

## On the Record:

### Robert Gates on the Middle East

Nov 9, 2006



#### Brief Analysis

Yesterday, President George W. Bush announced that he was nominating former CIA director Robert Gates as secretary of defense following the resignation of Donald Rumsfeld. Gates, currently the president of Texas A&M University, served as director of central intelligence from 1991 to 1993. In all, he spent twenty-seven years as an intelligence professional, having originally joined the CIA as an analyst in 1966. In February 2005, he announced that he had been offered the new post of director of national intelligence but had declined it. In 2004 he served as co-chair, with Zbigniew Brzezinski, on an independent task force on Iran sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations. He is currently a member of the Iraq Study Group, co-chaired by James Baker and Lee Hamilton, which is expected to report shortly on alternatives to U.S. policy on Iraq. The following is a range of quotes made by Gates, or conclusions with which he has been associated, on a range of subjects related to the Middle East.

#### On Iraq

On August 24, 2004, Gates was interviewed by Bernard Gwertzman of the Council on Foreign Relations:

Gwertzmann: "Do you have any predictions as to how Iraq is going to turn out?"

Gates: "No. We have the old line in the intelligence business that everything we want to know is divided into two categories: secrets and mysteries."

Gwertzman: "And Iraq is which?"

Gates: "Iraq is very much the latter."

#### On Iran

The following quotes are taken from the executive summary of Iran: Time for a New Approach, a report issued in July 2004 by the previously mentioned independent task force sponsored by the Council on Foreign Relations:

"[T]he current lack of sustained engagement with Iran harms U.S. interests in a critical region of the world. . . . [D]irect dialogue with Tehran on specific areas of mutual concern should be pursued."

"A political dialogue with Iran should not be deferred until such a time as the deep differences over Iranian nuclear ambitions and its invidious involvement with regional conflicts have been resolved. Rather, the process of selective political engagement itself represents a potentially effective path for addressing those differences."

"A 'grand bargain' that would settle comprehensively the outstanding conflicts between Iran and the United States is not a realistic goal, and pursuing such an outcome would be unlikely to produce near-term progress on Washington's central interests."

"U.S. policies toward Tehran should make use of incentives as well as punitive measures. The U.S. reliance on comprehensive, unilateral sanctions has not succeeded in its stated objective to alter Iranian conduct and has deprived Washington of greater leverage vis-à-vis the Iranian government apart from the threat of force."

“The United States should press Iran to clarify the status of al-Qaeda operatives detained by Tehran and make clear that a security dialogue will be conditional on assurances that its government is not facilitating violence against the Iraqi and Afghan governments or the coalition forces that are assisting them. At the same time, Washington should work with the interim government of Iraq to conclusively disband the Iraq-based Mojahideen-e Khalq Organization and ensure that its leaders are brought to justice.”

“In close coordination with its allies in Europe and with Russia, the United States should implement a more focused strategy to deal with the Iranian nuclear program. . . . Over the longer term, the United States should aim to convene a dialogue on issues of cooperative security involving Iran and its nuclear-armed neighbors.”

“Iranian incitement of virulent anti-Israeli sentiment and activities thrives when there is no progress towards peace. . . . A serious effort on the part of Washington aimed at achieving Arab-Israeli peace is central to eventually stemming the tide of extremism in the region.”

“The United States should adopt measures to broaden political, cultural, and economic linkages between the Iranian population and the wider world, including authorizing U.S. nongovernmental organizations to operate in Iran and consenting to Iran’s application to begin accession talks with the World Trade Organization.”

#### On Intelligence and the War on Terror

“The conventional wisdom seems to be that in the midst of the war on terrorism and wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, we should try something completely different. This would be a grave mistake.” —“Racing to Ruin the CIA,” op-ed, New York Times, June 8, 2004

“To defeat terrorism, our global military, law enforcement, and intelligence capacities must be complemented with positive initiatives and programs aimed at the young people in developing nations who will guide their countries in the future. No policy has proved more successful in making friends for the United States, during the cold war and since, than educating students from abroad at our colleges and universities.” —“International Relations 101,” op-ed, New York Times, March 31, 2004

This rapporteur’s summary was prepared by Sadie Goldman and Nathan Hodson. ❖

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