

# WebMemo



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## The Gates Confirmation Hearing: Congress Must Focus on Defense Essentials

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Job one for the Senate in the confirmation hearings for Robert Gates as the next Secretary of Defense is to focus their questioning on the Pentagon's near-term priorities. Gates must concentrate his efforts where he can have the biggest impact on ensuring America has the military it needs to deal with the national security challenges of the 21st century.

### Twilight Time

The last years of any presidential administration provide scant opportunity to impact the course of defense policies and programs. Gates will face a particularly daunting task when he takes over the Pentagon. Not only will he have little time to make a difference, but many "hot button" issues will be competing for his attention. The Secretary of Defense-designate and the Senate can make best use of their time during the confirmation hearings by reaching consensus on what issues have to come first.

### Topics to Discuss

Prudent confirmation hearings must focus on the near-term issues that can be addressed and that will have the greatest long-term impact on national security. These should include:

- **Developing consensus on Iraq policy:** It is long past the time for treating Iraq as an issue for partisan political debate. The Pentagon's principal task in Iraq must be to prepare Iraqi security forces to assume full responsibility soon for addressing sectarian violence, the insurgency, and terrorism. This will entail developing a solid

plan for how the Pentagon can effectively support the Iraqi forces and the Defense and Interior ministries over the long term.

- **Working with NATO in Afghanistan:** NATO is struggling in Afghanistan. As it ponders overly ambitious and unrealistic plans to undertake nation-building, it is often unwilling to use the military force necessary to take on the terrorists. With its limited capacity and resolve, NATO could well fail in Afghanistan. Active American engagement will encourage NATO forces to focus and prioritize their efforts to match the strategy to the resources.
- **Getting the terrorists:** The war on terrorism requires employing all the instruments of national power, including diplomatic, economic, intelligence, law enforcement, and political tools as well as the force of arms. The Pentagon must commit to working with other federal agencies and international partners. Where it's needed, the military must have the right forces to root out terrorist leaders, networks, and sanctuaries.
- **Keeping missile defense going:** Missile defense is neither a subject for ideological debate nor a Defense Department science experiment. It is an

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essential component of national security in the 21st century. The task of the Pentagon and the Senate is to recast the debate over missile defense, moving it from partisan political bickering to practical discussion of the most efficient and effective means to extend the deployment of missile defenses for the United States and its allies. Proliferating missile defenses is the free world's "ace in the pocket" against rogue regimes like Iran and North Korea.

- **Rebuilding America's military:** The last half-decade has inflicted much wear and tear on the armed forces. The last two years of an administration will not be enough to refit and repair equipment, modernize the force, and ensure a trained and ready military is prepared for future

missions. Defense budgets will need to remain robust for at least a decade. The Senate and the Pentagon must work together to make the case for sustained, robust defense spending.

The Gates hearings offer an opportunity for the Secretary-designate and the Senate to define together the Pentagon's key short-term leadership challenges. It is an opportunity that should not be missed.

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