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In Conversation with Rep. Adam Smith

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A P P E A R A N C E S

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In conversation with Rep. Adam Smith

(8:45 a.m.)

MS. PSAKI: Well, good morning. I am thrilled -- my name Jen Psaki. I work at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. I'm thrilled to be joined by Congressman Adam Smith, the Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee.

We will be taking questions from the app. So they're open now. Please submit your questions. If you can't make the app work, we understand. There's paper in the back of the room and you can submit questions that way. So I'm going to start out and just ask a couple of questions and then we'll go to the moderated ones.

So yesterday, Chairman Smith, the White House submitted a $750 billion budget, including an 8% -- 7% to 8% increase of the Pentagon budget for modernizing the US nuclear arsenal and infrastructure. Proponents of modernization say that this percentage was a small price to pay for such an important piece of U.S. national security.

My bet is you have some thoughts on this. So
I wanted to start by asking you where you see room for cuts and why and what elements of our nuclear spending are necessary for U.S. national security and that of our allies?

MR. SMITH: Well, first of all, it's not really debatable that we need to modernize our nuclear force. I think by and large we agree with that, that there are aging systems both, you know, delivery warheads of all manner or different aspects. In fact our command and control system to make sure that we can adequately secure all of the technologies that are important in protecting and having our missile systems ready.

That needs to be modernized. It doesn't need to be modernized as much as the Nuclear Posture Reviews of 2010 and 2018 said. That's where I disagree. I think a deterrent policy, having enough nuclear weapons to ensure that nobody launches a nuclear weapon at you because you have sufficient deterrent, I think we can do that with fewer warheads.

You know, I'm not sure, you know, whether that means getting rid of one leg of the triad or simply
reducing the amount in each one. And I feel this way for, well, three reasons. Number one, I don't think it's necessary to have that many weapons, to have that deterrent capability. The power of nuclear weapons is fairly overwhelming. I mean, China gets by with about 250 of them, which they consider to be sufficient to deter adversaries. That's number one.

Number two, the more you have, the more risky the system is. And, you know, one of the things that can absolutely destroy the planet is an all-out nuclear war. So avoiding that is a huge priority for me. So the more you have, the more dangerous it is that that could happen. If you don't need them, it doesn't make sense.

And third, it's really expensive. And when you look at where our budget is at and at our national security and defense needs, some choices are going to have to be made. This is an area where I think we can save money and still meet our national security objectives.

MS. PSAKI: Now, you mentioned China. Given the changing trajectory of our relationships with
1. Russia and China, are there areas of the defense budget you think there should be an increase?

2. MR. SMITH: Certainly. I think the biggest area of warfare going forward is in cyber warfare and information warfare. That's where a lot of what is happening -- it's what -- I mean, Russia has had an outsized influence on the world through their disinformation and cyber campaigns, undermining democracy in Europe, in the US and elsewhere by spreading discord, by trying to mess with the elections, all on the cheap, frankly, compared to an armored division or a whole bunch of nuclear missiles. It doesn't cost much to do what they're doing.

3. We are not in that game sufficiently.

4. Meanwhile, we're talking about building all these nuclear weapons, doing this other stuff, which I know we need a deterrent capability. But odds are we are not going to have that sort of full frontal war with Russia or China. We are going to have these soft power battles and these battles -- so where is our funding for that on the soft power point?

5. The defense budget, as you mentioned, is
enormous. The budget for the State Department and development is cut by 25%. So we are undermining the actual battles that are going on in favor of things that aren't really happening.

So I think that's the way we need to recognize what both Russia and China are doing, is the way they're attempting to influence things not by invading anything or doing a military attack, but by other means. That's what we need to be in a position to deter as well.

MS. PSAKI: And you've put forward legislation that supports a no first use policy, a declaration that the United States will not use nuclear weapons first. A lot of experts here in the room. But what can Congress actually do? What power does Congress actually have to prevent that and where are the limitations?

MR. SMITH: Well, first of all, it's one of the downsides of my job that I am constantly in rooms with people who know a lot more about the subject that we're talking about because --

MS. PSAKI: Join the club.
MR. SMITH: -- it's their specialty. And I am like, "Yeah, one thing I've heard" -- look, the no first use policy is based on the premise that our nuclear weapons exist as a deterrent and that is where, you know, I think the real crux of this debate is.

You know, back in the 50s and 60s, there were a lot of people in the military and within the nuclear world who were debating, you know: "How can we win a nuclear war? You know, how can we use nuclear weapons to deter conventional?"

And eventually, with some of the arms control treaties elsewhere, we evolved. And as (inaudible) said, you know, "Hey, I wanted to have everyone in my committee simply watch the movie WarGames with Matthew Broderick." You cannot win a nuclear war. That's the basic point. And we reached that conclusion.

So the purpose of the weapons is to deter. And if the purpose is to deter, then you should not say or even have it as a possibility that you are going to use them to counter conventional attacks or other kinds of attacks.

So no first use is simply a recognition that
deterrence is our policy. And let me -- deterrence is enormously important. And, you know, as strongly as I feel that we need to reduce our nuclear weapons presence, I don't agree that we should ever contemplate getting rid of all of our nuclear weapons. You cannot un-ring the bell.

And as long as that technology is out there, we need to be in a position to deter anyone from using it. And the only way to deter them is to have a nuclear deterrent. Basically, to make it clear: "If you use a nuclear weapon, you will cease to exist. So don't. Let's not go there." And that's the point of no first use.

MS. PSAKI: One of the powers of Congress, as everyone knows, is of course funding. And with the recent withdrawal from the INF Treaty because Russia had violated and Russia's withdrawal as well, I wanted to ask you about kind of how that is approached. So funding to modernize nuclear weapons has often gone hand-in-hand with passage of arms control treaties, most recently with New START. Should this pro quo -- quid quo pro quo, excuse me, be flipped --
MR. SMITH: Yeah. You said that three times.

MS. PSAKI: A hard word, hard phrase -- no modernization funding without meaningful steps in arms control such as New START extension or a new agreement?

Or should it remain how it's been?

MR. SMITH: Well, no, certainly I wouldn't say, you know, we can't modernize our nuclear force unless we get an arms -- I mean, that's like giving foreign powers veto control over your national security and that would not be a smart thing to do.

But what we need to do is we need to restart the arms negotiation process. Because what's happened here is we've fallen into this dangerous void. And Secretary Perry, Former Senator Nunn have written about this far more eloquently than I. They describe it as, you know, stumbling towards a nuclear catastrophe.

When the Cold War ended, one of the things that changed the world obviously in a bunch of different ways was that there was a certain sigh of relief, okay? "You know, we are not on the nuclear brink any more and this is all good. You know, we'll work with Russia. We'll figure this out."
But then as that sort of shifted and Russia became more of an adversary and tried to undermine the West and rebuilt their nuclear forces and their military forces, we did not similarly rebuild the communications that was necessary to talk with our adversary about arms control, about preventing a nuclear war.

You know, when I look at nuclear policy, it's three things. One, as I said in the outset, I don't think we need as many weapons as they are contemplating and I think it's dangerous. But two, we need to open backup dialog with Russia just for de-confliction, and China too. China needs to be part of this conversation as well.

And we had that near the end of the Cold War, regular, you know -- and Secretary Perry outlines this in his book, all the times we came close to a nuclear catastrophe. But because we had lines of communication between our military even at the height of our adversarial relationship, we avoided that. So just having the communication about, you know, making sure that we don't stumble into a nuclear war.
And then third is arms control, is having that discussion to try and make sure that we don't, you know, stumble into an arms race, particularly a nuclear arms race. I think all three of those things are really important.

MS. PSAKI: Now, the fears about stumbling into a nuclear arms race are not alone in United States. And what you say to our partners and allies around the world about where we are in terms of leading on this effort or not? Should they be concerned? Or how should they look at our role at this point?

MR. SMITH: Well, I mean, that's what's troubling about the administration's policy. It's not really clear. They have not really done a lot to reassure our allies. And I think that is concerning because everything we are talking about here is a global effort, and the more partners we have in that effort, the more successful we are going to be.

And obviously, the best partner that we've had since World War II is NATO and our European allies. And strengthening that alliance is crucial in deterring Russia and China as well and finding ways to work
And this is why -- there's a lot of things that the president has said that I could point to you, but I guess the best summary is the whole 'America First' thing. In the modern world that is a truly moronic foreign policy. And it's not that you don't want to pursue your own interests, but we have never been in a position where we have needed more other nations.

And those are evolving relationships. We are, for instance, building a much stronger relationship with India right now and that is helpful in a variety of different ways. As we seek to deter China, our relationship with Vietnam, with the Philippines, with South Korea. All of these relationships are important.

And, you know, we can debate 'America First' and what it means. But if you are not the United States of America, if you are another country in the world and you look at the one country in the world that is the overwhelmingly dominant military power, the overwhelmingly dominant economic power -- and however good China is doing, they are still barely over half of
our GNP -- or GDP, sorry. So all that power. And the rest of the world sees, "And by the way, it's all about us. Screw you, okay." That is going to put them on edge. That is going to make them go looking for other friends. Because it's like, you know, "The biggest" -- "you know, the strongest country in the world has just said that they don't care about us. We better look for other relationships."

And again, I'll come back to the State Department budget and the development budget being slashed. We need more friends, not fewer. And if you keep telling the rest of the world -- you know, if you keep badgering them and berating them, it's going to push them away at a time when we need more allies.

MS. PSAKI: So one of the big responsibilities and undertakings no doubt for you is producing the annual National Defense Authorization Act, the NDAA as it's commonly known. What are -- what should people here know about your top priorities on nuclear policy in the NDAA process and how are your colleagues on both sides of the aisle viewing those priorities?

MR. SMITH: With trepidation --
MS. PSAKI: That's a modest --

MR. SMITH: -- I think will be the honest way to put it. No, I mean, it's a messy process. The Founding Fathers in their infinite wisdom created government to be very, very difficult to accomplish anything.

(Laughter)

MR. SMITH: No, I mean, that it's just -- it's the way they set it up. I mean, you go to a -- I mean, I had a British -- a person from England one time. We were talking about immigration reform and why we couldn't get it done. And she's been here two years. "I just don't understand how your government works?"

And I was like, "I get that. A parliamentary system is much more straightforward. You are in power, you govern until people decide you shouldn't be and then you are out. Here it's like, well, you got the House. You got the Senate. You got the White House. You got to get 60 votes in the Senate to do anything. So it takes a whole bunch of people coming together to get anything done."

And so as a consequence, the NDAA, at the end
of the day, we have to produce a product that both I
and Senator Inhofe like and that the president wants to
sign. And it's enormously important that we do that.
Because for all of the controversial stuff that we'll
talk about, there's 90% of the NDAA that is just making
sure that we have a Department of Defense that
functions, that we do the authorizing bill.

So it's a difficult negotiating process.
Every year that I've been here, we've had three or four
times when we've all thrown up our hands and said
"we're just not going to get it done, you know, we
can't bridge this gap." But for 59 years, we've done
it and we'll do it again.

And when it comes to the nuclear stuff in
particular, they are a little bit freaked out by what
I've been saying, to be perfectly honest with you,
because it's not been said --

MS. PSAKI: What are they most freaked out by?

MR. SMITH: Well, the mere fact that I don't
want to spend as much money as humanly possible on what
they want.

(Laughter)
MS. PSAKI: Uh-huh.

MR. SMITH: Yeah, the fact that somebody is asking the question, not, "Oh my gosh, we're all going to die. We're not spending enough money. What more do we need to spend?" But let's just hold up a minute here. We're spending, you know, $700 billion a year, which even these days that's a lot of money. Is there a better, more efficient way we can do that?

Whereas, the way the Armed Services Committee works if you've been there -- and I've been there 22-plus years now -- is the Pentagon or a think-tank sends somebody in to talk about a problem, a threat. And they explain to us how grievous that threat is. And how no matter how you've thought about it, after this moment -- you have not considered how serious it actually is. And you are not spending anywhere near enough money to deter it. And if you don't, you're all going to die. Have a nice day.

MS. PSAKI: It is a little dark for --

MR. SMITH: Right.

MS. PSAKI: -- (inaudible).

MR. SMITH: Right. And then we all freak out
and say, "Oh my god, we've got to spend more money."
And I say, "Yeah, like I said, let's just take a step back here and look at a finite amount of resources and figure out, you know, what are the real choices that are involved, because I think that there are other important priorities in this country. And if we spend all the money on defense, we will not be able to meet those priorities."
Witness the budget the president just presented. You know, we got a $600 billion shortfall in infrastructure. He wants to cut it by another 5%.
So, yeah. But here's the thing. I am a reasonable guy. I've been a legislator for a long time.
MS. PSAKI: You seem very reasonable to me.
MR. SMITH: Yeah. And at the end of the day, I know we have to pass the bill and we're going to work together to get it. But I just -- I want to spur the conversation and hopefully get a more efficient, a more effective Pentagon, where it really matters where you spend the money, where you can't just waste it.
I mean, my gosh, they just said, you know, "We've got $8 billion for a wall, you know. I said,
"Yeah, well" -- "you know, this, here you go." I mean, if you got $8 billion just sitting around that you didn't really need, well, what are you doing? We've got to look at how to make it more efficient, more effective, not just thinking that spending more money necessarily makes us safer. And that's the discussion we're going to have.

MS. PSAKI: There are a lot of questions submitted. Please I encourage you to submit them through the app, or again there's paper in the back. But I'm going to start with some of the questions that have been submitted either from our digital participants, people in the room or people attending the conference.

From Professor Matthew Vaughn (phonetic). I apologize in advance if I mispronounce anyone's name, not intentional. From Professor Matthew Vaughn. Given the need for risk reducing dialog, should we eliminate the NDAA ban on US-Russia military-to-military cooperation?

MR. SMITH: Yeah. First of all, by the way, doing it this way eliminates the fun of handing a
microphone to somebody when you just don't know exactly

MS. PSAKI: "Is it working?"

MR. SMITH: -- what they're going to do.

(Laughter)

MR. SMITH: But where's the joy in that?

MS. PSAKI: We could just (crosstalk) up here and just take questions.

MR. SMITH: Yeah, yeah. But the answer to the question is, yes, we should reopen the military-to-
military conversation. And that's one of the things that I was alluding to in my earlier remarks that I'm concerned about. A lot of those channels of communications broke down when -- you know, prior to the fall of the Soviet Union, it was a fraught relationship certainly, but we understood it, okay, and we had dialog within that understanding.

And now the relationship is much less well understood. We need to have mil-to-mil conversations so that we don't have these miscalculations. I mean, there's the speculation that Russia has a policy of, you know, escalate to de-escalate. The idea that
they'll use a low-yield nuke in a conventional war thinking that that will discourage any from doing -- anybody from, you know -- they will win the war, but it will be a low enough yield nuclear weapon that no one will do anything.

And one of the things that I would like to communicate to the Russians is, yeah, it doesn't work that way. Use a nuclear weapon, we are going to respond and we are not going to be overly concerned about being "proportional". A nuclear weapon is a nuclear weapon, and if you use it, we will nuke you.

So don't.

That type of dialog, which brings to mind the Dr. Strangelove movie and the lack of communication that led to the disaster there. That's what we want to avoid, is to have that type of dialog. And I think military-to-military is crucial.

MS. PSAKI: Excellent. I am going to move next to Travis Wheeler (phonetic). What are the risks associated with a low-yield nuclear warhead proposed by the Trump administration's NPR? What if anything could Congress do to prevent the deployment of these low-
yield warheads now that the production has begun?

MR. SMITH: The risk is a miscalculation that a low-yield nuclear weapon enables you to basically launch a nuclear weapon without leading to an all-out nuclear war. You know, I mean, low-yield I guess is slightly more -- well, now, low-yield doesn't make any sense. A nuclear weapon is a nuclear weapon. They used to call them tactical nuclear weapons, which I really found absurd. There's no such thing as a tactical nuclear weapon.

So the risk in a low-yield weapon is, well, are we developing the low-yield weapon in the same sense that I just talked about Russia, where we think, "Well, if we launch this one, yeah, it will be a little nuclear blast. So they probably won't overreact to that, will they?"

Yeah, I think they will. So we don't want to contemplate the notion that we can use a low-yield nuclear weapon and somehow have a manageable nuclear war.

And ultimately, what does it get us? The argument is what it gets us -- well, you know, if the
Russians are -- you know, if they have a low-yield nuclear weapon and they launch a low-yield nuclear weapon at us and if we don't have anything but a bigger nuclear weapon, well, then what can we do? We launch the bigger nuclear weapon is what we do. That's the deterrent.

As far as what Congress can do about it, we can cut off the funding for it. But again, reference the fact that, you know, the Republicans still control the Senate, the president still controls the White House. So I would like to kill the low-yield nuclear weapon program. I don't think it's a good idea and we're going to try to do that. Many others disagree with me on that. And we'll see how that plays out.

MS. PSAKI: We'll be watching. What do -- the question is from Dr. Najmadin Miscoti (phonetic).

MR. SMITH: See, I am Adam Smith. It's easier.

(Laughter)

MS. PSAKI: I know.

MR. SMITH: I just make it easy for people to throw it out there.
MS. PSAKI: I have a hard last name too, so I'm very -- I'm sympathetic. So Dr. Miscotis asks, what does your committee and the House plan to do vis-a-vis the JCPOA, the Iran nuclear deal, in 2019 and beyond?

MR. SMITH: Yeah. I guess I could give the really easy answer there and say, well, it's not actually our jurisdiction. That's the Foreign Affairs Committee's jurisdiction.

But, look -- I mean, the truth is I would like to try to protect that agreement and Europe would like to try to protect that agreement. You know, having Iran not marching inevitably towards a nuclear weapon I think is a very positive thing and I really disagree with the people who were critical of that agreement, because it was simply about the nuclear program. It was about trying to stop Iran from continuing down that road and it was working. We had inspectors in there. They were able to do that.

Now, I understand that Iran is a bad actor in a whole lot of other areas, you know, what they're doing in Syria, what they're doing in Lebanon, what they're doing in Yemen, their support for a whole bunch
of different terrorist groups. And we should deal with
that as a separate issue.

But to back out of the nuclear agreement, I
think gives Iran, you know, free rein to restart their
nuclear program and also it alienates our allies. We
worked together on this agreement. It was one of the
things that helped bring us together. Reference all of
my comments earlier about how we need more friends in
the world at this point. And here we are, you know,
just like with the Paris Agreement, pulling out of
something that we had agreed to. And it makes us an
unreliable partner and undermines us in a variety
different ways.

As far as what we can do about it, not a lot.
We can continue to put pressure on the president and I
think we should, you know, try to reassert the
agreement. But at the end of the day, he has the power
to do what he did. So we'll need a new president at
some point.

(Laughter)

MS. PSAKI: Well, we know where you stand on
that. Mr. -- this is leading into a question about if
there is a new president, so I'll ask this one next.

Mr. Jeremy Foust (phonetic) asks, it has been almost
two decades since the CTBT was rejected for
ratification by the Senate keeping a key component of
the nuclear non-proliferation regime from entering into
force. If Democrats control the presidency and the
Senate after 2020, do you think your colleagues in the
Senate can draw some bipartisan support to push for a
renewed debate and ratification?

MR. SMITH: Yeah. Refresh my memory on what
those initials stand for because I don't know.

MS. PSAKI: Who here would like to share with
us because I don't know either? Anyone?

MR. FOUST: Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban.

MS. PSAKI: Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban.

MR. SMITH: Okay, nuclear. Okay, yeah. Got
you, yeah.

MS. PSAKI: Oh, so if you would just write it
out, then we would all been speaking the same language.

MR. SMITH: Yeah. I love it when they get you
to ask what an acronym is and it's something very
simple and they explain like you're really stupid. If
know -- it's like, "I know what that is. I didn't know what the acronym stood for."


MR. SMITH: Right. Yeah. Yeah -- no, I think that's an important part of arms control. It's a crucial part of it. There are a whole bunch of different layers beyond just how many nuclear weapons do you have.

If you, you know, eliminate the testing, that gives people some confidence that, okay, we know what the known universe is of weapons capability and that too can reduce the likelihood that people will think they have to do something prematurely to start a war. So I think that would be crucial. I would love to renew that debate and we get us moving forward on that piece of it as well.

MS. PSAKI: Excellent. I wanted to ask -- so the next question is from Aaron Dumbbacker (phonetic).

What are the most important international security issues where you and your committee are looking for new, better or more practical ideas? I guess this is
sort of some advice for the audience or people watching who may have these ideas. What kind of problems are on the horizon for which you think the U.S. needs a new playbook?

MR. SMITH: Well, I think the entire thing involves a new playbook. And I think the biggest piece of that is what I said earlier about cyber and information and, you know, sort of the technological aspect of the ongoing battle as opposed to the traditional, you know, what missiles do you have, what ships do you have, what planes, you know, how big is your military, your army, and more in, you know, what are the key technologies going forward that are going to be crucial to making sure you have a strong military.

So sort of getting off of legacy systems and focusing on the future and how important technology is in that and then all of the sort of, you know, non-direct military confrontations that we have.

Look -- I mean, the simplest way to think about it is the following steps. You know, we -- in fact, I think we need to come up with the mnemonic for
this because it's the basic idea of what our national security threats are: North Korea, Iran, Russia, China, transnational terrorist groups. It's those five things. And then the question is: How do we deter our adversaries in those five areas?

And the military strategy, the budget that we have is all based on, you know, here's how many aircraft carriers we think we need to deter China, here's what we need in special ops to deter terrorists. And it's all built on that.

But I think what we're not thinking about is there are other ways to deter adversaries other than having a strong military. Now, having a strong military is an important piece of it. But, for instance, as I said, we can deter China from messing with the South China Sea if we have partners in the region who are with us on deterring them and pushing back on that.

You know, if we have a strong State Department and a strong development policy, we can stop some of the areas where terrorism is going to grow because it is an ungoverned space.
So, you know, that is I think the way we need to start thinking about our approach to national security is a whole of government approach, not just the military.

But I think at this point, the threats are well understood. Now, as you will hear us say, inevitably it is a complex threat environment and it is rapidly changing. And, yes, it is. So we need to be prepared for that.

But I think basically that idea of partnerships to deter these core adversaries that I think we are now reasonably well briefed on is the approach we need to take.

MS. PSAKI: There's some live questioning here commenting on your comments, which is always interesting. Thank you for saying we need to step back and take a look -- this from Jessica Slate (phonetic) or Slight (phonetic); I'm not sure how to pronounce. We need to step back and take a look at what is actually needed for national security and for holding a hearing on U.S. nuclear strategy last week (sic) -- thank you for holding the hearing she says.
How can the nuclear arms control and non-proliferation community support and encourage these conversations? And what is the most effective talking point when speaking with members of Congress to counter the "we're all going to die, but all the weapons" line of thinking?

MR. SMITH: Right. Well, the most effective thing to begin with is, you know, "I'm a constituent of yours and I care about this issue." Now, people ask me all the time, "You know, how can we organize? What can we do?" And they're like mystified like there's got to be some secret formula code in order to influence Congress. And it's pretty straightforward.

I mean, lobbying is not a dirty word and it's easily understood and there are a lot of groups that do a very effective job of it. There's a group called Results that organizes around global health and foreign aid. And what they do is they recruit people from all across the country and then they go and they meet with their member of Congress. And it's all constituents. It's all constituents from that district who care about foreign aid. And they always have three or four key
asks, "Here's what we want."

So if you want to get members of Congress to start thinking about, you know, the risk of an arms race and the risk of putting too much money into defense, find people who agree with you, organize them and send them to go see their members of Congress and make that case.

And I think -- I really think at the Pentagon -- you know, like I said -- I described to you the way it works. Now, we just sort of turn that around and really start thinking about how we spend money instead of just assuming that more money is better.

Also this isn't directly applicable, but I love the quote -- it's close. Winston Churchill had the great quote that: "Gentleman, we're out of money, now we have to think."

(Laughter)

MR. SMITH: And I always liked that. And it was -- it was -- when we passed this budget agreement a couple of years ago, we passed it in March. So for the first year of the fiscal agreement, we gave the Pentagon an unbelievable amount of money and they only
had half a fiscal year to spend it. And their problem was literally they had way too much money, they didn't know what to do with it in that short of a time period.

Now, part of the solution to that is to actually pass the appropriations and the budgets on October 1st instead of March. But part of it also is - yeah, maybe we'll do better if we didn't have money.

As a venture capitalist friend of mine who said he has not yet encountered the company that doesn't run better after you cut it by 10%. That is a concept that the Department of Defense would 'waaahaa' yell in horror at. But we can get better and more efficient in terms of how we do this.

MS. PSAKI: Uh-huh. Samantha Nickras (phonetic) asks, you mentioned the need to invest in cyber and information warfare in response to Russia's use of those tools. Do you mean investments in defensive or offensive cyber information war tools? If you mean offensive, how do you think about balancing those investments with preserving the ability to later agree on norms that govern use of those tools

MR. SMITH: Well, I think we need to do both.
And that's the same thing with arms control. I mean, you're building weapons even as you're negotiating how to control that. You don't set aside the one waiting for the other.

So I think we do need to get that international understanding of cyber. It's the Wild Wild West in Cyber. And you can stumble into a very, very dangerous situation there if we don't get a greater international understanding of what's acceptable and what's not. So we'll need to continue to work on that, while at the same time upping our cyber capabilities.

But really the big thing I am focused on is the information warfare piece. And that is what Russia and to a lesser extent China are doing. They are trying to undermine confidence in democratic institutions. They are trying to say autocracy works better. And to do that, they are finding, you know -- they are sowing discord right here. They find arguments within American politics and they try to turn up the temperature on it. And they've done that clandestinely and we have not had an effective counter.
And I do think it needs to be both defensive and offensive. And the best offensive thing we can do is quite frankly negative campaigning. Everybody hates negative campaigning. But everybody -- not everybody, but enough people respond to it. That the reason negative campaigning is done is because it works. It works relentlessly and it will keep happening until it doesn't work.

I think we should make the case that the Russian form of government is an utter disaster for the Russian people. That, you know, they -- the kleptocracy, the number of people who have looted that country and taken all of the money and parked it in foreign banks while meanwhile, you know, the average citizen in Russia isn't able to afford what they need to afford. We have the better form of government.

But across Europe in election after election, we're not making that case as effectively as we should as to how democracy is messy, but it is better. Well, maybe I'm going to -- I quote Winston Churchill all the time, you know, "best system of" -- you know, "it's the worst system of government except for all the others."
But we have to make that case. You know, the support for democracy globally has not been this low in decades and part of that is because Russia is organizing a campaign to convince people of that. So we need to fight back.

MS. PSAKI: So I'm going to take my moderator role here and just ask one follow up question.

MR. SMITH: Sure. You've got the tougher job, by the way. I just sit through -- I just answer whatever you ask.

MS. PSAKI: It takes some technologically, you know, advanced work here. So on that point, Russia obviously invests a great deal of money in running their state-run media around the world, in Europe and Eastern Europe. Do you think the United States should invest that kind of money in funding, because it would take money to do that?

MR. SMITH: No, I do. And, you know, Mac Thornberry and I caught no end of hell for diving into this world. But there's a little thing called the Smith-Mundt Act from a long time ago that basically said that the government cannot, you know, propagandize
to its citizenry. And it makes sense and I agree with that. I mean, I don't, you know, want our government to be running ads telling you, you know, love your whatever.

But the problem with that is it didn't contemplate the internet. So when we were trying to combat, you know, Al-Qaeda and ISIS and others when we are trying to combat them, information is a huge part of what they do. They are constantly sending out propaganda about how awful we are and a whole bunch of things. Our ability to respond to that was that was impeded by the fact that if we put anything on the Internet, well, a U.S. person could see it.

You know, before it was like, "Well, you can do information campaigns overseas. That's fine. You can't do them to a domestic audience." But in this age everything hits the domestic audience. So our hands were tied. So we amended that to free us up a little bit in terms of what we can do in terms of propagandizing now.

And people freak out about it. They're like, you know, "They are sending out this disinformation
campaign to get" -- it's part of the fight, it's part of what we have to do internationally to undermine support for radical terrorist groups and to undermine, you know, support for Russia's worldview. We have got to get in the information game, compete and fight. So that has to be part of it.

MS. PSAKI: The next question comes from Mr. Timothy Westmeyer (phonetic). What are the elements of a permanent peace treaty on the Korean Peninsula that the House Armed Services Committee would like to see come out of talks with North Korea?

MR. SMITH: Yeah, again -- yeah, not our --

MS. PSAKI: It's a big one.

MR. SMITH: -- jurisdiction, but Foreign Affairs. But there's a reason -- it's not that I don't know the answer. It's just that I'm hesitating as to exactly how to put this.

Ultimately, we would like North Korea to become a more peaceful, less (sic) prosperous and, you know, a less dictatorial country. In the short term, I simply want to make sure that we don't stumble into a war with them.
So I think negotiations by and large on -- I don't support the fact that the president seems compelled to kiss up to dictators and talk about them, you know, like they are the greatest people on the planet. That part of it I think is a problem.

But talking is good. And the tensions in the Korean Peninsula are the lowest they've been in decades because the dialog has increased, there's been less cross-border. And that's a good thing, okay? In the short term if we can simply stop a catastrophic war in the Korean Peninsula, I'm all for it.

Now, in the long term, yes, we need to get North Korea to denuclearize and we need to move them into the modern world. But we have to be patient as we get there and I think the incremental steps approach.

I don't want to say, you know, "North Korea unless you get rid of every single nuclear weapon tomorrow, we're going to cut you off and attack you." I don't think that's a good message.

So I think sort of building trust between South and North Korea, building trust between Japan and North Korea and us as a way forward. Be patient on
that. Because if we rush it and we wind up going to
war, there's catastrophic consequences.

MS. PSAKI: We have about five minutes left,
so if anybody has any last questions please do submit
them. The next question is coming from, let's see,
Professor William Potter (phonetic). Some of us
acquired foreign language expertise thanks to the
National Defense Foreign Language Act. Is it time for
us to foster expertise in the area of non-proliferation
through a national Non-Proliferation Education Act?

MR. SMITH: Well, I can learn that a heck lot
easier than I can learn a foreign language.

MS. PSAKI: There you go.

MR. SMITH: So -- and I appreciate that. I
don't know. I think we need to -- and I don't know if
that's the method -- but we need to renew the idea of
why non-proliferation and dialog is important. Because
again, when the Cold War ended, I think there was sort
of this assumption that our, you know -- you know,
being on the nuclear brink was finally over.

You know, like we all saw that movie, the --
well, not all of us, some of us were too young. But
The Day After, you know. I literally had nightmares for a week like 'waahaaa'. So it's good, you know, that we can go off of that. But there are still nuclear weapons in the world and we lost sort of our non-proliferation momentum.

I mean, right after the Cold War ended, we did have a huge push to like, "Okay, let's get all this nuclear material in Russia under control." There were a lot of efforts to do that. But in the last decade, we've really moved away from it. So I don't know if that's the best way to educate people on it. But we certainly need to re-educate the American public about the importance of arms control and non-proliferation and the risk of nuclear war and the devastating consequences of that.

I mean, the two things that can -- we work in a lot of policies; they're very difficult. But the climate changing and making the planet uninhabitable and nuclear war are the two things that threaten our very existence as a species. So an increased focus on those two things I think is warranted however we get there.
MS. PSAKI: So last question to end this really interesting panel. And this tells you everyone is using the app, because this is from James Acton who helped organize this conference.

(Laughter)

MS. PSAKI: I am just going to give him a little reward and ask his question. Congressman, you argue that the United States should pursue nuclear modernization even without further arms control because we shouldn't hand foreign powers a veto over U.S. decisions. So does Congress have any tools at its disposal to encourage the administration to extend New START?

MR. SMITH: We can ask. Yes, you know, we're policymakers; we obviously have tools. We can put a bunch of things in legislation both the NDAA and elsewhere, then encourage and push them in that direction.

So I -- sorry, I try to be realistic in my answers and that does frequently get me in trouble. But there are things we can do. But this is not slam dunk. At the end of the day, the president of the
United States has an enormous amount of power. And we've thought about this in a whole bunch of different ways, but the executive, president has -- that's why it is so unbelievably important who we give the job to. So, yes, we can persuade, we can push, we can influence, and we will. But it is difficult to fight your way past a president. Every arms control agreement that has been negotiated has been primarily because of the president, Ronald Reagan, Jimmy Carter, Richard Nixon in China. I mean, the president made the decision to negotiate. We cannot force the president to negotiate if he doesn't want to. We simply have to try to convince him of the wisdom of doing it. Look, he likes to talk to people, he likes to negotiate, so it's not like it's impossible to move this in that direction.

And the final thing to say about that is the whole relationship with Putin and the whole Russian interference in 2016 election really messes this up. Because obviously, you know, the president is not free to deal with Russia as he might want to because of all the controversies surrounding his relationship with
Russia and what happened in 2016. And that's unfortunate, because we need dialog with Russia, we need to begin that.

So, yes, I think there are a lot of things not just Congress, but all of us can do to say, "This is a priority. This is something that we ought to be doing. We ought to be having arms control negotiations."

And also I don't mind saying to some degree -- you know, putting a little emphasis on, you know, "we won't fund this particular thing unless you do this."

I just said we're not going to stop nuclear modernization pending negotiations. You can nudge and push and prod, you know, with small little connections to funding, but we're not going to stop modernization altogether.

MS. PSAKI: Well, Chairman Smith, thank you for joining us.

MR. SMITH: Thank you.

MS. PSAKI: It was a really interesting panel. I appreciate it.

MR. SMITH: Thanks.

(Appplause)