forces to defend Kuwait and southern Iraq is unlikely to be substantially eroded over the next six to twelve months even if effective sanctions can be maintained.” (Freedman and Karsh, The Gulf Conflict 1990-91, 370)

Bush requests a congressional resolution authorizing the use of force in the Gulf on the 8th. The House and Senate approve identical resolutions on the 12th.

Mounting tensions between Vilnius and Moscow lead to violence as Soviet forces suppress Lithuanian demonstrators on the 11th. Following escalation of violence on the 15th, Bush privately threatens to cut aid to the Soviet Union.

Operation Desert Storm begins on the 17th as a U.S.-led coalition initiates the air campaign.
Eagleburger arrives in Tel Aviv on the 20th to encourage Israeli restraint in the face of mounting Scud-missile attacks.

**February**

The U.S. receives reports that hundreds of Iraqi civilians had been killed in allied air strikes against a military command and control post. Webster confirms that the building contained both a military target and a shelter for civilians. Webster adds that reports indicate that Hussein will continue to house civilians in all Iraqi military bunkers to elicit international sympathy when those civilians were injured. (Bush and Scowcroft, *A World Transformed*, 469-470)

Webster challenges DoD’s bomb damage assessments as being too optimistic at a White House meeting with the President on the 21st. (Gordon and Trainor, *The General’s War*, 334-335; Freedman and Karsh, *The Gulf Conflict 1990-91*, 370)

The coalition launches a highly successful ground attack on the 24th. The Bush Administration decides to suspend combat operations on the 27th, as some senior officials reportedly hope internal uprisings following Iraq’s devastating defeat would remove Hussein from power. Bush announces the liberation of Kuwait on the 28th. Iraq accepts allied terms for ending the Gulf War on March 3rd.

**April**

On the 16th, Bush announces a plan to set up safe havens for the Kurds in northern Iraq.

**May**

Bush announces on the 8th that Webster is retiring as DCI. Bush nominates Gates to succeed Webster on the 14th.

Defending the U.S. intelligence community in the wake of the Gulf War, Webster states that U.S. intelligence agencies helped to track terrorists and prevent major international attacks during the Gulf War. (*Washington Times*, 05/23/1991)

Meeting with reporters on the 30th, Webster suggests that Gorbachev’s future is “increasingly uncertain” because of pressures from secessionist republics and a sagging economy. “Moses didn’t get to the promised land, and this may be the case with Gorbachev.” (*USA Today*, 05/31/1991) Webster also warns that authorities in the Soviet Union are becoming less confident about keeping their nuclear weapons out of “unfriendly hands” as the country stands on the edge of dismemberment. (*Washington Post*, 05/31/1991)

**June**

Newly-elected Russian President Boris Yeltsin meets with Bush in D.C. on the 20th.

**July**

The Senate Intelligence Committee announces on the 11th that it will delay Gates’ confirmation hearings until mid-September after testimony by Alan Fiers on Iran-contra prompts Independent Counsel Walsh to reopen investigation.

Bush and Gorbachev sign START I in Moscow on the 31st and announce the co-sponsorship of a Middle East peace conference.
Walsh’s report on Iran-contra following Fiers’ testimony does not implicate Gates.

With the signing of the Union Treaty drawing near, Soviet hard-liners launch a coup attempt against Gorbachev on the 18th. The coup fails by the 21st. Gorbachev resigns from the Communist Party on the 24th. The Soviet parliament bans Communist Party activities on the 29th.

Webster leaves office on the 31st.
Federal Bureau of Investigation

- Discuss Reagan’s decision to hold Webster over from the Carter Administration. Did Webster’s service in the Carter Administration pose any special challenges for his work in the Reagan Administration?
- Primary responsibilities as FBI Director. Discuss the impact of the Hoover legacy and Watergate on Webster’s management and organization of the FBI. What reforms had Webster already implemented under Carter? Were further changes needed?
- How did Webster understand the role and function of the FBI in the post-Hoover era? Discuss the division of intelligence and counterintelligence responsibilities between the FBI and CIA. How were jurisdictional lines drawn between the FBI and other federal law enforcement agencies such as the DEA and ATF? Discuss Webster’s relationships with the Attorneys General serving in the Carter and Reagan Administrations. Which relationships with other Reagan Administration officials were most important to Webster’s work?
- Discuss the various laws and directives in place to regulate FBI activity. How were these regulations altered over the course of Webster’s tenure? What were the Bureau’s major priorities under Webster? What issues took up most of Webster’s time? Possible topics to discuss might include: the fight against terrorism, drugs, white collar and organized crime; the Abscam operation; CISPES; and the Iran-contra investigation.

DCI: Reagan Administration

- Webster’s nomination as DCI by Reagan. What were Webster’s primary responsibilities as DCI? How did Webster assess the state of the U.S. intelligence community in the wake of Iran-contra and the Casey era? What kinds of internal changes did Webster feel were needed, particularly regarding the structure and management of covert operations? Describe the organization of the intelligence community under Webster. How did Webster understand the role and function of the U.S. intelligence community? Discuss the relationship between intelligence and policy in the Reagan Administration.
- Discuss the various laws and directives in place that regulated the types of activities in which the CIA could engage. How did Iran-contra affect the intelligence community’s relationship with Congress? How did Webster seek to improve relations with Congress? How would Webster assess the role and importance of congressional oversight?
- What were the major priorities of the intelligence community under Reagan? Discuss the role intelligence played in supporting U.S. decision makers in important areas such as: arms control; monitoring internal developments within the Soviet Union; the Persian Gulf; the Central American peace process; and Panama.

DCI: Bush Administration

- How did Webster come to stay on as DCI in the Bush Administration? How did the change in Administration impact the role and organization of the U.S. intelligence community? Did Webster feel any changes were needed? What guidance did Webster receive from Bush?
did Bush’s experience as DCI affect Webster’s time in office as DCI?

- How did Webster try to adapt intelligence priorities to the rapidly changing international environment and anticipate new challenges? Discuss efforts to improve coordination between intelligence agencies in important areas such as counter-terrorism, counter-narcotics, and arms control verification.
- Discuss important intelligence issues such as budgetary pressures to streamline the intelligence community, the rising importance of economic intelligence, maintaining an East-West versus regional geographic focus, and human versus technological intelligence.
- Discuss the role intelligence played in supporting U.S. decision makers in some of the following areas: arms control; monitoring Soviet economic and military developments; Tiananmen Square; the failed coup and invasion of Panama; the fall of communism in Eastern Europe; the failed coup in the Philippines; the Nicaraguan elections; German unification; the Gulf War; the Baltics; and the failed Soviet coup.

**Reagan and Bush in Retrospect**

- What were the strengths and weaknesses of the Reagan and Bush Administrations?
- What features of each presidency were missed or misunderstood by the press?
- How should the Reagan and the Bush presidencies be viewed in history?
TIMELINES

- William H. Webster Timeline, prepared by Rob Martin, Miller Center of Public Affairs, University of Virginia, 08/28/2001.

FBI DIRECTOR


Role and Organization of U.S. Intelligence Services


DCI: REAGAN ADMINISTRATION


DCI: BUSH ADMINISTRATION


- “Q&A Session with Judge William Webster, Director of the Central Intelligence Agency, American University, Washington, D.C.,” excerpted from the *Federal News Service*, 03/20/1990.

- “An Interview with William Webster, CIA,” excerpted from transcript of *Nightline*, 08/07/1990.


