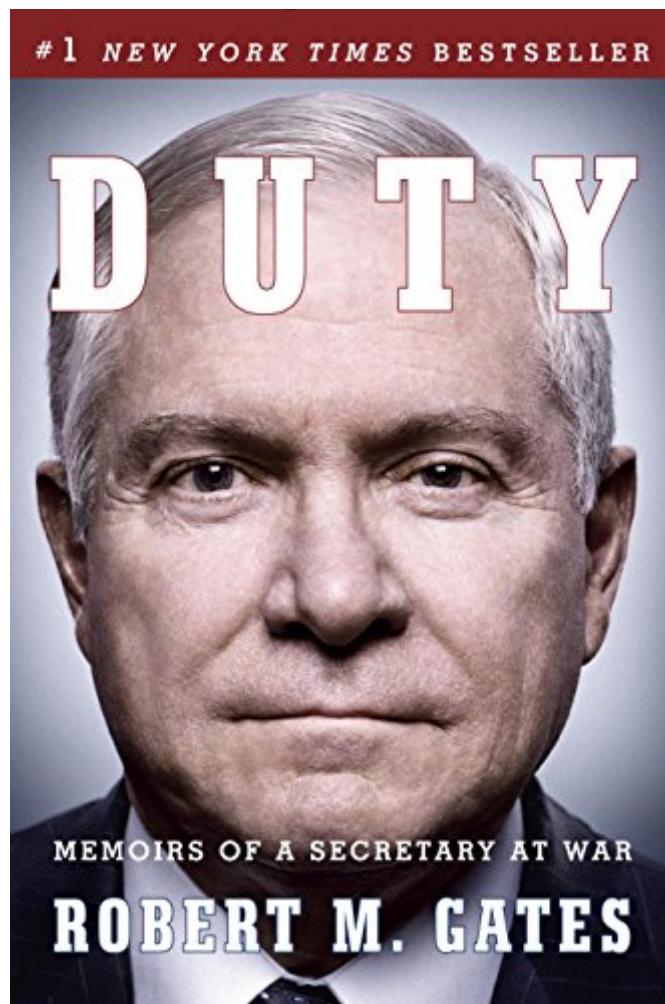


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# Duty: Memoirs Of A Secretary At War



## **Synopsis**

From the former secretary of defense, a strikingly candid, vivid account of serving Presidents George W. Bush and Barack Obama during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. When Robert M. Gates received a call from the White House, he thought he'd long left Washington politics behind: After working for six presidents in both the CIA and the National Security Council, he was happily serving as president of Texas A&M University. But when he was asked to help a nation mired in two wars and to aid the troops doing the fighting, he answered what he felt was the call of duty.

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## **Customer Reviews**

One paragraph from Gates is worth highlighting to encapsulate the book's overall theme - "I did not enjoy being secretary of defense. As soldiers would put it, I had too many rocks in my rucksack: foreign wars, war with Congress, war with my own department, one crisis after another. Above all, I had to send young men and women in harm's way." That quote frames what I believe to be the cathartic reasons that Gates wrote this book. I do not believe that he wrote this book for political reasons. The first two chapters chronicle those events which I feel set the tone for the rest of the memoir, namely, Gates' uncomfortable introduction to Washington politics in the midst of an

unpopular conflict, having replaced an unpopular SecDef, as the Democratic Party in both houses flexes its newly gained clout. A significant portion of the third chapter is devoted to Iraq. It is also where Gates discusses his observations and opinions of prominent members of the Bush cabinet and military services. Chapter Four - entitled "Waging War on the Pentagon" - focuses on Gates' struggles to overcome the entrenched bureaucracy within the Pentagon. Gates talks about Syria, Russia, Iran, Israel, Pakistan, China, North Korea, NATO, Eastern Europe, Georgia (Former Soviet Republic), and "of all things, piracy" in Chapter Five. The strongest points of this chapter are Gates' insights into his dealings with the Chinese, Russian and Israel leadership, as well as the somewhat symbiotic relationship between Israel and Iran. Chapter Six - entitled "Good War, Bad War" - examines the shifting operational/strategic perspective as the war in Iraq seemed to be going much better while the conflict that enjoyed strong bipartisanship support, namely Afghanistan, seemed to be getting much worse. Gates' interaction with Vladimir Putin makes for more interesting reading. You will also find the author's perspective on the relief of the CENTCOM commander, Admiral Fallon, which highlights the fact that while administrations like candor from its military leaders, they don't like to read dissenting viewpoints in the national news. Chapter 7 is a bit like Chapter 3 (but shorter) in that Gates' once again looks inward when chronicling a series of events that both horrified (flying nuclear weapons around the United States and Dover mortuary issues), annoyed (aerial tanker contract and Congressional reactions to several confirmation hearings) and mildly amused him (Condoleezza Rice's reaction to a briefing on Somali pirates). He also presents his side of events leading to the replacement of the Air Force's senior leadership. In Chapter 8 ("Transition") Gates discusses how he walked a fine line between the incoming or outgoing administrations. He handles transition well, ably assisted by both the incoming and outgoing team, in a manner I can only describe as masterful. The title of Chapter 9 (New Team, New Agenda, Old Secretary) hinted at the first signs of stress between Gates and the new team in the White House. He has many words of praise for SecState Hilary Clinton, who instantly gains his respect and trust. This chapter also discusses inadequate aeromedevac in Afghanistan, the need to produce an MRAP variant suitable for that theater, more Wounded Warrior and family initiatives, approving the photographing of the arrival of fallen heroes at Dover, FY 2010 budget pains, Repealing Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Iran, problems with USMC parochialism in Afghanistan, and a number of other related topics. Chapter Ten is where the narrative discloses that relationships are starting to fray. There are also problems between US diplomats and soldiers and the Afghan president. Gates adds considerably to the previous coverage (Bob Woodward's Obama's Wars) through his first-person observations. He also names who he believes to be Woodward's sources within the White House staff in an effort to

explain the perspectives found in Woodward's account. Chapter Eleven (Difficult Friends, Difficult Foes) deals primarily with issues surrounding Iran, Israel, Russia, Vietnam, Bolivia, Pakistan, Korea (North and South), WikiLeaks, and China during the 2009 - 2010 timeframe. He also reveals a disquieting session in the White House immediately following the earthquake in Haiti in which mid-level White House staffers question the competence of the SOUTHCOM commanding general because the US military apparently cannot get a tremendous amount of aid to that stricken nation within a reasonable period of time. Ironically, the very scale of US military assistance prompted the French and Brazilians to complain about the United States acting like an occupying power. Chapter Twelve (Meanwhile, Back in Washington) discusses the disappointments experienced by Gates during this period. He observes that, "After the assurances from the president and Rahm (Emanuel) that they would oppose congressional action before the [Don't Ask, Don't Tell] review was completed, I felt there had been a breach of faith by the White House." Disappointment surfaces again during the FY budget development cycle. The chapter, however, does not concentrate exclusively on these events. Gates also discusses how once again he has to energize the DOD bureaucracy when the services and OSD fail to keep pace with enemy IED developments in Afghanistan. The first half of Chapter Thirteen (War, War, and Revolution.....) seemed, oddly enough, somewhat anti-climactic. It covers the removal of the US Ambassador to Afghanistan - Karl Eikenberry and the relief of General Stanley McChrystal, ISAF commanding general, but in a way that seemed familiar. It was one of the few sections where I did not find myself repeatedly thinking "I didn't know that!" The second half of the chapter, which deals with the revolutions in Libya, Tunisia, Egypt, etc. evoked diametrically opposite reactions as I eagerly absorbed a great deal of detailed information about those landmark events. During the discussion prior to our Libyan intervention, you learn that stereotypes are made to be broken as the military chiefs and Gates initially argue against using airpower to assist the Libyan rebels while staffers and advisors with academic or political backgrounds push for the use of military force. Unlike Afghanistan, it does not take long for President Obama to come to a decision. Chapter Fourteen is where I am going to wind up my chapter summary. It covers the last months of Gates' tenure, focusing on his final trips to Russia (where he had a much better reception than in 2007, although the Russians were concerned about American involvement in aiding the Libyan revolutionaries - which blew back in our faces in Syria where the Russians counseled against our involvement), to China, Israel and Saudi Arabia. The world tour accounts segues into a discussion of military and defense succession covering the changing of the guard within DoD (Panetta replaces Gates), CIA (Petraeus replaces Panetta), ISAF (Allen replaces Petraeus), Afghan ambassador (Crocker replaces Eikenberry) and CJCS (Marty

Dempsey replace Mullen). Gates' account of the Bin Laden Raid follows next. After initially coming out against a direct action strike, Gates was persuaded to support the raid. Within an hour after Gates informed Obama of his change of heart, the President approved the operation. The chapter ends with another discussion of bruising budget battles and his final trips to Iraq and Afghanistan. I found the book fascinating, informative, and plausible. That said, I would plead guilty to allowing my having read Donald Rumsfeld's memoir to influence my five star rating for Gates' much more candid account.

I have not read the book so this is strictly about how the book arrived. I ordered for my husband as a gift. When I pulled it out of the box I immediately noticed the sleeve was put on incorrectly. The cover, spine and back writing inside the sleeve is off. We enjoy reading our books and then putting them on display. This book would be horrible to display. Actually it makes me question if this a reputable copy. Also the inside pages look and feel odd. I'm attaching photos. This might be returned for a new one because it's totally a disappointing gift from the jump.

Robert Gates' 2014 memoir covering his four-and-a-half years serving as Secretary of Defense provides a balanced and insightful perspective on the enormous challenges that he faced as a cabinet member under both the Bush and Obama administrations. With a clear and organized voice, Gates shares very personal accounts of dealing with two wars, two presidents, inter-agency squabbles, a highly partisan Congress, and, above all, the military and civilian personnel who served under him during his years at the Pentagon. The book begins with Gates's interview with Bush "43" in late 2006. Gates describes the strong sense of duty that compelled him to accept the nomination to replace Donald Rumsfeld in the late years of Bush's second term. In great detail, Gates describes the high points and the low points of the ensuing years, as his initial short-term assignment stretched into 4-1/2 years of service. To me, the book served dual purposes. First, it provides insight into the day-to-day challenges of a senior cabinet member -- one who happens to be running a 3-million-person bureaucracy with a \$700 billion annual budget. Second, it reviews the key events of the 2006-2011 period in American foreign policy, including the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Arab spring, the successful raid on the Osama bin Laden compound in Pakistan, relationships with Russia and China, and so much more. His perspectives on the behind-the-scenes dialogue and negotiations shed a lot of light on how Bush and Obama approached and responded to the many challenges and quagmires of the early 21st century. It's tempting to dissect Gates's experience along partisan lines -- which president did a better job of leading the United States, were

more in touch with the needs and interests of the American people, had the strongest vision and insight in foreign policy? The author is certainly not shy about sharing his opinions and experiences about those issues. At the same time, he comes across as very honest and balanced in his points of view, heaping ample amounts of praise and criticism on both administrations for which he served.

I was a bit disappointed in this book. It has a lot of Gates slapping himself on the back saying (and I'm paraphrasing here) "Well, I did this and I did that and no other Secretary of State had done that before. I'm just so smart and I'm a whiz with the budget and personnel management and I can move mountains." He also mentioned way too many times how he loves the troops and he just would do anything for them. I'm glad he loves the troops, don't get me wrong, because I am a retired military man myself, but he said it over and over in the book to the point of really being self serving, in my opinion. I got it the first 10 times you said it in the book Mr. Gates. Also, I expected a bit more of behind the scenes background information, and I felt he went out of his way to be politically correct. He basically said that Obama can't make a decision to save his or anyone else's life but Gates attributes that to the fact that Obama likes to study things before making a decision. You get the idea. This is just my opinion. Most of the books I read are non-fiction because that's what interests me, but this one really didn't hold my interest, even though I did finish reading it.

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