

Gates, Dempsey Speak Out On War Avoidance

Former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates has been interviewed widely about his new book, "Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War." Here are some of his comments.

Jan. 13, National Public Radio: Gates, asked whether it were appropriate to criticize a sitting President, replied: "You know, I did think about that, but the reality is if you look at the book as a totality, it's about war, it's about getting into wars, how you get out of wars, about the risks of launching military operations, whether it's in Libya or Syria or Iran. It's about dealing with China. It's about relations between the President and his senior military. It's about defense reform and how we ought to be spending our defense dollars. It's about the role of the Congress in all of this, and the impact of the dysfunction in Congress in all of these areas. These are all contemporary issues, and having worked for eight Presidents and being a historian, I felt I had a unique perspective. And these issues are with us today. These are not issues that can wait to be written about in 2017. And so that's the reason that I decided to go forward with the book."

On his comments about President Obama's staff, he said: "Well, I had a lot of battles with those folks. . . . I'd worked for probably three of the most significant and toughest national security advisers in our history: Henry Kissinger, Zbigniew Brzezinski, and Brent Scowcroft. And there were things that went on in the Obama White House that, under those three guys, I'm confident would have been a firing offense, such as direct calls from NSC staff members to four-star generals, and so on. That just wouldn't have been allowed."

Jan. 15, Fox News: Gates was asked why he didn't wait to write the book until Obama were out of office.



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"As we look at Syria, we look at Iran, China, Russia," Gates answered, "I've worked for eight Presidents, and I think I have a perspective on how to deal with these problems that I brought to those Presidents. And because those debates and issues are still before us, I wanted to put my views on the table." Gates said that "waiting to write those things in 2017, struck me, it would just make everything irrelevant."

He added that he "would like to see less micro-management from the White House," but that, "as much as anything, it is a message to the Congress, as well, about how damaging their approach and the way they are conducting their business, is to the national security of the United States. And people ask me, 'What's the greatest threat to American national security today?' And I say: It's encompassed within the two square miles that involve the Capitol and the White House."

MSNBC's Morning Joe: Asked why he had written the book, Gates answered: "Well, first of all, there are a lot of contemporary issues that are addressed in the book, both at the end, but also threaded throughout, in terms of, when do you use military force? What are the criteria? What are your goals? What are the consequences? What are your assumptions? We, for example, in both Iraq and Afghanistan, we made the assumptions that both wars would be short—a grievously wrong assumption. And I make the point in there, that that's an assumption often made when you launch military forces."

"So that has relevance as you look at Syria, as you look at potentially using force against Iran, if the negotiations don't work. It was part of the considerations when we were deciding to intervene in Libya. And so what I've tried to do is write a book that shows and humanizes, by bringing the personalities of the people into it, how Presidents wrestle with these questions of peace and war, the passion that comes to the table."

On Afghanistan, Gates said: "I thought our original goals were a fantasy, they were so ambitious." Gates made it clear he was referring to both Bush and Obama.

Jan. 16, Wall Street Journal: "One should be extremely careful about preventive war," Gates said, when asked to define the "Gates doctrine." Such wars

depend on high levels of accuracy and confidence in U.S. intelligence, and “frankly, we shouldn’t have that much confidence that we can get it right,” he said, citing the Iraq war as an example.

The Daily Show: “One of the points that I make in the book is that in recent decades, I believe, Presidents, when confronted with a foreign challenge or a foreign problem, have been too quick to reach for a gun to solve it. I said in another book I wrote 15 years ago, that the dirty little secret in Washington is that the biggest doves, wear uniforms. Because they have *seen* war, and they have *seen* the consequences, and they have also been sent into battle, sent into conflict, and seen political support evaporate because of political leadership, the lack of political leadership, or whatever. So one of the themes in the book is that we need to be a lot more *careful* when we deploy our forces, and when we use the military force, and be willing to admit that we don’t understand unintended consequences, and that we know very little, usually, about our adversaries. And we make assumptions like, ‘all wars will be short, and we’ll be in and out’—that’s 12 years after we went into Afghanistan. So I think there’s some cautionary tales in the book, that I hope will have some relevance as we look at the problem in Syria, and we look at the issues with Iran. . . .”

Asked whether we’ve grown to see American power as being infallible, Gates responded, “Well, we have more power than anyone else in the world. I *do* believe that we are an indispensable nation—there’s really not any major international problem that can be solved without the United States being involved or leading the effort. But the reality is, we *can’t* solve every problem, and every time there is an oppression, or some terrible thing happens internationally, the answer is not necessarily to send in American troops. We need to pay more attention. . . .”

Jan. 17, Politico: At an event in Washington, sponsored by Politico and the Bank of America, Gates was asked about his views on George W. Bush’s preemption doctrine. He said he was “by and large, very much against preventive war,” since you rarely had the degree of intelligence necessary to proceed. He quoted the American General Fox

Conner, who Gates said, had three maxims: Never fight unless you have to, never fight alone, and never fight for long.

“One of the few issues in the book where I am critical of the President [Obama], he said, “has been in his reluctance to speak out, particularly for the troops, on why success in Afghanistan is important. . . . I once told [former White House chief of staff Rahm Emanuel] that I don’t object to the President’s speeches about exit strategies, but the troops need their Commander-in-Chief to tell them why he is sending them there and why their sacrifice is worthwhile.”

When asked what he would recommend to young people coming into government in Washington, Gates responded: “Read history.”

Dempsey Continues His War-Avoidance Drive



DoD/Staff Sgt Sun L. Vega, USA
Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman
Martin Dempsey

Jan. 14, National Defense University: Gen. Martin Dempsey stated that “being the Chairman [of the Joint Chiefs of Staff], actually requires me to be more reflective and much less reflexive,” warning his listeners: “If you don’t understand the difference in those two words, you’re in the wrong place. So reflective is good, reflexive is not so good in terms of strategy.” He added that “we face a deficit that’s larger than our budget, and that is a deficit of understanding between those of us who serve in uniform and our fellow citizens.” He noted that the problem is not

that the military has lost contact with the American people, but “it’s really a lack of understanding about our role, not just during times of war, but in everyday life and the everyday business of protecting our national interests and promoting our values . . . and I worry the American public as a result doesn’t really understand what they’re buying, with all of the significant budget authority that they grant us.”

Because of this, he said, “I’ll need the remainder of my time as Chairman to actually fully unpack the definition of military strength and how it interrelates, and must interrelate, with other instruments of national power.”