Presentation of the Thérèse Delpech Memorial Award

Speakers

Scott Sagan  
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George Perkovich  
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Vipin Narang  
Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy

George Perkovich: Hi, good afternoon. I hope everybody had a filling lunch, if that's the least one can say. It actually reminds me of a joke that I don't have time to tell about a prior Carnegie conference many years ago where I was in the restroom, and there was a port guy there, and he was saying, this lunch when we paid for the conference and everything and he says food wasn't very good. There was hardly any of it. It's that old joke, but he was telling it in real life.

At the end of the day, well, thank everybody who's made this happen, especially Toby and James and Lisa and others. It really an underappreciated task and that admonition about the lunch always comes back to me every time we do one of these things of how hard it is for these guys to do all the work, to organize it, and it can be underappreciated.

I am here to do a different kind of appreciation, a genuine appreciation of Thérèse Delpech, in whose name we give an award. That award in itself is an appreciation of someone who has rendered exceptional service to the non-governmental community that work on nuclear policy. The nominations for this award are welcome from anyone based in any country who's actively engaged in the field of nuclear policy in any capacity. As wide an aperture as possible.

Please consider submitting a nomination in advance of our next conference. We would like to have it nine months ahead of time, and our website opens then and so have in mind someone that you think would be a fitting recipient. The winner selected by a panel of five international experts, two are from Carnegie and three from other entities. I'm pleased to say and to recognize that we have the last winner of the award, Bill Potter here with us in the front row.

Many of you-- I was going to say, are young enough not to have known Thérèse Delpech, which is the positive way to talk about my being old and some of us being old enough to have spent many years with Thérèse. I want to explain just very briefly a little bit about her and why we've named this award for her. She was born in 1948, and she died in January of 2012. She had been the Director of Strategic Studies at the French Atomic Energy Commission since 1997.
She had served on the [unintelligible 00:04:22] inspection oversight body at the UN on the board of the International Red Cross. Thérèse wrote many books including her last, which was on deterrences that was published in 2012, but to give you a sense of some of her range, two of her late books, one was on *Freud and Historical Tragedy*, and the other was *The Power of the Irrational*, which was a beautiful analysis of a lot of great fiction and other work that deals with irrationality, including violence.

Her best book was in English, the *Savage Century: Back to Barbarism*, which won one of France’s major literary awards in 2006 or 2007. I'm going to read a paragraph on that just to give you a sense of how she thought and how beautifully she wrote. It's pertinent now. "The current self-destructive phase in Russia is the direct result of the mediocrity of those who wield power in the country and the psychological depression that followed the failure of the 1990s.

Its main roots are to be found in the terrible tragedies of the last century, which have witnesses in every family. The return of Stalinist imagery in Russia today can hardly be interpreted as a simple desire to return to the past. The spirit of revenge abroad in the land is symptomantic of a traumatized country in the process of extreme regression, but inspiring fear in one citizens is no longer enough to establish a strong state."

She wrote that 17 years ago. It gives you a sense of why those of us who were fortunate enough to know her always welcomed a chance to be with her, to hear from her. She was a profoundly deep thinker, a foresighted thinker. She was a mentor to so many officials and defense analysts and others in France. I've not met a woman who works in the French system on national security, who didn't find Thérèse to be an idol of sorts, a path breaker that they would wish to follow.

She was a courageous, innovative thinker about nuclear issues and about much else. She was a fiercely loyal friend to a wide range of people from countries all over the world. When I say fierce, I mean it. She was a fighter for human dignity and security. She wasn't always right, but when she was wrong, she was wrong on behalf of people who had been the victims of abuses of power. That was always what drove her.

No one who had the pleasure of her friendship goes a week without thinking of her. Even now, 10 years on she is with those of us who are fortunate enough to know her. Now with the award and the recipients of the award, the idea is that her memory gets a wider and longer birth. I appreciate the opportunity to introduce those of you who didn't know her a little bit.

Now I turn to Vipin Narang, who is a dear friend and also the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy to you. I was going to say it's the other stuff. He's going to introduce the winner of the award this year. Thank you.

[applause]

**Vipin Narang:** Good afternoon, everyone. Good to be back here. My name is Vipin Narang, and I am as George indicated, currently the Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Space Policy and stuff. I'm not here to say anything about
our Nuclear Posture Review, which was coincidentally just released yesterday. In fact, when I was last here at the Carnegie Nuclear Conference as an academic, I apparently nearly caused a diplomatic incident between India and Pakistan.

Now, thankfully for everyone, I can't and won't offer us sequel. That is why we send as Johnson armed with Kevlar but not a slick men to roll out the Nuclear Posture Review later today. You'll have to unfortunately wait another hour and a half for his amazing roadshow with Das Bell and Corey Henderson. Today, I'm here in my personal capacity as a student and academic son of this year's Thérèse Delpech award winner Scott D. Sagan.

Scott needs no introduction to anyone in this room. His scholarship is foundational reading for anyone even remotely interested in nuclear weapons, from Limits of Safety to Moving Targets to Wide Statesville Nuclear Weapons, to The Spread of Nuclear Weapons, to Inside Nuclear South Asia, to The Forthcoming Fragile Balance of Terror, and to my favorite title of all time, The Problem of Redundancy Problem.

Scott's Scholarship has touched every facet of nuclear security from proliferation and non-proliferation, organizational and bureaucratic pathologies to nuclear strategy of the United States, to nuclear strategy of other states, to the nuclear taboo, to the laws of armed conflict, to the security of nuclear weapons, to exhausting reading this to the future of deterrents. The quality and quantity of Scott's scholarship is unparalleled and he is revered in the field for scholarly work and is towering intellect. He is a model of the scholar we all wish we could be. Setting a bar frankly, none of us can ever hope to meet, myself included. More than a scholarship, which is foundational and enduring Scott's legacy goes well beyond that. He has built an institutional pillar in the field. He is synonymous with Stanford Center for International Security and Cooperation.

When I was a young chemical engineering undergraduate at Stanford in the 1990s something, Scott was director of CSAC at the beginning of his first, I think dozen year run as director. Building it into a towering institution of nuclear studies excellence, attracting scholars, fellows, and policy and technical practitioners to beautiful Palo Alto California, which in retrospect actually isn't that hard a job. Few nuclear scholars and practitioners have not in some way been touched by CSAC and therefore influenced by Scott.

He built an institution that attracted the best scholars and practitioners and future directors, but he paid for his talent and sins when one of those directors turned out to be the president of Carnegie, and another, departed become my current boss, the under-secretary for policy, forcing Scott to return for a second Stennis director, which I'm sure his wife truly appreciated. The field would not exist without the pipeline provided and sustained by CSAC and CSAC would not exist without Scott, but his greatest legacy, which comes out of Stanford and CSAC are students, some of which are here today.

Many of the fellows are here today from former times at CSAC and Stanford. I was fortunate to be in the first class of one of Scott's most innovative and influential CSAC programs, the undergraduate honors program in international security studies. He plucked this young wandering chemical engineer who had an abiding interest in international security, and for the first time showed me what committed mentorship
looked like. He changed my life and I was all set to go to medical school until Scott encouraged me to believe myself and to follow my passion for nuclear security. My mother has still not forgiven him.

Both then and later in graduate school, when I was doubting my ability to think of, let alone write a dissertation, he simply said, "As long as we have nuclear weapons, we will need talented people to study and manage them." He believed I had that ability, even when I was deeply unsure whether I did. He taught me to challenge conventional wisdom, to be unafraid of making bold arguments to challenge giants in the field, and to truly, truly hate the Los Angeles Dodgers.

His steer single-handedly put me on a trajectory that led me to where I am today, as a professor and a newfound practitioner in this field. Never think that one person can't change your life. He changed mine, so blame him. I just hope that as a professor, I can one day have the influence on even one student that Scott had on me. When I look around this room around academia and around the maze of halls in the Pentagon and the White House, I see so many of Scott's formers in the State Department.

I see so many of Scott's former students, fellows, or colleagues who are there in no small part indeed, sometimes entirely because of him. We are as academic children, and I believe his greatest and most enduring legacy and achievement, carrying his influence into the deepest reaches of academia and the basement and the bowels of the earring in the Pentagon. It is my greatest honor and privilege as one of his eldest academic sons and parents always love their firstborn children, right? To present this year's Thérèse Delpech Lifetime Achievement Award to Scott D. Sagan.

[applause]

Scott Sagan: Wonderful surprise. Not only do I get the plaque and that wonderful speech, but I also get the barista menu, which has the limits of caffeine. Actually, I sent a note to Eric Schlosser saying there's a command and cocoa as well on this, so he needs one as well. Well, let me thank George and James, Toby, Tino, especially Vipin, for that very moving introduction and to all the students and friends and colleagues who nominated me over here and many others who are not.

I was only given five minutes, so I'm going to do three things very, very quickly. One, explain why I'm so honored by this award. Second, say why I think we should worry a little bit about the dangers of success, about building a community because it has some downsides as well. Then lastly, tell what I think is a funny story, but with a serious lesson about Fidel Castro. First, there are two reasons why I'm really honored with this award. One is that I knew Thérèse, I actually wrote Fierce Intellect before you used the term. I said because that's what she was like, but she also had an unwavering moral compass.

That would help explain why sometimes she would make an argument, but then we'd reverse it and think about what was right and what was wrong, and she was just deeply inspiring. I'm also grateful for an award that honors the contribution of sustaining a community. One of my favorite quotes from the novel Killer Angels is when Michael Shaara has Joshua Chamberlain, the colonel leading the union forces up to little round top on the night before the battle, trying to convince a group of
volunteers whose time was up and they had a right to go back to Maine, and he
wanted to convince them to stay and fight.

They said according to Shaara, "This is a different kind of army. If you look at history,
you'll see men fighting for pay, for gold, for some other kind of loot. They fight for
land, they fight for a king because the king makes them, or just because they like
killing, but we're here for something new. This hasn't happened often in history.
We're an army going out to free men." For the young people, you're joining a
community that's trying to stop the risk of nuclear war. It's trying to prevent nuclear
war. You're not here just for the pay or just for the writing or just for whatever else
you're doing.

You're doing something really, really important and you should be proud and don't
forget that. The second part is I want to issue a bit of a warning about the dangerous
success because when you build a strong community, there's always a risk that that
community can be restrictive. You should not let the righteousness of the cause
make you self-righteous. I say that both about the non-proliferation arms control
community and the so-called nuclear enterprise.

I don't know why the nuclear enterprise gets a spaceship while the non-proliferation
disarmament gets a community more like a church, but both have a risk and I'll be
making the same argument next week at Lawrence Livermore Lab Bar and give me
a talk. The risk is that sometimes you talk too much and don't listen enough. You
speak to the choir rather than to the audience elsewhere or even the people outside
your church and it's really important that as we move forward, build not just
community in an enterprise, but coalitions across different communities. I think it's
very important that we do that and keep that in mind.

Lastly, I promised I'd tell a funny story with a serious lesson. I apologize for those
who have heard me tell this story before, but in 2002 I had the great privilege to go
with Bob McNamara and many of the other Kennedy administration officials to
Havana to meet with Fidel Castro and Raul Castro and the Cuban Generals and
some Russian generals from the Cuban Missile Crisis. After the first day, Fidel had a
reception line where you go through and meet the president.

When I got there, I told him my name and he said, "Oh, are you Carl Sagan's son?"
Through his interpreter and I gave my normal smart alec answer, which was, "No,
I'm not. I've been asked that question billions and billions of times." Fidel Castro said,
"I'm sorry if I've asked you a stupid question." I realized that he didn't hear, he'd
never seen Carl Sagan say billions and billions of stars, which he did all the time on
his television show. I realized I've just insulted a communist dictator in his country.

This is probably the stupidest thing that I've ever done. My wife disagrees because
she says I've done stupider things. I did what you should do in that situation. I
changed the subject very, very quickly. I said, "Oh no, Mr. President, I said that
because Dr. Sagan used to say billions and billions of stars, but I do want to talk to
you about why you should ratify the NPT."

[laughter] He put his big pitcher's arm around me. He was a pitcher, he was this big
guy and said, "Yes, let's talk about the NPT." I said that in democracies, if an
executive branch signed something and they don't get ratified, people know it's
because there's a disagreement here. Everybody knows that you're just holding it up, so it doesn't look very good if you've signed it and you're not ratifying it. They ratified later that year. I've jokingly sometimes said, "Well, that's a big achievement of mine." I know it's just joking, and the moral lesson here is actually for receiving this award and for things that I've said. I realize that, still tell the story, but I'm not going to claim that that was an important thing. Because what really is important is that, for me, is I look around the room and I see lots of people who I've influenced. Surrounded by my former students and mentees. I just want to say thank Carnegie for recognizing that importance and for reminding me that that's true. Thank you.

[applause]

[00:21:35] [END OF AUDIO]