

Ambassador Linton Brooks
“Preserving the Legacy”
Dedication of the Atomic Testing Museum
Las Vegas, Nevada
February 19, 2005

Good afternoon. I'm honored to represent the Administration at the formal opening of the Atomic Testing Museum. You've just heard an eloquent statement of why museums are important to preserve the past. The past has made us who we are today, both as individuals and as a nation. We need to preserve the past so it can help point the way to the future. That's why what is being done here in this museum 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 why remember the Nevada Test Site? Why does a piece of remote desert, pockmarked with subsidence craters from underground tests, deserve its own museum? Because the Test Site was integral to America's nuclear deterrent and that deterrent dominated our history and ensured our security for over forty years. This museum helps preserve and 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 Nevada desert about 65 miles from where we stand this afternoon. It was won because of the site whose legacy this museum will preserve. I'd like to talk about that war and the part the Nevada Test Site played in winning it.

The precursor to the Cold War was, of course, World War II. America developed nuclear weapons as a defensive measure, in the fear that the Nazis would develop them first. We used them to shock Japan into surrendering and to prevent an American invasion that would have resulted in hundreds of thousands of casualties. We thought that surrender would bring an enduring peace. We were wrong.

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 EuropeAll these famous cities ... lie in what I must call the Soviet sphere.

Churchill's speech called attention to an oppression that would lead nations to spend trillions of dollars to prevent aggression and a peace built on the bedrock of the American nuclear deterrent. Three years later, the Soviet Union conducted its first nuclear test and the Cold War came to the U.S. nuclear weapons complex.

The Cold War had many symbols. One was a barbed wire fence and later a wall dividing the city of Berlin and imprisoning its people. Other symbols were 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 over 42 years ago. At 8:45 a.m., October 16, 1962, when 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 called on Soviet Chairman Khrushchev to “halt and eliminate this clandestine, reckless and provocative threat to world peace.... 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. I spent those days on a destroyer as part of the quarantine of Cuba, expecting that we would shortly go to war. Others in this audience 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, though America never again came as close to the apocalypse. A permanent condition of global tension became an integral part of who we were as a people. And then, in a three-year frenzy, our longest war ended. In 1989 the Warsaw Pact began to collapse and on November 9th, 1989, a mid-level bureaucrat in East Germany prematurely announced to journalists that the ban on travel to the west would be lifted immediately. That announcement led to a flooding of West Berliners to the Brandenburg Gate. They began to demolish the Berlin Wall and in days it had fallen completely.

In the Soviet Union, General Secretary Gorbachev had unleashed forces he could not control. He allowed demonstrations that led to the call for the end to the Communist Party’s stranglehold on power. In a stunningly short time, the Communist Party --- a party that had ruled since the October Revolution of 1917 --- collapsed and 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. In an act that symbolized the irrelevance of the Soviet system, those three states informed the American President 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 into the dustbin of history where it belonged and the Cold War ended.

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—forged in part here in Nevada--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.

That test might not have happened. In March 1949, the AEC concluded that, excepting a national emergency, a test site within the continental United States, “was not desirable.” The August 1949 Soviet test ended the U.S. monopoly on nuclear weapons, surprised many American leaders, and 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 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 employment and appeared to have an uncertain future. But when the Soviets broke the moratorium, NTS responded and was ready.

As nuclear doctrine became more complex, the numbers of weapons increased. The Test Site ensured they were reliable. Gradually, the United States developed weapons that were so survivable that we could begin serious efforts at arms reductions. That would not have happened without the work of the Nevada Test Site.

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 an existing treaty on limiting the yield of underground nuclear weapon tests. 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 Department of Energy threat reductions programs in Russia. They thus set the stage for the important non-proliferation 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. But that doesn’t mean that the Test Site has been idle. Non-nuclear tests routinely

conducted here in underground experiments and on complex machines with names like Jasper and Atlas help ensure the continued safety and reliability of our nuclear stockpile. More recently, the Test Site has taken on new missions relating to the war on terrorism and of course, if nuclear testing is ever required to deal with unexpected problems in important elements of the stockpile, Nevada once again will be ready.

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 in preserving peace and I know that the Nevada Test Site played a major part in that deterrence.

So did Nevada as a whole. In a democracy, you don't spend decades testing nuclear weapons next door without community support. And the support of the people of Nevada for a strong deterrent was – and remains – legendary. Today we honor them as well.

We don't usually look to government documents for eloquence, but the best description of the legacy of the Nevada Test Site that I've found 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 the world with some glimpse of an important component of the effort that many dedicated Americans gave to maintain nuclear deterrence during the Cold War. It will ensure that we don't forget those dedicated men and women who helped win that war. All Americans can be proud of their legacy and of the consistent support of the people of Nevada for a strong national defense. We are forever in their debt. 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 who have worked so hard to make this day possible.

God bless you all, God bless the men and women of the Nevada Test site, and, above all, may God continue to bless America. Thank you.