

The Carter Center
President Jimmy Carter – Challenges of a Superpower

Gloria: Welcome to this podcast from the Commonwealth Club of California, a nonprofit, nonpartisan forum open to the public. I'm Gloria Duffy, President and CEO of the club. To learn more about events or membership, join us online at CommonwealthClub.org.

George: Good afternoon and welcome to today's meeting of the Commonwealth Club of California, the place where you're in the know. Find us on the Internet at CommonwealthClub.org. I'm George Smith, member of the Commonwealth Club's Board of Governors and your chair for the program.

It is now my pleasure to introduce today's distinguished speaker, President James M. Carter Jr. As many of you know, the Commonwealth Club is proud to have had virtually every U.S. President since Theodore Roosevelt's address to our audience, though not all of them. Today we're honored to have with us an American president we've wanted for a very long time, the 39th President and founder of The Carter Center, President Jimmy Carter.

Let me just say a few words about his background. James Earl Carter Jr. was the 39th President of the United States and founded The Carter Center, which advances global health and conflict resolution. In 2002, President Carter was awarded the Nobel Peace Prize for his decades of untiring effort to find peaceful solutions to international conflicts. Jimmy Carter was born in the small farming town of Plains, Ga., He was educated in public school, attended Georgia Institute of Technology, and received a bachelor of science degree in 1946 from the U.S. Naval Academy in Annapolis. He became a submarine officer, serving in both the Atlantic and Pacific fleets. Chosen by Admiral Hyman Rickover for the nuclear submarine program at Union College in Schenectady, N. Y., he studied nuclear physics and served as senior officer of the pre-commissioning crew of the *Seawolf*, the second nuclear submarine.

Carter became governor of Georgia in 1971 and was elected U.S. President in 1976. It was in 1976 that many here in San Francisco first met Jimmy Carter. I remember the day. His son Chip came down Montgomery Street in advance of a procession, crying out, "He's coming, he's coming," sounding a little like first century Palestine, where something really important might have been happening. Chip plotted out a grassroots campaign state-by-state across the country, and they won.

Significant foreign policy accomplishments of The Carter Administration include: the Panama Canal Treaties, the Camp David Accords, the Treaty of Peace between Egypt and Israel, the Salt II Treaty with the Soviet Union, establishment of U.S. diplomatic relations with the Peoples Republic of China.

The Carter Center advances health and agriculture in the developing world and is engaged in conflict mediation in Ethiopia, North Korea, Haiti, Bosnia, Sudan,

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and Colombia, as well as 91 election monitoring missions to the Americas, Africa, and Asia, and most recently to Tunisia and Egypt. I was privileged to join the election monitoring in Nicaragua and in China.

We have not mentioned his better half, Rosalynn Carter. And further to that, the Carters have three sons, one daughter, nine grandsons, three granddaughters, two great-grandsons, and four great-granddaughters.

It is a pleasure to introduce President Jimmy Carter.

Pres. Carter: ...Thank you. Thank you very much. Well, first of all, let me say that I'm glad to be here. This is not something that I do very often, but I came because of my — I'd say the influence and pressure from George Smith, my good friend, and when

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minorities or have mental illnesses. In fact, the largest mental institution in the United States is a prison in Los Angeles.

Let's look at justice, or equity. I was asked to make a speech, two speeches, as a matter of fact, when 2000 rolled around. And the subject that I was assigned was, The Greatest Challenge the World Faces in the New Millennium. I decided it was the growing chasm between rich people and poor people. Well, we have that in our own country as well. Since I left office in 1980, the income for the top 1 percent of Americans has doubled, and income for the top 100th of a percent has quintupled, because of our political system permitting the more powerful people, the richer people, to benefit from tax laws and so forth.

High school graduation rates in America stopped climbing last year for the first time since 1890; the cost of tuition in either public or private institutions has increased from 4 percent of average income to 10 percent of family income; and the number of Americans living in poverty has increased 31 percent in just the last five years.

Democracy — we all know the state of our democratic process now. When I ran for office, first of all as a peanut farmer and a governor, against the incumbent, Gerald Ford, do you know how much money we raised for the general election? Zero. When I ran four years later against your governor, Ronald Reagan, we raised zero. We just used a \$2 per person check-off. Now there's a massive infusion of money into the primary and general election system, unrestricted by the stupid decision of the U.S. Supreme Court. And most of that money, as you well know, is spent on negative commercials to destroy the reputation of opponents. And that has fragmented or divided Americans into red and blue states and also has divided candidates against one another, so that when they finally get to Washington, there's no compatibility detectable now between Democratic and Republican senators or members of Congress, or between a House that's Republican and a Democratic president. And the blame is both ways, it's not just one way.

We haven't had a federal budget now in five years. About 40 percent of everything we spend out of the Federal Government now has to be borrowed. And there's no concerted effort to address the roughly \$1 trillion deficit each year.

Regarding the environment, up until I'd say George Bush, Sr., America was in the forefront of nations on earth promoting a good environment and dealing with global warming. We're now one of the laggard countries. The Europeans and many others are moving ahead of us.

Well, I'm not criticizing my country, which I think is the best nation on earth, and I'm very proud to have served as its leader. But I'm pointing out to you that in this time of assessment, I'd say particularly for my 23 children, grandchildren,

and great-grandchildren, which George enumerated, for the students that I've taught now for 31 years, and for other young people, we need at least to look at what the possibilities are for improving.

Since I left the White House, involuntarily retired by the 1980 election, Rosalynn and I have formed The Carter Center. We now have programs in 73 countries — 35 of them in Africa. We try to deal with the principles that I just outlined to you in kind of a negative way. We try to go to countries that promote peace, where the United States is somewhat or totally alienated from them. The Carter Center — we go to Cuba regularly. We go to North Korea regularly. We have fulltime offices in Jerusalem and Ramallah and also in Gaza City. And we deal with both sides within the Palestinian community, as well as with Israel, and with Jordan, and with Egypt, and with Lebanon, and even with Syria now, where we deal with both sides in the terrible ongoing civil war.

We see the adverse impact of 60 years of economic embargo as we strive to destroy the economy of the people of Cuba, who are already suffering under dictatorship, as you know. The same thing is true in North Korea, where I go into the countryside and see the starving children, where the World Health Organization and the United Nations World Food Program measure the upper arms of 10-year-old children that are just about as big around as a golf ball. And we have a punitive embargo against them, also having lasted now for 60 years.

But we try to change that. The Carter Center tries to promote freedom and democracy when countries are facing challenges in their governments. We just finished our 93rd troubled election in Sierra Leone in the Mano River Basin area of Western Africa, which includes also Cote d'Ivoire and Guinea and Liberia. It's just a typical place. As the Arab Spring or Arab Awakening has taken place, The Carter Center has been there. For two years, we've been in Egypt as it struggles to form a new government, and I'll soon be going back again. We helped with the elections in Tunisia and in Libya and with the first election in the largest Muslim country on earth, Indonesia, following 50 y

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We get free medicine to treat river blindness from major pharmaceutical companies like Merck & Company. Last year we treated 12.8 million people with free medicine they provided, and we distributed a total of 160 million doses of the treatment, called Mectizan.

We also have dealt with trachoma, which is the number one cause of blindness, except for cataracts. We've delivered 75 million cases of free Zithromax®, an antibiotic, and last year, The Carter Center supported 40 percent of the total trachoma surgeries worldwide. Trachoma is a disease caused by flies gathering around filthy eyes of children and adults. The resulting infection makes the upper eyelids turn inward, so that every time the person blinks, the eyelashes slice the cornea, eventually causing blindness.

We also have built in Africa, or encouraged the people to build, 2.3 million latrines, outdoor toilets. I'm not known in Africa as the one who brought peace within Israel and Egypt. I'm known as the person who builds the most latrines on earth.

Guinea worm is another case. Guinea worm is caused by drinking filthy water from a rain pond where it only rains two or three months a year. The people ingest the larvae, which grow inside the body into a worm that 12 months later is about 30 to 36 inches long. And it stings the inside of the epidermis and causes a terrible infection that destroys muscle tissue. We found nobody else wanted to deal with this disease because it affects isolated villages in the desert areas and also in the jungle areas, so we decided to take it on. We found 3.5 million cases in 20 countries, three in Asia and the rest of them in the Sub-Sahara Africa; 26,500 villages had Guinea worm. We've been to every village and have taught the people what to do so they won't have the disease. We've now reduced those 3.5

Skip: Our thanks to President Jimmy Carter. I'm Skip Rhodes, past chair of the Commonwealth Club Board of Governors and your moderator for today's audience question period. President Carter, we have a huge number of questions.

Pres. Carter: I see that, yes.

Skip: So let's begin.

Pres. Carter: Do I get to choose the ones I want?

Skip: If you'd like. Let's start with a couple of questions I'm going to roll together, concerning the nuclear situation in North Korea and Iran. Is the situation dangerous? How does it contrast North Korea versus the Iranian nuclear situation, and why does the United States have no clout when it comes to influencing settlement policy?

Pres. Carter: By settlement policy, are you still talking about the nuclear — not settlements in the West Bank?

Skip: Yeah.

Pres. Carter: Okay, just want to make sure. Well, I think there's a very close parallelism between Iran and North Korea. I've been going to North Korea quite regularly since 1994, when we were on the verge of a war between North and South Korea, and I went over and negotiated unofficially with Kim Il-Sung. President Clinton followed up and had an agreement on a number of issues, including no nuclear program in North Korea that was consummated in Geneva a little bit later on. Unfortunately, when George W. Bush became president, he threw that agreement in the wastebasket, and at that time, North Korea, who is very paranoid and very isolated, as you know, and very dominated by dictatorship, decided that they would go all out to defend themselves by creating nuclear capability. The first thing that they did was to purify spent nuclear rods from inside very small power plants that I knew about then. The world knew about it. And they agreed not to do that anymore. That's the way you make plutonium, and what they have now is probably the capability of four or five or six plutonium bombs. They just exploded another one, as you know, this past month. We don't know if it was purified uranium, which takes a lot longer, or just the plutonium made out of spent fuel. I think that the North Koreans are going to have enough judgment not to be suicidal. They know that if they ever use a nuclear weapon against South Korea or anywhere else, that the United States will wipe them off the map because we have 5,000 very advanced nuclear weapons.

I think the same thing exists in Iran. My hope is that we can prevent Iran from developing a nuclear weapon. And I'm not sure at this point, and no one else is

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prevailed and came in first in both the parliamentary and presidential elections, but that's not hard to comprehend because 90 percent of the people in Egypt are Muslims, and you couldn't expect 10 percent of the Coptic Christians, for instance, to prevail.

My own belief is that the Muslim Brotherhood and the elected President Mohamed Morsi are moderate in comparison with some of the other extremes. I know President Morsi quite well. He's an engineer. He was educated here in California at Southern Cal, where he got his Ph.D. in engineering. When I first met him, he was a Dean of the Engineering School in Cairo, and he had no idea that he would ever be running for president. But the way things happened, he did run because some other candidates were disqualified. I think he's struggling to bring about a moderate government in Egypt because it's to Egyptians' benefit to be accepted as a moderate government, respecting human rights and so forth, by the rest of the world in order to have trade, commerce, tourism, and so forth. So this is a very difficult issue.

They have fumbled. They finally have a Constitution. It's not perfect, but it's a Constitution. He just took office in May or June, and they got a Constitution in December. A lot of us in this audience might say, well, they should have done better than that. But it took the United States 12 years to get a Constitution after we declared our independence in 1776. It was 12 years later before we finally had our Constitution approved. I think we have to be patient with them.

My own belief is that the so-called Arab Spring or Arab Awakening has been potentially a very good move. All three countries that I mentioned, in which The Carter Center has monitored every election, have moved from dictatorship to freedom and democracy. We may not approve the leaders that the people elect, but I think as time goes on, every one of those institutions of government will be more moderate and more accommodating to the outside world because of their own potential benefit, economically and politically.

Skip: Would you please comment on Turkey's role on the stabilization of the social and economic landscape in the Middle East? Do you see Turkey as a role model for secular democratic governments in the Middle East?

Pres. Carter: Well, Turkey, as you know, is potentially going to become a member of the European Union. I hope it will. The Turks have made great, great strides in my political lifetime, which is not all that long, in becoming more moderate. They have abandoned their military dictatorship and moved to a government of a Muslim nature, but it's quite moderate in its attitudes. I think the Turkish government has worked harmoniously with the U. S. government, and have become a stabilizing factor. In fact, when I go to Egypt and read their newspapers or hear their comments on radio at night, or television, they quite often refer to Turkey as a model for the future government of Egypt. So it's setting a fairly

The Carter Center works with human rights organizations all over the world. We work with Amnesty International, the Lawyers Committee for Human Rights, the whole gamut of them. Every year we have what we call a Human Rights Defenders Conference, where we bring in human rights defenders, or human rights heroes, to The Carter Center, to consider a key issue. This year, the issue will be women's rights, and we're going to have the conference in Cairo, Egypt, in June. Human rights heroes from 45 countries, plus religious leaders, will go to Cairo to meet with us. We have the support not only of President Morsi, whom I've just mentioned to you, but also of the Grand Imam, who is president of so-called Al-Azhar, the university in Cairo that has 120,000 students. He's also the number one Sunni Muslim on earth and is the one who gives the philosophy or the interpretation of the scriptures for the Sunni Muslims. And he's helping us with our conference because he wants to see religion stop being a cause of abuse of women.

There's no doubt in my mind that this is the case — that often, religions do cause abuse of women. I was a Southern Baptist until the year 2000, when my wife and I withdrew in protest because the Southern Baptists derogated women to a subordinate position. A woman now in the Southern Baptist Convention, for instance, can't be a preacher, she can't be a deacon, and if she is in a Southern Baptist seminary, she can't even teach male students. As you know, the Catholic Church does not let women be priests, and the Islamic world also derogates women in some cases. In Saudi Arabia, a woman can't drive a car. And I think that when men are inclined to abuse women, the best excuse they can make is, "Well, if God doesn't consider a woman to be equal to a man, why should I treat my wife as my equal? Why should I treat my women employees as equal to male employees if God thinks that women are inferior?" So this is the basic thrust of the conference in June and another example of the kinds of human rights issues The Carter Center confronts — drones, the death penalty, women's rights, and so forth.

Skip: A reminder for our radio audience, you're listening to the Commonwealth Club of California radio program, and our guest today is President Jimmy Carter. This questioner in the audience says, "I participated in the Guinea worm eradication program in Ghana and thank you for your work. How did you come to learn of Guinea worm, and what gave you and The Carter Center the hope that it could be eradicated?"

Pres. Carter: My drug czar in the White House was a man named Dr. Peter Bourne, and when he and I both left the White House, he went to the United Nations and became Assistant Secretary General of the United Nations. He was assigned the responsibility for the Decade of Water, and his charge was to analyze the impact of water on people's health and well-being. He found that this particular disease was one of the worst diseases that came out of water, and it was not addressed by anybody else because it was so intractable and so widespread and so uncertain.

So he came to The Carter Center and made a talk to us one day, and we decided to take it on. Near The Carter Center is the Centers for Disease Control, and we are able to steal the best people out of the CDC. One of the men there, Dr. Don Hopkins, was working on Guinea worm. He had been instrumental in eradicating smallpox earlier, and he wanted to come and work fulltime on this project. He couldn't do it in CDC, but he could do it at The Carter Center. So that's how we got involved in it.

So we started a tour of the world, and I went personally — first to Pakistan and then to Yemen and then to India and all across Canada; we found the countries that did have Guinea worm, and we started eradicating it one-by-one. Now, there's zero cases in Ghana — zero cases in 17 of the countries. In fact, of the 542 cases, 521 are in Southern Sudan and only 21 cases in the rest of the world. We know every case and every village, and we know every one of those people that have Guinea worm now, so they don't go back in the water and start the disease all over again. So we're getting now very near the end of Guinea worm on earth.

Skip: Mr. President, you recently met with the new Chinese leader.

Pres. Carter: Yes.

Skip: This questioner wants to know your impression of him and in which direction he will lead China. And can you tell us how you look at the relationship between the United States and China, especially from the economy and human rights perspectives?

Pres. Carter: I first visited China in 1949. I was on a submarine, and this was in the last few weeks before the nationalist Chinese left the mainland and the communist Chinese took over. I've had a very high interest in China ever since. When I became president, we had been 35 years alienated from China and had diplomatic relations only with Taiwan. I decided that I would normalize relations with China, and we were able to do that; it was announced the 15th day of December, 1978, and it took effect the 1st day of 1979. Since then, I've gone to China quite often. The Chinese government trusts me and The Carter Center in an extraordinary way.

For instance, they have authorized The Carter Center, with a contract with the government, to monitor elections in all the 650,000 villages in China, and they are purely democratic elections. Everybody in those little villages is automatically registered to vote when they reach the age of 18. They have a secret ballot. The candidates can run for office whether they're communist or not, and most of them are not members of the Communist Party. They can run for reelection after three years and that sort of thing. So The Carter Center has monitored that process for 15 years.

We also are helping the Chinese now with their relationship with African countries, and we are helping the Chinese implement a freedom of information law to let the people of China know what their government is doing. The Chinese government, by the way, calls on us to do this.

Xi Jinping has been a friend of mine for many years. I have met four different times with Xi Jinping since I knew that he was going to be the next leader of China. He will be ordained next month when the National People's Congress convenes. He's been to the United States

think we should do to compete with them successfully. There's no way that China is going to ever threaten the United States militarily. And I don't think they're ever going to threaten the United States politically either, unless they change and make the democracy that exists in their lit

the American hostages would escape using Canadian passports. But you can imagine the difficulty legally speaking for the Canadian Parliament to issue false passports. So the entire Parliament had to go into secret session — the only time they've ever done that in history — and they voted to issue the six false passports. And they kept it secret. So the false passports went over there, and the hostages were permitted to leave.

Regarding the movie role of the American hero, he was only there a day and a half. Ken Taylor and the others were there through the whole thing. And so, contrary to the very vivid end in the movie that brought me to the edge of my seat as well when I watched it, where this pickup truck outran a jet airplane taking off, I'm not criticizing Hollywood, but — when the Americans escaped, nobody ever knew they had been in the Canadian Embassy until they were safe in Switzerland.

My wife and I were invited to go to a French college in Canada last fall to receive honorary doctorate degrees, which we did, and so I watched *Argo* before I went because I knew that Ken Taylor and Flora MacDonald were going to be in the audience. They had also seen the film, and my judgment is that 90 percent of the credit for that heroic and brilliant move should have gone to the Canadians. The movie ignores practically any contribution by the Canadians. But aside from that, it's a vivid, wonderful film...not precisely factual, but I hope it gets the Best Picture award.

And you said one other thing — one other thing that hasn't ever been issued before. On a different basis, we had CIA agents going into Iran fairly often. We knew there was a very close relationship between Iran and Germany — most of the Iranian leaders were educated in Germany — so our agents ordinarily used German passports. Once, we had four CIA agents who went into Iran, and when they were leaving and going through Cust

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Mashuq Askerzada, who was an Afghan soldier who came to Fort Benning, Ga., near Plains to train during the time of the Shah. While he was in Fort Benning training, the Shah was overthrown, and he couldn't go back home. So Mashuq stayed in America and married a beautiful blond girl from Columbus. He heard about my being nearby, so he came over to hear me teach the Christian faith. He was a devout Muslim then. He accepted Christ, and now he's the best Christian in our church and is my substitute teacher. So a former Afghan Muslim is my substitute when I'm not home teaching Sunday school.

Skip: Our thanks to President Jimmy Carter. We also thank our audience here and on radio, television, and the internet. I'm Skip Rhodes, and now this meeting of the Commonwealth Club of California, the place where you're in the know, is adjourned.

Pres. Carter: Thank you all very much. Thank you.

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