

**Ambassador Linton Brooks**  
**“The Cold War and the Nevada Test Site: Preserving a Legacy”**  
**DRI Research Foundation/Nevada Test Site Historical Foundation Board Dinner**  
**October 2, 2003**

Good evening and thank you for inviting me to join you tonight. We're here for a number of reasons. We're here to recognize the generosity of those who have made The Frank H. Rogers Science and Technology Building and the National Atomic Testing History Museum possible. We're to honor the vision and the leadership of people like Steve Wells and my long-time colleague Troy Wade who saw the need.

We're also here because there is something in all of us that makes us want to preserve the past. We see evidence of this desire to remember our roots all around us. Historical books from the McCullough biography of John Adams to *The Brotherhood of the Bomb* gain a rapt audience.

In George Orwell's nightmare vision of totalitarian future, *1984*, a Party slogan was "Whoever controls the present, controls the past. Whoever controls the past controls the future." That nightmarish slogan embodies a fundamental truth. The past has made us who we are today, both as individuals and as a nation. The past shapes the future. But as free people we don't seek to control the past but to preserve it so it can help us understand who we are and can point the way to the future. That's why what is being done here in Las Vegas to capture and remember the events, the history, the people and the activities of the Nevada Test Site is so valuable. It is important that we preserve that history.

But I think we are here for another reason. This is a dinner to help – belatedly – celebrate a victory in America's longest war, a Cold War with no defined start or end, no front lines, no declaration of war, and no victory parades. It is a war that was won, in part, in the desert of Nevada some 65 miles from where we sit tonight at the site whose legacy you are trying to preserve. Tonight I'd like to talk about that war and the part the Nevada Test Site played in winning it.

In 1946, in a small midwestern city named Fulton, Missouri, Winston Churchill delivered a sobering message to the world. He said:

From Stettin in the Baltic to Trieste in the Adriatic, an iron curtain has descended across the continent. Behind that line lie all the capitals of the ancient states of central and Eastern Europe -- Warsaw, Berlin, Prague, Vienna, Budapest, Belgrade, Bucharest and Sofia. All these famous cities and the populations around them lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere.

Churchill's speech gave a name to an oppression that would lead nations to spend trillions of dollars to prevent aggression, preserve peace, a peace that was built on the bedrock of the American nuclear deterrent.

The Cold War became more than a slogan when a barbed wire fence and later a wall divided a city, imprisoned its people, and became the embodiment of the Cold War. The Berlin Wall was one symbol of Cold War. Another symbol was the periodic "local wars" in places like Korea and Vietnam, wars seen at the time – especially in Korea – as surrogates for a global war.

The most frightening symbol, however, was nuclear confrontation, which reached its peak 41 years ago this month. At 8:45 a.m., October 16, 1962, President John F. Kennedy received an assessment from the Central Intelligence Agency that Soviet missiles were in Cuba. The President went before the American people and said, "I call upon Chairman Khrushchev to halt and eliminate this clandestine, reckless and provocative threat to world peace, and to stable relations between our two nations. He has an opportunity now to move the world back from the abyss of destruction."

The following days were filled with the fear of imminent nuclear confrontation was at the fore thought of many of the nation's leaders. I spent those days on a ship as part of the quarantine of Cuba, expecting that we would shortly go to war. Others in this room spent those days preparing our deterrent. All Americans spent them facing the possibility of nuclear war. We all now know just how close the world came to the brink of a nuclear confrontation. But catastrophe was averted.

The Cold War continued. It became an integral part of who we were as a people. And then, in a three-year frenzy it ended.

In December 1988, Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev met with the first President George Bush and outgoing President Ronald Reagan to discuss improved relations and bringing an end to the Cold War. Soon afterwards, Gorbachev told the peoples of Eastern Europe they had the right to choose their own future. The Polish Communist government began talks on how to shift to democracy. Other states followed. And then came the historical moment that many see as the true end of the Cold War and the Iron Curtain.

On November 9<sup>th</sup>, 1989, a mid-level bureaucrat in East Germany prematurely announced to journalists that the ban on travel to the west would be lifted immediately. The East German government had meant for the announcement to be made the next day and that it would be done in a phased approach. That November 9<sup>th</sup> announcement led to a flooding of West Berliners to the Brandenburg Gate. They began to demolish the Wall and in days it had fallen completely.

In the Soviet Union, Gorbachev unleashed forces he could not control. He gave Soviet citizens the right to demonstrate. Those demonstrations led to the call for the end

to the Communist Party's stranglehold on power. The Communist Party --- a political organization that had ruled since the October Revolution of 1917 --- fell.

The 15 constituent Republics of the Soviet Union began to gain their independence. Finally, at Minsk on December 8, 1991, Russia, Belarus and Ukraine moved to dissolve the Soviet Union and set up the Commonwealth of Independent States. In an act that symbolized the irrelevance of the Soviet system, those three states informed President George Bush of their action before telling Gorbachev what they had done.

And on Christmas Day in 1991, the Soviet Union, that great experiment in communist totalitarianism, went to the dustbin of history where it belonged. The Cold War was over. President George H.W. Bush, in a Christmas address to the nation said:

For over 40 years the United States led the West in the struggle against communism and the threat it posed to our most precious values. This struggle shaped the lives of all Americans. It forced all nations to live under the specter of nuclear destruction. That confrontation is now over.

Why was it only a Cold War? Why, when the West was faced with an expansionist power with a messianic ideology did global war never break out? Because the American nuclear deterrent made global war unthinkable.

That deterrent was tested and honed a few miles north of here, starting before dawn on January 27, 1951 when a B50 bomber dropped the first of the hundreds of weapons to be tested at the Nevada Test Site.

It might not have happened. In March 1949, the AEC concluded that, excepting national emergency, a test site within the continental United States, "was not desirable." The August 1949 Soviet test—which ended the U.S. monopoly on nuclear weapons and surprised many American leaders—provided that emergency. The Army Air Corps had established the Las Vegas Bombing and Gunnery Range in October 1940. President Truman gave permission to use part of this range as a test site in December 1950 and the Nevada Test Site was born.

From that day on, America's arsenal was tested here in Nevada. New concepts in tactical weapons, weapons for submarine launch, thermonuclear weapons, all were tested here. At Nevada, deep in tunnels, complex effects tests took place to help us understand the effect of nuclear explosions on our own military systems. At Nevada we tested modern safety and security systems that helped ensure the reliability, safety, and security of the deterrent. Year after year America needed to be certain the deterrent was effective and year after year the Nevada Test Site was there.

When concerns over fallout lead to the a Limited Test Ban Treaty in which both nations ceased atmospheric testing, scientists and engineers developed complex diagnostics for underground testing. Late in the Eisenhower years, a brief moment of

euphoria resulted in a three-year moratorium on nuclear testing. The Nevada Test Site severely reduced its employment levels and appeared to have an uncertain future. But when the Soviets broke the moratorium, NTS responded and was ready.

There were attempts to ease tensions during our history of the Cold War. The moratorium I just referred to was one example. Some of these attempts, like the various strategic arms control treaties, had a limited effect on Nevada. Others were profound.

- Fear of the health consequences of radioactive fallout led to the 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty in which tests in the open air, in water or in space were banned. Going underground let Nevada increase the yield of its tests; the 1968 Boxcar test was 1.3 megatons.
- In 1974, the Threshold Test Ban Treaty limited tests to a yield of 150 KT.

In 1988 the United States and the Soviet Union reached an historic but little known agreement. They agreed to conduct joint nuclear tests in each other's country. On August 17, 1988 at the Nevada Test Site, Soviet scientists were present for the first Joint Verification Experiment called *Kearsarge*. On September 14, 1988 at the Semipalatinsk Test Site American scientists were present for the second Joint Verification Experiment called *Shagan*.

These joint experiments were a prelude to the signing of verification Protocols to the treaty on *Limitation of Underground Nuclear Weapon Tests* and the *Underground Nuclear Explosions for Peaceful Purposes* treaty. Their more important result, however, was to establish a precedent for scientific cooperation between weapons laboratories that lives on in the Cooperative Threat Reduction program and the various DOE/NNSA threat reduction programs in Russia. They thus set the stage for the important work we are doing today.

On September 23, 1992 the last underground test took place in Nevada. Of the 1054 American nuclear tests, almost 90 percent had taken place at the Test Site. Since 1992 the United States – and the Russian Federation – have observed a moratorium on testing. We don't know how long this moratorium will last. The Administration seeks to maintain a readiness to resume underground testing within 18 months. We do this not because we seek to develop new weapons, but because we want to be ready to deal with problems in important elements of the stockpile.

From the first Soviet test to the collapse of the Soviet Union was just over 42 years. For much of this time, the world feared total nuclear destruction.

The Cold War wasn't peace. In Korea, Vietnam, Afghanistan, Africa, and Central America huge numbers perished. But the apocalypse never came. We don't know why it never came. The nature of deterrence is that you can never prove that it worked, only that it failed. But I believe that nuclear deterrence played a major role and that Nevada played a major part in that deterrence.

Perhaps the best evaluation of the legacy of the Nevada Test Site comes from the official DOE history of its founding:

Here is where the Cold War was fought. Here...officials, with the acquiescence and sacrifice of a local population willing and even eager to do its part, conducted some of the most spectacular... important, and potentially hazardous experiments ever seen...by humankind. The Nevada Test Site...stands as a monument to what they did and how they made the world as we know it today.

This museum will provide to the world some glimpse of an important element of the effort that many dedicated Americans gave to maintain nuclear deterrence during a time of this countries Cold War history. It will ensure that we don't forget those dedicated men and women who helped win the Cold War. On behalf of the Department of Energy, of the Administration, of the nation and of generations unborn who will visit this museum and learn of an important part of their legacy, I salute those of you who have worked so hard to make this day possible.

Thank you, God bless you all, and God bless America.