

***The following excerpts are from an editorial published 9/16/16, six weeks before the election in the Wall Street Journal. As you read, please fill in the Current Foreign Policy Issues Chart.***

## **SIZING UP THE NEXT COMMANDER-IN-CHIEF: NEITHER CANDIDATE HAS SERIOUSLY ADDRESSED HOW HE OR SHE THINKS ABOUT THE MILITARY OR THE USE OF FORCE**

By **ROBERT M. GATES**—Gates served 8 presidents—both Democrats & Republicans), over 50 years, including as Secretary of Defense under Presidents Bush and Obama, and as CIA Director under President Bush, Sr.

You wouldn't know it from the presidential campaigns, but the first serious crisis to face our new president most likely will be international. The list of possibilities is long—longer than it was eight years ago. Here is the world the new president will inherit at noon on January 20—a range of challenges for which neither candidate has offered new strategies or paths forward.

Every aspect of our relationship with China is becoming more challenging. In addition to Chinese cyber-spying and theft of intellectual property, many American businesses in China are encountering an increasingly hostile environment. China's determination to assert sovereignty over disputed waters and islands in the East and South China Seas is steadily increasing the risk of military confrontation. Most worrying, given their historic bad blood, escalation of a confrontation between China and Japan could be very dangerous. As a treaty partner of Japan, we would be obligated to help Tokyo.

China intends to challenge the U.S. for regional dominance in East Asia over the long term, but the new president could quickly face a Chinese military challenge over disputed islands and freedom of navigation. Dealing effectively with China requires a president with strategic acumen [judgment] and vision, deft diplomatic and political skill, and sound instincts on when to challenge, when to stay silent and when to compromise or partner.

Then there is Vladimir Putin's Russia, now routinely challenging the U.S. and its allies. How to count the ways. There was the armed seizure of Ukraine's Crimea; Moscow's military support of the separatist movement in eastern Ukraine; overt and covert intimidation of the Baltic states; the dispatch of fighter and bomber aircraft to [assist] Syria's [dictator] Assad; sales of sophisticated weaponry to Iran. There is Russia's cyberattacks on the U.S., including possible attempts to influence the U.S. presidential election; and covert efforts to aggravate division and weakness with the European Union. And there is the dangerously close buzzing of U.S. Navy ships in the Baltic Sea and close encounters with U.S. military aircraft in international airspace.

The only thing longer than the list of hostile Russian actions abroad is the list of repressive actions inside Russia to stifle dissent and strengthen Mr. Putin's security services-run state. Mr. Putin will continue to behave aggressively until confronted and stopped. No one in the West wants a return to the Cold War, so the challenge is to confront and stop Mr. Putin's aggressions while pursuing cooperation on international challenges.

North Korea and Iran are sworn enemies of the U.S. North Korean [ruler] Kim Jong Un is building more nuclear weapons for his arsenal even as he develops ballistic missiles that now, or very soon, can reach all of our allies (and U.S. military forces) in Asia. During the first term of the next president these missiles will be able to reach the U.S. mainland. On his good days, Kim Jong Un appears to outsiders as a cartoonish megalomaniac; on his bad days, he seems to yearn for a [total collapse of society/mankind] in which a perishing North Korea takes a lot of Asians and Americans with it. Or is he simply continuing to pursue a strategy designed to preserve his rule and North Korea's independence through nuclear blackmail? The new U.S. president could face an early North Korean provocation against South Korea, the Japanese or us, and for sure will be confronted by a long-term strategic nuclear threat to our allies and to America.

Regarding Iran, whatever value Mr. Obama's nuclear agreement has brought, the deal has led to no decrease in Iran's aggressive meddling in the Middle East nor any lessening of its hostility to the U.S. Iranian naval challenges

to U.S. warship operations in the Persian Gulf have nearly doubled over the last year. Iran will do all it can to embarrass the U.S.—such as allowing Russian planes to use Iranian airfields to attack the Syrian opposition and testing ballistic missiles—even as it strives to eject us from the entire region. Our new president had best be prepared for an early test of U.S. resolve in the Persian Gulf and Iran’s continuing regional subversion.

Both candidates have spelled out how they would deal with ISIS, and terrorism more broadly, but their approach in essence sounds like what President Obama is doing now. Neither has addressed what the broader U.S. strategy should be toward a Middle East in flames, from Syria to Iraq to Libya, and where Gulf Arab states worry about their own stability amid growing doubts they can rely on the U.S.; both Egypt and Turkey are ruled by increasingly authoritarian strongmen; and an Israeli-Palestinian conflict further from resolution than ever.

Mr. Trump has suggested we should walk away from the region and hope for the best. This is a dangerous approach oblivious to the reality that what happens in the Middle East doesn’t stay in the Middle East. Each of these challenges may require the use of the American military, the most powerful the world has ever seen. The president commands some two million men and women in uniform, and every previous president would attest that the decision to put those lives at risk is the weightiest burden of office. Yet neither candidate has seriously addressed how he or she thinks about the military, the use of military force, the criteria they would apply before sending that force into battle, or broader questions of peace and war. Based on what each candidate has said and done, who can we trust with the lives of young Americans in uniform?

Mr. Trump has expressed support for building a wall between the U.S. and Mexico; for torturing suspected terrorists and killing their families; for Mr. Putin’s dictatorial leadership and for Saddam Hussein’s nonexistent successes against terrorism. He also has said he is for using defense spending by NATO allies as the litmus test on whether the U.S. will keep its treaty commitments to them; for withdrawing U.S. troops from Europe, South Korea and Japan and for the latter two developing nuclear weapons—a highly destabilizing prospect.

Unfortunately, Mr. Trump has been cavalier about the use of nuclear weapons. He has a record of insults to servicemen, their families and the military, which he called a “disaster.” He has declared our senior military leaders “reduced to rubble” and “embarrassing our country” and has suggested that, if elected, he will purge them—an unprecedented and unconscionable threat. As of late, he appears to be rethinking some of these positions but he has yet to learn that when a president shoots off his mouth, there are no do-overs.

Mr. Trump is also willfully ignorant about the rest of the world, about our military and its capabilities, and about government itself. He disdains expertise and experience while touting his own—such as his claim that he knows more about ISIS than America’s generals. He has no clue about the difference between negotiating a business deal and negotiating with sovereign nations.

All of the presidents I served were strong personalities with strongly held views about the world. But each surrounded himself with independent-minded, knowledgeable and experienced advisers who would tell the president what he needed to hear, not what he wanted to hear. Sometimes presidents would take their advice, sometimes not. But they always listened.

The world we confront is too perilous and too complex to have as president a man who believes that he, and he alone, has all the answers and has no need to listen to anyone. In domestic affairs, there are many checks on what a president can do; in national security there are few constraints. A thin-skinned, temperamental, shoot-from-the-hip and lip, uninformed commander-in-chief is too great a risk for America.

I understand the broad anger and frustration against political leaders in both parties. I have written about my disgust as secretary of defense as I watched politicians repeatedly place re-election above the nation’s best interests. Polls make clear that most Americans are dissatisfied with the two major party candidates for president. But as I used to say in the Pentagon, we are where we are—not where we might wish to be.