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Carnegie Endowment for International Peace

Robert Gates: Nuclear Weapons and Deterrence in the 21st Century

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WELCOME: Jessica Mathews, President, Carnegie Endowment

SPEAKER: Secretary Robert Gates, U.S. Department of Defense

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JESSICA MATHEWS: Good afternoon, all. I am Jessica Mathews, president of the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace.

It's my great privilege to introduce our distinguished secretary of defense and old friend, Robert Gates, today. As you know, he is going to speak to us on the subject of nuclear weapons and the U.S. faces a number of challenges in this area, challenges that cross that boundary between
domestic and foreign policy and challenges that are linked to each other, how best to contend with our aging nuclear infrastructure, how to restore and then strengthen an increasingly fragile international non-proliferation regime. What role nuclear technology can play in reducing
dependence on foreign energy sources and then combating climate change and how to breathe new life into the traditional arms control, strategic arms control agenda, critical issues that are still very, very much with us.

Carnegie's non-proliferation program is headed by George Perkovich and has worked on all of these issues and has been a source of cutting-edge thinking on all of them. We have just published an Adelphi paper by Perkovich and James Acton called "Abolishing Nuclear Weapons," which for the first time puts real meat on the bones of the question of what it would take in practical terms, technologically, politically and in terms of geo-strategic political alliances to actually get to zero if that's practical.

In another major new paper by Deepti Choubey, we've looked at the question of the relationship between nuclear armed states and non-nuclear states, which have talked past each other for so long and asked the question of whether a new kind of engagement is possible there. And out in the field, we are working with nuclear vendors from long-established nuclear exporters and new exporting countries to try to develop an international code of conduct so that if there is a nuclear renaissance, it will happen both safely and securely with respect to proliferation.

So these are just a few examples of what we're doing here at Carnegie, but what makes this occasion notable is not what we're doing, but what you, Mr. Secretary, have been doing and thinking and are doing on these issues and in the dozen other issues in your domain.

You have taken on two troubled wars and brought new thinking to both. You have tackled overstretched military services and addressed personnel issues, acquisition reforms and much more.

You've used your position to try to force some new thinking on critically needed issues, what you had called "the militarization of diplomacy," calling for a rebalancing of funding and human resources and capacities between the Department of Defense and the State Department and the other civilian agencies that are active internationally.

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You haven't succeeded in everything; no one does. But I think it's beyond question that you took over this job two years ago in extraordinarily difficult circumstances in both external conditions and internally within the Department of Defense and you have done a superb job in making things better across the board. Very few Cabinet secretaries can say as much and very few have created such a clear record of achievement.

So we are particularly eager to hear today your remarks and your thoughts on whether and how you might put your remarkable personal weight behind the issues of new thinking on nuclear weapons, than which no greater national security challenge exists.

Thank you for being with us. We look forward to it.

SECRETARY ROBERT GATES: Thank you, Jessica, for that very kind introduction. And my thanks also to the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, which has for almost a century been dedicated to understanding and preventing war and its myriad causes.

I'd also like to thank you all for tearing yourselves away from our national election drama for at least a while. At one point, President Truman was traveling in England and he commented on the strange behavior of Americans every four years. He said that in election years, we behave somewhat as primitive peoples do at the time of the full moon; the moon is certainly full.

It is an honor to speak at a forum with such a long and storied past, in fact, the idea for an endowment dedicated to international peace was first suggested to Andrew Carnegie almost exactly a century ago, right around the time that Carnegie entered the final phase of his life dedicated to philanthropy and devoted to the cause of peace. At the time, the nation was reeling from a meltdown on Wall Street and I should note a severe crisis in the credit markets. The international arena wasn't much rosier. The early years of the century had seen the United States fight an insurgency in the Philippines in which 4,200 Americans died.

Russia and Japan had waged a brutal conflict and the Boer War had recently ended. At the same time, Europe was arming itself to the teeth and forming a series of alliances whose implications were obvious to anyone who cared to look. Against this backdrop, there were proposals for arbitration courts, for arms limitations, for dispute resolution, all familiar to us today, but somewhat of a novelty then.

The movement for international peace may have been in its infancy, but it was having an effect. More so than ever before the civilized world was focused on efforts to reduce conflicts around the globe, so was Carnegie who brought to bear his considerable resources, including the establishment of this endowment. It also agreed to fund a peace palace in Europe, in The Hague.

He called it a holy temple of peace to house an international court of justice and a library, a function that it still carries out today.

At the dedication of the Peace Palace in August of 1913, Carnegie said that the only measure required today for the maintenance of world peace is an agreement between three or four of the leading civilized powers pledged to cooperate against disturbers of world peace.

The day when men would cease to take up arms against other men, he said, was certain to come and come soon as day follows night. Less than a year later, an archduke fell to an assassin in Sarajevo, military collided with miscalculation, bombast met bluster and the continent was plunged into darkness, essentially for the next 75 years.

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I mention all of this because one of the horrid lessons of history is that it has a way of defying even the best of intentions, especially on matters of war and peace. Consider that the carnage of World War I came in the midst of mankind's first large-scale concerted effort to bring about peace and that this war to end all wars was followed by another world war, employing even deadlier weapons, which, in turn, was followed by numerous conflicts throughout the last century and into this one.

Simply put, we cannot predict the future and so even as we strive to live up to our noblest goals as Carnegie did, we must deal with the messy realities of the world in which we live. One of those realities is the existence of nuclear weapons, the subject I want to discuss today.

I should start by noting that three presidents I worked for during the Cold War, Jimmy Carter, Ronald Reagan and George H.W. Bush, genuinely wanted to eliminate all nuclear weapons and said so publicly. More recently, George Shultz, William Perry, Henry Kissinger and Sam Nunn echoed that sentiment in The Wall Street Journal, but all have come up against the reality that as long as others have nuclear weapons, we must maintain some level of these weapons ourselves to deter potential adversaries and to reassure over two dozen allies and partners who rely on our nuclear umbrella for their security, making it unnecessary for them to develop their own.

The Cold War is over, and with it, much of the need for a massive nuclear arsenal of the same size and composition as that period warranted. Our policies reflect a new set of post-Cold War requirements. We've taken numerous weapons systems out of service, including the peacekeeper ICBM, half our Minutemen ICBMs and a number of ballistic missile submarines. Our B-1 heavy bombers and four Trident submarines no longer have a nuclear mission.

In 1992, we unilaterally stopped nuclear testing and developed the stockpile stewardship program to improve the safety, security and reliability of our stockpile in the absence of further testing, a subject to which I'll return later.

We've completed all the reductions required under the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty or START. We're planning to reach the limits of the Moscow Treaty, a two-thirds reduction of our deployed nuclear force levels of eight years ago by 2010, nearly two years early. All in all within a few years, we will have 75 percent fewer nuclear weapons than at the end of the Cold War.

In 2001 after a thorough review of our strategic posture, President Bush announced a new triad. It consists of, first, our strike capabilities, including our traditional nuclear deterrent and conventional capabilities, second, defenses, including limited ballistic missile defenses, and finally, an infrastructure to support the other two.

The goal of the new triad is to reduce our emphasis on nuclear weapons for deterrence and provide the president more non-nuclear deterrence options and responses to potential crises. Even so, we must be realistic about the world around us, about the challenges we face and about our ability to predict what other nations will do.

President Clinton called his nuclear arms reductions part of a lead and hedge strategy: we'll lead the way in reducing our arsenal, but we must always hedge against the dangerous and unpredictable world. That is still true today and maybe even more so. Rising and resurgent powers, rogue nations pursuing nuclear weapons, proliferation of international terrorism, all demand that we preserve this hedge.

There is no way to ignore efforts by rogue states such as North Korea and Iran to develop and deploy nuclear weapons or Russian or Chinese strategic modernization programs. As long as other states have or seek nuclear weapons and potentially can threaten us, our allies and friends, then we must have a deterrent capacity that makes it clear that challenging the United States in the nuclear arena or with other weapons of mass destruction could result in an overwhelming, catastrophic response. There is little doubt that some nations will continue to think that

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possession of nuclear weapons is the best way to preserve their regime or threaten their neighbors. We remain concerned that this is the case with North Korea and Iran today as it was with Libya and Iraq in the past.

At the same time, demographic and budgetary concerns have led other countries to rely more heavily on their nuclear forces. This is a strategy that resembles President Eisenhower's New Look during the 1950s where nuclear weapons became the top priority for defense budgeting and strategic planning as Eisenhower feared that trying to compete with Soviet conventional forces would either bankrupt America or turn it into a garrison state. Ironically, that is the case with Russia today, which has neither the money nor the population to sustain its Cold War conventional force levels. Instead, we have seen an increased reliance on its nuclear force with new ICBM and seabased missiles, as well as a fully functional infrastructure that can manufacture a significant number of warheads each year.

China is also expanding its nuclear arsenal. It has increased the number of short-, mediumand long-range missiles and pursued new land-, sea- and air-based systems that can deliver nuclear weapons. To be sure, we do not consider Russia or China as adversaries, but we cannot ignore these developments and the implications they have for our national security.

Our nuclear arsenal also helps deter enemies from using chemical and biological weapons.

In the first Gulf War, we made it very clear that if Saddam used chemical or biological weapons, then the United States would keep all options on the table. We later learned that this veiled threat had the intended deterrent effect as Iraq considered its options. While some may not see a real nuclear threat to the United States today, we should be mindful that our friends and allies perceive different levels of risk within their respective regions. Here our arsenal plays an irreplaceable role in reducing proliferation.

Ever since the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty was signed in 1968, the international community has recognized that the fewer nuclear armed states, the better. In recent years, this concern has been highlighted by the grim realities of ideological terrorism, revelations about scientists selling nuclear know-how to the highest bidder and information exchanges between irresponsible regimes.

Our goal continues to be to keep the number of nuclear states as limited as possible, and to this end, non-proliferation and arms control efforts have had real successes over the last 45 years.

South Korea, Taiwan, Brazil, Argentina, South Africa and Libya have all forsaken nuclear weapons for a variety of reasons, and our nuclear umbrella, our extended deterrent, underpins our alliances in Europe and in the Pacific and enables our friends, especially those worried about Tehran and Pyongyang, to continue to rely on our nuclear deterrent rather than to develop their own.

Our nuclear arsenal is vital for a final reason I mentioned earlier: we simply cannot predict the future. Who can tell what the world will look like in 10 to 20 years? As someone who spent most of his career in the intelligence business, I can assure you that our track record for long-term guesswork hasn't been all that great. We have to know our limitations. We have to acknowledge that the fundamental nature of man hasn't changed and their adversaries and other nations will always seek whatever advantages they can find. Knowing that, we have to be prepared for contingencies we haven't even considered.

Try as we might and hope as we will, the power of nuclear weapons and their strategic impact is a genie that cannot be put back in the bottle, at least for a very long time. While we have a long-term goal of abolishing nuclear weapons once and for all, given the world in which we live, we have to be realistic about that proposition.

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What seems to work best in world affairs, historian Donald Kagan wrote in his book, "On the Origins of War," is the possession by those states who wish to preserve the peace of the preponderant power and of the will to accept the burdens and responsibilities required to achieve that purpose.

Now, if we accept that nuclear weapons are still relevant and indeed necessary, then we also have to accept certain responsibilities. You are well aware of problems over the last year or so with the Air Force's handling of nuclear weapons and nuclear weapons-related material. These problems are being addressed as I speak. The Air Force is standing up a new headquarters office at the Air Staff that will focus exclusively on nuclear policy and oversight. This office will report directly to the Air Force chief of staff.

The Air Force has also proposed a Global Strike Command that will bring all its nuclear weapons and materiel supporting U.S. Strategic Command, the nuclear-capable bombers and ICBMs, under one entity that can focus solely on the nuclear enterprise. The Nuclear Weapons Center at Kirtland Air Force Base is being revitalized and expanded with a focus on sustainment and clearing up ambiguous chains of command that have created problems in the past. During the 1990s, supply chain streamlining folded some nuclear-related components, such as the nose cones sent to Taiwan, into the regular supply chain.

The Air Force is undergoing a top-to-bottom review of which items need to be taken out of that chain and placed under control of the Nuclear Weapons Center. And finally the Air Force is developing a stronger, more centralized inspection process to ensure that nuclear materiel is handled properly, an effort that will be bolstered by expanded training for security personnel assigned to nuclear duties. This will undoubtedly be a long-term process. But I have confidence that the Air Force is now moving in the right direction. And I thank all the airmen who are currently working to return the Air Force's nuclear mission to the standards of excellence for which it was known throughout the entire Cold War.

Beyond the changes currently under way, I asked former Energy and Defense Secretary James Schlesinger to form a task force to review the organization of both the Air Force and the Department of Defense as a whole, to ensure that we have proper leadership and oversight of the
nuclear enterprise. And I look forward to receiving his report and recommendations in December.

There is another element equally important to our arsenal's credibility: the safety, security, and reliability of our weapons. Let me first say very clearly that our weapons are safe, reliable and secure. The problem is the long-term prognosis, which I would characterize as bleak. No one has designed a new nuclear weapon in the United States since the 1980s, and no one has built a new one since the early 1990s.

The U.S. is experiencing a serious brain drain in the loss of veteran nuclear weapons designers and technicians. Since the mid-1990s, the National Nuclear Security Administration has lost more than a quarter of its workforce. Half of our nuclear lab scientists are over 50 years old, and many of those under 50 have had limited or no involvement in the design and development of a nuclear weapon. By some estimates, within the next several years, three-quarters of the workforce in nuclear engineering and at the national laboratories will reach retirement age.

Our nuclear weapons were designed on the assumption of a limited shelf life and that the weapons themselves would eventually be replaced. Sensitive parts do not last forever. We can and do reengineer our current stockpile to extend its life span. However, the weapons were developed with narrow technical margins. With every adjustment, we move farther away from the original design that was successfully tested when the weapon was first fielded. Add to this that no weapons in our arsenal have been tested since 1992. So the information on which we base our annual certification of stockpile grows increasingly dated and incomplete.

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At a certain point, it will become impossible to keep extending the life of our arsenal, especially in light of our testing moratorium. It also makes it harder to reduce existing stockpiles, because eventually we won't have as much confidence in the efficacy of the weapons we do have.

Currently, the United States is the only declared nuclear power that is neither modernizing its nuclear arsenal nor has the capability to produce a new nuclear warhead. The United Kingdom and France have programs to maintain their deterrent capabilities. China and Russia have embarked on an ambitious path to design and field new weapons. To be blunt, there is absolutely no way we can maintain a credible deterrent and reduce the number of weapons in our stockpile without either resorting to testing our stockpile or pursuing a modernization program.

For several years, the Department of Defense and the Department of Energy have pursued a Reliable Replacement Warhead Program, a program to field a safer, more secure warhead. New designs build in enhanced safety features and high reliability that can be assured without actual underground testing. The program would reinvigorate and rebuild our infrastructure and expertise, and it could potentially allow us to reduce aging stockpiles by balancing the risk between a smaller number of warheads and an industrial complex that could produce new weapons if the need arose.

The Congress has so far refused to fund the program beyond the conceptual phase, and this year funding was cut even for that. The reason, I believe, lies in a deep-seated and quite justifiable aversion to nuclear weapons, in doing anything that might be perceived as lowering the threshold for using them or as creating new nuclear capabilities. Let me be clear: The program we propose is not about new capabilities - suitcase bombs or bunker busters or tactical nukes. It is about safety, security and reliability. It is about the future credibility of our strategic deterrent and it deserves urgent attention. We must take steps to transform from an aging Cold War nuclear weapons complex that is too large and too expensive to a smaller, less costly, but modern enterprise that can meet our nation's nuclear security needs for the future.

I spent most of my time talking about our nuclear arsenal. Before closing, I want to take a step back and discuss briefly some of the broader implications of deterrence in the 21st century.

There can be little doubt that the post-Cold-War world offers a new strategic paradigm for nuclear weapons, and particularly for the concept of deterrence. As our 2008 National Defense Strategy puts it, the challenge is one of deterring or dissuading a range of potential adversaries from taking a variety of actions.

Deterrence has a specific policy goal, and in this sense deterrence strategies can be applied to many situations. A few examples come to mind. Rogue regimes that threaten their neighbors and our allies, potentially with nuclear weapons, are a problem today and will be in the future. Our goal is in part to reduce their ability to hold other nations hostage and to deny them the ability to project power.

The new triad I mentioned earlier, with conventional strike force and ballistic missile defense, helps achieve this. A conventional strike force means that more targets are vulnerable without our having to resort to nuclear weapons. And missile defense has reinforced deterrence and minimized the benefits of rogue nations investing heavily in ballistic missiles. They won't know if their missiles will be effective; thus, other nations will feel less threatened. And we must not forget the deterrent value of other parts of our conventional military forces.

We also still face the problem of weapons passing from nation states into the hands of terrorists. After September 11th, the president announced that we would make no distinction between terrorists and the states that sponsor or harbor them. Indeed, the United States has made it clear for many years that it reserves the right to respond with overwhelming force to the use of weapons of mass destruction against the United States, our people, our forces and

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our friends and allies.

Today we also make clear that the United States will hold any state, terrorist group or other non-state actor or individual fully accountable for supporting or enabling terrorist efforts to obtain or use weapons of mass destruction, whether by facilitating, financing or providing expertise or safe haven for such efforts. To add teeth to the deterrent goal of this policy, we are pursuing new technologies to identify the forensic signatures of any nuclear material used in an attack, to trace it back to the source.

As we know from recent experience, attacks on our communication system and infrastructure will be part of future war. Our policy goal is obviously to prevent anyone from being able to take down our systems. Deterrence here might entail figuring out how to make our systems redundant, as with the old nuclear triad. Imagine easily deployable replacement satellites that could be launched from high-altitude plains or UAVs that could operate as mobile data links. The point is to make the effort to attack us seem pointless in the first place.

Similarly, future administrations will have to consider new declaratory policies about what level of cyber-attack might be considered an act of war, and what type of military response is appropriate. Now, some may find it ironic that I chose this forum, dedicated to international peace, to address this topic, dealing with the most destructive weapons every conceived by mankind, and some of the most cutting-edge ideas for future warfare. At the end of the day, however, every great nation has learned - often the hard way - that, in George Washington's words, "To be prepared for war is one of the most effectual means of preserving peace."

Not surprisingly, Andrew Carnegie rejected that notion. Never one to mince his words, even to the president of the United States, Carnegie traded sometimes caustic letters with Teddy Roosevelt during his time in the Oval Office. In one exchange on arms limitations, Roosevelt cautioned him, writing, "We must always remember that it would be a fatal thing for great, free peoples to reduce themselves to impotence and leave the despotisms and barbarisms armed."

Years later, Carnegie corresponded with a different president. Times were different. It was early 1917. Carnegie's spirit was largely broken by the horrors of World War I, and President Wilson, who had won reelection with the slogan, "He kept us out of war," was nearing the decision to send American doughboys to Europe. Andrew Carnegie, the great spokesman for international peace, who had once donated a rowing lake to Princeton to discourage football - (laughter) -

because he thought that sport gave young men too much of a taste for violence - (laughter) - that same Andrew Carnegie encouraged the president in the strongest terms to declare war because, he wrote, "There is only one straight way of settlement."

As long as human nature is what it is, as long as the tragic arc of history continues its course, we cannot eliminate the need to be prepared for war any more than Andrew Carnegie was able to eliminate war itself. As Theodore Roosevelt said, "It would be a fatal thing to leave ourselves unarmed against the despotisms and barbarisms of the world."

Thank you.

(Applause.)

I would be happy to take a few questions.

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Q: *Do you think the United States should ratify the Comprehensive Test-Ban Treaty?*

SEC. GATES: I think that if there are adequate verification measures, probably should.

Yes, sir.

(Cross talk.)

Q: *(Inaudible.) I wonder if you believe that the United States should maintain strategic forces that could deny Russia a deterrent. Because your use of the word extended deterrent meant, during the Cold War, that we should maintain the option to launch a disarming attack on the Soviet Union, if need be and in such a way that we could imagine surviving the resultant nuclear war.*

It seems to me that the question, of whether we maintain submarines on 15-minute alert and maintain counterforce-capable weapons in this degree, is a very important issue. And I was alarmed at the way you used extended deterrent and wondered if you meant it in the way it was used during the Cold War.

SEC. GATES: No. I used extended deterrence, in the context of my remarks, strictly in terms of the nuclear umbrella that provides protection to our allies in Europe and in, and in the Pacific. So it was a much more limited reference.

Q: *But, Mr. Secretary, that's what it meant during the Cold War, that if our allies were attacked, we would not only have a deterrent capability but an extended deterrent capability that permitted us to launch a disarming attack on Russia.*

SEC. GATES: If our allies are attacked with nuclear weapons, our deterrent has failed.

Yes, sir.

Q: *Mr. Secretary, thanks for taking time to address this difficult topic.*

You mentioned the Reliable Replacement Warhead and the fact that it was not - completion of the study wasn't funded by Congress. Seems like the next administration will run into an additional problem, in that the kinds of studies that are going on now, on how to get to zero nuclear weapons in the world, will provide an excuse for some in Congress to further defer studies or modernization of that type. Could you kind of address your thoughts on how you would address those in Congress that would seek to defer those kinds of efforts?

SEC. GATES: Well, I think we just have to work harder in trying to make clear to members

of Congress that this - the Reliable Replacement Warhead is not about new capabilities, but about safety, reliability and security. And as long as we have a stockpile, we need to have it in all three of those - where it is viable in all three of those categories. As I say, we've been re-engineering our stockpile now for essentially 16 years, and we are okay today. It is the longer-term prospect that concerns me.

And I think this is just an effort where we have to spend more time sitting down with individual members of Congress and talking to them about what this is about, reassuring them that it's not about new capabilities, but that it has to do

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with how we can actually take advantage of the Reliable Replacement Warhead to cut the stockpile and make sure that the weapons we have are safer.

MS. MATHEWS: Can I ask people, please, as a courtesy just to identify themselves and also to wait for the microphone? There are two.

Q: *John Isaacs, Council for a Livable World. Could the Pentagon accept a new weapons system, such as Reliable Replacement Warhead, without having conducted nuclear explosive testing?*

SEC. GATES: Yes.

(Laughter.)

Q: *Hi. My name is Daryl Kimball with the Arms Control Association. The United States and Russia are approaching a deadline regarding the Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty and on December 5, 2009, it's due to expire. The two countries have not been able to reach agreement on a follow-on, in part because the United States resists, apparently, deeper reductions in the two countries' stockpiles.*

Number one, do you believe the United States and Russia, should, can live without the verification provisions that the 1991 START treaty provides? And two, why can't the United States and Russia achieve deeper mutual reductions in their arsenals? And I would note that the two major presidential candidates have both called for a new treaty with Russia to achieve deeper reductions than outlined in the Moscow Treaty.

SEC. GATES: Yeah, I think actually that there is a willingness and an ability to make deeper reductions. We are at about - the goal now, I think, is to get down to something on the order of 1,700 to 2,200 deployed warheads, and we can probably do better than that.

The real issue has centered around the nature of the agreement we should have with the Russians. My own view is, there will be another agreement with the Russians. I am confident that the new - that whoever is elected president, we will go to the bargaining table. If we don't have time to get a new START agreement before the current - before the Moscow Treaty expires, there is provision for both sides to extend the existing treaty, with the verification procedures and so on.

And I have every confidence that we will do that.

I think that you do have to have - that many of the verification procedures that are in the previous agreements are important. But I would tell you - here's a concern that I have, and I spent the early part of my career as an intelligence adviser to both the SALT and START delegations in Vienna and Geneva, and ended up having to spend a lot of time working on arms control issues, both at the agency and at the National Security Council. And the one thing that I remember is how long, the years it took to negotiate first SALT and then START. And I am not sure that agreements that are the size of a telephone book and take years and years to negotiate are in the interest of either party.

So the question I have if I were advising a new president - I would say: What kind of an arms control agreement can we get with the Russians that provides for further reductions, keeps the verification - keeps most of the verification provisions that we've had and come to rely on, and yet is simpler and easier to amend as the world changes? Because if you set a certain level of warheads in a treaty but you make more progress than I expect you will make in arms control in getting other nations to reduce their arsenals in a significant way, then you ought to be able to amend

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it fairly quickly.

So I have no - I believe we should go for another agreement with the Russians. I believe it could involve further cuts in the number of deployed warheads. I believe we do need the verification provisions. But I think it ought to be an agreement that is shorter, simpler and easier to adjust to real-world conditions than most of the strategic arms agreements that we've seen over the last 40 years.

Yes?

Q: *Just continuing on that theme. I'm Laura Holgate from the Nuclear Threat Initiative.*

Most agree that the next phase of arms control is almost certainly bilateral. When do we start to move into a phase of numbers or strategic reality in the world when we need to have five nuclear powers around that negotiating table?

SEC. GATES: Well, one of the things that - you know, I've - I'm not sure how successful we were, at least in the early START and SALT agreements, in terms of actual reduction of arms in the strategic arena; but one of the things that I believe very strongly is that the arms control process itself contributed to a safer world; that it was, in essence, a quarter-century seminar between the United States and the Soviet Union on how each thought about nuclear weapons, nuclear war, strategic planning, how they intended to use these weapons. We learned a great deal.

I can tell you that the story involving General Trusov at the very beginning of the SALT talks, when General Trusov, the senior military guy on the Soviet delegation, came to Gerry Smith, the head of our delegation, and said, you guys cannot talk about our nuclear capabilities in front of our delegation because they're not cleared for it - (laughter) - it's a true story. But the point is, we learned a lot from each other during that time.

So when I was in China a year ago, a little - well, about a year ago, I proposed to the Chinese leaders that we begin a strategic dialogue, that we begin to talk to each other about what our modernizations are - programs are for, and why do you need them, and what are you - what do you see as the threat, and so on. So I think that beginning that dialogue, which I think has to underpin a negotiation on limiting arms, I think it not only is worthwhile; we would like to see it get started. I would tell you that there has been a rudimentary start to that, and I think that's all to the good.

Q: *Andrew Pierre, Georgetown University.*

Mr. Secretary, if you were advising the next president of the United States, would you have him undertake a basic review of missile defense in Europe, in the overall context of our relations with Russia and the context of the technical capabilities of missile defense in Europe? Or would you more or less go straight forward from where we are now in the current program and objectives?

SEC. GATES: Well, I suspect that whoever's elected president, that they will take a fresh look at these arrangements.

I will tell you that I think we have gone a long way toward providing the necessary assurances, to Russia, that this system is not aimed at them but is aimed at a very limited threat coming from Iran. And we have made a number of proposals to them, to provide them that reassurance, including having their representatives at both the sites, in the Czech Republic and in Poland, if those governments agree to it, having technical monitoring of what is going on, at both of those sites, having a common data-sharing center in Moscow.

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We have - I've proposed to President Putin, now Prime Minister Putin, that we would not operationalize the sites until the Iranians had tested a missile that could reach most of Western Europe, not to mention a good part of Russia.

We have offered transparency in a variety of ways. And to tell you the truth, the Russian military has shown some interest in this. But I think that for political reasons, the Russians have chosen to make an issue of it.

The notion - first of all, the geometry that is involved makes it impossible for these missiles, these missile defense interceptors to be used against Russian missiles to start with. But second, the notion that the Russian arsenal is any way put in jeopardy, by 10 interceptors, I think, is laughable on its face.

We've - I've also talked to them very directly about, well, is your worry breakout? That someday we would change the configuration of these sites and expand them, in a way that might put your deterrent at some risk? I have said, we can reach agreements on that, and because you'll be there, you'll know if we're going to start to do anything.

So I think we've leaned forward pretty far and been quite open with them about what we intend to do. So I think that this is part of an overall NATO missile defense which all of the NATO leaders endorsed in Bucharest last April. I think the Russians know perfectly well this isn't aimed
against them.

Yes?

Q: (Off mike) - *CSIS. Mr. Secretary, in the context of the Nunn-Lugar legislation, both senators have said that it would be an absolute miracle if there hadn't been leakage of nuclear materials from Russia since the end of the Cold War. How much do we know about nuclear leakage?*

SEC. GATES: Well, I think the problem here is - is not what we know but what we don't know. I think that we can - I know this question was still coming up even when I was still director of CIA back in the early '90s, and particularly as Russia went through that particularly chaotic period from '89 to '93 or '94. I'm pretty - I have fairly high confidence that no strategic or modern tactical nuclear weapons have leaked. What worries me are the tens of thousands of old nuclear mines, nuclear artillery shells and so on, because the reality is the Russians themselves probably don't have any idea how many of those they have or, potentially, where they are.

And I don't know how much has changed now. I know that under Nunn-Lugar, we have helped them a lot in terms of improving the security of their storage facilities, but there were times during the 1990s when these facilities were no better guarded than an ordinary warehouse and by a guard who was barely being paid at all.

So I think that of the weapons where the Russians know where they are and know what they are, I have pretty high confidence they're under control. What happened maybe during an earlier, more chaotic period or what has happened to some of these older weapons, I think that there are some uncertainties.

Q: *Thank you. Greg Giles. Mr. Secretary, what additional measures do you think we need to strive for in order to deter Iran from producing nuclear weapons?*

SEC. GATES: Well, I think that - I think, frankly, we need more help from the Europeans, from some of the other countries around the world that do business with Iran.

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The measures that have been taken are having some impact - economic impact in Iran. And maybe that impact will be magnified by $62 oil, as opposed to $147 oil. And I really believe that we need to focus on the political and economic pressures. I think that if you could have a verifiable arrangement that the Iranians had forsworn nuclear weapons in a nuclear-warhead program that the other countries, the international community would probably be willing to work with the Iranians in

terms of figuring out a way where they could get enriched uranium for civil power - civil nuclear power, where there have been talks about them using a Russian-enriched uranium bank and so on.

And if we could get verifiable arrangements to all of that, I don't think that the international community is concerned about Iran having civil nuclear power to produce electricity. What worries us is their apparent intention to develop nuclear weapons. I believe they are determined to develop nuclear weapons at this point. I think that pressures from the international community and pressures that cause them - economic pressures that cause them difficulty at home still have promise in terms of getting them to make a policy decision to go in another direction. And it probably involves also some kind of assurances with respect to security.

The key, though, is getting them to stop the enrichment process and then beginning to see what we can work out. I think there is potential there, but so far, they have not shown much interest in it.

I will tell you, you know, there has been a lot of conversation about this. I have spent 30 years in the search for the elusive Iranian moderate. When Jessica and I were working together under Dr. Brzezinski - I was with Zbig when he was at the 25th anniversary of the Algerian
revolution. And we got word that the Iranian leadership wanted to meet with him. This was October 1979. And Zbig got permission to do this. So we met with the prime minister, defense minister and foreign minister of the new Iranian revolutionary government. I think it was the first senior-level meeting with the Iranian leadership since the revolution.

And Brzezinski laid it all out. He said we will sell you the weapons that we had contracted to sell the shah. We will recognize your revolution. We will work with you because we have a common enemy to your north, the Soviet Union. And he laid it all out in strategic terms for them.

They said give us the shah. It went back and forth like that for about two hours. And finally, Brzezinski got up, turned to them and said, "to give you the shah would be a violation of our national honor." That ended the meeting. Three days later, they seized the embassy. And two

weeks later, all three of those guys were out of power. Thus began the American attempt to reach out to the revolutionary regime in Iran.

And the truth of the matter is every American administration since then has tried to reach out, sometimes with catastrophic consequences if you remember the Reagan administration.

(Laughter.)

Yes?

Q: *Mike Wheeler, DTRA. Mr. Secretary, since Harry Truman gave his Navy Day speech shortly after Nagasaki, then the Eisenhower administration began grappling with some of the most intractable problems, namely, not only how do you prevent proliferation and once proliferation*

takes place, how do you minimize misunderstandings between companies that have nuclear stockpiles, but how do you actually have shared responsibility for nuclear-weapons matters? That has been an extraordinarily difficult problem to deal with.

My question to you, sir, is whether or not you see the potential for shared activities on nuclear terrorism with states like China and Russia perhaps being an intellectual framework in which one can not immediately, but over time, move toward this wider issue of not merely understanding one another, eliminating misunderstandings, seeking stability, but having some sense of what shared responsibility is over the longer term for the nuclear-weapon endeavor?

SEC. GATES: I think it is an idea worth pursuing. I remember when I was in Moscow the first time, a very senior Russian official told me, you know, the Iranians don't need a missile to get a nuclear weapon into Russia. And so I think that - and on another occasion, another senior Russian official said that Iran was Russia's principal national security challenge. So I think that there is clearly the potential for not only a common concern, but an opportunity to begin a dialogue, where you can just take it a step at a time and see how far you can go toward that in terms of getting some shared responsibility.

Q: *Thank you. Steve Clemons. Thank you, Mr. Secretary. To some degree, countries like Malaysia, quite a long time ago thought they needed to get an automobile industry to sort of show that they were a rising great state, that they were able to bring on a capacity even though it made no economic sense for it to do so. And to some degree, that seems to be happening in the nuclear area, as well. You see rising states that want to sort of be at the table of global stewardship and perhaps states like Iran.*

And so part of the question may be in this Deepti Choubey report, I don't know. But what do you do with states in terms of the pretensions, as they rise, as technology makes it easier for states to become nuclear countries. And secondly, Japan is often not talked about in these circles.

But Japan with a full fuel-cycle capacity to some degree represents a template that makes it very, very difficult to tell other nations not to pursue that. So how do you fit Japan into a future, sort of, nuclear stewardship regime? I mean, Japan is already there. But how do you explain why you don't let other states aspire to what Japan has?

SEC. GATES: Well, first of all, I would say that - I mentioned in my remarks the number of countries that have abjured proceeding with a nuclear-weapons capability and presumably had the technological capacity to pursue it. Those were all - those were and are all nations potentially on the rise. And they have found a way to assure themselves of their national security with respect both to the world and to their neighbors in a way that has worked for some period of time for most of them.

So, you know, it seems to me, again, and I guess in a way, I would just, thinking aloud, go back to the previous question. And it seems to me that beginning to sit down with some of these other declared nuclear powers to begin with and talking about how we proceed in the years ahead in dealing with these different challenges, and I think you would have to bring in countries like Japan, as well. But I think that this is kind of new territory for everybody. And to begin with, people are going to have to get comfortable talking about these kinds of issues. And I don't think we are there yet.

Ironically, we are probably furthest along with the Russians just because of the history of the last 40 years. But I think that there are some real opportunities along those lines. And it is hard for me to see any downsides.

Last question, way in the back.

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Q: *Paul Ingram from the British American Security Information Council. You said in your talk, you made reference to the nuclear umbrella. I wonder if you could tell us whether you feel that the nuclear umbrella depends upon the United States handing over the control of nuclear weapons to some European allies at time of war and for preparing for that when European allies are not spending sufficient on conventional military capability when it comes to Afghanistan.*

SEC. GATES: Well, you have just given me an idea. We might sit down and say we are willing to talk about it after you get your GDP spending on defense up to two or 3 percent. And I think that would set the bar plenty high for most of them, that it would be a distant, future problem.

I think that - I think that the Iran - I think the way I would leave it - it is obviously a sensitive subject - I think the way I would leave it is that my impression is that all of our allies in Europe are very comfortable with the arrangements that we have today.

Thank you all for your time.

(Applause.)

(END)