

Air War College (Montgomery, AL)

Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates  
Maxwell-Gunter Air Force Base, Montgomery, Ala.  
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Good morning. It's a pleasure to be back at Maxwell.

As you may know, this week I am visiting each of the service war colleges to discuss the budget recommendations I made to the President. Those recommendations have three principal objectives:

- First, to reaffirm our commitment to take care of the all-volunteer force, which, in my view represents America's greatest strategic asset; as Admiral Mullen says, if we don't get the people part of our business right, no other decisions will matter;
- Second, to rebalance this department's programs in order to institutionalize and enhance our capabilities to fight the wars we are in today and the scenarios we are most likely to face in the years ahead, while at the same time providing a hedge against other risks and contingencies; and
- Third, in order to do all this, we must reform how and what we buy, meaning a fundamental overhaul of our approach to procurement, acquisition, and contracting.

During my visit to Quantico on Monday, I was asked why I decided to go to the war colleges to discuss this topic. What I said then, and repeat now, is that these recommendations are less about budget numbers than they are about how the U.S. military thinks about and prepares for the future. Fundamentally, the proposals are about how we think about the nature of warfare. About how we take care of our people. About how we institutionalize support for the warfighter for the long term. About the role of the services and how we can buy weapons as jointly as we fight. About reforming our requirements and acquisition processes. These are just the kinds of basic questions you will be dealing with as you go on to senior staff and command positions.

So with that in mind, for the next few minutes I want to give you some more insight into the thinking and analysis behind my budget recommendations, and then give you a chance to ask questions and share your views.

In many ways, these recommendations are really a reflection of my experiences in this job for the past two-plus years. Starting with the roll-out

of the Iraq surge, my overriding priority has been getting troops at the front everything they need to fight, to win, and to survive while making sure that they and their families are properly cared for when they return. And whether the issue was fixing outpatient care, getting better armored vehicles, or sending more ISR capability to theater, I kept running into the fact that the Department of Defense as an institution – which routinely complained that the rest of government was not at war – was itself not on a war footing, even as young Americans were fighting and dying every day.

For too long there was a view, or a hope, that Iraq and Afghanistan were exotic distractions that would be wrapped up relatively soon – the regimes toppled, the insurgencies crushed, the troops brought home. Therefore, we should not spend too much, or buy too much equipment not already in our procurement plans, or turn our bureaucracies and processes upside down. As a result, the kinds of capabilities that were most urgently needed by our warfighters in theater were for the most part fielded ad hoc and on the fly, developed outside the regular bureaucracy and funded in supplemental appropriations that would go away when the wars did – if not sooner.

The wars we are in clearly have not earned much of a constituency in the Pentagon as compared to the services' conventional modernization programs. That was the root of my frustration when I came to Maxwell a year ago and spoke about "pulling teeth" to get more ISR. And this situation applied as well to programs to care for and reduce the stress on people – the troops and their families – as a result of the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan.

This did not mean that conventional capabilities and preparing for other contingencies were not important. It was a matter of balance. I just wanted to see that the needs of the warfighter – on the battlefield, at home, or in the hospital – had a seat at the table when priorities were being set and long-term base budget decisions were being made. And one of the things I've learned since entering government 43 years ago is that the best way to ensure that an organization really cares for and protects something – as a lioness does her cubs – is to put that thing in its base budget.

So, the top priority recommendation I made to the president was to move programs that support the warfighters and their families into the services' base budget, where they can acquire a bureaucratic constituency and long-term funding. This includes, among others, more funding for medical research and treatment for TBI and post-traumatic stress, improved child care, spousal support, lodging, and education. In addition, priorities such as expanding the ground forces and halting Air Force and Navy manpower

reductions were put in the base budget, as was increasing funding for special operations, helicopter support, and ISR.

With regard to ISR, I would be remiss in this setting if I did not give credit where credit is due for what has been accomplished over the past year. We've seen a dramatic increase in UAV orbits in theater – from 23 combat air patrols twelve months ago, to 34 today. The Air Force also stood up a second schoolhouse and created a new operational specialty for unmanned system pilots. Due to that second schoolhouse we are projected to reach 50 combat air patrols by Fiscal Year 2011. With Task Force Odin deployed in Iraq, and now Task Force Liberty in Afghanistan, we've seen how a modest expenditure to mate advanced sensors to turbo-prop aircraft can make a huge difference to the men and women at the front. This year's budget recommendations include more funds for hardware and operations support in the area of ISR processing, exploitation, and dissemination.

These proposals, then, begin the effort to establish an institutional home in the Department of Defense for today's warfighter as well as tomorrow's.

Another theme underlying my recommendations is the need to think about future conflicts in a different way. To recognize that the black and white distinction between irregular war and conventional war is an outdated model. We must understand that we face a more complex future than that, a future where all conflict will range along a broad spectrum of operations and lethality. Where near-peers will use irregular or asymmetric tactics and non-state actors may have weapons of mass destruction or sophisticated missiles as well as AK-47s and RPGs. This kind of warfare will require capabilities with the maximum possible flexibility to deal with the widest possible range of conflict.

Now, even with this in mind – perhaps especially with this in mind, we cannot ignore the risks posed by the military forces of other state actors. This is a particularly salient issue for this group, as the weight of America's conventional and strategic strength has shifted to our air and naval forces. This brings me to some of our conventional and strategic modernization programs, which continue to make up the overwhelming bulk of the department's procurement, research, and development accounts.

Broadly speaking, there were several principles or criteria that governed, either in total or in part, most of my major program decisions. The first was to halt or delay production on systems that relied on promising, but unproven, technology, while continuing to produce – and, if necessary, upgrade – systems that are best in class and that we know work. This was a factor in my decisions to:

- Cancel the Transformational Satellite (TSAT) program and instead build more Advanced Extremely High Frequency (AEHF) satellites;
- Cap the Navy's DDG-1000 ships at three while increasing the buy of Arleigh Burke-class destroyers; and
- Halt the airborne laser at the R&D phase while increasing funding for the THAAD missile defense program.

Furthermore, where different modernization programs within services existed to counter roughly the same threat, or accomplish roughly the same mission, we should look more to capabilities available across the services. While the military has made great strides in operating jointly over the last two decades, procurement remains overwhelmingly service-centric. The Combat Search and Rescue helicopter had major development and cost problems to be sure. What cemented my decision to cancel this program was the fact that we were on the verge of launching yet another single-service platform for a mission that in the real world is truly joint. This is a question we must consider for all of the services' modernization portfolios.

Another important thing I looked at was whether modernization programs, in particular ground modernization programs, had incorporated the operational and combat experiences of Iraq and Afghanistan. The problem with the Army's Future Combat Systems vehicles was that a program designed nine years ago did not adequately reflect the lessons of close-quarter combat and improvised explosive devices that have taken a fearsome toll on our troops and their vehicles in Iraq, and now in Afghanistan.

Finally, I concluded we need to shift away from the 99 percent "exquisite" service-centric platforms that are so costly and complex that they take forever to build and only then in very limited quantities. With the pace of technological and geopolitical change, and the range of possible contingencies, we must look more to the 80 percent multi-service solution that can be produced on time, on budget, and in significant numbers. As Stalin once said, "Quantity has a quality all of its own."

This was a major consideration with shipbuilding and air superiority. I recommended accelerating the buy of the Littoral Combat Ship, which, despite its development problems, is a versatile vessel that can be produced in quantity and go to places that are either too shallow or too dangerous for the Navy's big, blue water surface combatants. As we saw last week, you don't necessarily need a billion-dollar ship to chase down a bunch of teenage pirates.

I also believe these budget recommendations demonstrate a serious commitment to maintaining U.S. air supremacy, the sine qua non of American military strength for more than six decades. This budget increased funding from \$6.8 to \$11.2 billion for the fifth generation F-35, accelerating the development and testing regime to fix the remaining problems and begin rolling out these aircraft in quantity – more than 500 over the next five years, and more than 2,400 total for all the services.

When examining the issue of air supremacy, we had to ask, what is the right mix of weapons to deal with the span of threats? What are the things that the F-22, and only the F-22, can do – and where would it be required? There is no doubt that the F-22 has unique capabilities that we need – the penetration and defeat of an advanced enemy air defense and fighter fleet. But, the F-22 is, in effect, a niche, silver-bullet solution required for a limited number of scenarios – to overcome advanced enemy fighters and air defense systems. In assessing the F-22 requirement, we also considered the advanced stealth and superior air-to-ground capabilities provided by the fifth-generation F-35s now being accelerated in this budget, the growing capability and range of unmanned platforms like the Reaper, and other systems in the Air Force and in other services. I also considered the fact that Russia is probably 6 years away from Initial Operating Capability of a fifth-generation fighter and the Chinese are 10 to 12 years away. By then we will have more than 1,000 fifth-generation fighters in our inventory. In light of all these factors, and on the recommendation of the Air Force secretary and chief of staff, I concluded that 183 – the program of record since 2005 – plus four would be a sufficient number to meet requirements. To be clear, the F-22 program of record as codified in the FY 2005 budget (and all budgets since) will be completed, and not cut as many have said and reported.

Looking forward, the goal of our weapons buying is to develop a portfolio – a mixture of weapons whose flexibility allows us to respond to a spectrum of contingencies on or beyond the horizon. Focusing exclusively, or obsessively, on a single weapons system designed to do a specific job or confront a single adversary ignores what a truly joint force can and must do in the 21st century.

Where the trend of future conflict is clear, I have made specific recommendations. In other areas, however, I believe that we need to develop a more rigorous analytical framework before moving forward – the type of framework that will be provided by the Quadrennial Defense Review. I should note that this will be the first QDR able to fully incorporate the numerous lessons learned on the battlefield these past few years. Lessons

about what tactics future adversaries, both state and non-state actors, are likely to pursue – especially given our conventional dominance in air and at sea.

Again, as noted earlier, one thing that is clear is that, going forward, the distinction between high-end and low-end war, between mechanized battles and stability operations, are blurring to the point where the old definitions of conventional and unconventional are no longer useful. War in the future will often be a hybrid blend of tactics. Where a nation-state might deploy a mix of crude and advanced weapons to limit options, disrupt freedom of action, or deny access to key assets such as forward air bases.

We have started to address these developments in the budget recommendations. The QDR, as well as other reviews like the Nuclear Posture Review, will examine these issues more closely. That is one reason I delayed some decisions to do with, for example, amphibious operations and the next generation cruiser: to develop an intellectual construct through which we can more precisely determine what requirements and capabilities will be needed in the future.

A few examples relevant to the Air Force:

- Before continuing with a program for a manned bomber, we should first assess the requirements and what other capabilities we might have for this mission – as well as the outcome of post-START arms-control negotiations.
- We know that the future will see an increase in unmanned systems of all kinds – with further reach and more capabilities. What are the implications of this reality on the number and types of manned fighters we need, since the UAVs must be considered a key component of our air capabilities?
- And, since UAVs do not re-fuel midair, how will this affect the number of tankers we buy? Having said that, I am committed to moving forward on the rebid for the Air Force's KC-X tanker as quickly as possible – hopefully by this summer. Our aging tankers, the lifeblood of any expeditionary force, are in serious need of replacement.

As we look towards the future, I have directed the QDR team to be realistic about the scenarios where direct U.S. military action would be required. We have to be prepared for the wars we are most likely to fight – not just the wars we're best suited to fight, or threats we conjure up from potential adversaries with unlimited time and resources. And as I've said before, even when considering challenges from nation-states with modern militaries, the answer is not necessarily buying more technologically advanced versions of

what we built – on land, sea, or air – to stop the Soviets during the Cold War.

While there were many other issues that arose, and many other decisions that were made, I'd like to give you some time to ask questions. I'll close with a final thought.

Throughout its history, the Air Force has constantly re-invented itself to meet evolving threats – one of the primary reasons we have such air dominance today. Indeed, all of the services are challenged to find the right balance between preserving what is unique and valuable in their traditions, while at the same time making the changes necessary to win the wars we are in and be prepared for future threats. With this budget, I have tried to make a holistic assessment of capabilities, requirements, risks, and needs across the services. I ask you to do the same – to look outside your area of specialty, and outside your military branch. To look forward with the certainty that the battlefield is constantly evolving, and that the Air Force and the joint force must always be evolving with it.

Thank you for your being here this morning, and for your continued service to our country.

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