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Gates: No more land wars for US

February 26, 2011

US Defense Secretary Robert Gates has told an audience of West Point cadets that it would be unwise for the United States to ever fight another war like those in Iraq or Afghanistan.

"In my opinion, any future defense secretary who advises the president to again send a big American land army into Asia or into the Middle East or Africa should 'have his head examined,' as Gen. [Douglas] MacArthur so delicately put it," The New York Times quoted Gates as saying on Friday.

In what he said is his final address to the cadets at the US Military Academy, Gates told the cadets that the Army would have to reshape its budget, since potential conflicts in places like Asia or the Persian Gulf were more likely to be fought with air and sea power, rather than with conventional ground forces.

"As the prospects for another head-on clash of large mechanized land armies seem less likely, the Army will be increasingly challenged to justify the number, size, and cost of its heavy formations," Gates said.

Gates said the odds of engaging in a war like those in Iraq or Afghanistan again was low, but the Army and the rest of the government must focus on capabilities that can "prevent festering problems from growing into full-blown crises which require costly and controversial large-scale American military intervention."

Repeated deployments have left the army “numb to individual performance,” he added.