

RELEASE IN  
PART B6

**From:** Anne-Marie Slaughter <[REDACTED]>  
**Sent:** Monday, September 5, 2011 9:27 AM  
**To:** H  
**Cc:** Abedin, Huma; Mills, Cheryl D; Sullivan, Jacob J  
**Subject:** reading for Labor Day Monday  
**Attachments:** Brubaker Memo on Cyprus.docx; Brubaker Memo on Cyprus.docx

B6

I had hoped to send you a few things that you could read at greater leisure during a summer break, but you never actually seemed to take a break! Was fascinated to follow the Libya conference in Paris – so wished I could be there. Meantime, though, here is an interesting (and very critical) piece on Gates published in the Armed Forces Journal. I know he's your friend, and I admire him a lot, but I think the point about strategic vision is not unfair, and it contrasts sharply with your own tenure :-). It's also very interesting on Petraeus and civ-mil relations.

I am also attaching a 2-page memo on Cyprus that I asked a very smart young Rhodes Scholar to draft; she has worked intensively on Cyprus politics and would make a great assistant to Phil or a special Cyprus representative. I know I keep harping on this, and you are going to think I am absolutely crazy for suggesting that you put still MORE on your plate, but there are strong economic arguments for doing this that resonate now in Europe, including Greece; indeed, I would frame the entire issue in terms of your emphasis on economic diplomacy – Europe is having all sorts of economic trouble, focused on Greece; Egypt, Libya, Tunisia all need trade and investment more than anything; resolving the Cyprus issue would be the linchpin of a genuine and vibrant Mediterranean economic community (remember Bob Wechsler's idea for a Turkey-Greece-Israel-Cyprus free trade area). It's also way of shifting attention from Turkey/Israel over Gaza and could provide huge incentives to Hamas to transform itself to be able to offer real economic benefits to Gaza. Finally, it would prove that SOME intractable disputes can actually be resolved. I can hear you thinking that I'm back in the academy and thinking pie in the sky, but I would describe it as doubling down and doing something bold. It's a Holbrooke move. And you have a great partner in Cathy Ashton. You could at least start raising the issue in UNGA, obviously behind the scenes.

I will of course send this memo to Phil, perhaps also to Liz Sherwood-Randall.

Best,  
AM

## The failed secretary

### Gates' lack of strategic vision weakened the Defense Department

BY BERNARD I. FINEL

Despite the near-universal praise Robert Gates received as secretary of defense, a systematic consideration of his tenure reveals a persistent record of failure.

Throughout his time in office, Gates repeatedly pledged to focus on "the wars we're in." But his single-minded focus has yielded few concrete results. Worse, this focus on the "now" has seriously undermined the ability of the Defense Department to address mid- and long-term challenges. In short, Gates' failure to act strategically has left the Defense Department weakened and in disarray.

This argument will return to the issue of the "wars we're in" later, but as a starting point it is worth specifying some of the attributes of a successful secretary of defense. A secretary should, at a minimum, address three key sets of responsibilities.

First, a defense secretary needs to manage the department effectively. This is not simply a matter of prevailing in bureaucratic battles, but rather in charting a course for the department that balances ends and means, that ensures that long-term risks are addressed as well as managing short-term challenges. One fundamental element is allocating and managing the defense budget to ensure resources are wisely expended to address the entire portfolio of risks the U.S. military might need to engage.

Second, a secretary, as the person most directly responsible for ensuring civilian control of the military, must manage civil-military relations. This involves both ensuring that military expertise is tapped to support civilian decision-making, but also that civilian control of the military remains unchallenged. It is the secretary's responsibility, in short, to ensure that there is a solid working relationship between the military and civilian policymakers, and also to ensure that civilian control is robust.

Third, a secretary must provide sound and balanced advice to the president about military options and operations. This requires not only an ability to be responsive to the needs and desires of the president and his staff but also an ability to interject forcefully to ensure that decisions about the use of force be made with a full appreciation of both the opportunities and limitations inherent in the use of the military instrument.

In all three of these core areas, Gates was largely ineffective.

## MANAGING THE DEPARTMENT

The defense budget today is in complete disarray. Scanning the horizon, it is difficult to find any good news. Even without considering looming defense budget cuts (or at least cuts relative to inflation), it is clear that the force is facing a series of seemingly intractable challenges on the budgetary and procurement front.

The Navy shipbuilding program is largely incoherent. The size of the fleet continues to shrink dramatically, with the number of ships declining by 10 percent in the past decade even as the navies of potential future adversaries continue to grow. The decision to cut the DDG 1000 Zumwalt-class destroyer program may have been sound, but it left open the challenges associated with naval fire support for land operations. Given the increasing challenge of adversaries using anti-access capabilities against American power projection, this is an issue that needs to be addressed rather than simply swept under the table. The problem is not with the decision itself but rather with the lack of strategic justification. The Navy budget also features challenges associated with airframes for carriers, underfunding of maintenance and the odd decision to purchase two separate types of ships to perform the littoral combat mission.

But, of all the services, the Navy is actually in the best shape. Air Force programs by contrast are rapidly reaching a crisis point as airframes age. Gates' decision to cap the F-22 program at 187 fighters was widely praised given the cost of the program. But as a practical matter, the decision made little strategic sense. Absent some sort of major strategic shift on Taiwan, capping the F-22 program at 187 fighters introduces a great deal of risk to our commitments in the western Pacific, particularly given China's rapidly growing capabilities. At the time, it was argued that some of the air superiority requirements could also be met by F-35 Joint Strike Fighter buys, but Gates then signed off on a slowdown of the F-35 program that is very likely to turn into a death spiral. Reduced and delayed F-35 buys will push up the per-unit cost, increasing scrutiny of the program even as the budget shrinks. The U.S. military had originally planned to purchase roughly 3,000 F-22 and F-35s combined, but it now looks as though those figures will end up being between 1,000 and 1,200. But again, there is no indication that a strategic shift has occurred that would justify such a reduction in the planned force.

The Army is, in many ways, in even worse shape. There is no question that many of the Army's woes are self-inflicted. The Army's failure to think strategically about requirements throughout the 1990s resulted in a force that was unprepared to deal with the full range of likely contingencies. The Future Combat System that was to be at the core of Army modernization made sense to no one outside of the Department of the Army. The past decade has been a long series of epic failures for Army programs, highlighted by the cancellations of the Crusader artillery system, the Comanche attack helicopter and the Future Combat System. And yet, regardless of who is to blame, Gates left office with land programs in complete crisis.

There is no clear conception of what the Army should look like in 2015, much less 2025. How central should the counterinsurgency mission be? What will be the main platforms used by the force? How large will the force be and where will it be based? As a practical matter, there are many questions but few credible answers. Coming out of a decade in which U.S. ground forces were the focus of American military power, it is surprising that even the outlines of Army transformation and modernization remain so murky.

Even the Marines, who have been the best of the services at enunciating a clear vision and matching it to programs and resources, are facing challenges. The delays on the F-35 program are a major source of risk, given the challenges the Marines face in terms of fixed-wing platforms. But even more significantly, the entire logic of the Marine Corps is being questioned as amphibious operations seem increasingly unlikely.

The problem, in a macro sense, is a consistent lack of strategic planning coming out of the Office of the Secretary of Defense. When Donald Rumsfeld came into the job, he sought to initiate a disciplined and coherent transformation initiative. This was pushed aside by the attacks of 9/11, but under Rumsfeld there was always a current of strategic planning that looked beyond the current emergency. Given the needs of existing conflicts, this interest yielded few concrete benefits, and yet under Rumsfeld the department adopted planning processes that were designed to be more adaptable and responsive to both policymaker guidance and strategic assessment.

Gates' approach, by contrast, was dominated by his inbox. Many of the challenges the force faces today were clearly visible when Gates took office. Even in 2007, analysts were concerned about an end to supplementals and were worried about a likely slowdown or even reduction in the defense budget. But we are now in 2011 and the crisis — clearly visible four years ago — is hitting the department like a ton of bricks.

Worse, many of Gates' decisions have made things worse on this front. His support for expanding the size of the ground forces back in 2007 addressed the immediate force rotation problem, but given the cost of personnel increases, the initiative was predictably unsustainable. But both increasing and then decreasing the size of the force cost money. Gates' supporters also like to point to his aggressive approach toward procurement of mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicles (MRAPs). But many of those vehicles — purchased in a rush in 2007 and 2008, even as violence was decreasing in Iraq — are unsuited for deployment in places such as Afghanistan due to their size and weight. In the meantime, the costs associated with purchasing MRAPs for Iraq and now a lighter (but still quite heavy), also-rushed version for Afghanistan, are cannibalizing funds that might have been used to sustain the Joint Light Tactical Vehicle program, which now seems to be at risk.

Gates also oversaw a consistent weakening of Defense Department strategic products. The 2010 Quadrennial Defense Review (QDR) continued a downward spiral for these assessments from the already mediocre 1997 review (although the 2002 version does contain some compelling analysis). But the 2010 version essentially lacks any rigorous analytical methodology. Indeed, it doesn't include a force-sizing construct at all, meaning that, in a macro sense, it does not even try to answer the "how much is enough" question, much less seek to rigorously assess risk to the current national military strategy. Indeed, given the QDR and current National Military Strategy and National Defense Strategy, it isn't even clear how one can assess risk given the vagueness of these products and their lack of prioritization.

As a consequence, given current fiscal realities, the defense budget is likely to at least shrink relative to inflation. Given the state of strategic analysis out of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, it is likely that cuts will be allocated essentially across the board. Such an outcome would be a definitive indicator that strategic planning has been lacking over the past several years.

## THE CRISIS IN CIVIL-MILITARY RELATIONS

Civil-military relations under Gates were more dysfunctional than any time since the early days of the Civil War. Though it may seem hyperbolic to some, the reality is that the accumulated transgressions of civil-military norms by senior military leaders far outstrip the misconduct of Gen. Douglas MacArthur during the Korean War.

During the Gates years, senior military leaders intervened in domestic politics; actively lobbied for policy preferences; waged sophisticated information operations against the American public; blocked the development of alternative options requested by the president and sought to punish those in uniform who were willing to respond to presidential requests; and created command environments in which contempt for civilian leaders was widespread. And Gates was either absent or an accomplice in most of these transgressions.

Clearly, civil-military relations in the U.S. are not problematic in the same way they can be in countries such as Turkey and Pakistan, but by well-established American standards and norms, the last several years have been extraordinary, and not in a good way.

Each of the incidents mentioned deserved — and has received — extended, even book-length, treatments. So the discussion here will necessarily be cursory. But even still it is worth a brief review.

The shift in civil-military relations certainly predates Gates' tenure. In September 2004, then-Lt. Gen. David Petraeus wrote a widely publicized op-ed in the Washington Post praising progress in Iraq. Even if this argument wasn't contradicted by his private efforts to dramatically change the American

approach in Iraq, the decision to publish this commentary mere weeks before a presidential election in which Iraq was a major issue should have raised eyebrows. Indeed, had the op-ed instead given full voice to Petraeus' criticisms of the conduct of the war, he would have been immediately cashiered. But since his views were politically convenient for the Bush administration, his career, if anything, received a boost.

When Gates came into office to oversee the Iraq "surge," he either further encouraged Petraeus in his manipulation of domestic opinion or at least countenanced it. Petraeus made very effective use of access. Friendly reporters and pundits were given better access. They received VIP treatment, including face time with the general and access to at least some classified briefings. This access was valuable in increasing the profile of these friendly analysts and reporters, creating an unhealthy back-scratching relationship.

By boosting the credentials of Petraeus' supporters, the general was able to shape the public debate on Iraq. Combined with extensive media appearances by Petraeus himself and aggressive lobbying of congressional opinion, the manipulation of domestic opinion was a sophisticated, multifaceted campaign.

It is easy — even tempting — to blame Petraeus for these transgressions. Indeed, the liberal anti-war group MoveOn.org took this tack with its widely vilified "General Betray-Us" ads. But, of course, Petraeus was only able to become the public face of the war with the acceptance and encouragement of the Bush administration and Gates. MoveOn's ad may or may not have crossed the bounds of respectful dialogue, but the very existence of the ads should have been a red flag for Gates. When military leaders end up in the crosshairs of domestic advocacy groups, it does suggest that the leader in question has too much visibility in domestic political debates and should be reined in. This did not happen.

At least during the Bush years, Gates allowed the military to shape domestic politics in ways that supported pre-existing administration policy preferences. After all, no one doubts that President Bush's decision to "surge" in Iraq was his own, and indeed, it was perfectly consistent with his previous views on the conflict as well as what we know of his strategic world view and personality.

This significantly changed with the election of Barack Obama, who had run largely as anti-war candidate, although with a more hawkish stance on Afghanistan. The military-led campaign to "surge" in Afghanistan, applying the Petraeus-approved concept of population-centric counterinsurgency, was not just an effort to sell an unpopular, but pre-existing, administration policy. The effort was now to actually make policy.

There are too many details to address in depth. But at a minimum, the military shaped the debate through several tactics. Obama's early strategic reviews recommended a counterinsurgency approach, even though few of the participants seemed to understand this would imply a massive increase in the size of the mission in Afghanistan. It may seem unfair to take the military to task for failing to warn civilians about the consequences of their actions. But providing effective military advice is an affirmative duty, not an optional decision. Standing aside when civilians make decisions you know they will regret simply because it is what you want is irresponsible.

These early efforts to shape the Afghanistan debate were supported by a scurrilous decision to slander the character and qualifications of Gen. David McKiernan, then-commander of the International Security Assistance Force and a skeptic of grand schemes to engage in one-size-fits-all state-building efforts in Afghanistan. The debate was further shaped when McKiernan's successor, Gen. Stanley McChrystal, put together a group of reliable outside analysts to write another strategic assessment that was then mysteriously leaked right as the president was moving toward making a decision on a second surge in Afghanistan.

It is not surprising, given how prominent Petraeus and McChrystal were allowed to be, that McChrystal, who lacks Petraeus' political skills, would overstep his bounds. But McChrystal's public criticism of Vice President Joe Biden's position in administration debates was just as severe a transgression of civil-military norms as was MacArthur's criticism of President Truman. Indeed, McChrystal's was worse. At least MacArthur's criticism was contained in a private letter to an American congressman, not in a public address to a foreign think tank. Amazingly, McChrystal was allowed to remain in place until the command climate he'd created became public in a Rolling Stone article.

Petraeus has also commented publicly on politically sensitive issues such as the Israeli-Palestinian dispute, and he publicly condemned an American citizen exercising his free speech rights in the admittedly offensive Koran-burning incident.

But perhaps most significantly, Gates stood aside or was complicit in efforts to punish military officers who were willing to buck Pentagon conventional wisdom and provide the president with alternatives to escalation in Afghanistan. In addition to McKiernan, who saw his career ended, Gen. James Cartwright was widely seen as a likely successor to Adm. Mike Mullen as chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff until he clashed with Mullen over providing Obama with alternatives to the Gates-Mullen-Petraeus-McChrystal-favored surge. He was then subjected to an extended whispering campaign that finally knocked him out of the running.

National security is a high-stakes game, of course, and debates often bring out the worst kinds of bureaucratic gamesmanship. And yet, the sheer list of problematic civil-military issues during the Gates years points to a fundamental weakness in his tenure.

#### THE PROVISION OF EFFECTIVE MILITARY ADVICE

Gates' inability or unwillingness to enforce civil-military relations norms is even more problematic as a consequence of the specific policy consequences. There is not enough space here to address the weaknesses of the Afghan surge decision of 2009 in depth, but suffice it to say that the strategic logic of the decision is open to question.

A large number of assumptions were untested at the time and are now increasingly dubious. Gates essentially signed off on an Afghanistan surge despite a lack of sufficient information about conditions on the ground. As Maj. Gen. Michael Flynn, deputy chief of staff for intelligence in Afghanistan, wrote shortly after the December 2009 surge decision: "Ignorant of local economics and landowners, hazy about who the powerbrokers are and how they might be influenced, incurious about the correlations between various development projects and the levels of cooperation among villagers, and disengaged from people in the best position to find answers — whether aid workers or Afghan soldiers — U.S. intelligence officers and analysts can do little but shrug in response to high-level decision-makers seeking the knowledge, analysis and information they need to wage a successful counterinsurgency."

The strategy also made heroic assumptions about Afghan President Hamid Karzai's effectiveness, the level of cooperation the U.S. might expect from Pakistan and the timeline for success. The point is not to relitigate the Afghan surge decision, but rather to note that despite a series of strategy reviews, the final product was problematic at best. Gates must take some of the blame for that. Since the surge, violence in Afghanistan is up, tensions with Pakistan and Karzai at an all-time high, and there is increasing skepticism about the strategy.

Similarly, while Gates was apparently skeptical of the Libya intervention, it also occurred on his watch. This operation, now approaching its fourth month, seems increasingly like a pointless, open-ended commitment that fails to use military force effectively. Should not a successful secretary of defense have a better track record for interventions under his watch?

#### WINNING THE WARS WE'RE IN

The main problem with Gates was his tendency to see his job as that of quartermaster or personnel chief. Instead of providing high-level leadership, he tended to see his job as intervening at lower levels to solve specific problems. Soldiers are killed by improvised explosive devices? He worked to get more MRAPs into theater. Units not having enough time to rest, refit and train between deployments? He signed off on temporary force-size increases. Various programs overbudget or facing technical challenges? Gates was willing to kill them to fund more pressing priorities. But in all of this, where was the strategic leadership we expect from our senior leaders?

The problem is that "winning the wars we're in" is an appealing mantra. It sounds tough and hands-on. But except in the rare circumstance of total war, the "wars we're in" must always be balanced against the threats and challenges we may face in the future. This is particularly true when our current conflicts are, essentially, sideshows, wars of choice in strategic backwaters. The notion that American national security strategy ought to be subservient to the short-term demands of Iraq or Afghanistan is obviously flawed. Instead, those conflicts must be waged with an eye to making them consistent with long-term national security requirements. In a fundamental sense, Gates consistently put the tactical/operational cart before the strategic horse. That is an understandable flaw for a theater commander, but it is precisely the sort of mistake we expect a good secretary of defense to avoid.

**CHALLENGES FOR PANETTA**

Given the legacy of challenges left over from the Gates era, incoming Defense Secretary Leon Panetta faces a difficult task. In order to be successful, he will need to address three key issues:

· Panetta must reintroduce a culture of strategic thinking to the Office of the Secretary of Defense. This involves a willingness to think clearly and precisely about the medium-to-long term. This will require cutting through the intellectually lazy tendency to describe the world as "complex" and hence resistant to analysis. Defense planning involves making choices, and choices require firm analytical foundations that go beyond listing a generic set of future risk factors. Ultimately, the department will need to abandon "capabilities-based" planning and return to "contingency-based" planning. But this will require an unwillingness to tolerate the vague and fuzzy language that currently permeates DoD strategic documents.

· Panetta must re-establish traditional norms of civil-military relations. Simply put, too many uniformed officers are involved in too many policy areas. Panetta must reduce the visibility of the uniformed military in policy debates.

· Panetta will need to push Obama to adopt a more disciplined approach to decisions about the use of military force. The problems and challenges with the Afghanistan and Libya decisions were predictable — and widely predicted — at the time.

In the final analysis, Gates gets a lot of credit from analysts because the situation in Iraq seemed to improve under his watch. Certainly he deserves some credit for that. But in the bigger picture, there are many more problems with Gates' tenure than there are successes. Panetta's job, in many ways, will be to be the "anti-Gates" if he is to put the Defense Department back onto a sustainable track. AFJ

☞ email | ☐ print | ☐ continue the debate

■ **BERNARD I. FINEL** is associate professor of national security strategy at the National War College. His views are his own and do not necessarily reflect those of the National War College, National Defense University or the Department of Defense.



**Keynote Speakers:**  
• **Rep. Mike Rogers**  
 (R-Alabama)  
 Chairman, U.S. House  
 Permanent Select  
 Committee on Intelligence  
• **U.S. Gen. John C. Hensley, USAF**  
 (Ret.)  
 Deputy Assistant Secretary  
 of Defense (Strategic)  
 for Joint and Counter-Intelligence  
 Warfare, and Director of the  
 Joint Force  
• **Dr. Scott R. Silliman**  
 Deputy Under Secretary of Defense  
 for Strategic Programs & Resources,  
 Office of the Under Secretary of  
 Defense (Acquisition)

**JOIN THE DEBATE**

Take part in discussions about the articles in the current issue of Armed Forces Journal, or other defense-related topics, in AFJ Forums.

[visit the forums »](#)

**About AFJ | [Subscribe](#) | [Renew](#) | [Customer Service](#) | [Advertising](#) | [Contact Us](#)**  
For inquiries about reproduction or distribution of any materials contained herein, please [click here](#).  
All content © 2011, Armed Forces Journal | [Terms of Service](#) | [Privacy Policy](#)

Bert G. Kerstetter '66 University Professor of Politics and International Affairs  
Princeton University