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# Face the Nation transcripts May 12, 2013: Gates, Pickering, Ayotte, Durbin, and Angelou

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BOB GATES: Well, first of all I have to say I only know what I have read in the media. I haven't had any briefings or anything. And I-- I think the one where place where I might be able to say something useful-- has to do with some of the talk about-- the military response. And I listened to the testimony of-- both Secretary Panetta and General Dempsey. And-- and frankly had I been in the job at the time-- I think my decisions would have been just as theirs were. We don't have a ready force standing by in the Middle East. Despite all the turmoil that's going on, with planes on strip alert, troops ready to deploy at a moment's notice. And so getting somebody there in a timely way-- would have been very difficult, if not impossible. And frankly, I've heard "Well, why didn't you just fly a fighter jet over and try and scare 'em with the noise or something?" Well, given the number of surface to air missiles that have disappeared from Qaddafi's arsenals, I would not have approved sending an aircraft, a single aircraft-- over Benghazi under those circumstances. And-- and with respect to-- sending in special forces or a small group of people to try and provide help, based on everything I have read, people really didn't know what was going on in Benghazi contemporaneously. And to send some small number of special forces or other troops in without knowing what the environment is, without knowing what the threat is, without having any intelligence in terms of what is actually going on on the ground, I think, would have been very dangerous. And personally, I would not have approved that because we just don't it's sort of a cartoonish impression of military capabilities and military forces. The one thing that our forces are noted for is planning and preparation before we send people in harm's way. And there just wasn't time to do that.

BOB SCHIEFFER: But I guess that would bring up the question why not? Why wasn't there not some force? I mean, there were Americans there. They-- they obviously were-- were in danger. And there was nothing to protect them.

BOB GATES: Well, I don't-- I don't know the circumstances leading up to Benghazi in terms of requests for additional security there at the consulate or-- or any of that. I frankly just don't know. These things always look a lot simpler in retrospect though.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Let me just ask you-- General Mike Hayden, a former head of the C.I.A., said this week that the continuation of a false narrative that the administration perpetrated in the weeks after the Benghazi attack was not understandable and is not forgivable. Do you agree with that?

BOB GATES: Well, I think that's pretty strong. I mean, I've got a lot of respect for Mike. And-- and he's a good man. But-- I think-- I think without knowing all the facts, without knowing exactly what happened-- it's difficult to make that kind of-- that kind of a harsh judgment.

BOB SCHIEFFER: Have you talked to-- Secretary Clinton about this?

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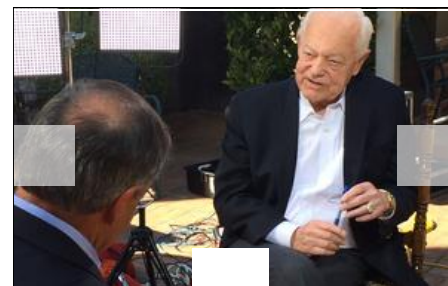
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BOB GATES: No. Not at all--

BOB SCHIEFFER: You have not?

BOB GATES: No.

BOB SCHIEFFER: I know you worked very closely with her. And I mean-- you know what they're saying. The Democrats say the Republicans are on a witch hunt here, they're playing politics. Republicans are saying that the Democrats have been part of a cover-up, perhaps to protect her political future. Have you come to any judgment-- about any of this?

BOB GATES: No. I-- I think the only thing I'd say is that-- I mean, I worked with Secretary Clinton pretty closely for two and a half years. And-- I wouldn't want to try and be somebody to con-- trying to convince her to say something she did not think was true.

BOB SCHIEFFER: You don't think she would do that?

BOB GATES: No.

BOB SCHIEFFER: You-- let's-- talk a little bit about Syria. You originally opposed going into Libya because you said you didn't think we had a vital interest there. The President intervened. He said that the U.S.-- couldn't stand by while thousands of people were slaughtered. How is Syria different from Libya?

BOB GATES: I believe that we have-- misjudged-- the Arab Spring and the Arab revolutions. And I will call it the Arab revolutions. And I, looking at it from a historian's standpoint. We tend to forget that if you look back over the last 200, 250 years, the history of revolutions is not a pretty one. And in truth when you think about the American, the French, the Russian, the Chinese revolutions and many others, only one turned out reasonably well in the first decades. And that was our own. There are no institutions in-- any country in the Middle East, in any Arab country that provide a basis or a foundation for enduring freedom or democracy. There is no rule of law. There are no civil institutions. And there is no history along these lines. And our preferred approach would have been an evolutionary change during which reforms could be enacted, institutions could be built, and you could have something long term. Now, I think in all of these countries, including Syria you have the threat of civil war, the threat of these countries falling apart. Syria, Libya both artificial creations of colonial powers putting together historically adversarial groups, religions, and sects. And-- and for us to think we can influence or determine the outcome of that, I think is a mistake. I thought it was a mistake in Libya. And I think it is a mistake in Syria. We overestimate our ability to determine outcomes, even if we had intervened more significantly in Syria a year ago or six months ago. I-- I think that caution, particularly in terms of arming these groups and in terms of U.S. military involvement, is in order.

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