

# WebMemo



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## Gates Confirmation Hearing Focuses on Right Issues

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Today's Senate hearing on the nomination of Robert Gates as the next Secretary of Defense capitalized on the opportunity to discuss the Pentagon's most pressing challenges. Members of the Senate Armed Services Committee rightly focused on the critical issues the Secretary will have to tackle over the next two years: the war in Iraq and broader war on terrorism, equipment modernization, the size of the military, and defense spending.

### **Unified Approach to Iraq**

With the highly charged elections behind us, Iraq policies must not be partisan. During today's hearing, Dr. Gates agreed that a bipartisan approach to the U.S. strategy in Iraq is in the country's best interest and vowed to work with Congress to achieve consensus going forward. He expressed his sense of urgency and outlined the holistic challenges within Iraq and the region. He also discussed his view that the military solution in Iraq is inextricably linked with a political solution, and he discussed the need for other federal agencies, from the Department of State to the Department of Agriculture, to play a larger role in Iraq. Dr. Gates understands that unity is necessary to win the Long War and seeks to reiterate to potential enemies that the U.S. will not simply "cut and run."

Dr. Gates outlined the delicate balance between the need for Iraqis to take increased control over their country and security forces and ensuring the U.S. does not draw down troops too quickly and cause additional chaos in Iraq or the region. He assured Congress that he will do his part to create stability in Iraq

and leave the country in better shape than it was under the brutal reign of Saddam Hussein. Any changes in U.S. troop levels in Iraq would be conditions-based, and he supports increasing the size of the military to achieve its global mission if warranted.

### **Afghanistan and NATO**

In order to succeed in Afghanistan, ongoing American engagement with NATO forces is important. The narcotics trade is currently threatening security in Afghanistan, notably in southern Afghanistan where the Taliban is resurgent. A comprehensive plan, developed with Western European nations, is needed in order to eliminate this trade from Afghanistan. During today's hearing, Dr. Gates said it would be a tragedy to let the U.S. military victory in Afghanistan slip away due to neglect. He sympathized with the need to increase troop levels in the country and discussed the need for Afghan farmers to have alternative legal crops and agriculture opportunities available to them in order to develop legitimate and long-term industries.

### **Maintaining a Strong Military**

U.S. leadership in the world requires a sustained commitment to making the necessary funding and

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resources available to our military. In order to win the war on terrorism, the overall defense budget should consume four percent of gross domestic product. Dr. Gates supports robust defense spending and promised to consult Congress regarding any review of the need to increase defense spending. In fact, he said there is a very “real possibility” the defense budget should be increased to achieve all the missions of the Armed Forces. He also discussed the immediate need for comprehensive modernization of the military and its equipment. He acknowledged the increased demand on the National Guard and Reserves and the importance of cautiously employing these troops who are essential to our total force.

### **National Missile Defense**

Deploying capable missile defense is indispensable to national security in the 21st century. Dr. Gates has long supported developing an effective missile defense system, which covers the full spectrum of capabilities. Today, he reiterated his strong backing of

that effort, promised to comply with the National Missile Defense Act of 1999, and endorsed the operational testing of various missile defense systems.

### **Conclusion**

Today’s hearing set the right tone for future national security policy. The U.S. should continue to prioritize completing the training of Iraqi security forces, supporting Iraqi political leaders, working to achieve the disciplined reduction of American forces, and turning the future of Iraq over to Iraqis. Dr. Gates recognizes that the stakes are high and appears able to lead our military establishment during this critical time in our history.

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