MR. PETER HUESSY: Good morning, my name is Peter Huessy, and thank you all for being here. This is the third in our series of seminars we’re doing this year on strategic nuclear issues, missile defense and homeland security. We have today – we’re very honored to have what I consider the two finest analysts and professionals on the issues of China and Russia.

Mike Pillsbury and Dr. Steven Blank are here today. Steve, as you know, is with the Strategic Studies Institute at the Army War College in Carlisle. And I was just thinking that Mike Pillsbury was at the UN, was at the United States Senate, was at RAND, and also was an assistant undersecretary of Defense for policy and planning during the Reagan administration.

Also I wanted to make a note, Congressman Mike Turner has switched from May 4 to June 7. And the new schedules are outside on the desk if you’d take a look at them. And next week we have Ambassador Joseph on the 9th, General Kowalski on the 10th, and Frank Rose on the 11th. All of those remarks will be on the record except for Frank Rose’s Q&A. He would like that to be off the record, but his remarks upfront are going to be on the record.

I also want to thank our sponsors, the Air Force Association, the National Defense Industrial Association, and the Reserve Officers Association of America. We’re going to start with our friend Dr. Steve Blank from the Army War College. Would you give a warm welcome?

(Applause).

MR. STEVE BLANK: Thank you, Peter, remind me to send you the check when this is over. I’d like to thank the Air Force Association, and the other groups involved, for inviting me to speak to you again. I have to caution you that what I’m about to say does not reflect the policies of the U.S. Army, the administration, the Defense department, my wife, anybody else.

(Laughter).

These are all my personal observations on developments affecting Russia’s nuclear program. And let me begin by pointing out something that’s obvious to everybody. Most of us, if not all of us, grew up in a particular world where nuclear weapons had a particular importance and relationship. Basically there were two or three nuclear powers and the U.S. followed a policy of deterrence and of arms control negotiations with the Soviets, and we’ve continued the latter since 1990.
And in that world numbers and missions counted for something important, which we all knew. But in this world, even though the nuclear weapons have remained, although they’ve come down by a large magnitude, the nuclear world order, if you like, has changed. I would argue that the number of actual warheads you have is not longer nearly as important as the quality of those warheads and the missions they are designated to perform.

And that’s important because there is a great debate in this country about nuclear weapons. The administration, led by the president, has a goal in mind of a long-term goal of getting to zero, which of course many people share. On the other hand, and as I wrote 12 years ago, we see that other states are not only not interested in getting to zero, they’re actually building new nuclear weapons and finding new missions for them.

That’s still the case. We just saw that last week with the Indian missile test where they’ve now developed a missile that can hit all of China. And that obviously has strategic implications for India and China and for Pakistan. And Pakistan is now going to retaliate in some way, and Pakistan has the fastest growing nuclear missile program in the world.

But Pakistan is not the only state developing nuclear weapons. Both Russia and China are developing new nuclear weapons. Mike is going to talk about China, and of course it’s a great secret how many nuclear weapons China actually has. There’s been some controversy about it, if you’ve been following the press recently.

With Russia, the issue is not so much a controversy over the numbers. Their numbers are low and they’re going to stay low because they don’t have the capability to go further. And, at least they profess to be interested in finding conventional deterrence to supplement their nuclear deterrent, which is going to remain primary for at least another nine years.

The state armaments programs for Russia today is a huge 23 trillion ruble – that’s about $730 billion – program through 2020. And the priorities are nuclear weapons, air and defense, navy, army. And within those service frameworks, the real emphasis is on high-tech communications, electronic capabilities, information warfare, things like that, which we are all familiar with.

Why is Russia doing this? Well, to be fair, there’s a crying need to recapitalize the Russian military. I think all of you are more or less familiar with this fact. They basically went through 17 to 20 years of a procurement holiday, although you wouldn’t have called it a holiday. So there’s a genuine need to do so.

Secondly, the Russian military has figured out what the nature of contemporary, and perhaps future war, is going to be and needs to reorient its military structure towards that kind of concept: fighting wars like the war in Georgia in 2008 or like the Israelis have fought against Hezbollah and Hamas in 2006 and 2008-09; the possibility of an Afghanistan threat now. And I’ll go into this in greater detail.
They see a real likelihood of a U.S.-Israeli attack on Iran this summer, especially if the negotiations that are now in Istanbul break down. And they see this war as spreading into the Caucasus, which as a matter of fact is their vital interest.

Beyond that, they see NATO building missile defenses which irks them no end. And their friends to the south and east, China, have, in the Russian view, successfully launched and maybe even consummated a military reform to informatize — that is to create an army based on information technology — that is capable of waging large scale modern conventional warfare and is a threat to seize territory in the Russian Far East.

And, of course, there’s also the Chinese navy. We write a lot about Chinese naval capabilities. There’s a whole industry grown up about it. But those capabilities are not only usable against us, they’re usable against Russia’s Pacific assets as well.

So that military buildup that we’re talking about is aimed at all of those contingencies. And if we look at their enemies, and they say this in their doctrine and in their national security concept, adversary number one — in Russian they call it delobny prochebnik (ph) — is the U.S./NATO, not that they think NATO is a robust military operation, but they see NATO as essentially being part of the U.S. military giving us forward bases and potentially significant capabilities in Europe. And not only that, they see even more. They don’t see a war in Europe so much as they see the possibility of the U.S. and NATO intervention in areas around their perimeter.

Now the perimeter defined by the Russian Federation today, not surprisingly, is the perimeter of the good old Soviet Union 22 years ago. Therefore, starting last year the General Staff, the Ministry of Defense and so on, have been screaming — not just saying, in fact they’ve been repeating this over and over — that the possibility of wars on Russia’s perimeter has grown. And what they’re talking about now is the possibility not only of an intervention on behalf of a state in the CIS, or the perpetuation of U.S. military bases in Central Asia, but a Syrian or an Iranian intervention. Because they believe these will be protracted, they can become large scale wars and can escalate even to the level of nuclear war.

Now we need to understand that. For Russia, regional security issues, regional conflicts, are fundamental threats to their interests and security as they define it. And they have the potential, because they do not have a lot of confidence either in our strategic judgment or because they understand that wars go out of control, which they do, that those wars will become protracted and can escalate beyond their intended scale. Iraq is an example of a war that completely escaped any of the calculations that were made before it, and they see this as a real possibility.

Now, how are they to deal with something like that? They don’t have the conventional means of deterring NATO and the U.S. What’s more, if you follow the literature on the Russian defense industry, it is already apparent that the state armaments plan is failing.

In 2008 they said that the Russian army modernizes itself by an annual rate of two percent a year, and was 10 percent modernized. Now I don’t know what they mean by that, but that’s the statement that they gave out. Six weeks ago Medvedev spoke and said that the army reform had been
completed and the Russian army was now 16 percent modernized. In other words, in the three years since 2008, despite billions of rubles thrown at the military, they’re still getting two percent modernization. But, the armies in the south, in the Caucasus and Central Asia, they say, are 70 percent modernized and there is a huge buildup going into the Baltic against NATO as well, which the Finns and the Poles, and I know this for a fact, are concerned about. So they see us as enemy number one.

They see China in the Far East as a potential enemy in the future, not now. They just did a naval exercise with China, as you know. But they see it as a potential future enemy who can only be deterred by nukes. And in their exercises against China in 2010 the exercise conclude with a tactical nuclear weapons strike on the PLA, in the maneuvers. In 2009 their exercise in the West concluded with a short-range nuclear strike on Warsaw.

Again, what does this mean? Nuclear weapons are warfighting weapons. We have taken the position, right or wrong -- and you can state your opinion on the issue -- that nuclear weapons are of declining military utility if any utility at all. Or, the only purpose nuclear weapons have is to deter other nuclear weapons. Not so in Moscow.

Tactical nuclear weapons, what you might call nonstrategic nuclear weapons, or the big ones, strategic nuclear weapons, ICBMS, boomers and so on, those are warfighting weapons and they can be used to target what the Russians call pre-assigned damage capabilities. Now, for example, it’s not that they’re going to drop a nuclear weapon on Chicago and obliterate the city. They have done their mathematical modeling and they have a coefficient of what it would take to take out a NATO-U.S. attack by dropping a nuclear weapon, perhaps maybe taking out a carrier battle group or some other target which would indicate their seriousness and force a return to the status quo ante and to political bargaining rather than actual fighting. And that’s what they’re going to do.

Moreover, the nuclear weapons they are now building, even though they are not going to approach in number the capabilities that they had in the past, are certainly going to be qualitatively much better and they are going to be asymmetric. Every article practically that talks about new nuclear weapons that the Russians are building, and for that matter new missiles, indicate that they are being built to a capability that will allow them to evade any missile defense. Now maybe they’re just blowing smoke. They have a habit of rhetoric inflation, if you like.

Nonetheless, what this means is that they see the United States as a threat. They see missile defenses as a threat. They see China as a threat. And they see Muslim insurgents as a threat, and they’re preparing to meet all those eventualities.

Now the Muslim insurgency, of course, is a conventional threat. They already have this in the north Caucasus. There’s no talk of using nuclear weapons there, for obvious reasons.

If Afghanistan falls after 2014, and I don’t think anybody I’ve read believes that Karzai’s government will survive once NATO gets out, the Russians will have a major security problem on their hands. So on the one hand they want us out of Afghanistan, on the one hand they want us in Afghanistan, and they get torn between that contingency. But with regard to the two big ones, and to
the possibility of a regional war on their perimeter, which includes the Middle East, Far East, Eastern Europe and so on, the nuclear asset is important.

And why is the nuclear asset important? Well, obviously, one is deterrence. They believe, for example, that the fact that Russia is a nuclear state deterred allied intervention in Georgia four years ago.

It deters NATO’s conventional superiority. It allows them to practice deterrence even in the absence of capabilities to do so, which they would like to acquire but are having difficulty doing. As everybody and his uncle writes, nuclear weapons allow Russia to pretend it’s a great power. It gives them status, and the Russians are obsessed with status and rank. But fifth, nuclear weapons demarcate an exclusive sphere of influence for Russia, a no-go zone if you like: namely the CIS, that precludes foreign military intervention there; or makes it possible only with Russia’s consent, as is now the case with the bases in Central Asia, even though they’re trying to get those out.

Sixth, nuclear weapons, and this is equally important, are weapons that can and will be used under certain circumstances. Now, it’s not because the Russians are ignorant of their capabilities, they’re not; but because they don’t see themselves as having much of a choice. So they have a fundamentally different world view, a different weltansheng (ph) to use the German term.

And as a result of that, they see a series of threats out there. And the major threat they see is missile defense. Now the Russian military knows that the present system is no threat. What they profess to be worried about is what’s going to come about in 2018 and ‘20. And to add to their discomfort, the administration has now announced we want to build missile defenses in the Middle East and Asia, which the Russians and the Chinese will interpret as an attempt – and they will be probably right – as an attempt to encircle them and take away their first strike nuclear capability, despite our professions to the contrary.

And whoever wins in November is likely to continue the program, maybe not at the same pace given budgetary pressures. But there’s a very good article in the recent issue of Defense and Security Analysis by Daniel Goure that makes this point, that the program is pretty secure and is going to move forward, although we don’t know the pace at which it’s going to move forward. Missile defenses in Europe, even if they are no threat now, could be a threat in eight year and they will take away the Russian capability to intimidate Europe, which is a major asset of Russia’s defense and foreign policy.

Second, it integrates the U.S. and European militaries, which is an equally great threat to Russian security because historically the greatest geopolitical threat to Russian security has been an integrated, united Europe. Now if we’re talking about a united, integrated Europe under Hitler, it’s one thing. If we’re talking about a united, integrated Europe under the European Union or NATO or some sort of other rubric, it’s a very different game because democracy is really the greatest political threat to Russia today that there is, not the United States as such. We’re not going to attack Russia. But democracy is an idea with bayonets, to quote Victor Hugo.
And as a result, they see missile defense as a major threat. And they fear that it is going to be expanded and that it is going to thwart their capability to strike first with nuclear weapons because they don’t have the conventional means to match. So where does that leave us?

One, even though the Russians may not actually meet the numerical targets that are in the new treaty that was signed 18 months ago – the new START or the Treaty of Prague, whatever you call it – they are building new, better weapons with qualitative indices to match. They have also, as well, a robust C3I and cyberwar capability that they’re building, or in some cases have built, to thwart and attack the United States and its allies. They are not going to get rid of tactical nuclear weapons. If anything, they’re going to put them on – the navy, in particular, is going to keep using them and use them in the form of cruise missiles against which there is no real good defense today.

Therefore, the administration’s attempt to put tactical nuclear weapons on the agenda is not likely to go anywhere. The Russians just again insisted that we withdraw ours before they withdraw theirs, which is not feasible. It’s not going to happen at the Chicago NATO summit.

They are not going to get into a negotiation with us about reducing numbers further beyond what was agreed to in 2010 until and unless there is progress on missile defense from their point of view. And, they are not going to negotiate on arms control unless China is in the room. In other words, it is very probably that the last nuclear treaty that we saw, the arms control treaty, new START, Prague and so on, is the last one that’s going to be bilateral.

Henceforth, the pressure to multilateralize the proceedings, to bring China into the arms control regime for the first time, is going to grow. Whether or not Beijing can evade that is a question I leave to China experts. But I’m very certain that the pressure on China to join these negotiations and stop trying to get a free ride is going to grow. The Russians are insisting on this even though they have a partnership with China and claim an alliance or community of interest rather with China.

What this means is that the administration’s arms control agenda has reached, I think, the limits of where it’s going to go. Missile defense will continue regardless of who wins the election in November. It’s not clear to me that we’re going to rebuild our nuclear capability beyond where it is now, no matter who is elected, despite Governor Romney’s promises to do so. The money may not be there.

And what’s more, we may decide that the strategic utility is outweighed by the cost. That’s a decision that the next administration will have to make, and we can’t predict in the future where that goes. And it also depends on a host of other conditions.

But what we can predict is that nuclear proliferation, until and unless some decisive action continues, is not going to stop, not just in the horizontal sense – that is more states who might be interested in getting it – but equally importantly if not more importantly in the vertical sense, that is in the quality and the capabilities and the missions that are assigned to those weapons: Pakistan and India, for example, to get back to what I first said. In such a situation, in a seven or eight power nuclear world, because North Korea has a nuclear weapon even if it’s not really a good one and not usable – and
it’s apparently gearing up for a third test – in that world depriving yourself of the nuclear capability in advance of securing the required political conditions to prevent their usage is not only bad politics, it is suicide by fear of death, to quote Bismarck.

Thank you.

(Applause).

MR. MIKE PILLSBURY: Thank you. I never know how much everyone knows about China, in the audience, so let me just assume you all know a lot about China. How many people have been to China at least once? Could you put your hand up? The vast majority.

How many of you speak Chinese and have spent months or 40 years dealing with the PLA officer corps? Put your hand up. You have; speak Chinese and have spent 40 years with the PLA officer corps?

I want to say a few words about where I’ve been working the last 40 years. I’ve had pretty much the same boss, off and on. We’re going to have the anniversary of the creation of the office next year in July. It will be 40 years.

And the same man has held the same post for 40 years. This doesn’t really happen in Washington, D.C. Sometimes a Senator will stay 40 years, but very rarely in the executive branch.

His name is Andy Marshal. The office was set up by Henry Kissinger because the function that had been done under Eisenhower of so-called net assessment – assessment after a nuclear war, who will win, who will lose, anybody – couldn’t be done at the NSC staff in the White House. The JCS, the Joint Staff, would not cooperate.

The idea of a net assessment is to measure at least two sides in a military balance. And that means you have to have data about the opposing side – that’s the intelligence community plus defectors and scholars and whoever else you can find. Then you’ve got to have data about yourself. What are American strengths and what are American weaknesses and how do they play out in a war?

So this office was moved to the Pentagon to be close to the American military so they could, in confidence, confess if you will, American weaknesses. And that’s been one of the strengths of the office low these years, since 1973. The office from the very beginning worked on China, worked on Asia.

A new book is coming out in a few months. Many of the veterans of net assessment, and Andy Marshal himself, got together for a conference to review the last 40 years. I’m somewhat hurt because Secretary of Defense Gates made a speech. He said our record at predicting future wars since 1945 is perfect. We’ve never successfully predicted one.

(Laughter).

And to some degree, the office of net assessment is responsible for having a picture of future warfare in 10 or 20 years, including where such wars may happen and who would be involved and how we would do, given our strengths and weaknesses. So we looked back over the last 40 years and found
the number of books on the Cold War, found the number of studies of the Soviet Union, how our country assessed the Soviet Union, what various strategies were. And we also discovered a remarkable number of studies of Asia, studies of China that had been done by the office.

The first thing one learns about the study of China is the level of differences, you might say, in judgments among China experts. There are not just two schools of thought. There may be 10 schools of thought, but there are two broad schools.

One school basically comes out of the Wilsonian model. China is our lover. China is our future wife, or China is our current wife. We must cooperate with China. Everything depends on cooperation with China. And anything that gets in the way of that in China is a minor source of friction or needs to be better explained to the Chinese.

And we see that in yesterday’s comment by President Obama. He was asked about a blind human rights activist who’s apparently running into U.S. property in Beijing. And his answer, covered in quite a few papers this morning, is we want a strong China. We welcome a strong China.

And I’m going to read to you and tell you a little bit about a memoir that just came out by President Obama’s national security council staffer for the first two and a half years who lays out this point of view, that we need to be partners with China no matter what. And he tells the story where President Obama’s heart is basically broken by the Chinese in a very dramatic encounter.

The other point of view about China is a growing sense of wariness, a growing sense that we have a competitor here who is deep inside our system, who knows a great deal about us. And not just from espionage, classic means, but from being in our system. Our basic journals where Steve Blank publishes so much are open to Chinese Communist Party members. Our university courses are taught on China by Chinese passport holders.

Our companies have partnerships, mergers and acquisitions. Goldman Sachs just announced a couple of years ago most of their profit for one year came from China: $200 million from stock offerings; $200 million more – this is profit now, this is not gross – from mergers and acquisitions; and $200 million more from helping Chinese companies with their IPOs. So China is a major partner for many American businesses. General Motors’ key guy in Shanghai, hired away by the Chinese. General Motors software for designing new cars, purchased by the Chinese.

So this is not a kind of Soviet Union or Russia that can be held at a distance and analyzed as a potential threat. This is a competitor -- this other school argues -- this is a competitor who is inside us and knows a great deal about us. We’ve never faced this kind of thing before. And the China experts in our society are therefore split into these two camps and tend to go over every little fact that comes in and analyze it in terms of one way or the other.

Our media senses this now. Our media is beginning to have both camps appear on television and debate. Or, you’ll see quotes in the New York Times where one person says well, there’s this, the other person says, that. But this is just beginning.
Back in the Cold War, there was a similar period about détente with the Soviet Union where every major American professor who wrote about the Soviet Union wrote about the word convergence. The convergence of our two great societies. The Soviet Union is becoming more like America. There’s interest groups and lobbies and Sakharov is lobbying for this and there’s samizdat literature. And then the forecast was as the United States becomes more socialistic, these two great powers will be able to work together and have kind of a G-2 that runs the world.

Along comes Reagan, along comes Gorbachev, along comes Yeltsin, history doesn’t work out the way this is. And now there’s three books very embarrassing to our Soviet experts -- not Steve Blank, mind you – but very embarrassing to our Soviet experts. One of these books is essentially quotations from CIA declassified materials about the Soviet Union. And the other part of the book is about American scholars.

It’s very embarrassing. Ninety-five percent, at least, got the Soviet Union wrong. But not all of them. They love to say, well we all got the Soviet Union wrong. We couldn’t possibly have known all these things were going to happen.

No. There was a group that got the Soviet Union right, saw them as a competitor, described what needed to be done. And Ronald Reagan gets onto this group, hires some of them, has his own views as well, and all kinds of things change.

Alright, China today is very similar. The school I mentioned to you about we love China, we’ve got to be partners with them, any more trouble or friction that pops up has to be overcome. That school is about 95 percent – actually it’s shrinking, I’d say 85 percent – dominant now.

There’s a growing school examining the same evidence, and saying wait a minute. And there are two interesting examples today where this battle or this competition for the president’s ear, you might say, or for the secretary of Defense’s ear, plays out. The first one is called the world order debate.

Now everybody here is a very practical person from the practical world, who cares about world order? Well, the Chinese care. They say we currently live in a hegemon dominated world order and we’re in transition to a Chinese-led world order.

The world order under China would be quite different. It will be virtuous. It will be fair. There’s quite a long list of features that this new world order will have.

The American-led world order – there’s quite a few books on this. The most recent is Brzezinski’s “Strategic Vision.” The Americans have long had a view of the world order.

Obviously the Americans will be the leader of it. They’ll be generous. There’ll be other countries consulted and so forth. But Bretton Woods, IMF, World Bank, voting rights, UN Security Council veto, military balance of power, all these things will be maintained and China will join this order as it grows. This is the American – I hate to say prescription – it’s the American belief about where the world is headed over the next 20 to 50 years.
The Chinese are saying, no. We will not join the American-led world order. We are going to organize a separate world order, and they’re busy doing that.

Now the interesting question, the second part of the issue, is what kind of military forces would China need to have in a Chinese-led world order? And when you ask Chinese generals this question, as I enjoy teasing them -- often after official meetings we have a dinner, so it’s any topic you want to discuss. So I can bring up, I’ve read all your scholars for the last 10 years about a Chinese-led world order. I’m sure there’d be many positive benefits, I’d see to a Chinese-led world order.

America has made many mistakes. I’m sure you’ll do much better. What kind of military forces do you need?

And a few who have been willing to answer lay out something quite fascinating. Chinese forces will need to protect the new world order against the hegemon, that is to say the immoral hegemon. Hegemon, by the way, means immoral. It’s a term that Americans don’t know quite how to translate. But when you say it in Chinese, a ba (ph) is a dictator, is a tyrant. So when they say the Americans are the current hegemonic leader, it means we are the tyrant.

So who is going to protect the world against the tyrant? And that’s when you begin to realize, anti-satellite lasers and missiles to blind the tyrant in a crisis. There’s writing about this in Chinese open source publications.

Number two, who is going to hold the hegemon’s carriers at risk? Well, we need an anti-ship ballistic missile with all kinds of fancy targeting capabilities and a decent range. And other countries may have to buy these systems from China to protect themselves against the hegemon.

And I’d say there’s a set of about 10 of these weapons systems: counter-lasers. Precision-guided munitions need lasers. They have to target. How do you break that? Well, you have to be able to break the laser designation system. For sale in arms shows -- the Chinese have brochures at arms shows to sell this particular system.

Missile defense against the hegemon’s missiles. Anti-submarine warfare. So all the things that a Chinese-led world order would need to defend itself, we begin to see in production or in an experimentation process in China.

So this puts a challenge on the first school I mentioned to you, the 85 percent school. And I’ll finish just with telling you the story. It’s on page 64 and runs about five pages, the NSC staffer in 2009. What happens to President Obama?

His staff tells President Obama it’s snowing back in Washington. Andrews Air Force Base is going to be closed. Air Force One won’t be able to land there. We really only have another one or two hours to leave Copenhagen – it’s December – and get back to Andrews.
There’s no deal on climate change. President Obama has been campaigning on climate change. It’s really part of his view of the new world order. He’s got to get a deal with the Chinese, Brazilians, Indians and Russians.

So he asks his staffer, Jeff Bader, the author of the book, shall we try one last time, go see the Chinese before we go and avoid the snow storm? And Jeff Bader say, yes sir. Let’s try one last time.

So they call the Chinese delegation. They say, can we meet you at 6 p.m., an hour from now? They’ve only got 90 minutes or so.

The Chinese delegation says, can’t you come at 7 p.m.? And they say, okay. As good presidents do, President Obama arrives early where the Chinese delegation is in a room.

But there’s protocol officers, security guards, they won’t let Hillary Clinton come in. So he portrays her – he doesn’t sort of like her very much. He portrays her – he helped run against here in the campaign. He portrays her as standing passively on the side. She wouldn’t dare to break into this room.

But President Obama and Jeff, like tackles they say rushing through the opposition, they force their way into the room to meet the Chinese prime minister to make this one last deal on a core issue of President Obama’s presidency. The door opens and at the table -- the meeting has been going on for quite some time -- are the heads of state of Russia, Brazil and India, with China in the chair asking for more ideas about how to block the American’s proposal, the American’s and the European Union and Japan’s proposal on climate change.

But President Obama is now cowed by this. His staffer, Dennis McDonough (ph), says these guys don’t know what they’re in for. They’ve never encountered anyone like Barack Obama before.

And there ensues a 90 minute talk where President Obama sees people stand up red-faced with frustration – one Chinese official stands up. Another one wags his finger in the president’s face. It’s a very unpleasant meeting.

They cannot make a deal. They cannot get an agreement. They leave. And climate change to this day remains an unfulfilled campaign promise – climate change agreement – of the Obama administration.

There’s several other stories in the book equally dramatic. I highly recommend this book. It’s quite brief, very much to the point, and it shows my larger point. If China is our partner we have to work together on these broad issues. On everything, nuclear zero, China says no. Almost any one of the great transnational issues, the Chinese don’t agree. So the main school, however says – that I’m trying to portray to you fairly – we’ve just got to work harder.

In the meantime, the DoD has now transferred – is rebalancing is the term that’s used – is rebalancing the Navy, the Air Force, acquisitions programs, intelligence collection, more and more toward Asia. My last sentence here is going to be – the consensus between the two schools of thought I’m describing to you. There’s a consensus.
Those who want to be partners with China say you guys can do those things you want to do, like the Air-Sea-Battle office or a next generation bomber. There’s quite a long list of American countermeasures to the rise of China. But you must never say in public that these systems are against China.

And the agreed language, which I myself often use, is the rise of the economics and trade in Asia means we have to rebalance in kind of a general, vague way toward Asia. But this leaves non-China specialists quite mystified. What is going on here, when they read the rhetoric of partnership with China and they can’t understand: new budget documents, new strategy review materials, nuclear posture review materials, because there seems to be something different going on than the American national rhetoric.

Thank you very much.

(Applause).

MR. HUESSY: Would you identify yourself if you ask questions and keep your questions to questions and not speeches, so we have enough time? And address your questions to both Steve and Mike.

MS. MARGARET POLSKI (ph): Margaret Polski of George Mason University. You’ve both raised the issue of American strategic judgment. I wonder if you’d each reflect on that a little bit more. You’re each at least putting up the argument for discussion whether or not we have good strategic judgment, whether or not we have the kind of strategic judgment we need to confront the challenges of the 21st century.

MR. BLANK: Do you have a month?

(Laughter).

MR. PILLSBURY: Thank you for the question.

MR. BLANK: It’s a wonderful question. But, you know, a truly fully, serious answer would take a long time. My personal view – and again, this is my personal view – is that no, we don’t.

I work for an institution that unfortunately has the word strategic – I mean, my office has the word strategic in it and I think we understand it. I don’t think the Army does, to be honest with you, and I just say that even here. In the new rebalancing strategy that Michael talked about, the Army is not mentioned in what he said.

Did you notice it talked about Land-Air and electronic and missile components? The Army doesn’t have an enemy anymore now that it’s pulling out of the Middle East. And it has all these capabilities that it wants to protect or develop, but it has no idea who the enemy is going to be or what kind of war it’s going to face.
And there’s a big debate in the Army now. Are we going to be doing something similar to Iraq and Afghanistan in the future? Or, are we going to be doing conventional, hi-tech theater operations or some third possibility?

But I think broadly speaking we are in the middle of a huge strategic debate that is quite inchoate – incoherent. For a lot of reasons I think we don’t do strategy. Colin Gray, of whom I’m a big fan, writes that too often there’s a black hole where there should be strategy in American thinking. That’s his term, not mine.

I see this not only in the public debate – both parties, this is bipartisan, this is not one side -- but in the public debate, candidates, politicians, people who brag about their ignorance about the external world or are not afraid to show it in public, commentators, talking heads. And, I see it as a father, I have to tell you, because this begins in school.

This is an older audience, for the most part. We have all learned geography and civics and stuff like that in elementary school and we went up the line, and we all have a pretty good sense of national security interests policy, foreign policy, and so on. Our kids don’t have that. And our kids are now moving into positions of power and influence just by the nature of things.

And we see people who – in our education system we are not teaching languages and foreign civilizations. We’re not teaching true security studies, in the political science departments. We think that peace is the natural order. Hopefully it would be, but the fact of the matter is we need to know more about war.

We have not won a war in 20 years. Let’s be honest. I mean, immense sacrifices were made in Iraq and are being made in Afghanistan and I don’t think the results justify those sacrifices. And I think there’s a failure of strategic leadership.

So in the short answer that I can give you, I think as a society and as a state we are failing in the strategic competition. And we are not doing enough to rebuild the sinews of American power abroad and are faced with enormous international crises, not only in Asia, but Europe, which is vital to us. So unfortunately that’s where I think we are.

Mike?

MR. PILLSBURY: One of the central, core studies of Andy Marshal and net assessment has been to try to answer your question. You’re at George Mason. I’ll email you some of the books. Several books try to address the quality of strategy making, not just by the United States, but other countries.

One is about the origins of World War I. One is about the origins of World War II. The general finding is that the strategy – or what you’re calling the strategic judgment, what we call assessment and making of strategy – this is often known to outsiders only 30 or 40 years later. Most countries classify their decision-making records by their head of state and his immediate advisers. And when errors are made the classification process lasts even longer.
So there’s now quite an important debate going on in our various journals, like International Security and elsewhere, on the causes of World War I. One of the theses is that the leaders after World War I lied to the historians, and they conjured up – there’s a guy named Mark Trachtenberg at Penn who’s the most famous for this now. He’s using the concept of archive-based history. Don’t believe what people say who were at the top in a crisis or in a war. Get the documents, which you can’t get for 30 to 50 years.

But it looks like the version that was presented, that we were all taught in school about why World War I began, was false. It was made up by the leaders and their foreign ministers: the train schedules, the Schlieffen Plan, we had no choice. No, they had plenty of options to do something different.

Probably the most interesting study to come out of our office is a book called “The Weary Titan.” And if no one here has read it, I’m deeply upset. “The Weary Titan,” took three years for a professor at Princeton named Aaron Friedberg to write. It’s been reprinted by Princeton in paperback just in the last few months.

It’s the story of what the British government thought was happening from 1885 to 1905, during this period when Britain was losing its primacy. It was no longer going to be the hegemon. The Americans were rising. The Germans were rising.

And Professor Friedberg got into the British records: army, navy, intelligence, what we would call commerce and treasury, to see what was the prime minister in parliament being told. Looking back, we can all say oh my god the British were going down. The Americans were going up. Surely they knew this?

No, no. The assessment process was fundamentally flawed. So the British did not know what was happening to them. They go into World War I actually thinking they are extremely powerful and nobody is really going to challenge them. The boys will be home quite soon. Downton Abby kind of shows this.

Now, if assessment error is a particularly unique British and American problem, and is a possible source of war – according to political science literature: misperceptions, mis-assessment; there’s a current article right now on this, actually called “Crossing the Rubicon – then the process of assessment and judgment at the very top, not think tanks, not companies, not professors, the people right around the head of state and what they are saying, becomes extremely important. But how good are our chances of knowing this kind of thing? (We’re in the dark ?) for 30 or 40 years.

That’s why I read to you from the Jeff Bader book. Here’s a fresh memoir, the last two or three years, by somebody who’s with the president, on China. So that’s why I recommended that book.

I think the assessment process is flawed in all countries. I can’t tell how much we – we may be the best, but we still make major errors. So this is a big subject. As Steve alluded to, if you have a
month – but I’m happy to give you the reading list and in 30 or 40 years we can all get back together and see what happened.

(Laughter).

MR. BLANK: Just as an addition, let me give you a quick example that’s current, today, happening now. If you’ve been reading the press, you now see a group of retired Israeli officials getting up in public and criticizing the prime minister and the minister of defense for deliberately or not deliberately as the case may be, spreading what they consider to be a false assessment of Iranian capabilities and therefore of what the threat to Israel is or may be. This speaks to what Michael talked about. Normally they’re like doctors, they bury their mistakes. But they do not normally get into a public debate as to the validity or the quality of a threat assessment today, for obvious political and intelligence reasons. But if you follow the debate in Israel you’ll see some examples of that.

MR. : You said at the beginning of your talk that the numbers of nuclear weapons don’t matter as much as they used to. What really matters is – I think you used the term quality of the weapon. Can you be more specific on that? What qualities would your ideal nuclear weapon have?

MR. BLANK: My ideal nuclear weapon? Well, to be honest with you, if I had my ideal there’d be no nuclear weapons. But that’s not going to happen and I don’t believe in it.

The ideal nuclear weapon depends on the person who possesses it and the strategic vision of that government. For the Russian case, which is the one I know best, the ideal nuclear weapon is, as I said, one that can evade any missile defense, that is usable as a weapon and therefore as a deterrent, and that can strike the target for which it is proscribed and inflict that calibrated or pre-assigned – that’s the term in Russian, zadaniya (ph) as they call it – pre-assigned level of damage to the other side that will make the other side sit up and say we don’t want to go further. Let’s get back to the table and let’s not have a nuclear war.

So the ideal is not that they have thousands of nuclear weapons, which is what they had. They had something like 45,000 nuclear weapons in 1989-90, if you can imagine that. Today they have many, many fewer, but they are trying to – as Lenin said – to build fewer but better ones; and also MIRV them where possible, so you have multiple independent re-entry vehicles as the term says.

But they are capable of striking a target without being impeded by defense, and therefore are usable. And, they can be also placed as cruise missiles against which the defense is much less viable than for ballistic missiles. So that’s the point. It’s much harder to stop a cruise missile than it is a ballistic missile.

So that would be the ideal nuclear weapon from the Russian point of view, that it reaches its target and that it not be susceptible to any defense on the way there. It doesn’t have to take out all of Chicago or New York or Washington, D.C. All it has to do is, let’s say, take out a division, let’s say Fort Stewart to strike up a target, to tell people that we mean business – or a tactical nuclear weapon against China.
So it’s a revolution towards precision, towards calibrated damage and towards evasion of defense and, of course, it’s mobile so it’s much harder to hit it if you are on the other side. So it’s a much more secure weapon and it can still reach its designated target from anywhere within that sphere of mobility.

MR. CURTIS: I’m Dr. Curtis from the U.S. Naval Academy. I would like very much to give you my card so you can send me that list because I’m a firm believer that at this stage of the game we don’t have a sufficient number of strategic thinkers that maybe we had in the past. The current generation is what I deal with and I’ve just instituted a new course at the Naval Academy on war and grand strategy and fundamental concepts. And I need this type of information.

MR. PILLSBURY: Okay, the latest book we’re sponsoring, just in draft right now, is by 10 scholars. It’s about grand strategy. The requirement was, find an example in history where there was a grand strategy written down. Find an example where it worked, and then tell us why in your case study. Seven of those case studies. Very rare, almost never happens.

An interesting story is the French foreign minister writes a memo to the king saying we’ve been losing a lot of wars with the British. Why don’t we try to separate the colonies in America by a covert weapons program, build them up. We can weaken Britain. And if this new country arises, we’ll be able to balance the British. That’s an example of grand strategy.

The king says, yes. Unfortunately, the British have a spy. They find out and begin to sink some of the ships as they leave Bordeaux.

But your average army war college -- where I was on the board of visitors -- colonel, has never heard this. What? The French were trying to balance the British and there’s this memo? Six more examples like that are in this book you might enjoy.

We have found there is not a lot of good teaching material about what is successful grand strategy. And the war college is -- and here’s I’m very harsh against the Army War College -- they’re teaching a lot of bullshit about strategy.

(Laughter).

I went to some of the current courses. Here’s colonels and Navy captains just back from Iraq and Afghanistan, very smart guys, maybe Annapolis graduates in many cases, and the professor would say now today we’re going to discuss our national security strategy. Here’s the document. And they start reading this document that talks about America stands for peace and stability. Please discuss now for one hour.

That’s it. That’s it. It’s sad. There’s a movement to reform by one professor at the Army War College who’s been trying to get academic articles going: Joint Forces Quarterly. Is this the way we should teach strategy? But no one has a counter book or a lesson plan that would say this is what strategy is, this is when it’s successful, this is when it fails, here’s case studies, please discuss. So I’m glad you’re interested in this.
MR. CURTIS: Can I just add one thing. I’m a graduate of both the U.S. Naval War College and the Air War College, and I just think we need to start developing this generation, not wait until they’re 40 or 50 years old at the War College. I would definitely appreciate it. (If it does not cure it?) my men will hunt you down and kill you.

(Laughter).

MR. BLANK: You’re absolutely right. What has to happen is a revolution in American education, and I don’t mean that lightly. History is the foundation (of war?), it’s not political science.

MR. PILLSBURY: The Army War College is one of the worst places in terms of the way they teach strategy. I’m indicting him and his colleagues.

MR. BLANK: I don’t teach. I write.

(Laughter).

MR. BLANK: But we have a bullet with your name on it, Mike.

(Laughter).

MR. HUESSY: Now I know what Les Aspin meant when we would go see him during the debate over Peacekeeper and Midgetman. And Jim Woolsey and myself and Brent Scowcroft, among others, would walk into his office. He’d look at us and say, oh my god, you trouble makers again.

Thank you, Steve. Thank you, Michael.

(Applause).