



**MAY:** Marshall Billingslea has worked on a range of significant national security issues. He was Assistant Secretary for Terrorist Financing at the Treasury Department, President of the International Financial Action Task Force, Deputy Under Secretary of the Navy, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Special Operations and Low Intensity Conflict, and Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Negotiations Policy. He's also been an Assistant Secretary General at NATO. Last April, he was appointed Special Presidential Envoy for Arms Control, personal rank of Ambassador. I would imagine that's been a challenging portfolio over the months that have followed. To find out more, we've asked him to join me, Cliff May, and my colleague, Bradley Bowman, Senior Director of FDD's Center on Military and Political Power. You're invited to join us too, here on *Foreign Policy*.

### *Foreign Policy Intro*

**MAY:** Well, Ambassador Billingslea, welcome. Glad to get to speak with you. Am I right about this being a challenging assignment? You've had to deal with the Russians who cheat, the Chinese who, I think, are less interested in arms control than in arms races. The rulers of Iran and North Korea have no interest in arms control. Maybe start just by giving us a general sense of your work this year. What's your life been like?

**BILLINGSLEA:** Well, Clifford, again, thank you for the kind introduction and it is great to be here with you. You run an outstanding policy institute that I've had the privilege of working with over the years in several of those different capacities. And I do appreciate the chance to discuss with you, really, the historic juncture that we are now at in the field of nuclear arms control. We're at a moment that we haven't seen since the Reagan era, since the Reagan Gorbachev agreement at Reykjavik. And the reason I say that, Clifford is that President Trump offered President Putin the opportunity to do something that none of his predecessors were willing or able to do. And that is to put a cap on both countries' nuclear warhead stockpiles, to cover all nuclear warheads.

This was a bold and unprecedented proposal. It's something that the United States Senate effectively demanded when it narrowly ratified the New Start Treaty under the Obama Administration. Now the Obama Administration was unable to get it done over the eight years of their tenure, but we were able to get it done in just six months of pretty intensive negotiations with the Russians. We in fact reached an agreement at the highest levels of the United States and Russia to do exactly that, for the first time ever, put a cap on nuclear warhead stockpiles.

**MAY:** In terms of Russia, does Russia have a grand strategy? Is Russia genuinely interested in arms control agreements that it will abide by? I mean, I mentioned before, and maybe comment on this, Russia has a long history of cheating on these agreements. And not just at the margins, but just egregious and chronic violations. Am I wrong about that?

**BILLINGSLEA:** No, you're spot on. And in fact, I don't know that Russia has a grand strategy, but Russia does have a strategy. And it's a strategy that is designed to, within their limited financial means and within their military means, to attempt to counter U.S. interests around the world, wherever they may occur. Whether we're talking about Venezuela or we're talking about Libya, or Syria, or the Crimea, Russia seems inclined and determined to thwart U.S. national security interests and equities.

Arms control to them is simply a means to an end. Because they, as you point out, are guaranteed to cheat on any agreement that meaningfully constrains them, they view arms control largely as a way of putting constraints, unilateral or one-way constraints, on the United States and our allies. And of course under the Trump administration, we're not going



to agree to any of that. We are only going to conclude an agreement with the Russians if it has a robust and effective verification regime; because we know they will cheat if it has meaningful constraints on them.

**MAY:** Brad, do you want to come in on this? You have some thoughts on negotiating with Russia, the treaties we have with Russia, what we can and cannot accomplish in terms of arms control with Russia?

**BOWMAN:** Thanks, Cliff. And it's an honor to join you Mr. Ambassador for this discussion. No, I think the Ambassador nailed it there. I would just add that generally speaking, I'm supportive of arms control agreements if they will promote U.S. national security interests and promote stability and security. But, if you're doing those agreements with partners who have habitually struggled, frankly, to comply with the agreements and habitually struggled to be honest, I think we have to be extra careful about the verification and compliance mechanisms in any treaty, whether it be a new one or whether it's one that re-upped. And I know that's been a real focus for the Ambassador.

**BILLINGSLEA:** If I could build on that a little bit, let's just review the recent history of Russia as a serial arms control violator. Okay?

So we're in a situation where Russia has systematically destroyed conventional arms control in Europe. They continue to stand in violation of the Open Skies Treaty, which left us with no option. The only enforcement mechanism we had was to ultimately withdraw from that agreement, but Russia was preventing over flight of Russian territory, which they are legally obliged to allow. They were also using their illegal occupation of a huge part of the Republic of Georgia, as well as Moldova, to similarly deny over flight for the treaty allowed aircraft.

Russia withdrew from the Conventional Armed Forces in Europe Treaty, which was actually renegotiated under the Clinton Administration several times to accommodate their massive violations of that treaty back in the '90s. Russia stands in violation of the Vienna Document requirements for notifications on conventional troop movements and exercises. Russia has violated the Helsinki Final Act in the UN Charter by their illegal occupation and attempted annexation of Crimea and the irregular warfare that they continue to practice in Ukraine today. When you turn to the nuclear field, Russia engaged in egregious clandestine testing development and ultimately deployment of nuclear capable medium range ballistic and cruise missiles, and ultimately destroyed the INF Treaty through that set of serial treaty violations.

And perhaps most outrageously, and this is something that I warned when I was serving on the Senate Foreign Relations Committee back in the '90s and the chemical weapons convention was ratified, if you go back and you read the historical record, I warned that they were developing the Novichok class of nerve agents, and they intended to cheat on the CWC. And lo and behold, over the past few years, we've now seen the Russian intelligence services engaged in targeted assassination attempts against political dissonance, Navalny being a good example, using this ultra-lethal Novichok nerve agent. This is outrageous stuff, and it underpins why one must be incredibly cautious and meticulous when one deals across the negotiating table with the Russians.

**MAY:** Well, I may just elaborate on that for a minute a little bit, because if I know that a guy always cheats at poker, I'm probably not going to be eager to sit down at a table and play with him and think it's enough to say, "Hey, caught you in the past. I don't want to catch you this time," when you know this guy has cheated in the past, is cheating in the present, and is going to cheat in the future. How do you successfully negotiate? You can get his signature on a document. What you can't get easily is him abiding by it and saying, "Yeah, I understand we're trying to have a rules-based order



here. And it's important I play my role and that I be a good stakeholder and a responsible global citizen," when you know, he ain't any of those things.

**BILLINGSLEA:** Well, you do want to avoid feeling like Charlie Brown and Lucy and the football. And there is a little bit of that on a repeat basis when it comes to the Russians and arms control. At the same time, we do have to recognize that the Russians are engaged in a series of dangerous and destabilizing activities, particularly in the nuclear weaponry field, which we seek to arrest or alleviate or otherwise cause them to choose a different path. And here I'll just talk briefly about a couple of things that are frankly quite alarming.

The United States is not engaged in a nuclear buildup. We're modernizing our forces under President Trump for the first time. It's long overdue. Was delayed from the Clinton Administration all the way through the Obama Administration. But under President Trump with the 2018 Nuclear Posture Review, we finally are getting at replacing the Minuteman-III missiles, which are old and aging, and bringing online a number of new capabilities.

Russia, on the other hand, is engaged in an arms race. They are today massively building up the size of their nuclear arsenal, particularly in the short and medium range type of weapon systems that I was talking about. So here I'm talking about torpedoes and artillery shells and short range ballistic and cruise missiles tipped with nuclear weapons. They also have invested in these outrageous doomsday science projects, very Strangelovian projects like a nuclear powered, nuclear tipped cruise missile. Just think about that. A nuclear reactor spewing out radiation behind a cruise missile that flies around for some extended period of time. And they've got the same kind of ridiculous concept for an under-sea weapon.

These are things which we fail to see why a country with an economy the size of the state of New York, nuclear armed as they may be, but why this is a good idea when they've got far more urgent priorities like pension reform and an aging population. That money really should be better pointed elsewhere. And we think that through a series of politically binding arrangements, that ultimately, we would transition into a treaty, we can help steer the Russians in the right direction. But even more critically to our way of thinking, we're interested in charting a course with Russia today because we intend to immediately pivot and apply that to the rising Chinese threat.

**MAY:** Brad, I think what the Ambassador says makes great sense to an American, and it may make great sense to the average Russian. I'm not sure it makes great sense to Vladimir Putin. And I wonder if you're confident that should we have a new administration in January, modernization will continue at a good clip or will it slow down because they'll say, almost what the Ambassador said, "No, we don't need money for nuclear modernization. We need money for various social causes in the U.S." And I wonder if we don't need also to, in your view, and you've worked on these issues a long time, to not just modernize, but to build and increase. That's a harder sell, but if our adversaries are doing it, don't we need to do it?

**BOWMAN:** Well, thanks Cliff, for the question I think, and I'll make a couple of points, I know the Ambassador's made in the past, but I think are worth reiterating. And that is, there's a strong connection between modernizing our forces and arms control. And not only are we making ourselves more secure by deterring an attack on our country, by complicating and planning of our adversaries, we're also empowering people like the Ambassador in their negotiations.

**MAY:** Right.



**BOWMAN:** Even as one enters the conversation, let's say one's left of center and you're a little bit skeptical maybe of some of this or that modernization program, but you're a big fan of arms control. If you're a big fan of arms control and the stability and security that they can bring, if properly formatted, then you should formulate it. And you should also be a fan of U.S. modernization of our tribe because that's going to make our efforts more powerful at the negotiating table and, by the way, make us more secure. I'd also add that the Ambassador went through a great litany of all the ways that the Kremlin has cheated, I would just provide a little bit more detail in one of them. On the INF Treaty, they cheated for a long time, right? And what they've done is, they've filled SSC-8 nuclear tip ground-launch cruise missiles that are threatening, not Omaha or Washington D.C. or New York, they're threatening Europe.

Perhaps that's why NATO has been so aligned with us in a lot of these efforts. And there's concerns often on Capitol Hill, as the Ambassador noted from his time up there about, oh, we're going to initiate an arms race. The Russians and Chinese are already racing. The question is, whether we're going to see the world as it is, and not as we want it to be, and what we're going to do about it. Putin likes to achieve military advantage, and then once he's achieved that military advantage, suddenly wants to ink a deal that codifies the status quo to his advantage. And I think we have to be smarter than that and not let him get away with it.

**MAY:** Yeah, I just got to make one point here and please feel free to elaborate on it, both of you. There is this view and it's held within a significant portion of the foreign policy elite, that if we don't race, then there will be no arms race. When in fact, if you're in a race and you sit down, what happens is, the other competitors beat you. It's very similar to the idea of, we can end endless wars if we just stop fighting, which is akin to saying, if I'm in the ring, in a prize fight, and I lie down on the mat, or sit down, that's the end of the fight, if I stop, if I put my arms down. No, they'll probably sock you in the nose and knock you out, is what he'll do. And it's odd that people, as smart as they are in foreign policy, think that we can stop arms races by not racing, and stop endless wars by not fighting, and not see that in both cases, you end up defeated. Ambassador, am I wrong in this, am I over-simplifying the problem?

**BILLINGSLEA:** Not in the least, and in fact, one of the flaws in arms control is that people dress it up and make it sound a lot more complicated than it really is. The reality is that President Trump and President Reagan have a number of things in common, but at the heart of their philosophy is the concept and the maxim of peace through strength. And we're not going to negotiate arms control deals that put the United States and our allies in jeopardy. Rather, we're going to build the capabilities we need to deter the adversaries. And let's make no mistake about it. We don't conduct arms control treaties or agreements with friends, we conduct them with hostile nations. And in the case of Russia and the case of China, we are not talking about democracies, and we are not talking about countries that respect the rule of law, or respect the geographical boundaries of their neighbors.

I mentioned Russia's attempted annexation of Crimea. If one pivots to look at what Xi Jinping is doing across Asia, with border disputes, with nearly every one of his neighbors, he even has a border dispute with the North Koreans. Just think about that. We are not dealing with trustworthy regimes, we're dealing with adversaries, and we have to be extremely cautious that we do not trade away the capabilities that we need to have, either through some type of poorly considered arms control agreement, or through unilateral disarmament. As we look to the next administration, continuing this long overdue modernization that I mentioned is vital, and any effort to walk away from that approach of building the capabilities we need, should be taken as a signal that the future of any additional arms control treaties on the nuclear front, will probably be in grave question when it comes to the United States Senate. Again, I caution, if the next administration wants a future nuclear deal, they're going to need to proceed with the modernization first.



**MAY:** And let me just ask you Brad, because you worked up on the Hill a long time, do you have a sense of whether there is support, bipartisan support, for modernization? Do you have a sense of whether Biden, who was Chairman of Senate Foreign Relations Committee for some time, and the people he's bringing in, understand the importance of modernization?

**BOWMAN:** I think there is an important and positive general consensus about the importance of nuclear modernization, both among Republicans and Democrats. I think people who look at these issues in detail, with a serious mindset, arrive at the conclusion that we absolutely have to modernize our nuclear triad, our nuclear deterrent, and I see that among both Republicans and Democrats. There have been questions along the way about whether we need a triad or a dyad, whether we need to modernize the ICBM leg, but I think generally speaking, there is a consensus that we do need to modernize our nuclear triad, solely for our own security, not to mention the benefits related to arms control. If I could just underscore one additional thing, Cliff, if I may, the Ambassador did a great job talking about all the things that Russia is doing.

It really bears repeating, I think, that the United States, generally speaking, we're not expanding our arsenal, we're simply modernizing it, whereas Russia is modernizing and expanding. And many or most of the areas, and Ambassador can correct me if I get any of this wrong, most of the areas where they're expanding, are what some people call non-strategic nuclear weapons, which is kind of a crazy concept, right? A nuclear weapon is like a nuclear weapon, to some degree, we can talk about det levels of yield. It's more accurately called an unconstrained nuclear weapon, in other words, these are things that Moscow's doing outside the New START Treaty. If we're going to renew the New START Treaty, we would be crazy not to include, as the Ambassador is saying, all nuclear weapons, and to have the strongest possible verification mechanisms in place. If we don't, we're simply playing right into Putin's game, in my view.

**BILLINGSLEA:** Yeah. Let me amplify that Brad, because you're exactly right. We are not interested in simply extending the New START Treaty. That treaty, like I mentioned, barely passed the United States Senate, it had 27 votes against it, all you need is 34 to kill a treaty. And the reason there was so much opposition to the New START Treaty in the Senate, is because it was a bad deal for the United States. It covered roughly 90% of the U.S. arsenal, and covered only around 40% of the Russian weaponry. Because, as you mentioned, the Russians have all of these nuclear warheads that they're building for shorter-range systems. Every single nuclear warhead is strategic in nature. This idea of non-strategic nuclear warheads is ridiculous. It's simply the distance that it flies based on what you've stuck it on, is all the differentiator here.

We've made clear to the Russians that, you know what, we're not going to leave our NATO allies vulnerable, we're not going to leave American citizens living in Europe vulnerable. We are going to insist that if we are going to extend the New START Treaty, that we equalize the ratios here and that we capture all of the Russian systems that fall currently exempt and outside the Obama Treaty. That's why we've said that we need a cap on all warheads, because the Russians are building up. They are actually set to potentially double the number of these non-strategic weapons in the coming years, if they keep on the pace that they're on. We're not pumping out hundreds and hundreds of more warheads, of any type. We are maintaining the inventory that we have, and our people are doing a great job, and it's sufficient for what we need to provide the extended deterrence guarantees to our allies, both in Europe and Asia as well.

But we cannot sit by and watch a regime that forcibly occupies a European territory, continue to build up nuclear weapons, particularly when they have a doctrine that calls for first-use, the so-called "Escalate to Win", we invade, we nuke, the other side simply surrenders. That's a dangerous concept, we can't agree to it, it's got incredibly dark ramifications for European security. And that's why President Trump took the bold move that he took, and frankly,



President Putin agreed, so we're going to hold him to that going forward. Any administration that brings back a simple extension of New START, without capitalizing on the Putin-Trump agreement, will have demonstrated a profound lack of negotiating acumen.

**BOWMAN:** It would also be blowing off the instructions of the U.S. Senate when they ratified the New START Treaty; they said we needed to be working toward exactly what you're saying.

**BILLINGSLEA:** That's exactly right. That is exactly right.

**MAY:** I want to go to China, but before I do, I'm going to digress just for a minute. You mentioned earlier that we negotiate arms control, not with our friends, but with our adversaries of various sorts. Recently on Twitter, Michael McFaul, a man I know a bit, he was Ambassador, under the Obama Administration, to Russia. He is a scholar, I have respect for him, but he talked about the JCPOA – the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action – that was concluded via the executive agreement that President Obama concluded.

Look, it's an arms control agreement, and here's what it does and doesn't do, and it has the faults and the pluses and the minuses of any arms control agreement, and Rich Goldberg, who works for FDD now, who was on the National Security Council not long ago, he's working also in the Senate and the House, he said, "You misunderstand. This was not an arms control agreement. This was something very different." And I want to just get your sense on the JCPOA, the Iran Deal, and whether that qualifies as an arms control agreement, or whether that's, as Rich suggests, a misunderstanding among even some very sophisticated actors in this realm.

**BILLINGSLEA:** Well Clifford, I tend to side with Rich on this point. Any arms control agreement that doesn't have effective verification or meaningful constraints, is not an arms control agreement, it's arms control folly. And let me be real clear here, the reason why the Obama Administration wound up with a JCPOA as a politically binding accord, as opposed to a treaty, is because the folly was well-recognized across bipartisan lines in the Senate, and they knew they couldn't muster the votes to pass that thing as a treaty. As I mentioned, it only takes 1/3, one vote more than 1/3 of the United States Senate, to reject any particular treaty, something that happens rarely. It happened, for instance, with the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty, but it certainly would have happened with the JCPOA if they had transmitted it as such. It should not be regarded as an arms control agreement, it should be regarded as something else, and something deeply flawed at that.

**MAY:** Okay, getting on to China. China is building up its nuclear arsenal. China is establishing bases overseas. China is not just in a defensive posture, protecting its interests, it seems to me, but is clearly competing and looking to compete with the U.S., and militarily over the long-term, achieving its own strategic nuclear triad. And it's not interested, as I understand it, in arms control, because it wants to continue building up, and that creates another problem, because if we conclude our arms control agreement with Russia and leave China out, we're leaving ourselves at a disadvantage, aren't we?

**BILLINGSLEA:** Yeah, we would be. And that's precisely why we're not going to do that. And frankly, the Russians themselves get it. My counterpart, the deputy foreign minister, Sergei Ryabkov himself has repeatedly said that the next nuclear arms control treaty has to be multilateral. Now he, of course, would include in that definition, the British and the French, but he also would include the Chinese. And so we share that in common. We believe that the next nuclear arms control treaty must be trilateral, pick your term here. But the reason for that is that the old U.S., Soviet, Cold War



bipolar way of doing business negotiating, just the two countries against one another makes no sense when you have a third power that is engaged in a massive, secretive and unconstrained nuclear buildup.

I've rattled off a number of the things that Russia's doing that concern us. But I must say in comparison with the communist Chinese, it pales. The Chinese are engaged in an incredibly secretive, crash nuclear buildup. The same kind of stonewalling that they presented the world with, the great wall of secrecy over the coronavirus, which they deliberately let spread around the globe.

We are faced with that stonewalling on any number of issues, but chief among them, their massive nuclear and missile buildup. We're talking about a country that – and one of the images that I put out, I gave a classified briefing to NATO, and then we declassified the imagery it's on my Twitter feed, shows the difference in the missile parade that they just conducted this past October, compared with 10 years prior, the length, the line of missiles on parade stretched more than two and a half miles. It was 10 times as long as what it was a decade ago. Just a couple of numbers here. In 2019, China shot off 225 ballistic missiles. That's a huge number. 225 missile shots. That's more than the rest of the world combined.

**MAY:** Those are tests that they're doing?

**BILLINGSLEA:** Well, tests, training, development programs, you name it. They want and they have a huge missile arsenal, and they are engaged in more testing and more training and more development than the entire rest of the world. Same was true in 2018. And now what we've seen as of November, they'd shot more than 220 missiles, they're on track to beat their own record. And so what are they doing with all of this missile buildup? The answer is that they are building and deploying – we talked a little bit about these INF category missiles, where we were prohibited by a treaty from having these things. The Russians cheated, they deployed the SSC8 that Brad mentioned. Well guess what? The Chinese were never constrained by that treaty. And they have today, sitting across from Taiwan and on the Eastern seaboard of their country, between 1200 and 2000 of these kinds of missiles, dual capable that could put a conventional warhead on them or a nuclear warhead, 13 different categories of missiles.

We don't yet today have a single type of such a system. We are developing one, the Marines and the Army together. We urgently need it. We're going to need it for both Europe and to defend Asia. But we're staring down the barrel of a massive Chinese arsenal that continues to grow by the hundreds every year. And the same is true in terms of their nuclear stockpile. They want the world to believe that they are a minimalist, no first use kind of nuclear power. And they want to hide behind the British and the French.

The reality is that we know that they intend in due course to achieve some type of nuclear parity with the United States. Now, whether that's quantitative at the outset or qualitative, I couldn't really say. But we see with the secretive work that they're doing at their nuclear test site – oh, by the way, they tell people that they're not engaged in a nuclear testing, but you can see that they've excavated a small mountain out of their nuclear test shafts, wonder what they're doing down there.

I've put out imagery of the square footage that they've constructed in the past couple of years at their nuclear weapons production facilities. It's mammoth. The same is true on their missile side. So we're not only talking about a country that is a revisionist power, that thinks that they can literally sail in the South China Sea and redraw maps by building fake islands. Or, unilaterally redraw the border with India by attacking soldiers across the line of contact, and the list goes on. Recently another encounter with the Japanese over the Senkakus. They are in border disputes with nearly



every one of their neighbors. It's something by the way, that we've reminded the Russians of, because Russians, there's 150 million Russians today, there's 1.5 billion Chinese. I wonder how that's going to work out in the long run.

**MAY:** Okay. So, that raises two questions. I'll start with you, Brad, on both of them and I'll ask both of them so I don't forget them. One is, this has been going on for a long time, not just over the last four years that these developments in China. These are programs that they have put in place. You were in the Senate, the past administrations and past congresses; did they simply turn a blind eye to this because it was convenient to do so, or because it was at least inconvenient to recognize what the Chinese were doing?

And the second question, which I'll just throw out there as well, is if you're a Vladimir Putin, you're very pleased that the Chinese are making life difficult for the Americans. On the other hand, you know enough about your history to know that there are basic geopolitical conflicts under the surface, and that you will have some problem with your tiny economy, the size of New York State or Italy with your population at 150 million, with this huge landmass that you got to figure a nation of over a billion is looking at thinking, "You know, I'm not sure Russia needs all this land and I kind of do." So if you're Putin, do you see China as an adversary or an ally? Or is it both in some complex way that's hard to understand. Sorry to give you both the questions at once.

**BOWMAN:** No, that's like a smorgasbord. That's great. If I don't cover all of it, let me know. I'll try to move quickly though. I think it's fair to say that so many of us, so many Americans and frankly, our allies in Europe as well have been slow to wake up to the threat from Beijing. You've written on, Cliff, and understand it well. I think we're in the process of waking up. I often use this silly metaphor of two gladiators in the Roman arena and one is Beijing and one is us and we've been asleep on the ground while they've been picking our pocket with intellectual property and beating on us. And then we're standing up and waking up and starting to defend ourselves and suddenly we're the problem, because we're simply defending ourselves. So there's so much more work to do.

We have to better understand the military civil fusion threat. We have to help our allies in Germany and elsewhere understand this. It's so much more than the military, but I take your point that we were slow in waking up. Real quickly, in terms of China. It's not just, in my view, the scope of what they're doing, which the Ambassador covered so well. And he knows far better than me, it's also the nature of what they're doing. They're working apparently on an air launch ballistic missile that would for them complete, if I'm not mistaken, a nuclear triad. So, they're expanding the scope and they're developing a nuclear triad, and let's not forget that they recently put out a video that showed an attack on Guam and U.S. bases on Guam. Their military put out a video.

So, talk about kind of obnoxious behavior. So they're doing that. And then the secrecy that the ambassadors talking about. Former Pentagon official James Anderson did an op-ed in *New York Times* earlier this year, where he made a point that I think is really important to repeat. And that is, it's not just annoying that Beijing's being so secretive, it's dangerous. Because when they're secretive, that that forces us to plan for the worst-case scenario. So that forces us to invest in things and programs and capabilities that we may not otherwise because of the secrecy. Having to plan for the worst-case scenario is we don't know exactly what they're doing because they're being so opaque. And that's very destabilizing and that potentially leads to miscalculation. And then just very quickly, our Director of National Intelligence has said, yes, Russia and China are closer in many ways than they've been since the 1950s.

But if you go back and review the history, it's also clear there's been a lot of problems through the years, as your question implies, Cliff, between Beijing and Moscow. And so, a lot of people spent their careers focusing on bilateral nuclear deterrents, mutual assured destruction and all that, and kind of the relative stability of a bilateral relationship.



When you spring in a trilateral element, any one of those three countries can do something thinking, “Hey, the Chinese might do something focused on us and forgetting the Russians are going to want to respond.” And you’re so right. The Russian economy is roughly one eighth that of China. So if I’m Putin, you better be real concerned that what China is doing is going to spark an arms race with the United States and it’s going to once again, bankrupt Moscow. So I would think that Putin would have a real incentive to want to bring China into any new arms agreement, because after all, they’re a little bit closer to China than we are.

**MAY:** Brad, that was a comprehensive answer, do you want to add or disagree with any of that, Ambassador?

**BILLINGSLEA:** No, I really would be hard pressed to have said it better, Cliff. The problem is that Vladimir Putin has behaved in such an egregious and irresponsible way around the world that he’s got no friends. The best he’s got his Chairman Xi, and so he doesn’t have much maneuvering room at this stage. They certainly understand the importance of including China in a future nuclear framework. Right now, they’re not going to lift a finger to help us get the Chinese to the table. That’s just fine as it goes for now. But let’s also remember that we have in the United States and in Europe, a foreign policy elite that think that the democratization of China is just one more trade deal away.

Just one more diplomatic round table away. Chairman Xi is no democrat and is far from it. This is someone who runs concentration camps for Uighurs. In this day and age in 2020, we have millions of people incarcerated in concentration camps in China. This is someone who has destroyed the democracy of Hong Kong, who is planning on forcibly destroying the democracy of Taiwan. This is a country that already is behaving irresponsibly and as a bully with its neighbors.

Can you imagine this country being armed to the gills with nuclear warheads on par with what either we or the Russians might have? And what kind of threat and menace to global security they will pose at that point? That is why the time for meaningful arms control is now. The time for nuclear arms control is not after China has built up to the levels that we and the Russians are at, but rather now, to forestall the emergence of this three-way arms race that Brad is warning about. In fact, I would suggest that it doesn’t stop at a three-way arms race. One must not forget the Indians and the Pakistanis in these equations.

So we are looking at a regime in Beijing, which through its actions and through its crash and secretive nuclear buildup is imperiling the equilibrium that we were able to establish during the Cold War and have successfully maintained since. President Trump doesn’t want to see that happen, and that’s why he’s insisted that the next treaty must include China as a precondition.

**MAY:** I got basically two questions I want to get in in the few minutes we have left. One is both of you have mentioned our allies. I wanted you, Ambassador to talk a little bit about as candidly as you can about the extent to which our allies, NATO allies for sure, but certainly Australia, New Zealand – I know you’ve had some comments on in the past – India. To what extent they are really helping us with these important tasks and to what extent we really should be asking for more and they should be doing more?

**BILLINGSLEA:** Well. So let’s start with NATO, and I must say the relationship, and as you might expect, as a former Assistant Secretary General of NATO, I hold the importance of the transatlantic relationship near and dear. And I’ve spent a great deal of time working with both the individual nations, as well as the collective Alliance as a whole, keeping them fully informed both before and after discussions and negotiations with the Russians. And I’m pleased to say that they’re on board. They’ve been very supportive of our approach. The allies, most of the allies will tell you that they still



would like to see the New START treaty extended. That's understandable given the historical approach of the Europeans to treaties. They really are far more enamored of treaties than we tend to be, but we get it. But they also get the fact that the New START treaty does really nothing for allied security because the Russians are building all of these weapons pointed at Europe that are not bound under any strictures. And so they have recognized also that this moment in time, with New START set to expire in February, that Putin is desperate to keep the United States locked in because this treaty advantages him.

And desperation translates into significant negotiating leverage. That's why we were able to get the public pledge to put the cap on. Now, we were undercut by claims by certain other parties that they would just willy-nilly extend the treaty for five years. And we're now in a holding pattern, which is regrettable given the historic juncture that we're at, but I think it's important that we don't move backwards from what we've been able to achieve with the Russians.

Many of the NATO allies, the Dutch, I believe, were the first to actually publicly call out the Chinese for their buildup. And you had a remarkable series of pronouncements in recent days by the NATO Secretary General, by the foreign ministers in meeting and the defense ministers, all of them highlighting the threat to global peace and security that the Chinese nuclear buildup poses. So I think we've had a seat change in the recognition that the future approach will not be bilateral. It must be trilateral at a minimum. When it comes to Asia, we've had good support out of both our Korean and Japanese allies. They well understand the threat that they're facing, and we're going to work with the Japanese and the Koreans on a series of defensive capabilities that they're going to need for the future.

**MAY:** Very quickly, Brad, if you've got thoughts on that, and then I've got a final question.

**BOWMAN:** Sounds good. To our allies, I would say many of these developments we're talking about today threaten you more than Americans, that the ground launch cruise missiles in Europe threaten Europeans not Americans, notwithstanding the many Americans that are stationed there. And what China's doing not only threatens Taiwan, as the Ambassador said, but it threatens the many, many Americans living in Japan, the U.S. troops stationed there. It threatens the 160,000 Americans in Guam. And as the Ambassador said elsewhere, some of these new systems they can reach U.S. territory in 30 minutes or so. So it threatens both allies and us, and we're going to be far more effective if we come together as allies and then go to Moscow and Beijing to try to achieve our objectives.

Very quickly, what are our interests? Our interests are stability and security. What are the three leading threats to those interests? It's Russian cheating, it's the Russian development of nuclear weapons unconstrained by the current formulation of New START and it's China's modernization expansion of their nuclear arsenal. Those are the threats. So what do we do? We do a new New START that includes all nukes, that includes China, and that has the strongest possible verification compliance measures. I think if we do that, we'll be in a much better place than we are right now.

**BILLINGSLEA:** Clifford, let me just add, Brad has just set out the yardstick by which any future agreement will be measured. And any future agreement that fails that litmus test, that fails that minimum standard of covering all nukes, of effective verification applied against the challenge of nuclear warhead production monitoring and facilities, and which includes the Chinese, if those three elements are not present, the United States Senate should roundly reject any agreement that fails to live up to that test.

**MAY:** So a final question I have is about arms control, not on the rhetorical but in the kinetic sense. What I mean is missile defense. It's long seemed to me, and I could be wrong, so if I am disabuse me of these notions, that it is not technologically impossible for us to have as a goal and achieve as a goal that any missile that goes up anywhere in the



world, we can prevent it from reaching its victims if we decide to do so with a layered and comprehensive missile defense system, the kind of thing that Ronald Reagan envisioned. It wasn't technologically possible then. I'm not sure it isn't within reach now, and I'd just love to get both of your thoughts on that.

**BILLINGSLEA:** Well, so this is an area where again, I feel that we probably have not made the kind of investments that we really should have made over the years, but under President Trump, there has been a renewed focus on missile defense and revitalization of our capabilities. The successful intercept, a few weeks ago, of an ICBM by an Aegis Cruiser was an amazing thing. And it shows that those who talked about this concept of layer defense and the ability to put up a missile shield to protect all Americans have been right from the very beginning. And the technology is now there. There've been a number of other successful missile defense intercepts. As is always the case in offensive and defensive capabilities, there's a seesaw that moves back and forth on the technological spectrum. Hypersonic warheads are going to make missile defense challenging in the future. That's precisely why the Russians have built and fielded nuclear hypersonic warheads. It's why the Chinese are engaged in so much testing in this area as well.

And ultimately, we're going to have hypersonics also, but what's great about how we're conducting our missile defense work in the United States is that the Missile Defense Agency is participating in all of our hypersonic work and benefiting from the development programs there and understanding how those things work, because we will be able to intercept those kinds of warheads in the future, and we should. Frankly, the American people want to be protected from nuclear blackmail, regardless of whether we're talking about North Korean tipped missiles or Iranian missiles or Chinese or Russian missiles. The job of any president is to protect the American people from all threats, foreign and domestic. And so I think under President Trump, we've driven hard on that goal. Efforts by the Russians to drag us into missile defense limitations, both quantitatively and geographically have failed. We've rejected those roundly, and we're not going to sign up to any such impairments and impediments. And hopefully, the next administration will draw the same bright red line.

**MAY:** Brad, your thoughts on this topic?

**BOWMAN:** I've always brought a bit of a skeptical view to suggestions that we need to limit our missile defense activities. That's like saying, "Hey, why don't you not protect your family?" I'm a fan of protecting one's self, one's family, one's country, and so that's kind of where I start. And we've talked a bit today about the Kremlin's cynicism and difficult relationship with the truth. A lot of Americans, some on Capitol Hill wring their hands about the disabling effects of American missile defense, forgetting little simple facts like, oh, the Russians have more homeland missile defense interceptors than we have currently. And by the way, correct me if I'm wrong, Ambassador, some of those above Moscow are nuclear tipped, if I'm not mistaken.

**BILLINGSLEA:** That's correct. That's absolutely correct. Look, the right to defend oneself is a moral imperative. And those who suggest that there's something intrinsically wrong with being able to defend yourself, have got such a skewed worldview that I'm not even sure where to start on that. We've got to be able to defend the American people. If there's anything de-stabilizing in that equation, it's the construct of all of these different kinds of missiles that are intended to blackmail and threaten the American people and our friends and our allies, and we're simply not going to let that happen.

**BOWMAN:** And I would just add our current formulation, it gives us a modicum of protection against an attack from North Korea. And Iran, it's just a matter of time until they convert their space launch program into an ICBM, and we have a modicum of protection. And again, we don't have shoot, look, shoot. I think we need to be working on that.



# FOREIGN PODICY

## Arms Control and the Man

December 22, 2020

*Featuring Ambassador Marshall Billingslea and Bradley Bowman*

*Hosted by FDD Founder and President Clifford D. May*

But the Kremlin and Beijing know, unfortunately we don't have the means to protect against a massive attack from them both, in terms of scale and difficulty of it. And any suggestion otherwise is just ridiculous, and they know it.

**MAY:** Well, this has been a fast paced and a fascinating discussion. And I want to thank you Ambassador, and thank you too Brad. I think you've made it accessible for a lot of people who may not have known a lot about these complex issues. But those who are sophisticates, they've been edified as well. I certainly have been. So thanks again. Thank you for your good work Ambassador. Brad, proud to have you as my colleague. And I hope to speak to you again before very long. Until then, thanks to everybody else who's listening out there. We're pleased always to have you with us here on *Foreign Podicy*.

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