

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 George asks you to do something, it's very hard to say no. Also, I wanted to follow in the footsteps of my wife, who was here two years ago, and I can't hope to fill those shoes, but I'll do the best I can.

This is an event that is nice to me because it illustrates an advantage of being a former president. I was trying to think of few advantages of being former, that's one of them. But it became most clear when the year after I left the White House, I was invited to go to China, and we traveled all over China as guests of their government. Then we came back through Japan, and I was invited to make a speech at a small college in the southern part of Japan, near Osaka. When I got there, it was graduation day at the college. And the audience was fairly small because the student body was small. But we had an interpreter that was very good and I began to make my speech; when I would say one sentence, he would interpret it. Then I'd say a couple sentences, and he'd interpret it. It takes a lot longer to say something in Japanese than it does in English. And finally, I decided that the audience was so nervous because of my presence, having just been president of the United States, that I would tell a joke to loosen the audience up. Instead of telling my best joke, I just told my shortest joke to get it over with, and when I got through, I had the best reaction to a joke I've ever had in my life. I couldn't wait until my speech was over to go to the green room and ask the interpreter, how did you tell my joke? He was very evasive, but I insisted. I said, "You've got to tell me how you told that joke so I can do it later." He said, "Well, I told the audience, President Carter told a funny story, everyone must laugh." So you see, there are some advantages in being a president and being here is one of them.

I know that we're going to have a question and answer period later on, and I'm going to cover some things here that might not be popular with some of you, but I spend my time now at The Carter Center. I've been a professor at Emory University now for 31 years. And I belong to an organization called The Elders. And the best way to describe them is a group of political has-beens. One of them is Nelson Mandela, another one is his wife, another one is Archbishop Tutu.

Another one is Kofi Annan, who has been the secretary-general of the United Nations. Another is President Cardoso, the former president of Brazil. Another one is a former president of Ireland, Mary Robinson, the former prime minister of Norway, Gro Brundtland, who was later the head of WHO and so forth. There are 10 of us now. Aung San Suu Kyi in Burma was a member, but we have a rule that if you hold public office, you can't be a member of The Elders, so she stepped down when she was recently elected to the parliament. And this is a group that has some special privileges. We go where we wish, we meet with whom we choose, and we say what we want. We try to tell the truth whether it hurts or not, and I'm going to maybe do a little of that today.

I'm going to talk about the title of my speech, which I also gave several months ago, on the Challenges of a Superpower. Of course, America is now the world's unchallenged superpower in many ways. And I would say that this is a time of assessing what America is and what the future of our country should be. The American heritage has been that in times of challenge, we have habitually or historically risen to greatness. And we realize that in a democracy like ours, change from challenge to greatness is a matter of responsibility for individual citizens. And that's what I am, just a private citizen like you.

What are the goals of a great nation? They're the same as the goals of a great person. They're the goals that have been established most clearly in the religions that we might adopt as our own — Christianity, Judaism, Islam, Buddhism, and so forth. And they are all the same. There's really no incompatibility between a desire on the part of a human being to be a superb human being, in the eyes of whatever God he or she worships, than it is for a nation to say, "I want to be a superb nation, I want to be a genuine superpower in all the meanings of the word."

So what are those characteristics? I would say it would be a commitment to peace, a commitment to justice, a commitment to freedom or democracy, a commitment to human rights, to protecting the environment that we've inherited, to sharing wealth with others. I think those are the hallmarks of a superpower.

Let's look at America for a moment. Let's talk about peace first of all. Since World War II, we've been almost constantly at war — in Korea and then Vietnam, Cambodia, El Salvador, Nicaragua, Grenada, Libya, Panama, Somalia, Haiti, Bosnia, Herzegovina, Iraq, Afghanistan. I don't know about the future. Iran, Syria, Mali? You get the point. Our country is now looked upon as the foremost war-like nation on earth. And there is almost a complete dearth now of a commitment of America to negotiate differences with others. It's not just Democrats or Republicans or a particular president; it's a consciousness or attitude of Americans like you and me.

I'm not a pacifist. As George pointed out, my career was as a naval officer. When I was six years old, all I wanted to do was to be a naval officer. I went to Annapolis, and I served on two battleships and three submarines. I wanted to give my life, if necessary, to protect the interest of my country. So I'm not against protecting us; I believe in a strong defense and worked for that when I was president. As a matter of fact, since the Civil War era, the only president who had more years of military service than I, was Ike Eisenhower.

Well, we need to be working for peace for others as well as ourselves. When my wife and I were on the way to the inauguration last month, we tried to think of anywhere on earth right now that the United States has a major commitment to bring peace to other people. I can't think of a place. The Mid-East is a typical example where there is a need for peace. This is the first time in more than 50 years that the United States has not been trying to bring peace to Israel and its neighbors.

Well, let's look at human rights. America was a nation with the foremost commitment to the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, which was passed with Eleanor Roosevelt's leadership when the United Nations was first formed. And for much of the time during the interim period, we've been the champion of human rights. That's no longer the case. Look up the Universal Declaration of Human Rights on your computer; you'll find there are 30 paragraphs, and our staff at The Carter Center has determined that we're now violating 10 of those 30 paragraphs. We've now disavowed the application of the Geneva controls on treatment of prisoners at war. And you know there's been a lot of altercation back and forth lately about the use of drones to assassinate Americans living in foreign countries, or not excluding within the United States.

We have 166 people at Guantanamo now. Half of them have never been tried at all and never have been accused of a crime. All of them now are faced with the prospect of serving the rest of their lives in prison. Our president has announced that we have the right to send people to prison for life without a trial, without legal counsel, and without any specific charge against them. This policy toward human rights is generally accepted now, particularly since 9/11, whereas before then, the restraints on treatment of prisoners and commitments to human rights were very firm and unequivocal in the United States.

There are some other things that need to be at least discussed. We're the only industrialized nation on earth that still has a death penalty. In fact, 90 percent of all the executions in the world are in four countries — Saudi Arabia, China, Iran, and the United States. We have the highest prison population by far in the world. When I left office in 1980, we had a very low prison population. For every one person in prison then, we now have 7.5, seven times as many people as we had in prison. And almost all of them, or a large proportion of them, are poor or

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 years of dictatorship. So, we try to assist those countries as they struggle for freedom and democracy.

We also work on healthcare. One of the basic principles of The Carter Center is to fill vacuums in the world. We started out just trying to promote peace between countries, or between the United States and other countries, then shifted toward democracy with the monitoring of elections, and then primarily to treating five of what the World Health Organization calls neglected tropical diseases. One of these is called onchocerciasis or river blindness. I just came back this week from Mexico, excited that we have almost completely eliminated river blindness from Latin American countries. There is just one tribe of 24,000 members that has any cases of river blindness. Those will be eliminated within the next two years, and there will be no more river blindness left in Latin America.

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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 million cases to only 542 cases on earth. And within a couple years, we'll have our last case of Guinea worm, which will be in South Sudan, a newly formed nation whose independence referendum elections we observed.

So, these are the kinds of things that just a small NGO will do. I didn't come here to brag about what we're doing, but I came just to point out that these apparently entrenched problems that our country faces and that every one of you individually faces and I face are not insoluble. If we set our goals high and are determined to work in harmony with each other, no matter what our social status or what our political alienation or affiliation might be, we can overcome any obstacles in this great country. This is what we need to assess.

In closing my remarks, so I can answer your questions, let me just say that I believe that all of us would agree that our country, the United States of America, should be a champion of peace. We should be a champion of justice. We should be a champion of human rights. We should be a champion of environment. We should be a champion of alleviating suffering among other people on earth. These are what I think are the challenges of a superpower. Thank you.

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

either, that Iran leaders have decided to go with a nuclear capability, that is a nuclear bomb capability. They have now purified their uranium and centrifuges — they have thousands of them — up to about 20 percent of pure U235, which is the explosive component of uranium. Most of it is 238, which is not explosive. So this is something that's a challenge for us, and my hope is that we can negotiate with them.

There was an earlier deal worked out between Brazil and Turkey and Iran that said that they could go up to 20 percent, and Iran agreed to let the international inspectors come in. So far, the United States has never offered Iran to lift all the economic sanctions if they would agree on limiting their nuclear capabilities at 20 percent and letting the IAEA come in and inspect them. But even if Iran should develop — this is the worst case and I hope it doesn't happen — if they should develop two or three nuclear weapons, then they know that if they should challenge Israel, for instance, with one of their nuclear weapons, Israel has, I don't know, 200 nuclear weapons of a very advanced nature. We have 5,000, and I'm not sure that the Iranians are suicidal enough to want to have their own country wiped off the map by challenging Israel.

My own preference is that we negotiate with Iran and with North Korea as well; we have not been willing even to talk to North Korea for a number of years. There's been not a single day of talks with North Korea since President Obama has been in office. I've been there twice since then. What they want is to have a peace treaty with the United States. So far, we just have a cease fire between the United States and North Korea, left over from the end of the Korean War 60 years ago. So there's a lot of parallelism between them. I don't believe either one of those countries is going to be suicidal enough to use nuclear weapons. I hope we can prevent their nuclear weapon capability by good faith talks with both countries.

Skip: Thank you. Mr. President, this questioner asks, first off, I'm a supporter of your views on the Middle East policy, but I have no definite answer on what prevents real progress in the Israel/Arab conflict. What is Israel's position? What is the Arab one? And why, again, does the United States have no clout when it comes to influencing Israeli settlement policy? And the final question, whose fault is most significant?

Pres. Carter: Uh-oh. Well, as I said in my talks, this is the first time since Israel has been a nation that the United States has, you might say, zero influence, either in Jerusalem or among the Palestinians. And I'm very grieved about that and hope that this upcoming visit by John Kerry, the new secretary of state to Israel, and then followed up by the first visit by President Obama to Israel will be meaningful. After he was first elected president, President Obama went to Cairo, as you may know. He called for zero increase in the Israeli settlements in Palestine; and he also later called for the 1967 borders around Israel to be

modified by good faith talks, saying these would be the prevailing premises for peace. That is generally called a two-state solution, with Israel living within its borders, modified slightly, and with the Palestinians living within their borders in the West Bank and Gaza and East Jerusalem, side-by-side with mutual respect and in peace. That's what everybody hopes for.

My own belief, with which many of you may disagree, is that Prime Minister Netanyahu for the first time has decided on a one-state solution. Under his administration, Israel has been madly building settlements in East Jerusalem and also in the West Bank — nobody wants Gaza, and this means that it's becoming decreasingly likely that you could have a viable Palestinian state alongside Israel. I'm very discouraged about that, and the only thing that can be done about it is for the United States to play a major role. If President Obama will go back to the two premises that he had earlier — no more Israeli settlements in Palestine and the 1967 borders would prevail between the two, modified to accommodate the large settlement that's right outside of Jerusalem — then that would be the best solution.

I think the Arab world will accept this. On two or three occasions already, every Arab country, in fact, every Muslim country, even including Iran, has agreed that is a premise they will accept and that they will recognize Israel equal to all the Arab countries with trade, commerce, and diplomatic relations. But so far that has not been possible. And I don't think the Israelis are going to do it unless the United States plays a very strong role.

I met with some Israeli leaders who came to visit me at The Carter Center last week. They believe if President Obama goes to Israel and makes a strong call for a two-state solution, based on what I've just said twice, that at least 60 percent of Israeli citizens will agree with him. I think the recent election in Israel showed that Prime Minister Netanyahu has gone too far along the road toward ending the possibility for a two-state solution. It's a very complex situation — I've fumbled through the answer, but I've written two or three books about this subject. Maybe you can buy one of my books and then you can get the answers.

Skip: Still staying in the Middle East, please comment on Egypt. What are your expectations for their government and the relationship of each with the United States?

Pres. Carter: Well, I know Egypt quite well. In fact, The Carter Center has been in Egypt, as I mentioned in my earlier talk, for two years. And I'll be going back again for the fourth time to see Egypt overcome 50-something years of dictatorship and move in a fumbling way toward honest and free and fair elections. There have been three elections so far for the Parliament and for president, and every one of them has been honest and fair. That is, they have accurately expressed the will of the people who went to the polls and voted. As you know, the Muslim Brotherhood

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

good example. It's been quite critical of what's going on in Syria, which I can certainly understand. So I believe that Turkey in the future is going to continue to be increasingly influential in a beneficial way in the Middle Eastern region. They're antagonistic toward Iran as you know. They are fairly compatible with Egypt. They've been fairly compatible in the past with Israel, until they had an altercation about the ship a couple years ago. So I think in general, to answer your question, Turkey is playing a strong role that is going to increase. I think it will be a moderating and positive factor.

Skip: Thank you. We're going to turn now to The Carter Center. Can The Carter Center do anything to improve human rights and diplomacy for peace here in the United States? With the help of The Carter Center and the passage of time, much has improved abroad. What can The Carter Center do to improve U.S. policies here in the United States?

Pres. Carter: Well, I would say that The Carter Center takes an idealistic, you might want to call it naïve, approach to human rights because we have publicly come out against the unlimited use of drones to assassinate people without trial and without any judicial oversight. We faced the same basic problem when I was president, and we passed what's called FISA, which established a group of senior judges who could act very expeditiously if the CIA or any other intelligence agency wanted to tap your telephone. If the executive branch wanted to tap your telephone, they had to go to this FISA court, which would then decide yes or no. I think it is something that President Obama might want to consider in the future —to form a Blue Ribbon Commission, maybe not having judges within a judicial system, but with some way to monitor to make sure the use of drones is not abused. We've now killed four Americans overseas. One of them was a member of Al Qaeda, who wasn't threatening immediate attacks on the United States, but maybe long-term. His 16-year-old son was also killed along with two other Americans. I would like to see some very tight restraints that private citizens like you and I and the Congress could understand. We are very much against the death penalty as a matter of principle. I would like to see the death penalty eliminated. As a matter of fact, when I was governor and president, nobody was executed because the Supreme Court at that time had put a hold on all capital punishment impositions. I recently wrote an op-ed piece that was in the Los Angeles Times as you were preparing to vote on whether or not California would continue with the death penalty. I was against it. You voted to keep it, and one of the things that I pointed out was that you have executed, I think, 13 people in the last 15 or 20 years, and the average cost per person executed by California has been \$307 million. That's how much you spend every time you execute a person.

My own belief is that the threat of the death penalty is not a deterrent to crime, and I put a lot of things in my editorial about it. If you want to look up those two editorials — against the drones and against the death penalty — you can do that.

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 once. And I've also met with Li Keyqiang, who will be the vice premier of China beginning next month. So I know the Chinese leaders very well.

The last time I was there, in December, two months ago, they were very deeply concerned about the attitude of the United States towards them, with the new move by President Obama to the Pacific and with the stationing of 2,500 Marines in Australia and things like that— I needn't go into detail about it. But also, the Chinese had a windmill project in Oregon, and President Obama declared that the windmill project of China would be a threat to our security. So some of those things and the rhetoric that you heard from Governor Romney and to a lesser degree from President Obama in the last election— the Chinese monitor every one of those words, and they try to interpret what these candidates mean in their attitude toward China. China is very concerned about the attitude of America towards them in the future.

I think we're going to be competitive in many ways. When I travel around the world now — my wife and I have been to more than 140 countries — you see that the Chinese are very influential, all over Africa, all over Latin America, and I think are forming contracts for political and economic benefit. I think in the future, China wants to stay peaceful. I mentioned a list of wars that the United States has been in since the Second World War awhile ago; it's a long list, and I didn't name them all. When I normalized relations with Deng Xiaoping, the next morning, by the way, when he met with me, he said he had a secret message he had to give me that China was going to invade Vietnam. And I said, don't do it because you and I have just formed a peace agreement for the first time, and if the first thing you do is to invade another country, it shows that we're not peaceful. He said, they would be there just to punish Vietnam — that they had to do it as a matter of honor. I asked if he would do me a favor and not stay very long, and he said okay. They were only in Vietnam two weeks and then withdrew. That was in 1979. The Chinese have not been at war since 1979.

So they're worried about U.S. attitude. But, I think that the best way for us to compete with China and win, if we want to have a victor or a loser, is for us to adhere to the principles that I mentioned earlier of peace and justice and democracy and freedom and environment, and that sort of thing. That's what I

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 little villages prevail in their big cities and counties and provinces.

I should point out very quickly that the little villages are not part of the Communist Party system. They are completely separate. The Communist Party starts at what they call townships, which are big cities, and then goes to counties and provinces. So I think eventually China is going to continue to move toward more democracy. I hope that Xi Jinping will bring that about. There's been a setback recently under Hu Jintao, but I believe that in the future we're going to see more freedom go to China.

Right now, for instance, compared to when we normalized relations, China has made great strides toward human rights. When I normalized diplomatic relations with China, they had no freedom of religion. It was against the law to own a Bible. Now the largest Bible producing company on earth is in China, and the fastest-growing Christian country on earth is China. So they have made some progress, not enough. We've made a lot of progress, not enough. Both of us can improve toward all of those nice things that I mentioned earlier.

Skip: Mr. President, moving a little closer to home, and I know before you came here, we were talking about your favorite for the Academy Awards Best Picture tonight. So there were a number of questions. Let me try to roll them into one. There's been a bit of controversy relating to the movie "Argo," over the role played by Canadian Ambassador, Ken Taylor, and his embassy staff, versus that played by the CIA in shepherding six U.S. diplomats to freedom during the '79 hostage crisis. Can you shed some light on these events, and are there any events that weren't captured in the movie that you can share with us?

Pres. Carter: Well, I was on the Piers Morgan show, and he's here in California, to report on the Oscar presentations tonight, and he concentrated on this particular issue. As a matter of fact, I was president when the hostages were taken in Iran, as most of you old enough would remember, and I was informed immediately that six of our hostages were not taken in the compound by the Iranians. They escaped and went to two or three other places and, for instance, the British and some others wouldn't take them in, so they finally wound up in the Canadian Embassy and the DCM's office, where they were taken in. The Canadians were in great potential trouble then because all of their diplomats could also have been taken hostage if they had been caught protecting Americans. Ken Taylor was the ambassador there, and Flora MacDonald was the foreign minister of Canada.

I was in a very difficult position too because I wanted to keep it absolutely secret. They finally worked out an agreement between the CIA and the Canadians that

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 Customs, one of them showed his passport and was told to go ahead. He walked about 20 feet and the Customs agent said, "Wait, come back." He said, "I've been a Customs agent here for 20 years, and I have never before seen a German passport with an initial on it. They always spell out the full name. And here, your name here is Ira H. Schechter...I don't understand it." So the CIA agent, thinking very rapidly, said, "Well, I have to confess, when I was born, my parents gave me the middle name of Hitler, and I have special permission to use the initial." So he was told to go on through. That hasn't been told publicly before.

Skip: And you heard it here. Unfortunately, we've reached the point in our program where there's time for only one last question, and that is, do you teach Sunday school at your church, and if so, who filled in for you today?

Pres. Carter: All right. I teach Sunday school every Sunday that I'm home in Plains, and we try to be home on Sundays. The Sunday before last, I taught my 603rd lesson since leaving the White House. When I'm gone, my substitute teacher is a man named

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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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