

The New York Times

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NOVEMBER 30, 2010, 7:30 PM

### Gates on Leaks, Wiki and Otherwise

By [ELISABETH BUMILLER](#)

Defense Secretary [Robert M. Gates](#) has regularly denounced [Wikileaks](#) in recent months for its extensive disclosures, and as a former director of central intelligence he places high value on secrets.

But at a Pentagon briefing on Tuesday, Mr. Gates, who plans to retire next year, responded to a question about Wikileaks' disclosure of 250,000 diplomatic cables by meandering down a different path.

Here is some of what he said:

“Let me just offer some perspective as somebody who’s been at this a long time. Every other government in the world knows the United States government leaks like a sieve, and it has for a long time. And I dragged this up the other day when I was looking at some of these prospective releases. And this is a quote from John Adams: ‘How can a government go on, publishing all of their negotiations with foreign nations, I know not. To me, it appears as dangerous and pernicious as it is novel.’

“Now, I’ve heard the impact of these releases on our foreign policy described as a meltdown, as a game-changer, and so on. I think those descriptions are fairly significantly overwrought. The fact is, governments deal with the United States because it’s in their interest, not because they like us, not because they trust us, and not because they believe we can keep secrets. Many governments — some governments — deal with us because they fear us, some because they respect us, most because they need us. We are still essentially, as has been said before, the indispensable nation.

“So other nations will continue to deal with us. They will continue to work with us. We will continue to share sensitive information with one another.

“Is this embarrassing? Yes. Is it awkward? Yes. Consequences for U.S. foreign policy? I think fairly modest.”