

# Beyond Guns and Steel: Reviving the Nonmilitary Instruments of American Power

*Remarks as delivered verbatim by Secretary of Defense  
Robert M. Gates, Manhattan, Kansas, 26 November 2007*



**I**T IS BOTH AN HONOR AND A PLEASURE to be part of the Landon Lecture series—a forum that for more than four decades has hosted some of America’s leading intellectuals and statesmen. Considering that, I at first wondered if the invitation was in fact meant for Bill Gates.

It is a pleasure to get out of Washington, D.C., for a little while. I left Washington in 1994, and I was certain, and very happy, that it was the last time I would ever live there. But history, and current events, have a way of exacting revenge on those who say “never.” I’ve now been back in the District of Columbia for close to a year, which reminds me of an old saying: For the first six months you’re in Washington, you wonder how the hell you ever got there; for the next six months, you wonder how the hell the rest of them ever got there.

Looking around the world today, optimism and idealism would not seem to have much of a place at the table. There is no shortage of anxiety about where our nation is headed and what its role will be in the 21st century.

But I can remember clearly other times in my life when such dark sentiments were prevalent. In 1957, when I was at Wichita High School East, the Soviet Union launched Sputnik, and Americans feared being left behind in the space race and, even more worrisome, the missile race.

In 1968, the first full year I lived in Washington, was the same year as the Tet offensive in Vietnam, where American troop levels and casualties were at their height. Across the nation, protests and violence over Vietnam engulfed America’s cities and campuses. On my second day of work as a CIA analyst, the Soviet Union invaded Czechoslovakia. And then came the 1970s—when it seemed that everything that could go wrong for America did.

Yet, through it all, there was another storyline, one not then apparent. During those same years, the elements were in place and forces were at work that would eventually lead to victory in the Cold War—a victory achieved not by any one party or any single president, but by a series of decisions, choices, and institutions that bridged decades, generations, and administrations. From—

- The first brave stand taken by Harry Truman with the doctrine of containment; to
- The Helsinki Accords under Gerald Ford; to
- The elevation of human rights under Jimmy Carter; to
- The muscular words and deeds of Ronald Reagan; to
- The masterful endgame diplomacy of George H.W. Bush.

All contributed to bring an evil empire crashing down not with a bang but with a whimper. And virtually without a shot being fired.

*Use approved by the  
Department of Defense*

PHOTO: Defense Secretary Robert Gates addresses the crowd during a Landon Lecture at Kansas State University in Manhattan, Kansas, 26 November 2007. (AP Photo/Charlie Riedel)

In this great effort, institutions, as much as people and policies, played a key role. Many of those key organizations were created 60 years ago this year with the National Security Act of 1947—a single act of legislation which established the Central Intelligence Agency, the National Security Council, the United States Air Force, and what is now known as the Department of Defense. I mention all this because that legislation and those instruments of national power were designed at the dawn of a new era in international relations for the United States—an era dominated by the Cold War.

The end of the Cold War, and the attacks of September 11, marked the dawn of another new era in international relations—an era whose challenges may be unprecedented in complexity and scope.

In important respects, the great struggles of the 20th century—World War I and World War II and the Cold War—covered over conflicts that had boiled and seethed and provoked wars and instability for centuries before 1914: ethnic strife, religious wars, independence movements, and, especially in the last quarter of the 19th century, terrorism. The First World War was, itself, sparked by a terrorist assassination motivated by an ethnic group seeking independence.

These old hatreds and conflicts were buried alive during and after the Great War. But, like monsters in science fiction, they have returned from the grave to threaten peace and stability around the world. Think of the slaughter in the Balkans as Yugoslavia broke up in the 1990s. Even now, we worry about the implications of Kosovo's independence in the next few weeks for Europe, Serbia, and Russia. That cast of characters sounds disturbingly familiar even at a century's remove.

The long years of religious warfare in Europe between Protestant and Catholic Christians find eerie contemporary echoes in the growing Sunni versus Shi'a contest for Islamic hearts and minds in the Middle East, the Persian Gulf, and Southwest Asia.

We also have forgotten that between Abraham Lincoln and John F. Kennedy, two American presidents and one presidential candidate were assassinated or attacked by terrorists—as were various tsars, empresses, princes, and, on a fateful day in June 1914, an archduke. Other acts of terrorism were commonplace in Europe and Russia in the latter part of the 19th century.

So, history was not dead at the end of the Cold War. Instead, it was reawakening with a vengeance. And, the revived monsters of the past have returned far stronger and more dangerous than before because of modern technology—both for communication and for destruction—and to a world that is far more closely connected and interdependent than the world of 1914.

Unfortunately, the dangers and challenges of old have been joined by new forces of instability and conflict, among them—

• A new and more malignant form of global terrorism rooted in extremist and violent jihadism;

• New manifestations of ethnic, tribal, and sectarian conflict all over the world;

• The proliferation of weapons of mass destruction;

• Failed and failing states;

• States enriched with oil profits and discontented with the current international order; and

• Centrifugal forces in other countries that threaten national unity, stability, and internal peace—but also with implications for regional and global security.

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Worldwide, there are authoritarian regimes facing increasingly restive populations seeking political freedom as well as a better standard of living. And finally, we see both emergent and resurgent great powers whose future path is still unclear.

One of my favorite lines is that experience is the ability to recognize a mistake when you make it again. Four times in the last century the United States has come to the end of a war, concluded that the nature of man and the world had changed for the better, and turned inward, unilaterally disarming and dismantling institutions important to our national security—in the process, giving ourselves a so-called “peace” dividend. Four times we chose to forget history.

Isaac Barrow once wrote, “How like a paradise the world would be, flourishing in joy and rest, if men would cheerfully conspire in affection and helpfully contribute to each other’s content: and how like a savage wilderness now it is, when, like wild beasts, they vex and persecute, worry and devour each other.” He wrote that in the late 1600s. Or, listen to the words of Sir William Stephenson, author of *A Man Called Intrepid* and a key figure in the Allied victory in World War II. He wrote, “Perhaps a day will dawn when tyrants can no longer threaten the liberty of any people, when the function of all nations, however varied their ideologies, will be to enhance life, not to control it. If such a condition is possible it is in a future too far distant to foresee.”

After September 11th, the United States re-armed and again strengthened our intelligence capabilities. It will be critically important to sustain those capabilities in the future—it will be important not to make the same mistake a fifth time.

But, my message today is not about the defense budget or military power. My message is that if we are to meet the myriad challenges around the world in the coming decades, this country must strengthen other important elements of national power, both institutionally and financially, and create the capability to integrate and apply all of the elements of national power to problems and challenges abroad. In short, based on my experience serving seven presidents, as a former director of CIA and now as secretary of defense, I am here to make the case for strengthening our capacity to use “soft” power and for better integrating it with “hard” power.

One of the most important lessons of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan is that military success is not sufficient to win: economic development,

institution-building and the rule of law, promoting internal reconciliation, good governance, providing basic services to the people, training and equipping indigenous military and police forces, strategic communications, and more—these, along with security, are essential ingredients for long-term success. Accomplishing all of these tasks will be necessary to meet the diverse challenges I have described.

So, we must urgently devote time, energy, and thought to how we better organize ourselves to meet the international challenges of the present and the future—the world you students will inherit and lead.

I spoke a few moments ago about the landmark National Security Act of 1947 and the institutions created to fight the Cold War. In light of the challenges I have just discussed, I would like to pose a question: if there were to be a “National Security Act of 2007,” looking beyond the crush of day-to-day headlines, what problems must it address, what capabilities ought it create or improve, where should it lead our government as we look to the future? What new institutions do we need for this post Cold War world?

As an old Cold Warrior with a doctorate in history, I hope you’ll indulge me as I take a step back in time. Because context is important, as many of the goals, successes, and failures from the Cold War are instructive in considering how we might better focus energies and resources—especially the ways in which our nation can influence the rest of the world to help protect our security and advance our interests and values.

What we consider today the key elements and instruments of national power trace their beginnings to the mid-1940s, to a time when the government was digesting lessons learned during World War II. Looking back, people often forget that the war effort—though victorious—was hampered and hamstrung by divisions and dysfunction. Franklin Roosevelt quipped that trying to get the Navy, which was its own cabinet department at the time, to change was akin to hitting a featherbed: “You punch it with your right and you punch it with your left until you are finally exhausted,” he said, “and then you find the damn bed just as it was before.” And Harry Truman noted that if the Navy and Army had fought as hard against the Germans as they had

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fought against each other, the war would have been over much sooner.

This record drove the thinking behind the 1947 National Security Act, which attempted to fix the systemic failures that had plagued the government and military during World War II—while reviving capabilities and setting the stage for a struggle against the Soviet Union that seemed more inevitable each passing day.

The 1947 Act acknowledged that we had been over-zealous in our desire to shut down capabilities that had been so valuable during the war—most of America’s intelligence and information assets disappeared as soon as the guns fell silent. The Office of Strategic Services—the war intelligence agency—was axed, as was the Office of War Information. In 1947, OSS returned as CIA, but it would be years before we restored our communications capabilities by creating the United States Information Agency.

There is in many quarters the tendency to see that period as the pinnacle of wise governance and savvy statecraft. As I wrote a number of years ago, “Looking back, it all seem[ed] so easy, so painless, so inevitable.” It was anything but.

Consider that the creation of the National Military Establishment in 1947—the Department of Defense—was meant to promote unity among the military services. It didn’t. A mere two years later the Congress had to pass another law because the Joint Chiefs of Staff were anything but joint. And there was no chairman to referee the constant disputes.

At the beginning, the secretary of defense had little real power—despite an exalted title. The law forbade him from having a military staff and limited him to three civilian assistants. These days, it takes that many to sort my mail.

Throughout the long, twilight struggle of the Cold War, the various parts of the government did not communicate or coordinate very well with each other. There were military, intelligence, and diplomatic failures in Korea, Vietnam, Iran, Grenada, and many other places. Getting the military services to work together was a recurring battle that had to be addressed time and again, and was only really resolved by legislation in 1986.

But despite the problems, we realized, as we had during World War II, that the nature of the conflict required us to develop key capabilities and institutions—many of them *nonmilitary*. The Mar-

shall Plan and later the United States Agency for International Development acknowledged the role of economics in the world; the CIA the role of intelligence; and the United States Information Agency the fact that the conflict would play out as much in hearts and minds as it would on any battlefield.

The key, over time, was to devote the necessary resources—people and money—and get enough things right while maintaining the ability to recover from mistakes along the way. Ultimately, our endurance paid off and the Soviet Union crumbled, and the decades-long Cold War ended.

However, during the 1990s, with the complicity of both the Congress and the White House, key instruments of America’s national power once again were allowed to wither or were abandoned. Most people are familiar with cutbacks in the military and intelligence—including sweeping reductions in manpower, nearly 40 percent in the active army, 30 percent in CIA’s clandestine services.

What is not as well-known, and arguably even more shortsighted, was the gutting of America’s ability to engage, assist, and communicate with other parts of the world—the “soft power,” which had been so important throughout the Cold War. The State Department froze the hiring of new foreign service officers for a period of time. The United States Agency for International Development saw deep staff cuts—its permanent staff dropping from a high of 15,000 during Vietnam to about 3,000 in the 1990s. And the U.S. Information Agency was abolished as an independent entity, split into pieces, and many of its capabilities folded into a small corner of the State Department.

Even as we throttled back, the world became more unstable, turbulent, and unpredictable than during the Cold War years. And then came the attacks of 11 September 2001, one of those rare life-changing dates, a shock so great that it appears to have shifted the tectonic plates of history. That day abruptly ended the false peace of the 1990s as well as our “holiday from history.”

As is often the case after such momentous events, it has taken some years for the contour lines of the international arena to become clear. What we do know is that the threats and challenges we will face abroad in the first decades of the 21st century will extend well beyond the traditional domain of any single government agency.

The real challenges we have seen emerge since the end of the Cold War—from Somalia to the Balkans, Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere—make clear we in Defense need to change our priorities to be better able to deal with the prevalence of what is called “asymmetric warfare.” As I told an Army gathering last month, it is hard to conceive of any country challenging the United States directly in conventional military terms—at least for some years to come. Indeed, history shows us that smaller, irregular forces—insurgents, guerrillas, terrorists—have for centuries found ways to harass and frustrate larger, regular armies and sow chaos.

We can expect that asymmetric warfare will be the mainstay of the contemporary battlefield for some time. These conflicts will be fundamentally political in nature, and require the application of all elements of national power. Success will be less a matter of imposing one’s will and more a function of shaping behavior—of friends, adversaries, and most importantly, the people in between.

Arguably the most important military component in the War on Terror is not the fighting we do ourselves, but how well we enable and empower our partners to defend and govern themselves. The standing up and mentoring of indigenous army and police—once the province of Special Forces—is now a key mission for the military as a whole.

But these new threats also require our government to operate as a whole differently—to act with unity, agility, and creativity. And they will require considerably more resources devoted to America’s nonmilitary instruments of power.

So, what are the capabilities, institutions, and priorities our nation must collectively address—through both the executive and legislative branches, as well as the people they serve?

I would like to start with an observation. Governments of all stripes seem to have great difficulty summoning the will—and the resources—to deal

even with threats that are obvious and likely inevitable, much less threats that are more complex or over the horizon. There is, however, no inherent flaw in human nature or democratic government that keeps us from preparing for potential challenges and dangers by taking far-sighted actions with long-term benefits. As individuals, we do it all the time. The Congress did it in 1947. As a nation, today, as in 1947, the key is wise and focused bipartisan leadership—and political will.

I mentioned a moment ago that one of the most important lessons from our experience in Iraq, Afghanistan, and elsewhere has been the decisive role reconstruction, development, and governance plays in any meaningful, long-term success.

The Department of Defense has taken on many of these burdens that might have been assumed by civilian agencies in the past, although new resources have permitted the State Department to begin taking on a larger role in recent months. Still, forced by circumstances, our brave men and women in uniform have stepped up to the task, with field artillerymen and tankers building schools and mentoring city councils—usually in a language they don’t speak. They have done an admirable job. And as I’ve said before, the Armed Forces will need to institutionalize and retain these non-traditional capabilities—something the ROTC cadets in this audience can anticipate.

But it is no replacement for the real thing—civilian involvement and expertise.

A few examples are useful here, as microcosms of what our overall government effort should look like—one historical and a few contemporary ones.

However uncomfortable it may be to raise Vietnam all these years later, the history of that conflict is instructive. After first pursuing a strategy based on conventional military firepower, the United States shifted course and began a comprehensive, integrated program of pacification, civic action, and economic development. The CORDS program, as it was known, involved more than a thousand civilian employees from USAID and other organizations, and brought the multiple agencies into a joint effort. It had the effect of, in the words of General Creighton Abrams, putting “all of *us* on one side and the enemy on the other.” By the time U.S. troops were pulled out, the CORDS program had helped pacify most of the hamlets in South Vietnam.

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The importance of deploying civilian expertise has been relearned—the hard way—through the effort to staff provincial reconstruction teams, first in Afghanistan and more recently in Iraq. The PRTs were designed to bring in civilians experienced in agriculture, governance, and other aspects of development—to work with and alongside the military to improve the lives of the local population, a key tenet of any counterinsurgency effort. Where they are on the ground—even in small numbers—we have seen tangible and often dramatic changes. An Army brigade commander in Baghdad recently said that an embedded PRT was “pivotal” in getting Iraqis in his sector to better manage their affairs.

We also have increased our effectiveness by joining with organizations and people outside the government—untapped resources with tremendous potential.

For example, in Afghanistan the military has recently brought in professional anthropologists as advisors. *The New York Times* reported on the work of one of them, who said, “I’m frequently accused of militarizing anthropology. But we’re really anthropologizing the military.”

And it is having a very real impact. The same story told of a village that had just been cleared of the Taliban. The anthropologist pointed out to the military officers that there were more widows than usual, and that the sons would feel compelled to take care of them—possibly by joining the insurgency, where many of the fighters are paid. So American officers began a job training program for the widows.

Similarly, our land-grant universities have provided valuable expertise on agricultural and other issues. Texas A&M has had faculty on the ground in Afghanistan and Iraq since 2003. And Kansas State is lending its expertise to help revitalize universities in Kabul and Mazar-e-Sharif, and working to improve the agricultural sector and veterinary care across Afghanistan. These efforts do not go unnoticed by either Afghan citizens or our men and women in uniform.

I have been heartened by the works of individuals and groups like these. But I am concerned that we need even more civilians involved in the effort and that our efforts must be better integrated.

And I remain concerned that we have yet to create any permanent capability or institutions to rapidly create and deploy these kinds of skills in the future. The examples I mentioned have, by and large, been created ad hoc—on the fly in a climate of crisis. As a nation, we need to figure out how to institutionalize programs and relationships such as these. And we need to find more untapped resources—places where it’s not necessarily how much you spend, but how you spend it.

The way to institutionalize these capabilities is probably not to recreate or repopulate institutions of the past such as AID or USIA. On the other hand, just adding more people to existing government departments such as Agriculture, Treasury, Commerce, Justice and so on is not a sufficient answer either—even if they were to be more deployable overseas. New institutions are needed for the 21st century, new organizations with a 21st century mind-set.

For example, public relations was invented in the United States, yet we are miserable at communicating to the rest of the world what we are about as a society and a culture, about freedom and democracy, about our policies and our goals. It is just plain embarrassing that al-Qaeda is better at communicating its message on the internet than America. As one foreign diplomat asked a couple of years ago, “How has one man in a cave managed to out-communicate the world’s greatest communication society?” Speed, agility, and cultural relevance are not terms that come readily to mind when discussing U.S. strategic communications.

Similarly, we need to develop a permanent, sizeable cadre of immediately deployable experts with disparate skills, a need that President Bush called for in his 2007 State of the Union address, and which the State Department is now working on with its initiative to build a civilian response corps. Both the president and secretary of state have asked for full funding for this initiative. But we also need new thinking about how to integrate our government’s capabilities in these areas, and then how to integrate government capabilities with those in the private sector, in universities, in other non-governmental

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organizations, with the capabilities of our allies and friends—and with the nascent capabilities of those we are trying to help.

Which brings me to a fundamental point. Despite the improvements of recent years, despite the potential innovative ideas hold for the future, sometimes there is no substitute for resources—for money.

Funding for nonmilitary foreign-affairs programs has increased since 2001, but it remains disproportionately small relative to what we spend on the military and to the importance of such capabilities. Consider that this year's budget for the Department of Defense—not counting operations in Iraq and Afghanistan—is nearly half-a-trillion dollars. The total foreign affairs budget request for the State Department is \$36 billion—less than what the Pentagon spends on health care alone. Secretary Rice has asked for a budget increase for the State Department and an expansion of the foreign service. The need is real.

Despite new hires, there are only about 6,600 professional foreign service officers—less than the manning for one aircraft carrier strike group. And personnel challenges loom on the horizon. By one estimate, 30 percent of USAID's foreign service officers are eligible for retirement this year—valuable experience that cannot be contracted out.

Overall, our current military spending amounts to about four percent of GDP, below the historic norm and well below previous wartime periods. Nonetheless, we use this benchmark as a rough floor of how much we should spend on defense. We lack a similar benchmark for other departments and institutions.

What is clear to me is that there is a need for a dramatic increase in spending on the civilian instruments of national security—diplomacy, strategic communications, foreign assistance, civic action, and economic reconstruction and development. Secretary Rice addressed this need in a speech at Georgetown University nearly two years ago. We

must focus our energies beyond the guns and steel of the military, beyond just our brave Soldiers, Sailors, Marines, and Airmen. We must also focus our energies on the other elements of national power that will be so crucial in the coming years.

Now, I am well aware that having a sitting secretary of defense travel halfway across the country to make a pitch to increase the budget of other agencies might fit into the category of “man bites dog”—or for some back in the Pentagon, “blasphemy.” It is certainly not an easy sell politically. And don't get me wrong, I'll be asking for yet more money for Defense next year.

Still, I hear all the time from the senior leadership of our Armed Forces about how important these civilian capabilities are. In fact, when chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Admiral Mike Mullen was chief of naval operations, he once said he'd hand a part of his budget to the State Department “in a heartbeat,” assuming it was spent in the right place.

After all, civilian participation is both necessary to making military operations successful and to relieving stress on the men and women of our armed services who have endured so much these last few years, and done so with such unflinching bravery and devotion. Indeed, having robust civilian capabilities available could make it less likely that military force will have to be used in the first place, as local problems might be dealt with before they become crises.

A last point. Repeatedly over the last century Americans averted their eyes in the belief that remote events elsewhere in the world need not engage this country. How could an assassination of an Austrian archduke in unknown Bosnia-Herzegovina affect us? Or the annexation of a little patch of ground called Sudetenland? Or a French defeat at a place called Dien Bien Phu? Or the return of an obscure cleric to Tehran? Or the radicalization of an Arab construction tycoon's son?

What seems to work best in world affairs, historian Donald Kagan wrote in his book *On the Origins of War*, “Is the possession by those states who wish to preserve the peace of the preponderant power and of the will to accept the burdens and responsibilities required to achieve that purpose.”

In an address at Harvard in 1943, Winston Churchill said, “The price of greatness is responsibility . . . The people of the United States cannot

escape world responsibility.” And, in a speech at Princeton in 1947, Secretary of State and retired Army general George Marshall told the students: “The development of a sense of responsibility for world order and security, the development of a sense of overwhelming importance of this country’s acts, and failures to act, in relation to world order and security—these, in my opinion, are great musts for your generation.”

Our country has now for many decades taken upon itself great burdens and great responsibilities—all in an effort to defeat despotism in its many forms or to preserve the peace so that other nations, and other peoples, could pursue their dreams. For many decades, the tender shoots of freedom all around the world have been nourished with American blood. Today, across the globe, there are more people than ever seeking economic and political freedom—seeking hope even as oppressive regimes and mass murderers sow chaos in their midst—seeking always to shake free from the bonds of tyranny.

For all of those brave men and women struggling for a better life, there is—and must be—no stronger ally or advocate than the United States of

America. Let us never forget that our nation remains a beacon of light for those in dark places. And that our responsibilities to the world—to freedom, to liberty, to the oppressed everywhere—are not a burden on the people or the soul of this nation. They are, rather, a blessing.

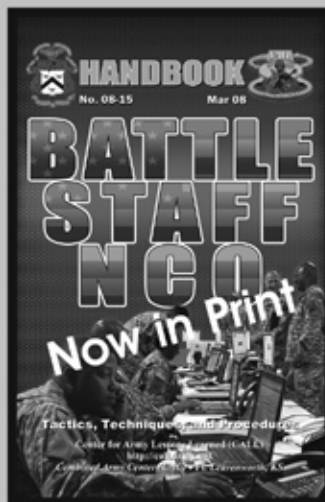
I will close with a message for students in the audience. The message is from Theodore Roosevelt, whose words ring as true today as when he delivered them in 1901. He said, “As, keen-eyed, we gaze into the coming years, duties, new and old, rise thick and fast to confront us from within and from without... [The United States] should face these duties with a sober appreciation alike of their importance and of their difficulty. But there is also every reason for facing them with high-hearted resolution and eager and confident faith in our capacity to do them aright.” He continued, “A great work lies ready to the hand of this generation; it should count itself happy indeed that to it is given the privilege of doing such a work.”

To the young future leaders of America here today, I say, “Come do the great work that lies ready to the hand of your generation.”

Thank you. **MR**

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