

*The following is an edited transcript of the Inaugural Oksenberg Lecture delivered May 6, 2002 at Stanford University by President Carter.*

**THE UNITED STATES AND CHINA  
A President's Perspective**

**An Address by  
The Honorable Jimmy Carter  
39th President of the United States**

Remarks delivered at the Walter H. Shorenstein Forum Asia/Pacific Research Center,  
Stanford University

**ABOUT THE OKSENBERG LECTURES**

The Oksenberg Lectures honor the legacy of Professor Michel Oksenberg (1938-2001), Senior Fellow at the Asia/Pacific Research Center, Professor of Political Science, and a foremost authority on China.

After receiving degrees from Swarthmore and Columbia, Professor Oksenberg began his academic career at Stanford in 1967, departing for Columbia in 1969, then the University of Michigan in 1973. He became President of the East-West Center in Honolulu in 1992, before returning to Stanford in 1995.

As a senior advisor on the National Security Council from 1977 to 1980, Professor Oksenberg played a crucial role in the decision that led to full diplomatic relations between Beijing and Washington. He then advised every subsequent President on China policy.

Distinguished scholar, beloved mentor to generations of students, senior government official, and a prominent force shaping American attitudes toward China, Professor Oksenberg was consistently outspoken about the need for the United States to be more thoughtful in its engagement of Asia. In tribute, the Oksenberg Lectures will recognize, annually, a distinguished practitioner of America's dealings with the nations of the Asia-Pacific region.

**President John Hennessy**

I'm delighted to be here today and to add my welcome to this inaugural event for the Mike Oksenberg lecture series. This year, our lecturer is former President Jimmy Carter, and as one who has long admired his moral leadership and continued engagement in world affairs, I'm looking forward to his remarks today.

I would like to add my thanks to Walter Shorenstein for his support of this activity, and my delight in seeing the Oksenberg family here at this event. I'd also like to thank

Russell Hancock and all the members of the Asia/Pacific Research Center and the Shorenstein Forum for their efforts in making this wonderful event occur, as well as their ongoing efforts in support of this important research center.

It is my great privilege and honor to introduce President Jimmy Carter today. As Professor Walder mentioned, Mike Oksenberg was a leading authority in the field of

we had enabled our people to be proud of their own government once again.” He concluded with, “I would hope that the nations of the world might say that we had built a lasting peace, built not on weapons of war, but on international policies that reflect our own, most precious values.”

True to his word, the Carter presidency was notable for its efforts in support of human rights and peace throughout the world. In foreign policy, US and China relations entered a new era when the United States established full diplomatic relations with the People’s Republic of China in 1979. Although later defeated by the Senate, Soviet President Leonid Brezhnev and President Carter were able to work through their differences, and to sign the Strategic Arms Limitation – the SALT II treaty. The Carter administration condemned the Soviet invasion in Afghanistan, suspended technology and grain sales to the Soviet Union, and boycotted the 1980 Summer Olympics in Moscow. And in 1978,



changed the life of this country, and to some degree changed the life of every citizen of China.

I first became aware of China as a little boy, maybe four or five years old, because in our Baptist church in Plains, Georgia, the preeminent and most exalted people on earth were missionaries serving in China. I gave five cents a week, to build schools and hospitals in China. And I looked with favor on that country from that time on, and with a great deal of interest.

Later, as President Hennessy has said, I went to the Naval Academy, and after graduation I became a submarine officer. I made my first official visit to China in 1949, as a young submarine officer. And it was a propitious and interesting historical moment: in April of that year, the Nationalist Chinese (Kuomintang), under Chiang Kai-shek, had been forced by the Communists out of the mainland, but they were permitted by Mao Tse-Tung's forces to stay in a few seaports. My submarine operated from one seaport to another, with ships at sea. Every night we tied up after turning our submarine around, so that we could very quickly go to sea if the Communists decided to take that seaport. All around the periphery of the seaports we could see the campfires of the Communist forces. Later that year, on October the first, the Nationalist Chinese left the mainland, and moved to Taiwan, and the People's Republic of China was born. That was a significant date, October the first—it was the date I was born. Later, when I negotiated with the Chinese leaders, they looked with great favor on fate that had made my birthday and the birthday of their regime one and the same.

Well, you all know what happened after the Nationalists left the mainland. There was an altercation between Chinese experts—like Mike Oksenberg and others—and the United States government, about why the revolution had been successful. The US government insisted, for more than a quarter of a century, that the people of China really preferred Chiang Kai-shek, and that the Chinese Communists were in power only because they dominated the people there. And Joseph Mcarthy became famous because he persecuted anyone who questioned that premise. So our country evolved its policy toward that powerful nation—the largest in population on earth—under a false premise, that Taiwan was really China.

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be resolved before we could have diplomatic relations. It was an unsuccessful visit, because Cy Vance, a wonderful man, was very cautious, and he had no rapport or friendship with the Chinese leaders of that time.

The next year I sent Mike Oksenberg back with Brzezinski—Zbigniew Brzezinski—and that was a totally different visit. There was an instant rapport between Brzezinski and Oksenberg and the Chinese leaders under Deng, a rapport filled with humor, friendship and understanding. So we decided to negotiate full diplomatic relations.

I chose Leonard Woodcock, the head of the automobile workers' union—who was a negotiator, not a foreign diplomat—to be my representative, because I wanted a tough negotiator. This was still a very sensitive issue and Mike and I agreed that if our efforts became public, the furor aroused would abort what we were trying to accomplish. I also knew that in the State Department there *are* no secrets—there's a pipeline between the Washington Post and the State Department. So we never sent Leonard Woodcock any negotiating instructions from the State Department. Not a single message. They all went from the White House—Mike and Brzezinski and Vance would come over—directly to Woodcock, and we were eventually successful.

On the fifteenth of December 1978, simultaneously in Beijing and the United States, we announced that we had finally established diplomatic relations between the United States and the People's Republic of China, to be effective the first day of 1979, fifteen days later.

I'm sure that all of you know about the US Constitution, which grants this prerogative to the President unilaterally. The President can declare diplomatic relations with any

So it's hard for me to say who was more responsible for our success, Mike Oksenberg or the ambassador's wife.

[laughter]

But Deng Xiao-Ping came to Washington, and we had a delightful visit with him. My daughter was a little girl, and Deng Xiao-Ping was her same height, and they became instant friends.

[laughter]

He had a great sense of humor.

Some of you may remember the so-called Jackson-Vanik Amendment on establishing Most Favored Nations. It was designed to guarantee that we could not have favored nations in trade with the Soviet Union because they were restricting Jewish immigration from the Soviet Union to the US. So before I could have most favored relations with any country, we had to comply with this ruling, that they do nothing to impede people who wanted to emigrate. I told Deng Xiao-Ping that this was one of the requirements. He said, "You mean that I can't keep people from moving to the United States?" I said "That's correct," and he said, "I will send you five million Chinese next week." And I said, "Okay, if you do, I'll send you twenty thousand lawyers." And he said, "I'll keep my Chinese if you'll keep the lawyers."

[laughter]

Well, we had a wonderful visit, and as a result of that, we established diplomatic relations.

Next came the question of Taiwan, and that was very serious. The Taiwanese had been our friends, and they had been *the* China up until that month. And the Congress was constrained to comply with my wishes to a major degree, because the legislation that was passed—the Taiwan Trade Act—had to be designed to continue our relationships with Taiwan (with the Chinese on Taiwan), absent any diplomatic relations. You see, we don't have an ambassador, and haven't had, to Taiwan. But we wanted to continue trade relationships with the people of Taiwan, and they have escalated since then. So have cultural relationships.

And then, immediately after I left the White House, the first trip I took was to China. I told you about that trip a minute ago. When Deng Xiao-Ping was here, we had a very pleasant personal relationship, and that existed until the end of his life. I think he was 93 years old when he died. On this trip he asked me if there was anything he could do of a special nature for me, and I said, "Well, yes." I told him about my weekly five cent donation for missionaries, and added, "I know you don't have freedom of religion in China. I wish that you would change the constitution to guarantee freedom of religion.





Well, this brings us down to the present time. There have been incredible changes in China. In 1981 Deng Xiao-Ping was very proud that he was opening up the economic system of China for the first time. The way he did it was interesting. He permitted small farmers to have 15 percent of the land available for them to grow crops and sell the produce. And of course, the other 85 percent was controlled by the Communist communes. And so the 15 percent were in the ditches, and the washed-away areas, and under the trees. Yet Deng told me later that almost as much was produced on the 15 percent under free enterprise, as there was under the 85 percent. And here's how Deng expressed it to me: he said that the Chinese farmers would stay up all night with a sick hog, if it was their hog, but if it belonged to the government, the hog would die. So he decided that year, also, to let some farm families—nobody that lived inside a town—have a little free enterprise. They could either make clay pots, or they could repair bicycles, or they could shoe horses, or they could grow as many as five pigs, or five sheep, and that was it. That was the first opening of the Chinese to what has now become one of the most successful and revolutionary economic developments in the world.

Well, I'm concerned about some things about China. My relationship with Deng Xiao-Ping was strained, to some degree, by Taiwan. We had a long-time treaty with Taiwan, and I told him that I would end that treaty arrangement after one year, which was what the treaty provided, and that we would no longer sell Taiwan offensive weapons. Instead, we would sell them defensive weapons. Deng agreed with that privately. I also told him I presumed that any differences between Taiwan and China would be resolved peacefully, and I said that publicly. He never agreed to that, but that was the presumption under which we proceeded.

My wife and I have not only visited the main

teachings and his influence on students and on former presidents, how we might realize his dream.

[sustained applause]

### **Russell Hancock**

President Carter has agreed to answer a few questions from the audience. Before we begin, however, I want to stress that your questions must indeed be questions, and not statements, and they should be brief. We'll take the liberty of intervening if anything seems inappropriate. You, sir, may ask the first question.

### **Question and Answer Session:**

*Audience Question: Mr. Carter, to what extent do you think that Cuba is like China?*

### **President Carter:**

As some of you might know, next Sunday I'm going to Cuba, at the invitation of Fidel Castro, with the understanding that I'll have unimpeded access to the Cuban people. In fact, a week from tomorrow, at Castro's invitation, I'll be speaking to an audience like this, in a major university in Havana, and my speech will be telecast live throughout the country.

I think in many ways there's a similarity between Cuba and China. The relationship between America and China, I think, was ill advised during all those years before President Nixon went there, and before we normalized relations. And I think a most serious mistake is still being made between the United States and Cuba. I felt this way when I was President, many years ago. I had only been in office a few weeks, six weeks, when I opened up the right to all Americans to travel to and from Cuba, and I helped to establish an interest section in Havana and Washington, which has given us a semblance of diplomatic relations since that time.

Unfortunately, President Reagan and all of his successors have imposed a tight embargo on the people of Cuba, which is counter-productive. It has made 11 million Cubans suffer; it has turned them against us and created animosity; and it has tended to let Castro blame all his self-imposed economic and political problems on Washington. It has made a hero out of him in many countries in the world, which I don't think he deserves, and I hope that we can change that.

By the way, I think at this point a majority of members of the House and Senate are in favor of removing all travel restraints, and of starting to lift the embargo against Cuba. That has not yet been possible, so my visit to Cuba will be designed to help the Cuban people understand us, and vice-versa.

Another thing that China did first that Cuba has not yet done is have economic freedom, at least in the small, family-operated businesses. That happened in China in 1981, and has led to an enormous increase in prosperity, at least in China. So far, Castro has refused to do that. China still retains political control; there is incomplete freedom of speech in both countries; you can't form an opposition party in either country. But I see a lot of similarities between the two: faulty policy on the part of the US, and tight political control. Still, China has taken a move toward economic freedom, and Cuba has not yet done this. I don't know what the results of my visit next week will be.

*Audience question: Mr. President, in your concluding remarks, you seemed concerned about future bilateral relations between the PRC and its Asian neighbors...*

**President Carter:**

I think in many ways there are inclinations in Washington to maintain American dominance in the Far East, and obviously in nuclear power and naval power we are able to do that. But the challenge is to work harmoniously with China, to maintain stability, to promote peace for relationships with all the countries, and so forth, and I hope that's what we can do. I think there are challenges to the premise. For instance the present plans of the US government to have a nuclear missile defense is not designed against North Korea, who has no missiles and no nuclear capabilities; it is obviously designed against China. The Chinese see that as a way to further restrain their capabilities, and to make the United States more dominant.

I think the relations between the mainland and Taiwan are difficult, and could erupt into violence. I don't think the Chinese mainland government – the PRC – will permit Taiwan ever to be an independent nation without resorting first to military force. And my hope is that both the mainland and Taiwan will see a way for the issue to be resolved peacefully.

I think the massive financial investment of Taiwan in the mainland now, is one thing that will ensure the relationship will improve. Wh

I see good times ahead if both governments are wise, and I believe that that will happen.

*Audience question: Mr. President, looking back, how do you view your decision to boycott the 1980 Moscow Olympics? Do you regret that?*

**President Carter:**

I really have mixed emotions about that; if there was one decision in my administration that I would reconsider it might be that one. You'll have to remember that at Christmas time of 1979, the Soviets invaded Afghanistan with massive military forces. Ten thousand troops moved into Afghanistan, and I felt that effort by the Soviet Union was a direct threat to the security of my country—one of the rare times that happens. Had the Soviets been able to consolidate their hold on Afghanistan, they could easily then have moved either through Iran, which was at war with itself, or through Pakistan. Then they would have achieved a long-time Soviet ambition, to have access to the warm waters of the Indian Ocean.

So I announced that this was a direct threat to the security of our country, and that we would not permit the Soviet Union to be successful in Afghanistan. We surreptitiously—and this was very secret then—gave maximum support to the so-called freedom fighters in Afghanistan. We channeled assistance for those freedom fighters through Saudi Arabia, through Egypt and other places, and at the same time I imposed economic sanctions against the Soviet Union to try to force them to withdraw.

But the debate about the Olympics is the one that was most memorable—you still remember it, obviously. Well, the Congress passed a resolution, with 330 votes in favor, that we boycott the Olympics. The US Olympic Committee, which is an independent agency—I had nothing to do with appointing members or anything else—voted overwhelmingly against participating in the Olympics in Moscow. I supported both those decisions. And I met, by the way, with the entire Olympic team, and expressed my regrets. At that time, most of them thought that the reasons were justified. But I've always regretted the—let me use my own word, the “necessity”—to put pressure on Moscow, because the Russians were then projecting participation in the Olympics as an imprimatur, or approval, not only of the Olympic Games, but also of the policies of the Soviet Union. I didn't think it was proper to do that. So the decision was made by the United States and, I think, fifty-three other nations, by the U.S. Congress, and the U.S. Olympic Committee, not to participate.

Let me say, in closing that I have really enjoyed being with you. I think the relationship between the United States and China is one of the most interesting and important relationships in the world, and I am particularly delighted to be here to honor a true American hero. Mike Oksenberg, better than anyone I have ever known, was able to combine an impeccable academic knowledge of a subject with a practical application of his knowledge for the well-being of two great nations.

Thank you.

[sustained ovation]

**Russell Hancock:**

President Carter, we thank you for your particular insight, and for these candid reflections. We also salute you for your dedicated service to our country. Ladies and gentlemen, these proceedings are closed. We thank you for coming, and look forward to welcoming you at the next Shorenstein event.