



Special Presidential Envoy Marshall Billingslea on the Future of Nuclear Arms Control

TRANSCRIPT

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- Ambassador Marshall Billingslea, *Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control, U.S. Department of State*
- Tim Morrison, *Senior Fellow, Hudson Institute*

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Tim Morrison:

Good afternoon. I'm pleased to be able to host Ambassador Marshall Billingslea today at the Hudson Institute for his first public event on US arms control policy. Ambassador Billingslea was named the Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control on April 10th. And more recently, he was nominated to be the Undersecretary of State for Arms Control and International Security, but it appears he's hit the ground running based on press reports and call readouts from the State Department.

Prior to his recent State Department appointments. Marshall spent the past three years of the Trump administration as the president's point man for economic warfare, where he specialized in financial pressure to achieve the president's goals. I'm sure more than a few heads in Beijing and Moscow were scratched while trying to consider what his appointment could portend.

The New START treaty doesn't expire until February of next year, but Russia is making a full court press to extend the deal now, perhaps because of the mostly one-sided of benefits it provides Moscow, and the disarmament clerisy in Washington is echoing this talking points, demanding the extension of that treaty, or there will be nothing that prevents an arms race.

The People's Republic of China is engaged in a substantial buildup of its nuclear forces, as it implements President Xi's vision of becoming a first-tier nuclear force, and it has long enjoyed being a free rider in global security by refusing to participate in most nuclear arms control. I don't envy Ambassador Billingslea and his job. He clearly has his hands full, even without considering the Chinese Communist Party's coronavirus pandemic.

Marshall, we look forward to hearing about how you look at the arms control problem you've volunteered to take on for the United States, how you see Russian and Chinese goals in any negotiation, and how you plan to deal with them, and what you think the president wants to accomplish at the end of the day. We're glad to host you at the think tank Herman Kahn built, and we thank you for your service. You have the floor, so to speak.

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Thank you, Tim. It's a great honor and a privilege to have been appointed by President Trump this past month as Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control. And my instructions are crystal clear. Safeguard American national security and the protection of the American people and that of our friends and allies while achieving the most complete, effective, and verifiable arms control agreement that can be negotiated.

The president has been unambiguous. We're not interested in agreement simply for agreement's sake. He will not sign a deal that does not reflect today's reality and do something to make the American people materially safer. Now, to that end any potential extension of our existing obligations must be tied to progress towards a new era of arms control.

To be sure arms control can, when properly structured and fully complied with by all parties, be a critical tool to promote stability and security. And I'm pleased that we already are making some progress in that regard. Just a few days ago, while discussing our expectations for trilateral arms control with my Russian counterpart, Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov, we agreed that it is imperative to meet, talk about our respective concerns and objectives, and find a way forward to begin negotiations. We have concrete ideas for our next interaction and we're finalizing the details as we speak.

So we've settled on a venue and we're working on an agenda based on the exchange of views that has taken place. In our call, I emphasized the crucial roles that verification and compliance play in making arms control effective, but above all, I made perfectly clear that it is our expectation that Russia help us to bring China to the negotiating table, just as the deputy minister himself said needed to happen.

Now, Tim, I recall that a few years ago, the minister himself said, quote, "We cannot endlessly negotiate with the United States the limitation of nuclear arms, while some other countries are strengthening their nuclear and missile capabilities." He added that quote, "Making nuclear disarmament a multilateral process is becoming a priority", unquote.

That was absolutely the right priority then and it is even more crucial now for reasons that I will explain shortly, but suffice to say, this won't be easy. It is new, but we're not serving the national interest if we simply keep doing the easy things. We must understand the world as it is today, not as we wish it to be, nor can we keep pretending that the two-party construct for nuclear arms control, which comes from the Cold War, is able to address satisfactorily the security issues of a multipolar world.

We must confront the reality that countries such as Russia and China are, simply put, arms racing. The United States is modernizing our forces without significantly increasing our overall number of nuclear weapons. The same cannot be said of Russia's and China's projected upward trajectories.

So let's look at Russia for a moment. Instead of lessening their reliance on nuclear weapons, the Russians have increased it. To paraphrase our 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, they've adopted a highly provocative nuclear doctrine that embraces early escalation and use of nuclear weapons, what the Russian military is calling escalate to win.

In keeping with this dangerous way of thinking, Russia is modernizing an unconstrained arsenal of thousands of so-called non-strategic nuclear weapons that fall well outside the boundaries of the New START treaty, they're giving them greater accuracy, longer ranges, lower yields, all to fill various war fighting roles.

As Lieutenant General Robert Ashley, director of the Defense Intelligence Agency said a year ago, and I believe at the Hudson Institute quote, "We assess Russia's overall nuclear stockpile as likely to grow significantly over the next decade." Significantly.

Moreover, we cannot forget the fact that Russia was for years clandestinely cheating on the INF treaty, producing, testing, and deploying an intermediate range, nuclear tipped cruise missile in secret, and the Russian military now deploys multiple battalions of the SSC-8 missile, which presumably are targeted at US forces in Europe and against our NATO allies. The United States fields no similar system. Zero.

You see, unlike Russia, we steadfastly complied with our international obligation not to have these types of weapons. We did so for 33 years.

Russia seems to think that there's some kind of line between strategic and non-strategic nuclear weapons use, but we and the rest of NATO have warned that the use of any nuclear weapon would change the nature of a conflict, and this is something that I have recently reaffirmed in my conversations with the NATO secretary general, and the conversations I've had with allies across Europe.

Unfortunately, Russia does not seem to see it that way. Why else would they hoard thousands of these shorter-range nuclear weapons? Why would President Putin not implement the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, the PNI pledges, that were issued by his predecessors? For our part, we did. Fully and completely.

Why does Russia feel the need to routinely conduct exercises and war games that involve the simulated use of these shorter-range nuclear weapons against NATO, against their allies or their neighbors, I should say, and the United States?

To be clear, Tim, we need to move away from Cold War thinking, in terms of delineating between “tactical” and “strategic” weapons. It's an artificial distinction. In this era, the use of a nuclear weapon, whether mounted on an ICBM or shot out of an artillery tube, has strategic implications.

So, modernization of nuclear arms control going forward must take all of this into account. We need to address Russia's buildup with an unconstrained nuclear warhead stockpile.

This, in fact, is something the United States Senate explicitly requested when it provided advice and consent to the ratification of the New START treaty. So, we're going to do precisely that. Along these same lines, we want Russia to adhere to the pledged reductions in theater range systems, including elimination of all of its nuclear warheads for ground-based tactical missile systems per their commitments under the 1991 Presidential Nuclear Initiatives.

Next, and this is crucial, we need to restore the principle that arms control agreements be effectively verifiable. This is something that I feel we've lost sight of over the past few years. The New START treaty suffers from some serious verification inadequacies, in my view. I will give you just two examples.

First, in essence, over the past decade, Russia has not been required to provide telemetry on any of their new systems under development. And they certainly have not.

Second, there are exploitable loopholes with onsite inspection procedures and the length of time given before inspectors are allowed to the location in question.

And then finally, given our focus on addressing Russia's unconstrained nuclear stockpile, we're going to be looking hard at various monitoring techniques that are associated with that.

I cannot stress enough how central to our thinking is effective verification and compliance. We are not in the business of negotiating new agreements or extending old ones if we cannot be assured that the other parties will hold up their end of the bargain. When it comes to Russia, we have little reason to be confident. Russia's track record is, to be frank, abysmal.

I already mentioned the INF treaty, which Russia destroyed by building and deploying explicitly prohibited missiles. I also mentioned the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives. The use of the deadly Novichok nerve agent in the Skripal assassination attempt in the United Kingdom was a clear violation of the chemical weapons convention.

And of course, Russia has systematically dismantled conventional arms control in Europe. They abandoned the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty, despite that treaty's flank agreement having been renegotiated to accommodate them. To this day, Russia is violating the Open Skies Treaty and completely defeating the purpose of that confidence and security-building measure.

They're not faithfully implementing the Vienna Document notification requirements, and their attempted annexation of Crimea and invasion of Ukraine stands in flagrant violation of the UN charter and the Helsinki Final Act.

The international arms control architecture, both bilateral and multilateral has been badly, badly damaged by Russia's many and varied violations. It's a fair question. As we contemplate new negotiations as to whether Russia can become a reliable arms control partner, many have their doubts.

It may be, to quote Oscar Wilde, "The triumph of hope over experience," but we're optimistic that with a strengthened approach to verification, Russia can be expected to comply with a future arrangement. As President Reagan famously said, invoking an old Russian proverb "Trust, but verify."

Now, this brings me to the other part of the equation as we see it, which is China. Like the United States, China is party to the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty, the NPT. Unlike the United States whose stockpile number has gone way down, Beijing is in the midst of a sizeable buildup. Just a few days ago, the editor-in-chief of China's *Global Times* wrote that China should expand its stockpile to a thousand warheads, a thousand warheads, on at least a hundred DF-41 strategic missiles.

Now, the *Global Times* is a mouthpiece of the Chinese communist party, it is not independent. There is no way that such a statement would be made without the approval, tacit or otherwise, of senior communist party officials. This reinforces the point that Beijing, like Moscow, is intent on building up its nuclear forces and using those forces to try to intimidate the United States and our friends and our allies.

Now, certainly our intelligence community has been clear about China's plans. I recall that last May, the DIA director warned, and I quote, "China will likely at least double the size of its nuclear stockpile in the course of implementing the most rapid expansion and diversification of its nuclear arsenal in China's history."

"Last year," he continued, "China launched more ballistic missiles for testing and training than the rest of the world combined." Unquote.

Further, China is on the verge of fielding a nuclear triad, by which I mean a mix of Intercontinental range warheads on land, sea, and in the air. Chairman Xi has made clear his expectation, put before the 19th Communist Party Congress, that China's military will be transformed into a first-tier force by 2050.

So, who are these first-tier forces today? Presumably, he means the US and Russia.

In the past, some have asked, and some continue to ask, why worry about China's nuclear arsenal, especially given how small it is relatively, and that it said that they won't use nuclear weapons first in a conflict.

Now, the reality is that China no longer intends to field a minimal deterrent. They want a form of nuclear parity with the United States and Russia. China's so-called no first use policy is now so riddled with caveats that as our STRATCOM commander recently testified, "you can drive a bus through it".

But perhaps the most dangerous aspect of China's nuclear program is the secretive and nontransparent way the regime approaches dialogue with the international community. Beijing has stubbornly refused to share any significant information about its plans, its capabilities, its intentions, regarding its move to a triad of delivery vehicles, a launch on warning posture, and exploration of low-yield nuclear weapons for decades.

For decades, Tim, the United States has tried to engage senior Chinese officials in a substantive dialogue. They've steadfastly refused our entreaties at every turn. Why does China refuse to engage in such a dialogue? What exactly is Beijing seeking to hide? A responsible power, committed to principles of fairness and reciprocity, and seeking to reduce the nuclear danger as required under the MPT, should welcome any opportunity to engage in good faith negotiation on these most important topics.

Instead, the world is presented with a great wall of secrecy while Beijing relies on selective shows of force and disturbing insinuations in state-controlled media. This is irresponsible, it's dangerous behavior. If China wants to be a great power, and we know it has that self-image, it needs to behave like one. It must demonstrate the will and the ability to reverse its destabilizing nuclear buildup, and it should engage us bilaterally and trilaterally with the Russians.

The notion that China should not be expected to engage in nuclear arms control until it has built up to US and Russian levels is an outdated display of Cold War logic. We intend to establish a new arms control regime now, precisely to prevent a full-blown arms race. It is for all of these reasons that President Trump has expressed his strong desire to see China included in future nuclear arms control agreements. A three-way arms control agreement would provide the best way to avoid an unpredictable three-way arms race.

Nor, as I mentioned at the outset, are we alone in making the entirely reasonable suggestion that China's growing nuclear arsenal be the subject of arms control limitations. The Russians have said as much. So have the Japanese, and NATO's deputy secretary general. Just a few months ago, with you at the Hudson Institute, the NATO dep sec gen quite eloquently said, and I quote, "You cannot ask for global status without assuming also responsibilities for world order, and this is why we believe that it is high time for China to participate in arms control alongside Russia and the United States."

We recognize that increasingly we have a trilateral nuclear competition, our NATO and our Asian allies see it. I think so do the Russians, we believe arms control has the potential to limit that competition. We intend to try.

As I've noted, we're already seeing some progress. Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov and I are building our respective plans for negotiations, and we both want to meet as soon as possible. I'm sure the deputy knows we will hold him to his government's public commitments to multilateralizing the next treaty after New START. And I expect him to live up to his own words. Russia must help bring China to the negotiating table. Both Russia and the United States share this interest.

So in conclusion, I'll reiterate a few key points. First, the president has made clear that effective and verifiable arms control is both possible and worth pursuing actively, but that the arms control agenda should address the threats and challenges of today, and not those of yesteryear, which means including both Russia and China.

Second, we agree with the Senate's clear view expressed when they provided advice and consent to ratification of New START, that the next agreement must include all nuclear weapons, both those currently constrained by arms control and those unconstrained.

And finally, we will design a truly verifiable agreement, not just to deter noncompliance and give us timely warning of militarily significant violations, but to promote real transparency and confidence-building regarding our respective nuclear forces plans and intentions.

These three objectives, taken together, will avoid a costly and dangerous nuclear arms race. When the president talks about including China in a future framework, he's thinking big and long-term, and he's looking out for the safety and security of the American people. As the president has said in the past, "My style of deal-making is quite simple and straightforward. I aim very high and then I just keep pushing and pushing and pushing to get what I'm after." We're going to do just that. We're going to push relentlessly to realize his vision.

Tim, thank you again to you, the Hudson Institute, to all of your colleagues, for the opportunity to speak here today and I very much look forward to your questions.

Tim Morrison:

Well, thank you, Marshall. That was a comprehensive speech and some exciting news about the conversations you're already having with your Russian counterparts.

My first question is this language you used about "unconstrained" nuclear weapons. You talked about unconstrained nuclear weapons, you referenced Russia's thousands of weapons and dozens of types. What does the term "unconstrained" mean to you compared to the traditional lexicon of "tactical" nuclear weapons or "non-strategic" nuclear weapons?

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Yeah. Great point. Really, in our way of thinking, there isn't such a thing as a non-strategic nuclear weapon in this day and age, if there ever was. Any nuclear weapon used anywhere would radically change the circumstances in a conflict. So, to us, it makes a lot more sense to talk about nuclear weapons that are subject to the constraints of arms control agreements currently, versus those that are not currently subject. And we intend to subject all nuclear weapons to future arms control constraints.

Tim Morrison:

Understood. So, I think the next question that everybody is interested in is New START. What is the fate of New START? Are you prepared to recommend extending New START? And can you see extending New START or recommending extending New START to the president, if China hasn't somehow come to the table in a serious way about some sort of a future regime?

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Oh goodness, Tim. I'm just not going to speculate on that at this very early stage in the negotiations. There will be plenty of time to look at the full range of options related to that treaty.

Tim Morrison:

Understood. So, many of the arms control community believe that by designating you as the Presidential Special Envoy, the president is signaling his animus for arms control. You have a reputation. And I have to say, it seems interesting that the president chose his chief, for the past three years, of financial and economic pressure as his arms control envoy.

You've literally been using all types of financial pressure to achieve the president's goals, and here you are now in charge of getting a treaty with Russia and China. What do you think your appointment means, and why do you think the president chose somebody with your background?

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Well, first, as you've said yourself, and as I've made clear, the president's interest in a three-way arms control agreement is crystal clear. The president has a long and successful career as a negotiator and he's a master at developing and using leverage. And we're going to follow his lead in that respect. And we're going to look at the full range of options to get a successful outcome with both Russia and China. But obviously, I just don't want to speculate right now further about the kinds of leverage that we have and that we're going to employ.

Tim Morrison:

Well, thank you. So, one topic that I think has gotten a lot of interest, there's been a lot of writing about it, there's been a lot of speculation is these new exotic systems. So, President Putin has been very vocal about them. He made a point of having a big state speech in March of 2018.

Now, my own take is that Putin is a poker player with lousy hand. He's a cheap magician trying misdirection because he can't really do much more, given the state of the Russian economy and so many other factors. How worried about these systems are you, given that, frankly, to date, they've really only been used to kill Russians?

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Yeah. Right. Well, I respect my Russian counterparts for the power and influence that they command, but the reason for that respect hasn't got anything to do with these exotic science projects. I really don't see why a "road mobile Chernobyl" is a good idea. They've already had a big environmental catastrophe with that thing, and further, the idea of lacing a nuclear torpedo to make cities radioactively uninhabitable for the rest of civilization, just that's a dark thinking that I have a hard time understanding.

I really think Russia has better things to spend their money on. As you point out, I've spent the last three years at the Treasury Department working on financial issues. They've got things like pension reform, for instance, that they desperately need to conduct, but if they're going to throw money down a sinkhole, so be it.

Tim Morrison:

There's been also a lot made about the link between arms control and modernization. So, we are on the cusp, in some respects, we've just started bending metal on our own modernization program. How do you see, now that a negotiation is underway, as you mentioned in your

remarks, you've been talking to your Russian counterpart, you're planning where you want to negotiate the topics and scope of the negotiation. How do you see the link between arms control and modernization, especially whereas now there appears to be a negotiation finally underway?

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Yeah. Well so, US deterrent modernization goes hand-in-hand with arms control. In fact, US deterrent modernization helps promote effective and verifiable arms control agreements. On a bipartisan basis, Congress has strongly supported the modernization of our deterrent and certainly now is not the time to change course.

And I need to be very clear about this. The risk of any cuts to the bipartisan consensus on modernization and the plans that we have that are underway, in the midst of a negotiation is to inadvertently or otherwise, hand the initiative to either Beijing or Moscow, or both. So we need to stay the course, and that will really strengthen the objective here of getting to meaningful trilateral arms control arrangements.

Tim Morrison:

I guess one way to look at it is, if for some reason the Congress were to cut one of our nuclear weapons programs, the new ICBM, or the new cruise missile in some respects, that's one less thing you have to negotiate with in order to get real reductions from the other party.

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

It would be incredibly counterproductive and I would urge them not to do it. I sure hope that there's no such thinking underway, but I'll certainly make my views known if such things are postulated, I would also say, on its face, such kinds of cuts, given what I've had to say about the Chinese buildup, would seem to me to be extremely ill-advised.

It's our job here to protect the security of the American people and the thing which underpins the protection of our national security and our people is our nuclear deterrent, as well as our conventional capabilities, but really our nuclear deterrent as well. And this also allows us to provide extended assurance and deterrence for our friends and our allies around the globe. This is rather crucial stuff, and we need to stay the course.

Tim Morrison:

So the big question here, you've talked about doing something new. The big question here is China. You mentioned we have no interest as a country in China building up before it comes to the table, like the big kids do, but what do we have the China wants? What does the People's Republic of China need from us, and how do you see their goals? What are their goals other than just not being dragged to the table and continuing to be some global free rider?

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Well, let's talk first, before we start talking about what China wants, let's talk about what China is obliged to do. China has an obligation to negotiate over its nuclear forces. It's an NPT obligation. Russia and the United States agree on this. And as far as an economic or defense buildup option, if Beijing fails to honor its NPT obligations, its commitments, then we'll develop

these options quietly. I think it's premature to discuss them, but we'll roll those out as we need to in the future. But I'm less interested in what China wants and I'm much more interested in what China needs to do.

Now, that said, what China also does want is they want to be afforded great power status. And I would offer that what better way to be seen as a great power than be seen as actually sitting down with the United States and Russia, as I said, the first-tier forces, to negotiate. We are certainly willing to afford them that respect and we look forward to a substantive dialogue on, currently, their unconstrained and secretive buildup.

Tim Morrison:

The Russians have long demanded that the US be willing to negotiate over missile defense in exchange for a broader deal on arms control.

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Yep.

Tim Morrison:

Is the US willing to negotiate over missile defense at this point?

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Well, look. The president has publicly stated that he will not permit limitations on US missile defenses. Russia is a sovereign nation and Minister Ryabkov has already clearly indicated to me that he is going to raise missile defenses and a number of other topics. And so, I'm sure we're going to have discussions. I can't stop him from raising these issues and we'll talk. But that said, I would imagine that the Russians would have to make some incredibly impressive offer, I can't even fathom what it might be, for the president to change that position, if that's even possible. So, there will be talks, but I do not foresee limitations.

Tim Morrison:

It's always struck me as ironic that the country that has nuclear armed interceptors protecting Moscow is the one that always demands that we limit our non-nuclear missile defenses.

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Well, since you raised that, Tim, let me tell you, be careful what you ask for, right? If we want to talk about missile defense, I've got a lot of questions about the wisdom of putting nuclear-tipped warheads on the end of an ABM system. I also want to know a lot more about what they're up to with these various S-300, S-400, S-500 systems. So, we can have talks. We've got a lot of questions.

Tim Morrison:

So, you referenced comments that General Ashley made at Hudson last May. And I had a couple of questions for you on that. So, I think General Ashley talked about fairly extraordinary developments in Russian nuclear forces.

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Right.

Tim Morrison:

Including developments in these systems unconstrained by New START, and it occurs to me, and I think you referenced it in your remarks, that had Russia not abrogated its commitments to the Presidential Nuclear Initiatives, many of these systems would in fact not exist.

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

That's correct.

Tim Morrison:

How do you think about Russian noncompliance with arms control? You mentioned Open Skies. There have been questions about its nuclear testing activities in the State Department compliance reports. So how do you think about Russian noncompliance with arms control, especially when it comes to these agreements like the PNIs?

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Yeah. Well, look. It's really regrettable what Russia has done to international arms control. They really have systematically violated nearly every agreement that they've made, political or legally binding. And by the way, China too doesn't have a stellar track record of abiding by its arms control commitments. And that's why I focused so heavily in my comments to you and to the community on the importance of effective verification and compliance.

There's a fundamental principle of fairness here. We expect when you sign a contract with the United States of America, that you're going to follow through, that you're going to deliver, that you're going to abide by what you committed to do. And there should be consequences if you fail to do so, not the least of which would be simply that we decide to exercise our sovereign right to withdraw from an agreement as we were forced to do in the INF context because of egregious Russian violations of that treaty.

That's what had to happen because of massive cheating in that context. Obviously, our goal here, as we negotiate this new trilateral framework, is to take into account a pretty disturbing lackluster track record of compliance on the part of both the Russians and Chinese, and to fashion as strong a verification and compliance regime as you could imagine.

Tim Morrison:

So again, General Ashley last May talked about this Russian buildup and he talked about a record setting buildup by the People's Republic of China. And then, you look at what you said earlier about the US modernization of its deterrent. And we're really just modernizing and sustaining what we have with no real growth in our stockpile. The UK and France are largely doing the same.

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Right.

Tim Morrison:

So when we hear these concerns about an arms race, I guess I'm curious, who's really arms racing here?

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Well, certainly it's not us, and it's neither us nor the UK, nor France. The arms racing is happening with Russia and China right now. And that's precisely why the president has made clear that trilateralization is where we need to go. I also think, by the way, that really, that concern about this three-way dynamic, where Russia starts to do things patterned off of what China is doing, where China is doing things reciprocally. We obviously have to factor in all the above.

I think that's probably why Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov was so clear in his comments on the fact that he too thinks the future needs to be multilateralization. All these countries need to honor their NPT obligations, frankly, Tim, and they just need to stop.

So let's get to the negotiating table. Let's hammer out the architecture for the future. Let's think big, the way the president is, and let's get this codified. I really hope your audience is going to support us in this endeavor. It is something new, it's long overdue, and we are committed to taking on the challenge.

Tim Morrison:

I guess that I have one more question for you, Marshall, and the president has talked a great deal about arms control. He's talked about not wanting an arms race, but if there is an arms race, he'll be sure to win it.

If I were Putin and I were looking at the cards that I have in my hand, I was looking at what the United States is capable of, what the People's Republic, the second largest economy now in the world, is capable of, I'd be really worried about getting on the wrong side of some sort of arms race, some sort of competition of a buildup.

How do you see Russia's interest in getting China to the table, especially given what you said about Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov's past comments about, once you get past New START, you need to multilateralize and bring other countries to the table? Certainly, Russia, which has manifested a clear interest in getting an extension of New START, you would want to see a country that has such a significant land border, they've almost fought a nuclear war with each other in the sixties.

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Right.

Tim Morrison:

It would be a significant interest on their part to getting China to the table. How do you see these factors playing in, if you were to put yourself in the position of your fellow negotiating partner?

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Well, look. I got to tell you. You're spot on. In fact, I'm quite glad I'm not in Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov's shoes. The president has written and spoken eloquently on leverage, on understanding when you have it, how to use it, how to employ it. And Deputy Foreign Minister Ryabkov has got his work cut out for himself. They very much need an extension of New START in their own minds.

We're very much focused on the future, looking ahead, and not in perpetuating some kind of bilateral framework, but on extending it to a trilateral arrangement. Because, of course, I think the Chinese are, in fact, doing certain things that are focused on the Russians, and the Russians are probably looking at that thinking, "Hmm, how are we going to deal with this?"

But, of course, they can get into a dynamic between the two of them, which then might precipitate us, necessitate us, having to take certain actions and you can see how that kind of unpredictable arrangement is precisely what the president wants to avoid. Because frankly, why go down this path of an unnecessary and unnecessarily expensive buildup in a three-way arms racing context.

That said, the president's made clear that we have a tried-and-true practice here. We know how to win these races. And we know how to spend the adversary into oblivion. If we have to, we will, but we sure would like to avoid it. And so, that's why this three-way arms control agreement to forestall a three-way race is so essential.

Tim Morrison:

Well, Marshall, you've been very generous with your time. I certainly appreciate you making your first public remarks at the Hudson Institute. That concludes my questions. And I speak for myself, my own family, and hopefully most Americans, when I wish you good luck. These are, after all, nuclear weapons. The stakes don't get much bigger. So good luck, and thank you for your service. And thank you for speaking with us today at the Hudson Institute. Stay healthy.

Amb. Marshall Billingslea:

Thanks, Tim. Thanks to all the fine people at the Hudson Institute. Thanks for having us.