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"Exercise of Power: Secretary Robert M. Gates"

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Robert M. Gates,

Former Secretary of Defense

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JOHN J. HAMRE: Good afternoon, everybody. This is John Hamre. I'm the president at CSIS and have the enormous privilege of spending some time with Secretary Robert Gates, with all of you today. We're going to review his most recent book, and it's a – it's really a fascinating book. Please go out and buy it. It's called "Exercise of Power."

Let me just explain a bit about how we're going to deal this session today. Many of you have already sent in questions that you would like us to ask of the secretary. If you still have questions you want to ask, go to the original invitation. There's a little block that you can hit, and you can send in invitations – send in questions. Dr. Seth Jones, who is the Harold Brown chairholder here at CSIS, is going to be running that part of this program.

I'm going to start with – for the next maybe 15 minutes to ask Secretary Gates to bring his book alive for all of us. I've had a chance to read it. Maybe many of you have. I suspect a good deal more haven't yet read it. And so I want to go through a little bit so that you can understand the theme – the themes that the secretary is illuminating in the book. It'll help all of us understand, you know, how he's going to respond to the questions that you're going to be asking.

Mr. Secretary, let me begin, if I could. You know, the very first chapter of your book is entitled "The Symphony of Power." It's the first chapter. It's the longest chapter. What does that title mean? What were you – what are you trying to say in that first chapter?

ROBERT M. GATES: John, first, thanks for having me with you all today. It's always a pleasure to be with the folks from CSIS.

Let me start by saying that the origin of the book really was a question in my mind. And that was in 1993 – in January 1993, in all honesty, when I retired as director of Central Intelligence, the United States was on top of the world. We had a singular economic, military, political, cultural supremacy that was singular in modern history, perhaps without precedent since the Roman Empire. Fast forward 27 years and we are beset. We are seen as withdrawing from international leadership. We face challenges from Russia and China, problems with North Korea and Iran. Our relationships with other countries are in disarray. And so the question was: How did we go from the mountaintop to where we are today?

And it seemed to me that it starts with how we looked at the world. And again, let me elaborate a little bit. The Cold War took place against the backdrop of the greatest arms race in the history of the world. But with the militaries so powerful, they essentially offset each other. And so the competition between the United States and the Soviet Union really took place in the – in the context of nonmilitary instruments of power: economics, technology, nationalism, religion, cyber, culture, economics –

especially economics. And we had very robust capabilities in all of those areas during most of the Cold War, strategic communications especially.

And yet, at the end of the Cold War, between the Congress and the President, most of those nonmilitary capabilities were dramatically weakened if not eliminated. The United States Information Agency was eliminated in the late '90s by Congress. Congress wanted to get rid of USAID. President Clinton refused to do that, but tucked it under the – under the State Department. But all these different instruments of nonmilitary power were significantly weakened and put on the back burner, if you will, or disappeared altogether. And yet, we sustained our military.

And so my thesis in this book is that, you know, when the only tool you have is a hammer, every problem begins to look like a nail. And so the military was used during the post-Cold War period – immediate post-Cold War period – as the primary instrument of American power rather than as a last resort for most presidents. And I think that has contributed not only to 20 years of war, but it has left us in a weakened position in terms of the long-term competition that I see ahead with China where, again, if we're lucky and we're smart, we won't have a military confrontation, and so this rivalry will take place in the context of nonmilitary instruments of power.

So what I wanted to do in the first chapter, "The Symphony of Power," was first of all remind everybody of what those instruments look like. What are they and how have they survived? Have they – how have they been diminished? Where have we used them in the last 27 years? Where have we failed to use them? Where have we tried to get the military to do the things that those nonmilitary instruments should have – were designed to do but didn't have the capacity by that time? And so it's not only about what those instruments of power are, and what a broad array they are, and in which disrepair they all are at this point except for our military, but it's also the failure or inability to integrate all of those instruments – to orchestrate them, if you will, into a coherent, integrated strategy to deal with our various problems.

And the final piece of the book is if you're going to have a symphony, you have to have a conductor, and you have to have all these parts interplaying with one another properly. And so the final point of the book and the lessons learned is the need for a restructuring of the national-security architecture to deal with the 21st century; that the National Security Act and the security structure that it established in 1947 is long past the sell-by date.

JOHN J. HAMRE: I'd like to come to that point in a few minutes, Secretary, because I think it's a very crucial issue.

Let me just ask that, running throughout the book is basically a theme that, you know, the president has to articulate and develop a strategy that's

broadly accepted by American society. Given our just really fractious politics these days, is that possible?

ROBERT M. GATES: I think it is. I think that there are – there are two way to look at it, John.

The first is you have to have a policy that the public can support. The public's patience with international leadership I think has been exhausted by 20 years of war, and they see global leadership – American global leadership – as synonymous with world policeman. And so you've got American military men and women all over the world, still engaged in conflict in a number of different countries, and Americans have – I think have soured on that approach to international leadership.

The second is they – most Americans don't see any benefit for us of international leadership. They see our allies taking advantage of us. In economic terms, the truth is that we made a number of very significant concessions in trade to the Europeans and to the Japanese after World War II in order to facilitate their recovery and to ensure that they wouldn't fall prey to communism. Too many of those concessions lingered for way too long, and the – and there are trade imbalances where we give benefits to other countries that are not reciprocal. And it's not just China; it includes the Europeans and the Japanese and others. And the Americans see this and they see foreign assistance – USAID. Boy, nothing is less popular in America than foreign aid because they think, well, we've got all these problems at home; why are we handing out money overseas?

So the solution, it seems to me, is to begin with a foreign policy that relies more on nonmilitary instruments of power so that we're not sending – spending huge amounts of treasure and also lives in implementing and carrying out international leadership, but we also have nonmilitary instruments that are used in such a way that they are evidently being used in our own interest – that we give assistance to countries that support us and support our values, that there's accountability, there's partnership with the private sector to make sure the projects make sense, and that there is a visible benefit to the United States, and we brag about – we brag to our own people, and we brag to the rest of the world about what we're actually doing to benefit people. Many of the positive things we do around the world, it's like we're in a monastic order. And I say in the book we need to be less monastic and more Madison Avenue. So the first part of getting the public onboard is changing the nature of our leadership in the world and putting it back, frankly, into an environment in which it is seen as using these nonmilitary instruments that – and in ways that actually advance our interests.

But the other piece of it – and it's really a critical piece, and in all honesty, recent presidents haven't done a very good job of this – and that is the importance of the president persuading the American people why American leadership is in our own interest. You know, Franklin D. Roosevelt once said

that the primary task of the president is to educate, and educate, and educate, and repeat, and educate. And most recent presidents have not spent a whole lot of effort trying to educate the American people why international leadership benefits us.

And beyond that, I think that presidents – the recent presidents, have failed to see the value of investing time in talking with both members of Congress and with the media about why American leadership is important. Truth is, it's hard for a president, and especially in these incredibly partisan times. Most of the time, when any president speaks in recent years, half the public tunes out automatically. And so what presidents need to understand is sitting down privately with small groups of members of Congress and explaining what he's trying to do, explaining what his strategy is, explaining why this is in the best interests of the United States, those people will go back to their districts, and even if they are from the opposing party, if the president has made a cogent case why this is in the interest of Americans then maybe we can get a little further back toward the old principle that politics stops at the water's edge, and you'll have people back in their districts explaining why we're doing the things that we are.

And then, finally, the investment of time with the media. Most presidents hate the media. I mean, the truth is every president believes that he's terribly treated by the – by the media, and they – it's always an adversarial relationship. But you know, I discovered when I was secretary, the media was the primary means through which I communicated to the 3 million people who worked for me. You know, I'd send out emails and directives and things like that, and like most big bureaucracies they'd pretty much get ignored. But if I used the – if I used the media, if I took advantage of the media to explain why I was doing what I was doing, and so – actually, that filtered down through the ranks, and people began to have an understanding of what I was trying to do. Presidents have underestimated the importance of investing the time both with the media and with members of Congress in terms of trying to explain what they're trying to do.

I think if you put all that together, John, you have the potential of a foreign policy that a president can sell to the American people.

JOHN J. HAMRE: Secretary, you mentioned it early and I did want to come to this, and that's this question you want to propose a redesign of, you know, the structure for how we do foreign affairs and defense policy. But let me pose an intermediate question. You know, over the last 40 years, we've seen presidents wanting to create greater capacity for controlling the whole government inside their – inside the White House through the NSC and through, you know, other organizations within the White House, and increasingly treating Cabinet secretaries like they're divisional vice presidents and they're just simply supposed to execute the direction coming out of the NSC. You were, you know, the vice national security adviser or deputy national security adviser. You were the secretary of defense. This

tension between the central role that the White House is trying to play versus the role that Cabinet secretaries play, could you give us your thoughts about that balance and how it's evolving?

ROBERT M. GATES: Well, I think – I think it varies from presidency to presidency. I think we had the balance pretty well right in the first Bush administration. You had a very strong secretary of state in Jim Baker and a very strong secretary of defense in Dick Cheney. You had a president who understood how government worked and actually relied on the departments and on the intelligence community. And the whole structure that Brent Scowcroft and I set up as national security adviser and deputy, particularly through the Deputies Committee, had all of the Cabinet – number-two Cabinet officials at the Situation Room table almost every day. And everything we discussed at the end of the meeting I'd say, OK, here's the action item. You go back and talk to your principal and let me know what he or she thinks by 5:00 this afternoon or within the next few hours. And then we would report to President Bush what his principal Cabinet officers would do.

And there were very strict limits in terms of how far the NSC reached into departments in those days, partly because of the strength of the Cabinet officers. So I would say how – the degree to which the problem you describe exists depends a lot on whether you have strong Cabinet officers. So I think that there was very little micromanagement, if you will, or attempts to micromanage the State Department when Condi Rice was secretary of state because everybody knew she had a very close relationship with the president. So a lot of what you're describing depends on the strength of the relationship between the Cabinet officer and the president, and also the relationships between Cabinet officers. I mean one way the White House builds strength is if the secretary of state and the secretary of defense can't stand each other and their bureaucracies are trying to undercut each other. That provides an opening for the NSC to get in the middle of things.

But if – one of the things that I did with both Condi Rice and then subsequently under Obama with Hillary Clinton was I said let's have an agreement here right at the start that – you know, there's always somebody in your office trying to set your hair on fire about what the other – the depredations of the other department. And I said, first time somebody comes in with one of these horror stories, you make him sit down and you call me, and we'll decide whether or not it's true, and if it's not true, then you will give direction to the person who came in with this harrowing story that if they ever do that again, they'll find themselves in Thule, Greenland. And once people know they can't play you off against each other, those games stop. And it also prevents a lot of meddling by the NSC.

Now, there was a lot of attempting. There were many attempts in the Obama administration, I felt, to micromanage when it came to military operations. And I finally got fed up. I complained to the chief of staff about it, and to a certain extent it worked, but to some extent it didn't. So when I

was visiting a joint special operations command center in Bagram Air Force Base in Afghanistan, I saw a direct line to the White House. And I stood there and I – and I said, I'm standing here – and I turned to the commanding general – I said, I'm standing here until you pull that phone out. And I sent – and I sent a message to all of the combatant commanders: If some White House staff – the president can call anybody he wants. But other than the president, if you get a call from the White House from some White House staffer, your answer is to be: I'm not authorized to describe – discuss that with you. You need to come through the chain of command, through the secretary – who, by the way, told me to tell you to go to hell.

JOHN J. HAMRE: (Laughs.)

ROBERT M. GATES: So you can – it is a problem, but it really depends, I think, mostly, John, on the strength of the Cabinet officers involved and their relationship to the president.

JOHN J. HAMRE: Yeah. Yeah. OK. Thank you.

Secretary, I've got – I've got many more questions I personally would like to ask. I think that would cheat the audience. So let me turn to Dr. Seth Jones.

Seth, would you – you've been collating the questions that our audience has been – some submitted in advance, some are ready now. Can I ask you to take the lead now, to have this conversation with the secretary?

SETH G. JONES: Sure. Thanks, Dr. Hamre.

Secretary Gates, the first question builds off of some points you make in the book on to what degree the U.S. has been restrained for too long using nonmilitary instruments of power. And so the questioner notes that during the Cold War, as you know better than any of us here, the U.S. beamed Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty into Eastern Europe and the Soviet Union, conducted covert action programs like the book program – you mentioned that in your book – provided aid to Solidarity as you've mentioned in other books. So how would that transform to today, the questioner asks? What are some of the things we should be thinking about? And this person points to protests in Iran, protests in Hong Kong, repression of Uighurs in Xinjiang, Putin's obsession about domestic stability. How should the U.S. think about aiding these kinds of organizations that are on the receiving end of repressive regimes?

ROBERT M. GATES: Well, I make the point in the book that I think that one of the errors in Iraq and Afghanistan was trying to impose democracy at the point of a gun. But there are a lot of tools, a lot of these nonmilitary tools, that we have used in the Cold War and that we could use today to promote democracy and to inform opposition groups in other countries.

And I, frankly, have been surprised – and it's a measure how far we have fallen in the realm of strategic communications. For example, that we have not figured out ways to get past the firewalls in Iran, and Russia, and China. Not to disrupt or interfere in their elections or whatever, but rather simply to expose the corruption – the vast corruption of the Ayatollah and the clerics around him, and the revolutionary guard, or of Vladimir Putin and his henchmen, and how they're looting Russia and the consequence of that for the standard of living for most Russians, or the extent of corruption in China, including the leadership and so on. And not to mention our support for groups like the Green Revolution in Iran.

I think we have to be very careful about supporting specific groups, because I think that has the potential to make them vulnerable to being arrested and severely punished. But in principle, support for more information, the kinds of support that I know I just said not specific organizations but if we can provide multiple organizations with communications capabilities and so on, I just think we've been very timid, ironically, in terms of communicating, getting inside the other side. And I guess part of it is my recollection and involvement in the '70s and '80s, all of the things we were sending inside the Soviet Union, and all the different radios and everything else that we had. I just think that there are a lot of opportunities there that we are letting pass by.

SETH G. JONES: Thanks. There's another question that asks you to put your defense hat on. And the question is about how much focus the military should put when it comes to competition with countries like China and Russia on conventional or even nuclear war. And the questioner talks about defense planning scenarios, OPLANs, war games, big-ticket items that are focused on conventional war. And this person says: You know, during the Cold War, there's certainly a need for deterrence along these lines, but at the end of the day our fights with the Soviets were in third-world countries, and they were largely irregular. So the question this person asks is: From your perspective, are the Chinese really planning for conventional war with the United States? And if not, then are we overspending on conventional items?

ROBERT M. GATES: Well, I think – I think you have to be prepared for the full range of contingencies. I mean, one of the reasons that the Cold War in many respects was fought using non-military instruments was because of the power of our conventional and nuclear forces to deter the – to deter the Soviets. There were hundreds of thousands of Soviet troops in Eastern Europe and western USSR. You know, at one point – one point in the late '70s early '80s, the Soviets had a million troops, conventional troops, on the Chinese border. So I think we have to be prepared for both a conventional conflict and nuclear conflict.

And particularly in the case of China, I think that the biggest – the biggest concerns are, first of all, that if they think we're kind of on the map because of our economic, our political, and our coronavirus disasters, the chance of

them taking advantage of that I think is well above zero. And I think we've seen a much more aggressive China in recent days – whether it's sending their aircraft carrier and other ships around Taiwan, whether it's their aggressiveness towards the Vietnamese and Malaysia in the South China Sea, or their open threats against Taiwan. And I do worry that, you know, they've taken – in a recent speech one of the Chinese leaders took the word "peaceful" out of the relationship – of the ultimate reunification with Taiwan.

And so I think we have to be ready for a conventional scenario in which the Chinese see an opportunity to try and take Taiwan, especially given what they've done in Hong Kong. So I think you have to be ready for both of those. And then you have to be ready for the lesser conflicts as well. I mean, this is – this is part of the challenge for the military is, you know, we have – our record since Vietnam in predicting where we will use our military next is perfect. We have never once gotten it right. We cannot predict where we end up in battle, even in the biggest conflicts.

The First Gulf War, if you had told George Bush on July 1st, 1990 that by the end of the year he'd have half a million troops in Saudi Arabia, he'd have probably had you in for a mental exam. And you just don't know about these circumstances. In fact, there's only been one war since Vietnam, one military conflict that we knew was coming. And that was in Iraq in 2003. And that's because we were going to start it. So I think the challenge is – for the secretary of defense but also for the defense establishment, is how do you cover – how do you have the broadest possible flexibility to address the widest possible range of conflict? And it's a reality.

And you – and you can't pretend one or another won't happen. But certainly when it comes to Russia and China, a strong nuclear deterrent is absolutely critical because had we not had the strong nuclear deterrent, had we not had the strong conventional deterrent in Europe during the Cold War, who knows what the Soviets might have done? They might have done exactly what Vladimir Putin did in Ukraine.

SETH G. JONES: Next question is on the coronavirus. Didn't make it into your book because it happened after, although you did mention, the person noted, in your Foreign Affairs piece. So how does COVID affect your thinking about instruments of power first and how the U.S. should or should not be responding? The writer of the question notes that there has been significant disinformation by the Chinese, the Russians, and the Iranians on who started it, including what looked like a lesson from the AIDS campaign during the Cold War, that it was manufactured at U.S. labs. So what are your thoughts – if you – if you had written this book after COVID, how would you have integrated that into the book?

ROBERT M. GATES: Well, I think – I think that part of it would have been the strategic communications failure to push back against this Chinese narrative. Now, Secretary of State Pompeo and others have pushed the China narrative. And

they've certainly done it here in the United States. But what's not clear to me is how hard this counternarrative has been pushed around the world, in Africa, in China itself. What have we been doing to get this message into China? And the original reaction of the Chinese government, how aggressively have we pushed that line inside China itself, would be – would be my major question. So it would come back to strategic communications.

But I also – you know, this gets to a larger point where I do have a difference with the president. And one of the – one of the instruments of power that I neglected to mention earlier in response to John's first question was our alliances. You know, Churchill once said the only thing worse than having allies is not having allies. And our allies are a unique source of power for the United States because we have them and neither Russia nor China have any allies. So it's a unique advantage for us. And so assembling our allies and working together to push back on these narratives and to – and to try and deal with the Chinese challenge and so on is really critical. But as I told a senior member of the administration a while back, I said: At what point are you guys going to come to realize that it's probably not a great idea to antagonize every single country on the – on Earth at the same time, because they are all useful to us at one time or another and can serve our interests.

Same thing with international institutions, like the World Health Organization. The answer is not to get out and leave the open – leave the whole thing for an open field running for the Chinese. The solution is how do you fix it? How do you restore American influence in those institutions and make them work better, and make them work for our interests? Because the idea of leaving them or walking away just is a big gift to the Chinese. And I just don't think that's what these people intend. But that's going to be the consequence of their action. So short answer to your question is the response to the COVID answer, using our allies, using strategic communications, there are easy ways to figure out how to respond to this internationally.

SETH G. JONES: There's a question that builds directly on this, on the importance of allies. And the questioner notes that NATO was established after World War II to balance, in part, against the Soviet Union. The questioner quotes Lord Ismay in saying that it was done to keep the Soviets out and the Americans in and the Germans down. And the question, though, is directed at Asia. What are your thoughts on alliance structures in Asia? How much of this should we be thinking about security-related alliances, or economic-related? What are your thoughts on multilateral frameworks within Asia, particularly directed at the Chinese?

ROBERT M. GATES: I think – I think the situation in Asia is different than in Europe in the security arena and in the military. And here I think, again, this is where American leadership is so important. We have a really strong military relationship with Japan, a strong military relationship with South Korea, very strong military relationship with Australia. And we are building

military relationships with the Vietnamese, the Malaysians, and others. But the United States needs to coordinate these. And I think most of these countries are not interested in a multilateral kind of arrangement, but they're all very comfortable having an arrangement with us. And it depends on us to pull that together in a cohesive and coherent manner.

In the economic arena I think it was a – I think President Obama made a big mistake in deciding not to join the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank that the Chinese were setting up. All of our allies did. It would have given us a voice in some of the Belt and Road projects that the bank is funding. It might even have provided opportunities for American companies to participate in some of those projects. I think it was an even bigger strategic mistake for President Trump to withdraw from the Trans-Pacific Partnership. Again, now the Chinese are expressing an interest in being a part of the Trans-Pacific Partnership.

So we've basically taken our marbles and walked away from the game. And again, just like in WHO, I think we leave the open field running to the Chinese to step in. But I think the TPP would have been a great instrument for the United States. And just – I've often used the analogy, when it comes to some of the structural problems we have with the economic relationship with China, just think how much more powerful our position would be if on our side of the table, in addition to us, we had the Australians, and the Japanese, and the Europeans, and the Indians and all saying: You have to change these ways of doing business because they are not fair to any of us. And we are going to hang together and you will pay an economic price if you don't play by reciprocal rules, and the same kind of rules all the rest of us play by.

Our position I think would be extraordinarily strengthened by that, instead of just sitting there alone. The Chinese love to deal with countries on a bilateral basis, and particularly smaller countries, because their ability to intimidate is dramatically greater. They hate it when large groups of countries come together and say: You're not doing the right thing.

SETH G. JONES: The next question, Mr. Secretary, is – comes from your final chapter. And the question is that the individual notes that in your final chapter, you note that most Americans have not been particularly interested in U.S. engagement in the rest of the world over time. So the question is really – it's not a political question, per se – but what will the world look like by 2024 if Trump is reelected and the U.S. continues to pursue the policies under this administration for another four years? What does it look like by that point with alliances? What does it look like just in general on the role of the Chinese? What does that kind of world look like?

ROBERT M. GATES: Well, since the conversation started talking about a general U.S. walking away from an international leadership role – a process that, I might add, really began under President Obama – we have a broader problem. No

matter who's elected, how do you persuade the American people that active engagement in the rest of the world serves American interests? And so the way I would answer the question is: If you can't persuade the American people of that, if the United States continues to walk away from international institutions, continues to antagonize allies, continues to fail to see the value of working together with other countries to address problems, first of all virtually every global problem will get worse because there is no substitute for the United States.

Russia, China, no one else can step in and galvanize international support for dealing with a problem, whether it's a pandemic disease such as COVID-19, or climate change, or a host of other issues that will simply get worse. I think trade alliances will become more regional, more bilateral, and many of those will disadvantage us because they will be made by countries other than us. It's just like once we walked away from the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the other countries all went ahead anyway. It's just that we're excluded. And now the Chinese may have joined that group. And that will not be to our advantage. So I think – I think that it's a world that is – I think that the U.S. is weaker internationally, has become weaker in recent years around the world.

I think another thing happens that accentuates a problem that has existed now for more than a decade. And that is the growing discrediting of the American model as something to emulate. I think it began with the economic crisis in 2008-2009, where a lot of countries said, you know, maybe this economic model of American capitalism isn't the one we want to follow after all. Maybe we need to do something different. Our political paralysis over recent years, a number of years not just the last three but going back quite a ways. Our inability to tackle a single one of our major problems – whether it's infrastructure, or immigration, or education, or race, or a host of others has discredited our political model.

And then when you overlay on it the racial problems that we have had and that have been manifested in what has happened in recent weeks, I think the rest of the world is looking at us and saying: Is this what we want to look like? And in the meantime, the Chinese are then saying, hey, look, you want an example of a country that works, just look at us. So I mean, my view is Maoism is dead as a doornail. I say that in the book. But the Chinese model of authoritarianism is attractive to a lot of people. They build great infrastructure. They brought hundreds of millions of people out of poverty. Oh, never mind, you have to give up your political rights. And if you're a Uighur, you're going to end up in a concentration camp. And there's political repression that just gets worse every day.

But the whole source of legitimacy of the Chinese regime is steady improvement in the quality of life of Chinese. If they can continue to deliver that, that will have appeal very broadly. And meanwhile, we're seen as completely wrapped around the axle, unable to advance our interests at

home or abroad. So I think – I think without some kind of a change, that our position internationally simply will continue to deteriorate.

SETH G. JONES: Thanks. You mentioned this a little bit in your response to the last question, and one of the questioners is asking whether you can weigh in on civil-military relations. What are – what your thoughts on the role of the military domestically in the United States? This is in regards to the protests. When should military forces be used in the U.S., if at all?

ROBERT M. GATES: I think that what brought normally reticent senior – retired senior military officers like Admiral Mullen, and General Dempsey, and others to break their silence was two things. First of all, the pressure for the president to use the Insurrection Act to deploy regular U.S. military forces to American streets, and particularly to Washington, D.C. And I think that what most Americans – I think most Americans have no idea of the distinction between the regular Army and the National Guard. The regular Army is basically trained to do one thing, and that's kill our enemies. The National Guard, on the other hand, is from the community. You're more likely to see them sandbagging a flooding river or handing out food at a food bank or dealing with a problem like that than anything else. They can fight, as we saw in both Afghanistan and Iraq, but they also have training in crowd control. They have close relationships with local law enforcement. Their commanders are local. The troops are local. As you've seen in some of the interviews with members of the D.C. National Guard, they know that the next day they take off their uniform and go back to their job down the street. And so you have a different attitude towards civilians and toward the nature of the problem that I think differentiates the National Guard. So when there is a problem that law enforcement cannot handle, then the National Guard is the logical group to come in and augment law enforcement, not regular forces.

When regular forces have been used, it's been in very specific, very narrow circumstances. The last time was nearly 30 years ago, when George H.W. Bush was requested by the governor of California to help restore order following the killing of Rodney King. Before that, it was used, for example, when President Eisenhower couldn't trust the National Guard in Arkansas to integrate the schools, and he sent regular forces to make sure that those kids safely got to school. And they were there for a limited period of time and for a specific purpose. So I think that was one aspect.

The other aspect was the appearance of General Milley and the secretary of defense for the photo op in Lafayette Square. And I noticed even at the time that General Milley managed to evade the photo op itself, but he was still photographed there in Lafayette Park, and the concern on the part of former military that this compromised the apolitical reputation of the professional military – that one of the fundamental tenets of the American military is that it's completely apolitical. It doesn't – it's not there for one president or another or for one party or another.

Every president I've worked for loves to use the military as a prop, politically. But, as I've said, I think this president takes it to a level we haven't seen before. I think that both General Milley and Secretary Esper, essentially, laid down a marker and henceforth will be much more cautious about allowing themselves to be gotten into a situation where they might be exploited along those lines.

SETH G. JONES: Thanks. Thanks for your thoughts on that.

There's a question on cooperation, particularly between the U.S. and the Russians and the U.S. and the Chinese, on arms control, and if you go back to the Reagan administration, for example, you know, Reagan and Gorbachev sat down and hammered the arms control negotiations.

So the questioner was asking about your thoughts on START right now and arms control talks. The U.S. and the Russians are meeting shortly at Vienna. The Chinese have declined invitation and will not attend.

How important is it for these discussions to occur? And what are your broader thoughts on the importance of arms control, particularly as competition appears to be heating up?

ROBERT M. GATES: One of my early jobs in the CIA as an analyst was as an intelligence support analyst for the strategic arms delegations negotiating the first – very first SALT agreements, strategic arms agreement. I have always believed that these agreements were in the interests of the United States because the availability of society and information between the Soviet Union and the United States was so disparate, and arms control gave us an access and knowledge about Soviet missile programs and other military programs we would not otherwise have gotten.

I'm not sure that SALT I did much in the way of controlling the number of arms. It put a cap on them. But it was very effective in giving us access to the Soviet Union.

The other things that arms control did was provide predictability in the arms race. It basically said, OK, they're not going to go above this certain number of weapons. So I, frankly, think that because of the verification provisions and the predictability that has been provided by the strategic arms agreements with the Russians that they have been an advantage for the United States. They've served both sides, but they've especially served us.

I've always believed that the notion of trying to pull the Chinese into that agreement, you know, in theory, a good idea. In practice, impossible. The Chinese have no incentive whatsoever to participate, and the irony is if they were to level out their military, their number of nuclear weapons, an agreement would have to authorize the Chinese to build dramatically more,

far more, nuclear weapons than we think they have at the current time to get level with the United States in China.

So I think getting China involved in this thing was a nonstarter from the very beginning and I really hope that they will renew New START, both for verification purposes and because of the predictability it brings into the arms control, into the strategic arms arena.

But I would say there are agreements that I would hope we could pursue with the Chinese along the lines of agreements we had with the Soviets during the Cold War, things like the Incidents at Sea agreement that were designed to prevent any inadvertent collision or confrontation from escalating and a means of communicating quickly at a very high level.

I think there are agreements such as that, and observation of exercises and a variety of other things that were done in the Cold War that would have merit with the Chinese and be seen as mutually beneficial.

So, I think there are some opportunities for arms control with China. I don't think strategic arms right now is one of them.

SETH G. JONES: Last question, and then I'll turn it back to Dr. Hamre.

It's an interesting question. You've worked for a number of presidents. Your book focuses on the activities of a number of U.S. administrations and presidents. So could you reflect on which of those presidents and, particularly, their administrations you think are models for how the U.S. should operate and how it should – it be viewed around the world, as this person quotes Reagan in his final 1989 talk to the nation, as a sort of a "beacon on a hill?" Which administrations do you look to as good examples, moving forward?

ROBERT M. GATES: I think that the administrations that – the administration that had the least infighting and where the government worked the smoothest was probably the first President Bush, and it was partly because the president had spent so much time in government and understood how government worked and made clear what he wanted and what he didn't want to those who worked for him.

I think that the Reagan administration had more internal conflict than the Bush administration by a long shot. But I think that there was a strategic coherence to the Reagan administration. And, you know, people talk about Reagan the hawk all the time and, certainly, his military buildup in the early 1980s was significant and needed.

But what people tend not to focus on as much was how he pivoted in 1985 to a different kind of relationship with Russia and one that opened the way not only for the Intermediate Nuclear Forces Treaty but, in essence,

developing a relationship with Gorbachev that helped keep Gorbachev in power, in my view, because it was in America's interest for him to be in power because he was destroying the Soviet Union, and, you know, when your enemy is in the process of wrecking himself, you just got to work to stay out of his way.

And I think that in terms of international reputation, looking back on the last 30 years or so, 30 or 40 years, I would say our international reputation probably was at its highest under both the Reagan and first Bush administrations.

SETH G. JONES: Thanks. And I'll turn it over now to Dr. Hamre.

JOHN J. HAMRE: Seth, thank you.

Secretary Gates, one last little question, and this could go on to a whole new session, but we don't have the time.

In your book you contrast two American presidents, Woodrow Wilson and John Quincy Adams. Woodrow Wilson, who was going to make the world safe for democracy, and you wrote of John Quincy Adams that he says America should be the well-wisher for the freedom and independence of all but the vindicator and champion only of her own.

And this was this – you know, what should guide American foreign policy, a kind of a realpolitik, you know, unblinking look or an idealism about what the world could become and what role we could play to do it.

Are you – where are you in this spectrum?

ROBERT M. GATES: I actually think that Wilson and John Quincy Adams have to coexist. I think that advocacy for democracy and human rights is fundamental to what America is all about and to our place in the world. The world knows we are imperfect. But they also know we are about the only country in the world that knows it and works to overcome our deficiencies.

By the same token, I think what Adams is saying, and another one of his quotes is, "Go not abroad in search of monsters to destroy." I think, in some ways, what he's saying is you don't – and I think you look at this in the context of the French Revolution. He does not believe the United States should send its military forces to try and democratize other countries.

One of my favorite quotes is from Churchill in late 1944 when he's being pressured to oust an authoritarian government in Greece and replace it with a democracy. Well, it so happened that authoritarian government was being very helpful to the allies. And Churchill's response was, "Democracy is not a harlot to be picked up in the street at the point of a Tommy gun."

I think we have to have the pursuit of democracy, the promotion of democracy and reform, at the heart of our foreign policy. But I don't think we send armies abroad to try and impose it on other people.

JOHN J. HAMRE: This has been, as I knew it would be, very inspirational.

Secretary, thank you. Again, colleagues out there, this is the – this is the book and I promise you it's deeply worth your time to read it and to internalize the wisdom that the secretary is giving us.

Mr. Secretary, thank you. It's been a privilege to be able to host you. Good luck with the book. I hope this helps a little bit. More than anything, I hope that all of the people who are listening in are willing to take – you know, think deeply along the lines of what you've just said.

America has been inspirational because it dealt with its own problems, not because it gave great lectures about how inspirational we were. (Laughter.)

So, Bob, thank you.

ROBERT M. GATES: Thanks, John.

JOHN J. HAMRE: It's been a privilege to have you. Thank you so much.

ROBERT M. GATES: Thanks for inviting me. My pleasure.

JOHN J. HAMRE: And – yeah. Thanks. See you. Bye.