Gates versus

For former Defense Secretary Robert Gates, it was "one damn thing after another."

Former CIA chief Robert M. Gates brought a very negative view of the Air Force with him when he took the job of Secretary of Defense. In his book, *Duty: Memoirs of a Secretary at War,* he describes USAF as "one of my biggest headaches"—a perception Air Force leaders were never able to turn around during his five-year tenure at the Pentagon. In the book, Gates sticks to his story about why he sacked the service's top leadership and shot down the Air Force's most important programs, but his memoir reveals he often based his decisions on cherry-picked facts.

During his tenure, Gates fired Secretary of the Air Force Michael W. Wynne and Chief of Staff Gen. T. Michael Moseley. He also killed the F-22 fighter, Next Generation Bomber, and Airborne Laser; delayed USAF's new aerial tanker; and stymied an increase in USAF manning, all of which he boasts of in the book as "notches on my budget gun." He complained of having to coax the Air Force to supply enough intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance assets to the war effort, famously saying it was like "pulling teeth." In fact, the service had maxed out its ISR assets and was adding more at the limits of the manufacturer's capacity—which Gates knew—but he kept up a public tirade against the service anyway, all the while ignoring the Army's withholding of similar assets from the fight.

Gates' feud with USAF started almost from the beginning, as a major subset of what he calls his "war on the Pentagon." He asserts that he was "brought in to turn around a failing war effort" in Iraq and Afghanistan and was appalled at anything the services did that was not aimed squarely at that singular goal. He derides all the branches for treating the wars in Southwest Asia as "unwelcome aberrations, the kind of conflict we would never fight again—just the way they felt after Vietnam." And while Gates claims to have backed some preparation for possible future wars against peer opponents, "I was convinced they were far less likely to occur than messy, smaller, unconventional military endeavors." As a result, he moved to quash any programs like the F-22 that were meant to counter a world-class threat.

The services, Gates claims, yearned to "get back to training and equipping our forces for the kinds of conflict in the future they had always planned for." They obsessed about big, set-piece conflagrations involving "massive formations," instead of winning the wars at hand, he charges. The Air Force could only think in terms of "high-tech air-to-air combat and strategic bombing against major nation-states." All branches, but particularly the Air Force, suffered from "next-war-itis," Gates writes, claiming USAF was not championing the needs of troops in combat.

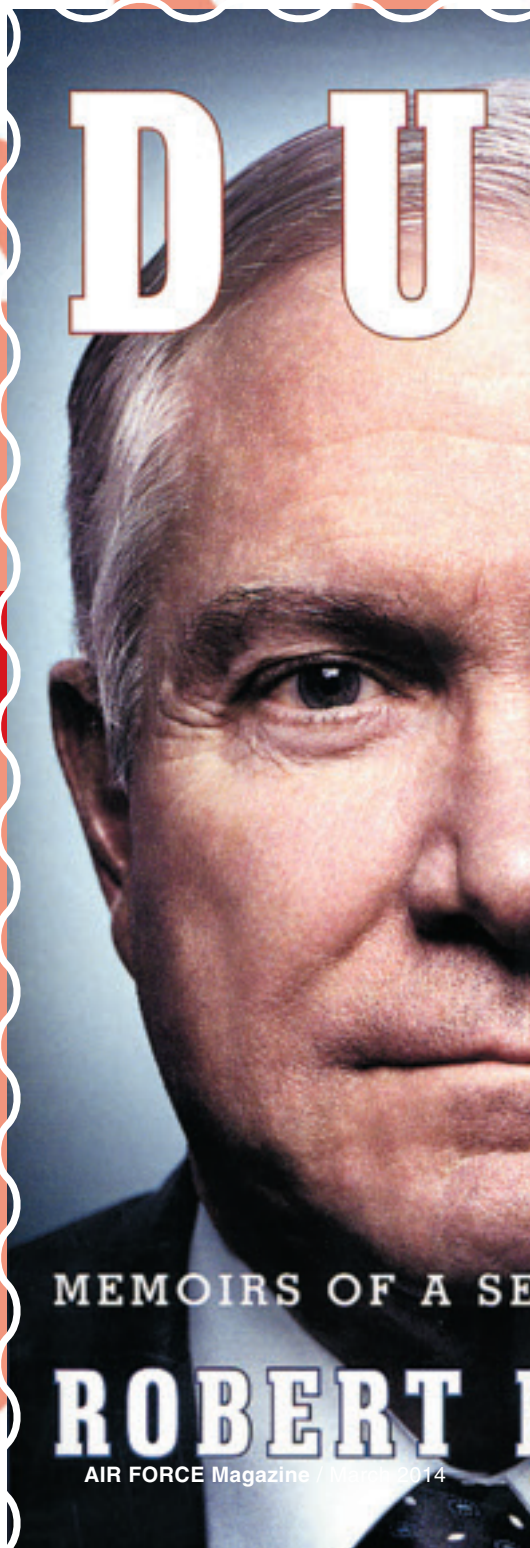
In a recent interview, Moseley told *Air Force Magazine* he thinks Gates suffered from "this-war-itis."

"I think you have to be able to walk and chew gum at the same time," Moseley said. "You have to do both: Fight today's fight and prepare for the future. ... It's not either-or."

Anxious to give fighting troops all the ISR they could possibly use, Gates said he "encountered a lack of enthusiasm and urgency" in USAF, where he'd served in his youth as a junior intelligence officer in Strategic Air Command.

The Air Force in 2007, he says, was dragging its feet in ramping up production of ISR "drones," the ground stations needed to process their data, and in training pilots to fly them. He said USAF "insisted on having flight-qualified aircraft pilots—all officers—fly its drones," unlike the Army, which used warrant officers and noncommissioned officers. Were it not for USAF's cultural bias against enlisted people, Gates suggests, it could have found all the remotely piloted aircraft operators it needed in short order. Moreover, "the Air Force made it clear to its pilots that flying a drone from the ground with a joystick was not as career-enhancing as flying an airplane in the wild blue yonder," Gates says.

He recalls that when he was CIA chief in 1992, "I tried to get the Air Force to partner with us in developing technologically advanced drones," but it "wasn't interested because, as I was



the Air Force

By John A. Tirpak, Executive Editor

told, people join the Air Force to fly airplanes and drones had no pilot."

Wynne, in a 2008 interview with *Air Force Magazine,* said that when Gates left the CIA, "that was the 'photograph' he took with him" of USAF's views on unmanned systems. However, when Gates became Defense Secretary, he apparently didn't appreciate that in the intervening 14 years, USAF had vaulted far into the lead on unmanned systems, developing the Global Hawk, arming the Predator, and upgrading to the A-10-sized Reaper. It was also pushing hard to shift the focus away from the number of unmanned aircraft to the amount of data each could pull in, developing wide-area surveillance systems like Gorgon Stare that could make one unmanned aircraft as powerful an ISR tool as six others.

Still, Gates charges USAF had just eight Predator combat air patrols in 2007 and "had no plans to increase those numbers; I was determined that would change."

It was already changing, Moseley said. He'd gone to Gates asking for authority to gear up to build more Predator/Reaper-type aircraft and got it. Moseley then went to Thomas J. Cassidy Jr., head of General Atomics' aircraft division (the Predator and Reaper manufacturer), and said, "Here's the check. We'll take all you can make."

Gates cheered the development of the MQ-9 Reaper—an Air Force initiative he does not credit—but praised himself and his top lieutenants for maximizing its production and deployment.

Moseley also ratcheted up training of new RPA pilots, assigning pilots from other systems involuntarily. Moseley volunteered to close the unmanned aircraft schoolhouse and put all the instructors to work running combat missions—a move that "would have taken five or six years to recover from." Nothing moved Gates, Moseley said. In his book, Gates says Moseley resisted speeding things up.

Part of the Air Force's frustration was that the Army had hundreds of Shadow unmanned ISR aircraft, but these were slaved to the battalions owning them. When the battalions finished a deployment, they took their Shadows home and out of the fight.

Gates complains in the book that "of nearly 4,500 US drones worldwide, only a little more than half" were in Iraq and Afghanistan, but later acknowledges that most of these were in Army hands. Wynne, in the 2008 interview with *Air Force Magazine,* said of the acrimony, "He didn't beat up the Army, which had almost a thousand Shadows. He beat up the Air Force, which had about 100 Predators."

All this led to what Gates describes as an "unseemly turf fight" with the Army and Navy wherein the Air Force sought to be the executive agent for unmanned aircraft, organizing their development and production and portioning them out to various users for maximum efficiency.

"The Army resisted, and I was on its side," Gates says, claiming the Air Force was "grasping for absolute control of a capability for which it had little enthusiasm in the first place." Gates says he "loathed" this kind of interservice rivalry, and "I was determined the Air Force would not get control."

Gates admits that each service "was pursuing its own programs" in unmanned aircraft and that "there was no coordination in acquisition, and no one person was in charge to ensure interoperability in combat conditions." Plus, the undersecretary of defense for intelligence, the director of national intelligence, and the CIA "all had their own agendas. It was a mess."

Moseley observed, "That's a recipe for having an executive agent. He just made the case for it." Moseley noted that there was a practical reason for placing one entity in charge: Medium altitude unmanned systems fly in the same airspace as manned aircraft. If their operations are not centrally controlled, there is a persistent risk of collision. It happened on more than one occasion—in one instance, a C-130 collided with an RPA—but luckily, no one was killed.

Adm. Edmund P. Giambastiani Jr., vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs and the head of the Joint Requirements Oversight Council, agreed with the Air Force. He sent a memo to Gates' deputy Gordon England in July 2007, saying the JROC endorsed executive agency for unmanned systems operating at medium and high altitude to the Air Force. USAF was to "standardize" and "streamline acquisition" of these systems, but all the services would still get to define their own requirements for them.

Gates, lobbied hard by the Army, overruled the JROC and did not give the Air Force executive agency. Instead, he

allowed various RPA committees to be formed. They were supposed to coordinate service unmanned aircraft efforts, but these were staffed by low-ranking officers with no clout. They remain relatively powerless today, and unmanned aircraft remains an every-branch-for-itself enterprise.

Moseley said, "I believe he [Gates] did not take the time to understand" the issue and that he was simply settling an old grudge. Asked what that grievance might be, Moseley said Gates had once related that when Gates was a young lieutenant in SAC, "he worked for some cigar-chomping fighter pilot who ... I guess didn't give him the recognition or praise he thought he was entitled to," Moseley said.

Off With Their Heads

At an exit briefing for President George W. Bush by the Joint Chiefs in 2008, Gates says the new Air Force Chief of Staff, Gen. Norton A. Schwartz, "reported that the Air Force would grow from 300 UAV pilots to 1,100, underscoring that the service had finally embraced the future role of drones."

The meeting concluded, Gates says, with Bush noting that "he didn't think the current strategy of being able to fight two major regional conflicts at once was useful any longer because we 'likely won't have to do that.' He [Bush] went on, 'If that is the standard for readiness, we'll never be ready.'"

The origins of Gates' decapitation of the Air Force's top leadership clearly lie with the F-22. Gates was ired that "every time Moseley and Air Force Secretary Mike Wynne came to see me, it was about a new bomber or more F-22s." Both were important, Gates admits, though he says "neither would play any part in the wars we were already in."

He discounts a majority of studies—most conducted outside the Air Force—that found that a minimum of 250 and probably 381 F-22s were needed to meet national strategy and cover the needs of the combatant commanders. Gates had described the fighter as "exquisite" but unnecessary and faulted it for having "not flown a single combat mission" against the airplane-less Taliban and al Qaeda. Had that logic been applied across the board, submarine-launched ballistic missiles and the entire Marine Corps amphibious capability would have to be scrapped as well.

Gates was convinced there would never be a war with China. In such a fight, he says the F-22's potential Pacific bases "in Japan and elsewhere" would be destroyed, making the jet irrelevant. He blames "virtually every Defense Secretary except me" for cutting the F-22 buy from an original, Cold War plan of 750 of the stealth jets. He simply delivered the coup de grace. Gates also argues the F-35 was coming along, and was comparable to the F-22 in the air-to-air mission. Not even Lockheed Martin, maker of the two jets, makes such a claim.

As part of his anti-F-22 campaign, Gates invoked the need to thwart the profiteering evil military-industrial complex and asserted that the Raptor would be overkill in any fight. He also said that intelligence informed him that China would not have a competing stealth fighter until the early 2020s, at the earliest. Gates does not comment on the irony of how, while he was on a 2010 trip to China, that country allowed photos revealing its J-20 stealth fighter's first flight to circulate on the Internet.

In his quest to divert resources to winning the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, Gates needed money to rush thousands of mine-resistant, ambush-protected vehicles into production. Moseley suggested that the F-22 was a convenient bill-payer for the MRAP, which initially cost $25 billion but wound up costing almost twice that.

Wynne and Moseley both were pushing for the F-22 against Gates' wishes, and Wynne said in a July 2008 interview with *Air Force Magazine,* "We were winning in Congress" and in the court of public opinion. "Our arguments were resonating," he said.

In a press conference on the day he left office, Wynne said "I advised the Secretary that I was not with him in the F-22 budget," nor was he a supporter of joint basing, which Wynne later said would result in USAF paying a lot of housekeeping bills for the other services. Wynne said he and Moseley had also "kind of told everybody that we needed to change the ... number of people that we had [from] ... 316,000 up to about 330,000. ... So there were differences [of opinion] that accrued."

Wynne was philosophical about the firing, saying Gates had every right to sack him if Wynne wouldn't back Gates on the budget.

"When your boss feels like it's time for you to go, he gets to pick the time and place," Wynne told the reporters. "It's business, it's not personal."

Still, Gates couldn't afford to let the firing of Wynne and Moseley seem like simply a difference of opinion, when Gates was not the expert. The excuse to get rid of Wynne and Moseley had to be something no one could argue with. Gates saw his opportunity in an August 2007 incident involving nuclear weapons.

In that incident, weapons unit airmen at Minot AFB, N.D., mistakenly loaded live nuclear missiles on a B-52 bomber, and the bomber crew failed to recognize that these were not the typical training rounds. The missiles were then flown to Barksdale AFB, La. The error was not detected for hours.

It was a serious breach of nuclear protocols.

The following spring, it came to light that Minuteman missile nose cones had been mistakenly shipped to Taiwan, two years earlier.

"There were no nuclear weapons in the shipment," Gates acknowledges, failing to mention that it wasn't the Air Force that had sent the mislabeled parts to Taiwan (which returned them when it saw they weren't the helicopter parts that had been ordered). Instead, it was the Defense Logistics Agency that had sent the parts, and Gates knew that. However, he sent a baffled Wynne out before the press with only 20 minutes' warning to explain the foul-up.

At the press conference, one of the reporters even asked, "Why isn't the DLA director here? This doesn't seem like an Air Force issue; it's a DLA shipping issue." Service officials at the time described it as "a setup."

Moseley said that after an early briefing on the Minot incident, Gates was uninterested in the details.

"He only wanted to know, 'How many generals are you going to fire?'" Moseley said. Though it was "a local problem," Moseley added—resulting initially in the punishment of three colonels and four NCOs—Gates wasn't satisfied with that retribution.

Gates had asked for a report from former Chief of Staff retired Gen. Larry D. Welch about the health of the Air Force nuclear mission soon after the Minot incident. Welch replied that a cultural "devaluation" of the nuclear enterprise had taken place in USAF, and the mistaken transfer was a symptom.

A month later, the Taiwan shipment story broke. Gates linked the two and put Adm. Kirkland H. Donald to work on a report to assess what had happened. Gates asked Donald

for a recommendation about who should be "held accountable ... at any level."

Donald reported "nothing nefarious had taken place" and that the "safety, security, and reliability of our nuclear arsenal were solid," Gates admits in his book. But "it seemed to me, I told Donald," that the standards of the old Strategic Air Command were not being observed. Donald "heard me out patiently," and then Gates, apparently having convinced himself, announced that both incidents "have a common origin: the gradual erosion of nuclear standards and a lack of effective oversight by the Air Force leadership." He then proceeded to fire Wynne and Moseley—the first time a service Secretary and Chief of Staff had ever been fired simultaneously.

Training, Schmaining

However, Moseley said he'd already long since briefed Gates on Moseley's concern that the furious pace of operations in Iraq and Afghanistan were hurting USAF standards of readiness in the large. Because "we had been at war for 18 years" enforcing the no-fly zones over Iraq and going without a break into Operations Enduring Freedom and Iraqi Freedom, operational readiness inspections had been either canceled or curtailed because "our fighter and bomber units had deployed so much," he said.

"The thinking was ... why practice this stuff when we're doing it for real?" Moseley said. It was believed by commanders that combat operations were a de facto substitute for the stressful ORIs, Moseley said. However, he was "uncomfortable" that many of the aspects of preparing for an ORI—such as exercising in chemical/biological warfare gear and getting ready for a major, whole-wing deployment to somewhere other than Southwest Asia—were not being practiced.

"If you don't do that, you miss things ... ignore steps ... lose discipline, get comfortable and ... complacent," Moseley said.

He reported discussing these concerns with the major command chiefs and that moves were underway to re-institute the strict and formal ORIs, both announced and unannounced, when the Minot issue flared up. Gates had been kept informed, Moseley said; Gates still insisted that Wynne and Moseley had been oblivious or uninterested in any such problems in the nuclear enterprise.

Though he "always believed firing someone or asking for a resignation should be carried out face-to-face," Gates writes, he delegated the task of sacking Wynne and Moseley to his deputy, England. The firings "stunned the Air Force," Gates says, but "there were no dire repercussions."

Gates says "There would later be allegations that I fired the two of them because of their foot-dragging on ISR, or more commonly, because we disagreed on whether to build more F-22 combat aircraft, or on other modernization issues. But it was the Donald report alone that sealed their fate."

Gates commissioned yet another study of how to move forward on the nuclear situation, to be headed by former Defense Secretary James R. Schlesinger. He produced two reports: one about reinvigorating the Air Force nuclear enterprise and one about the overall DOD nuclear mission. Gates accepted and implemented the Air Force-related recommendations. But "the Schlesinger panel identified further problems, including neglect in the Office of the Secretary of Defense," Gates writes.

Months later, Gates presided over the firing or reprimand of six Air Force generals and nine colonels in the chain of command related to the Minot and Taiwan incidents.

A comparably serious incident involving the nuclear Navy warranted no personal attention from Gates. Navy technicians aboard the USS *Hampton* nuclear submarine had falsified records of reactor inspections just a few months earlier. Only a commander and some seamen—no admirals—were disciplined for that incident, which involved criminal acts rather than a mistake.

After the firing of Wynne and Moseley, Gates nominated Schwartz, head of US Transportation Command, to be the new Chief of Staff. Perhaps to make a point about the F-22, Gates chose a non-fighter pilot for the job—and one who had been in mostly joint jobs for a long time. At the time of his nomination, Schwartz had come from a string of joint assignments as head of TRANSCOM, the head of Alaska Command, and jobs on the Joint Staff and Special Operations Command. It had been many years since Schwartz had been in a position to directly advocate for Air Force programs.

"To my surprise," Gates writes, Schwartz's nomination ran into trouble. A number of senators felt Schwartz had been evasive or deceptive in his previous dealings with them. A key incident, Gates says, involved Schwartz's 2003 rebuttal of Army Chief of Staff Eric K. Shinseki's famous assertion that an Iraqi invasion and occupation would require hundreds of thousands of troops. Schwartz had said the next day that the number would depend on the circumstances. Donald H. Rumsfeld, Gates' predecessor, and Rumsfeld's deputy, Paul Wolfowitz, were furious that Shinseki had suggested an invasion force and cost far in excess of what they were telling Congress. Ultimately, Shinseki's numbers proved prescient.

Schwartz "did not reveal that Rumsfeld had specifically given instructions that no one testifying should speculate on troop numbers," Gates writes. He walked Schwartz through a special meeting with the senators to allay their concerns, and quotes Senate Armed Services Committee Chairman Carl Levin (D-Mich.) as saying Schwartz's nomination would have failed without the meeting.

Gates writes that he told the senators "that not to confirm [Schwartz] would be a disaster for the Air Force, that the bench was thin, and there was no obvious alternative."

There were at that time a dozen other four-star Air Force generals serving, nearly all of whom had been forwarded for Senate confirmation in those posts with Gates' endorsement.

Gates offers a singular compliment to the Air Force in his book, saying the service "was making an invaluable contribution to the war effort by providing close air support to ground troops under fire, in medical evacuations, and in flying huge quantities of materiel into both Iraq and Afghanistan," all of which met his priority of supporting ground troops. But it becomes backhanded praise when he adds that this performance made it all the more "puzzling" that the service couldn't "think outside the box" in its alleged lackadaisical attitude toward increasing the amount of ISR it provided to the joint force.

While he ultimately reversed himself on the new bomber—albeit adding a seven-year delay to the program—and put the Air Force back to work on the tanker after adding years more to that timeline, his termination of the F-22 is having lasting impact. Air Combat Command leaders frankly assert that the F-22 force's size is "pitiful" and insufficient when measured against national strategy and combatant commander requirements. And, at best possible speed, the new tanker program won't deliver aircraft fast enough to prevent KC-135s from serving past their 80th year. ■