



U.S. Department of Defense  
Office of the Assistant Secretary of Defense (Public Affairs)

## News Transcript

Presenter: Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates

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### Remarks by Secretary of Defense Robert Gates at Maxwell Air Force Base, Ala.

#### EXTRACT

Q Sir, Lieutenant Colonel Looney (sp) from the Air War College. I'm an HH-60 pilot from the Alaska Air National Guard.

The advocacy for Air Force rescue seems to have been sidetracked by the CSAR acquisition program to the detriment of our mission itself.

While I recognize the arguments that drove your recommendation to cancel the CSAR-X, I know that Air Force rescue is not a single -- or does not merely have a single purpose itself.

As you know, we've performed thousands of joint and coalition recoveries in CENTCOM, largely because the operational flexibility of our profession transcends the risk capability of other recovery forces and allows often -- often provides the best chance, if you will, to recover a wounded soldier from the point of injury back to effective trauma care within the golden hour.

Given the dichotomy between the current issues and that objective, can you clarify for us please what is your vision for Air Force rescue as a core function of the Air Force and what would be a more sustainable approach at this time?

SEC. GATES: Well, I think if you look back at the last time we had a pilot down in hostile territory it was in the Balkans. And it ended up involving several services, including the Special Forces, to rescue that pilot.

The notion of -- the design of CSAR-X was basically to have a helicopter with the range to rescue a downed pilot 250 miles inside enemy territory. Frankly, the notion of an unarmed helicopter going 250 miles by itself to rescue somebody did not seem to me to be a realistic OPCON.

So what I want is a joint effort. We're also not just talking about Air Force pilots here. So what I want -- and we will start in FY '10 -- is to look at what we do next in combat search and rescue. It is an area where we need more capability. There's no question about that. But this is an area a little bit like the presidential helicopter where the acquisition and the requirements process got out of control.

And so I think that we need to take a hard look at it and a joint look at it and then go ahead and try to do something that we can bring to fruition. But again, I think it needs to be a joint capability.

And nobody cares more than I do about that golden hour. And one of the things that I've been devoting a lot of time to over the last several months is how do we get our troops in Afghanistan within that envelope of the golden hour? And we polled grade 60s from around the country and we added 10 helicopters a couple of months ago to give us the kind of -- and three additional field surgery -- surgical hospitals to Afghanistan to make sure that we could provide that capability for the troops there. That need will be met when the next -- when the combat aviation brigade deploys in May.

So I feel very strongly about giving our troops on the ground the assurance that somebody will be there within an hour for them. And we will provide that capability, but we will provide it, I think, more on a joint basis and an affordable one.