

Dr. John Hamre
President and Chief Executive Officer
Center for Strategic and International Studies
Washington, D.C.

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I am probably going to make some enemies here with some of what I'm going to say. I just want to make a very brief defense for lobbying. It's very unpopular right now. This last election was, in many ways, about lobbying and lobbyists. There is such a strong public sentiment that it is seen as one of the attributes of perversity and decay in America, that we have lobbyists.

Let me just say something here. We set up a system of government where we ask people to come from average parts of society, and set themselves apart, and represent us here in Washington. And it's a wonderful thing, but their connection to average citizens is limited to every two years or every six years, or, for a president, every four years. And if you aggregate all of the interests that are underway, day in and day out, for a four-year period, and then you ask the representative to represent your views, it gets too distended, it's too remote.

So how do average citizens connect with their representatives in Washington for the very real things that happen every day that affect our lives? There are only three ways that society makes big decisions.

One is through the marketplace. Things have a price, and you decide if you want it or don't want it at that price. Another is through administrative procedures, either the courts of law or administrative rules; you establish in advance the rules for how you will adjudicate conflicting interests, and you have an independent structure that does that. And the third way—the only other way—to do it is through politics. In our system, we have set up a system where people are accountable to us—to me, to you—and they have to come and get my vote.

But that is very remote. So, we count on structures to help represent your views, my views, and our shared interests to our representatives on a real-time basis, so that it isn't just every four years. This has to be a presence all of the time.

The very, very top of that is lobbying. Underneath it is a broad, broad structure of intellectual engagement. When we Americans, we citizens, try to think through—you know, what is our government trying to do, what are the problems—how do we have a voice in it?

We do it in many, many ways. Countless ways. We do it with think tanks, think tanks that provide policy inputs, ideas that they try to put into the landscape. We do it through trade associations. We do it through affiliation associations, like AFA [the Air Force Association]. We do it through church organizations. You know, each of the churches has major offices in town. Yes, the churches "lobby." They "lobby" for "pork." It's an important attribute for the success of democracy.

So my view is that lobbying is a good thing; it's an attribute essential to America's efficient democracy.

Now, unfortunately, you get some bottom feeders that are abusing the system. That's called criminal behavior and we have laws that take care of that. And we should prosecute people who abuse the system. So, I'm not making a defense for them.

I AM making a defense for this essential function that we need in a democracy, where the voice of the public gets registered with elected officials, in an efficient and ongoing manner.

And that's what we're doing today, with the defense landscape. I've been through it three times—this is the third time—when a secretary of defense and a president decide, "We're going to substantially cut back on weapon systems."

There's something very unique that happens in these environments. The media conclude, "Finally, somebody in DOD is being honest." That's just the broad landscape in this kind of environment. "Finally, they're telling the truth," you know?

And I'm not.... Look, I'm a huge admirer of Secretary Gates. I really do think he's done a superb job. But, what's emerging, in Washington, is a landscape that says, "Anyone who questions him is somehow parochial and self-serving. There isn't a wider interest to be debated. It's got to be a narrow and selfish interest." And that's wrong.

So our purpose today ... is to try to put information on the table for the American public to make decisions about where we're going. I think the secretary's been heroic. I really do. These are hard choices. He's looking at constrained budgets, and, frankly, budgets that may be getting smaller. And he's had to make a rational set of choices about how we should move forward. It's exactly what you want in your secretary of defense.

But it is also OUR responsibility to think our way through it. He's thought his way through it, and we now have to think our way through it. And that's the purpose of today, to help us collectively think our way through it, and to have the debate that I think the country needs.

Now, for me, I'm going to step back just a bit, because we've got a much larger.... This is the way I would frame the series of seminars that we're going to have over the next several weeks. What does America need to prepare for?

We're going to make decisions today—or this year, I should say—that are going to affect the shape of our capabilities for the next 25 years. We are actually the beneficiaries of decisions made 20 years ago that reflect what we have today. This is the one thing about this institution [national defense]; there is a very long range time horizon. You have to think in long cycles in this business.

The secretary was obviously confronting constrained budgets. In many ways, he was looking at the "people" dimension. And obviously it takes longer to build a good first sergeant than it does to build a tank. So, I don't quarrel with him one bit for looking at it the way he did.

I DO think we need to put on the table the weapons side of the defense budget and the industrial base that's on the horizon.

It was about 80 years ago that America made one of three decisions that helped us win the Cold War, before the Cold War even started. It was the decision that we made when we said we were going to place the industrial base for aviation in the private sector.

We had a big debate. Are we going to build arsenals? Are we going to build airplanes like we build cannons, artillery pieces, or tanks? Or are we going to put it in the private sector?

We made a very important strategic decision to put that industrial base in the private sector. I personally think it was one of the three decisions that helped us win the Cold War.

We now have to ask ourselves: What is going to be the nature of that partner, that industrial partner, going forward, with the sorts of decisions that people are making now? I hope we get into that. I hope our panel gets into it. I think that's one of the issues that we need to put on the table.

Another issue that I hope we put on the table at some point today ... is what is the nature of the future that we have to prepare for?

This is very complicated. This is very hard. You know, during the Cold War, it was relatively easy. There was a basic philosophy in the Cold War—if you were prepared to skin a cat, you could always skin a kitten. If you were ready to fight the Soviet Union,

you could handle other things.

But now we've got a very different environment. It seems to me that we've got three quite different scenarios, so we have to honestly think about them all.

We've got the very high end asymmetric warfare scenario. What happens if we seriously have to defend the Taiwan Straits? By the way, I'm not predicting it, and I'm not wanting it, but we do have to think about it. Very high end. Very sophisticated and demanding scenario.

On the other side, you've got insurgency wars, asymmetric low-tech. We're in the middle of two of them now, and we have to do better than we're doing. And by the way, we use high technology even to fight low-tech wars, too. We have C-17s on strip alert to provide GPS-guided parachute drops into Afghanistan on a daily basis. Pretty damned sophisticated, huh? So we need that capability, even in low end, asymmetric war.

And then we have to honestly talk about the mid-range wars. Now, again, I'm not predicting this, and I'm not asking for it, and I don't want it, but we do have to think about it.

So we've got three quite different scenarios that we have to integrate into the whole. The question, then, is how do these decisions, these very thoughtful decisions, that were made by the secretary, how do they fit in those three? I hope we get into that a bit.

This is not.... I mean, the debate in Washington.... Washington, for being such a sophisticated place, has such simple public controversies. This is evolving into a "virtuous Secretary of Defense" who is now being confronted by "venal politics." OK?

Now, that's easy to report in the press, but that's NOT what's going on here. What's really going on here is a long-term strategic choice that we have to make—we Americans have to make.

We've got an extremely important starting point—the Secretary's recommendations. But, ultimately, it's going to have to be OUR decision. How do we as individuals, how do we project our views to members of Congress who ultimately are going to have to decide this?

It is through these structures, where we take every citizen's views, we aggregate them, we confront them, we debate them, and then, ultimately, we bring them forward to the people who have to make the decision. And that's what today is all about.

Thank you all for coming.

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