

NATIONAL PRESS CLUB LUNCHEON WITH BRENT SCOWCROFT, NATIONAL SECURITY ADVISOR

SUBJECT: GERALD R. FORD PRESIDENTIAL FOUNDATION JOURNALISM AWARDS

MODERATOR: ALAN BJERGA, PRESIDENT, NATIONAL PRESS CLUB

LOCATION: NATIONAL PRESS CLUB, HOLEMAN LOUNGE, WASHINGTON, D.C.

TIME: 12:30 P.M. EDT

DATE: MONDAY, JUNE 07, 2010

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ALAN BJERGA: (Sounds gavel.) Good afternoon, and welcome to the National Press Club. My name is Alan Bjerga. I'm a reporter for Bloomberg News, and the President of the National Press Club. We're the world's leading professional organization for journalists and are committed to our profession's future through organizing our programming and by fostering a free press worldwide. For more information about the Press Club, please visit our website at www.press.org. To donate to our programs, please visit www.press.org/library.

On behalf of our members worldwide, I'd like to welcome our speaker and our attendees to today's event, which includes guests of our speaker as well as working journalists. I'd also like to welcome our C-SPAN and Public Radio audiences. After the speech concludes, I will ask as many questions from the audience as time permits. I'd now like to introduce our head table guests.

From your right, Michael Bolden, editor for *Development and Transportation* at the *Washington Post* and a new member of the National Press Club. Terry Shea, associate editor at *HR Magazine* and the former Washington Bureau manager for the *Detroit News*. Ben Feller, White House reporter for the Associated Press, and the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation Journalism Award Winner this year for coverage of the Presidency. Jack Ford, Chairman of the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation and son of President Ford. Andrew Schneider, associate editor for Kiplinger and Chairman of the National Press Club's Speakers Committee.

Skipping our speaker for the moment, we have Ken Delecky, freelance editor and member of the Speakers Committee, who helped arrange today's luncheon. Joseph Calvaruso, executive director of the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation. Greg Jaffe, military affairs reporter for the *Washington Post* and the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation Journalism Award Winner for coverage of national defense. Deborah Price of *The Detroit News* Washington Bureau, who we are proud to say is a newly announced recipient of a 2011 Neiman Fellowship at Harvard University. Congratulations. And, Eleanor Clift of *Newsweek*. (applause)

The National Press Club is once again honored to host the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation for the presentation of its annual awards for the outstanding reporting on Presidency and national defense. Our club has enjoyed a long association with the 38th President of the United States and with the Foundation. President Ford spoke at this podium a record 18 times, appearing before, during and after his Presidency.

Fewer Americans have personal recollections of his Presidency and public service with each passing year. And, as a tribute to his memory, that many who do are here today, including members of the press who covered him, and former members of his congressional and Presidential staff. We want to send special greetings to Betty Ford, who is viewing this event via C-SPAN, and to the President's children and grandchildren, who are with us today.

Reporters who knew President Ford admired his dedication to a free and unfettered press. The awards being presented today were established to further President Ford's support for a free press and the role it plays in preserving our democracy. Jack Ford, one of the President's sons, and the Chairman of the Gerald R. Ford Presidential Foundation, will now make this year's awards, as hosted by Joe Calvaruso, executive director of the foundation. Mr. Ford.

JACK FORD: (applause) Thank you, Alan, General Scowcroft, members of the Board, friends, all the people here today in attendance for these awards. But, before I begin, let me pass along mother's warm welcome. She wishes she could be here. But, as Alan mentioned, she is watching on C-SPAN out in California, and sends all of her best wishes, both to friends and members of the media here.

The Gerald R. Ford Foundation has awarded two Journalism Awards every year since its founding. The first is on national defense, a matter that was near and dear to dad's heart, having served on a number of congressional committees affected and, of course, as President, with the wind-down of the Vietnam war and a number of other National Defense matters.

And, the winner for this year's award is Greg Jaffe. And, the citation from the judges reads, "The judges are pleased to report the selection of Greg Jaffe from the *Washington Post* as the winner of the 2009 Gerald R. Ford Prize for Distinguished Reporting on National Defense. Mr. Jaffe's story on the Battle of Wanat was described as riveting. The heart-trending story of the father's efforts to investigate the death of his son,

both fascinated, on a personal level, and created a vivid picture of the challenges of the war in Afghanistan.

The readiness of U.S. troops, equipment and strategies to effectively wage that war. The articles are well reported, researched and written and created a cohesive picture that spanned the spectrum from individual tragedy to military failures and from on-the-ground-- and from on-the-ground decisions by local commanders to national efforts by the Secretary of Defense, to remake the military, to meet counter-insurgency conflicts.

In a world in which national security issues can become both complex and confusing, the readability of Mr. Jaffe's work helps to eliminate critically important defense challenges that foster greater public understanding and of the meaning behind the headlines.

So, with that, Mr. Jaffe, if you would step forward, I'd like to present you with the actual award, as well as the check that goes with it. General Scowcroft, would you-- (applause)

GREG JAFFE: I'll just make a couple of quick remarks. I want to thank my editor, Cameron Bart(?), who's in the audience today, especially for the comment about the readability of the stories. They wouldn't have been nearly as readable without his help. And, I also wanted to just, I guess, take a moment to remember the memory of the nine soldiers who died during the Battle of Wanat, including Jonathan Brostrom, who was a lieutenant who grabbed one of his soldiers, a soldier named Jason Hoseter(?), and they both ran into a hail of fire to reinforce a weak position on their post, to ensure that seven other Americans, who were killed up there, weren't dragged away.

And, his father, David Brostrom, who a lot of the information in my story would have never come out if not for his pushing. He was a retired army colonel and a former brigade commander, who knew enough about how the system worked to ask the right questions and who to push for answers. So, I guess I'd like to just remember all those folks. And, thank you very much. It's a terrific honor. And, I'm very grateful. (applause)

JACK FORD: Next in our awards is the award for coverage of the White House. And, the citation for the winner, Ben Feller(?), goes as follows: In the first year of a noble and newsworthy in office contentious new Presidency, Ben Feller of the Associated Press proved himself to be both a master of deadline reporting and an astute analysis of the meaning and significance of President Obama's initiatives and actions.

With singular surprise, Feller broke the story of the President's selection of Sonya Sotomayor for nomination of the Supreme Court, and then set the tone for coverage of her confirmation hearings by the Senate. In the diversity of Feller's other articles, the judges found that he portrayed a sense of President Obama's character, reflecting in his African heritage and honoring, in a midnight visit to Bilford Air Force Base, the fallen soldiers who speak forever of the tragic cost of war.

In all of his stories, Feller displayed insight and resourcefulness and a quality of writing that was both engaging, clear and substantive on a tight deadline. The judges were unanimous in selecting Feller as the most deserving of the 2009 Ford Prize for Distinguished Reporting on the Presidency. Ben. (applause)

BEN FELLER: Well, thank you very much. I just wanted to take a couple minutes and talk to you about why this is such an honor for me, not just an honor for this award, but the honor of being a White House reporter. My career, so far, has come at a time when reporters aren't held in the highest esteem, compared to other periods. I was reminded of this a few weeks ago.

I was visiting the family of my lovely lady, Elizabeth. And, we were walking around this reservoir. And, her eight year old nephew wanted to keep it interesting, so he brought along a football. And, we're walking along, and throwing the football. And, at some point, I forgot he was four feet tall, and I threw it right over his head. And, the ball went down and right into the water.

And so, I panicked, and I ran after it. And, Elizabeth panicked, and she ran after it. And, her brother, who has a degree in physics, saw this whole scene happening. And he's like, "Wow, this is just great. We've got a whole family of people who actually solve problems for a living, and we send in the two people who just write about them." (laughter)

So, sometimes the honor of this job gets overlooked. But, I take it seriously. And, when I know that it's an honor to be associated with an award with President Ford's name on it-- I hope you know that, Jack, and your family. This award is, as we heard, it's about explaining the Presidency and putting it into context for people. And, the fact that my work is up to that standard is terrific.

It's also an honor for me to be here on the same day as Greg Jaffe. I just met him today, but reread his work before I came here. And, his coverage of both the war and the tragedy of what happened is really compelling and, I think, heroic, and it's the kind of reporting I haven't done yet. So, it's nice to be here with you.

It's also an honor to have my friends and family here, some of whom have no connection to the media and politics of this town. And, they remind me, often, of what the White House is about. It's not just about the policies, but the majesty of the place, and just what makes it interesting to people.

I also have family who are watching this at home in different places. And, I'm honored by all of them. And finally, I've got almost a whole newsroom of AP people here, who are hoping nothing is happening right now. (laughter) And, I'll always remember that, when I see my name on this list of the winners, of award winners of the Ford Foundation, that it's not just my name, it's got the AP name right next to it. And,

this is a place that is as aggressive as hell, but does it the right way. And, I'm very proud and honored to be one of you.

So, maybe not all of our stories solve problems. But, I think that we always endeavor to try to make the White House relevant to people and just explain what the Presidency is all about. And, I think there's a real honor in that. So, thank you. (applause)

ALAN BJERGA: Well, congratulations, again, to this year's winners. And thank you, Mr. Ford and the Ford Foundation. Our speaker today served President Ford as National Security Advisor, the former U.S. Air Force Lieutenant General has advised Presidents stretching from Richard Nixon to Barack Obama.

Brent Scowcroft is willing to publically oppose Presidential policies with which he strongly disagrees. Although he served as Chairman of the Foreign Intelligence Advisory Board for President George W. Bush, he openly opposed Bush's plans to invade Iraq in 2003, predicting that the U.S. would be seen as an occupying power in a hostile environment.

He served as military assistant to President Nixon, Deputy Assistant for National Security Affairs for Presidents Nixon and Ford, and National Security Advisor for Ford and President George H.W. Bush. He also was tapped by President-elect Obama, to help select his National Security team.

Mr. Scowcroft keeps a close watch on international affairs as an academic and as an international business consultant. Ladies and gentlemen, please welcome to the National Press Club Brent Scowcroft. (applause)

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Thank you very much, Mr. Alan, for those kind and generous remarks. Unfortunately, most of the audience knows better. (laughter) It's great to be here with so many old friends. First, I would like to congratulate the award winners. I don't know if I'm supposed to say this. My daughter was on a review committee, so I have some idea how tough the competition was. And, you two are really to be congratulated.

Thinking of so many old friends, you know, we're all a year older than we were last year, and so on. It reminds me of the story of the old geezer who was driving down the freeway. And, his cell phone rang, and it was his wife. And she says, "Oh George, I'm so glad I found you. I was listening to the radio, and there's a man-- there's a car going the wrong way down the freeway." And he says, "A car? Hell, there are hundreds of them!" (laughter) So, it's nice to be with you all. (laughter)

Our national political scene at present is suffering, as we all know, from serious malaise. Confidence in government has plummeted. Political dialogue is broken down. Partisanship and polarization are rampant. And, never before, it is frequently said, have we been faced with so many seemingly intractable challenges, both domestic and international.

The current period, it is claimed, is absolutely unprecedented, both in the mood and in the variety of the problems we face. I think it's time for a bit of introspection. And, that's what I'd like to do for a few moments with you, to go back to a time, almost 36 years ago, to August 9th, 1974.

Gerald Ford became President because of Watergate and the threat of impeachment of Richard Nixon. His first Presidential words were, "Our long national nightmare is over." It wasn't. And, he, in a month, added to the flames of Watergate by pardoning President Nixon. It was an extremely tense period.

And, at the same time, in the country, the rancor stimulated by the Vietnam War-- think Kent State as an example of the emotion of the period.

*** was flowing through the country. President Ford added to that poisonous brew on August 19th, by announcing a willingness to consider an amnesty for Vietnam draft evaders. More about Vietnam in a moment.

Abroad, the Cyprus coup and crisis had erupted in July of '74. And, on August 14th, Turkish troops occupied major portions of Cyprus. One result was a major dispute between the President and the Congress over aid to Turkey, where we had major surveillance sites for observation of Soviet activities.

Domestically, at that time, there was an energy crisis. Sound familiar? Which began with the Arab-Israeli Conflict in 1973 and resulted in OPEC becoming an effective cartel. Gas prices were soaring, relatively speaking. And, we were trying to work-- we, the United States, were trying to work through the two giants of OPEC, both Iran and Saudi Arabia, to mitigate the effects of the cartel activities.

That, in turn, the gas prices, was helping to produce an economic crisis, which combined inflation and stagnation and resulted in the creation of a new word: stagflation. Some of us remember the win(?) buttons. The elections in the fall of 1974 produced a Democratic-- McGovern, some people say-- landslide. Sound familiar? And, the press would forecast of the November election.

Shortly after that, President Ford went to Vladivostok to pick up the discussions on strategic arms control, which had collapsed with the resignation of President Nixon. He succeeded in formulating with the Soviet leaders a new step forward, only to be savagely attacked by both sides on both the Backfire bomber, which most of you don't remember at all, and the cruise missile issue.

In December of 1974, there was a revelation of the so-called family jewels of the Central Intelligence Agency. It was a compilation of questionable CIA operations over previous decades. It resulted in two lengthy and acrimonious committee-- congressional committee investigations and in the Intelligence Reform Act of February, 1976, the repercussions of which are still issues for active debate today.

The clouds of this turmoil did not lift in 1975. President Ford had initiated attempts to unravel the turmoil created by the 1973 Middle East conflict. In 1975, efforts to broker a disengagement between Israel and Egypt in the Sinai broke down. As a result, President Ford declared that he might have to conduct a reassessment of U.S./Israeli relations. This is one of the few times any American President has suggested publicly a challenge to this relationship. Of course, his statement produced a powerful domestic reaction.

In the spring of 1975 came the evacuation of the United States from Southeast Asia. Congressional rejection of President Ford's request for \$300 million in aid to Vietnam initiated after a collapse of Vietnam resistance. This occasioned what was, for me, a shining example of the incredible bravery of President Ford and his dedication to principle and U.S. values.

The entire Senate Foreign Relations Committee came down to the Cabinet Room to urge, unanimously, that the President immediately withdraw all troops from Vietnam to avoid more casualties. President Ford listened politely and then reminded his visitors we had responsibilities to the many Vietnamese who had put their faith in us and their lives at stake in the cause for which we were fighting.

He kept U.S. troops in Vietnam at enormous risk to his own position and his own future, to get every possible Vietnamese at risk evacuated. The graphic picture of the last marines being helicoptered from the roof of the U.S. Embassy tell that dramatic story.

Sharp on the heels of that evacuation came the Mayaguez incident. This was a capture of the U.S. freighter off the coast of Cambodia by Cambodian troops. President Ford mounted a daring operation to rescue the crew, a matter of hours, a few days, this whole operation.

He brought marines from the Philippines. Brought a carrier taskforce on its way from Japan to Australia. Used logistics from Thailand. Put them all together in an operation which successful rescued the crew. Not only was it a high risk, but emphatically demonstrated that, even though we had had to withdraw from Vietnam, the U.S. was still a force to be reckoned with in Asia. And, it also prevented the crew of the Mayaguez from becoming hostages in the terrible manner of the Pueblo, which was seized by North Korea, off the coast of Korea.

Then, in July of '75, came the Helsinki Conference. This conference has become a hallmark of the factors in the collapse of Soviet control over Eastern Europe and the end of the Cold War. Yet, at the time, it was bitterly controversial. President Ford was accused of appeasement and of legitimizing the fruits of Soviet aggression in Europe.

I could go on, but I think you get the picture. We are not living in unique times. Indeed, the parallel to some of the things that happened in the Ford administration is quite striking. And, all this took place in the first year of Ford's term.

There's one other thing I must mention, which applies here. President Ford cast more vetoes than any other President since President Eisenhower, despite his relatively short period in office. And yet, despite everything I've said, and the litany of events, many of them at the time bitterly controversial, Ford is known as a great healer who bound up the wounds of a bleeding country.

How did this happen? First, as we all know, President Ford was a man of great human warmth and goodwill. He spent a career reaching across the aisle for understanding and cooperation. He played golf frequently with members of Congress, especially with none other than Tip O'Neill, the Speaker of the House.

He regularly practiced what Eisenhower was said to have said at the offset of most policy deliberations, "We must first ask ourselves what is best for America." President Ford did not smooth over difficult issues by giving in, but by pressing for responsible discourse.

He convened meetings with the bipartisan congressional leadership on a regular and routine basis, to discuss the national agenda of issues. He used the Bicentennial Celebrations of 1976 as a vehicle to counter anger toward and distrust of government. Gerald Ford turned around a desperate country. History does not repeat itself. But, we can learn from it, which gives me considerable hope as we struggle with our own current malaise.

We are resilient as a people. And, we have a great example before us. Thank you very much. (applause)

ALAN BJERGA: And thank you, General Scowcroft. We have many questions from our audience.

BRENT SCOWCROFT: That's too bad.

ALAN BJERGA: Some of which deal with Ford administration, and many of which deal with current events. First question, talking about the historical legacy and historical place of President Ford. He, of course, was an unelected President because of the resignation of President Nixon in Watergate. He ran for President in 1976, narrowly lost to President Carter. Do you think a political figure of the ideological background and the temperament of a Gerald Ford could be a viable Presidential candidate today? And, could he become President of the United States?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: That's a tough question. You know, the easy answer is no because there are a variety of reasons that the country has changed since then and has become polarized, both partly because of redistricting and gerrymandering of districts, partly because the congressional sessions make it more feasible, now, for congressmen not to bring their families to Washington, not to live in Washington, but to come in on

Tuesday and go home on Thursday. And thus, they don't have the opportunity that President Ford did, to get to know each other and to be able to reason together.

But still, I think beyond the point that the extremes on both parties are probably more outspoken than they were then, that still the country, as a whole, is in the middle. And, in the long run, I think both parties will need to move toward the middle in order to govern. So, while right now, I would say it appears to be difficult for a Ford-like figure to become the nominee, I think it would not be difficult for that nominee to become elected.

ALAN BJERGA: You discussed, in detail, many of the top National Security threats from the mid-1970s, and talked about the reverberations today. What do you see as the nation's top security threat now? And, how well is it being addressed?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Well, there are a wide number of them. And, they are very disparate. Unlike the threats of the Ford period, which was basically one-- In other words, the Soviet Union and its threat was central to everything we did, because a serious mistake could have blown us up, the world up. So, it was a different kind of concentration.

Now, there is no single threat that we worry about, that is likely to blow up the United States and the world now. But, there are a myriad of threats, some of which we don't even realize exist until something happens. And, that makes this a very complicated world.

I think that perhaps the most vexing area is what you might call a Middle East writ large, going from the Balkans through the Middle East into Central Asia and Afghanistan. It is an area in revolution of some sorts. You know, it's the residue of the last of the world's empires. The Austrian-Hungarian empire in the Balkans, the Ottoman empire in the Middle East, and the Russian empire in Central Asia. And, I think that probably is what is most vexing and difficult to find reasonable answers to perceive.

ALAN BJERGA: In your last response, you said the phrase, "Threats that we don't realize that exist until it happens." What do people not realize, yet, but should?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Oh my goodness. If I would-- If I knew the answer to that, I'd apply for the Director of National Intelligence. (laughter) Well, what I'm saying is that, you know, the proximate cause of 9/11 was fought out in the deserts of Afghanistan. So, that's the kind of thing I know.

Now, the intelligence community in the cold war was focused on a single target. And, you know, we knew almost everything about the Soviet Union and what was happening. I mentioned the systems we had in Turkey to watch over them and so on. It was a concentrated world.

Now it's like looking through the other end of the telescope. There are hundreds of countries out there. Who knows what's harboring what in them, which could bring

devastation to the United States. Not a thermal nuclear war, but just terrorism. And, terrorism is called terrorism for a reason. It frightens people. It's psychologically terrifying, even though, you know, we kill more-- we kill more people on the highways every month than were killed in 9/11. And, nobody is afraid to go out on the road. So, there's something about that kind of threat, which really is a problem for us.

ALAN BJERGA: You mentioned the Director of National Intelligence. There are several questions that came in on this topic. This one comes from someone who wants to say, "Thank you for being a true patriot and wise thinker." So, I think it's probably a friend of yours out here. (laughter)

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Thank you.

ALAN BJERGA: The questioner asked, "Do you think the Director of National Intelligence job should be redefined? It does not seem to be working well in its current form."

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Well, what happened after 9/11 was that pressure mounted for doing something about the intelligence community. The intelligence community, the CIA, was created-- the Director of the CIA was created at the same time as the Secretary of Defense. And, they were both presiding over conglomerations of separate agencies.

Over time, the defense was consolidated until the Secretary of Defense is pretty much the owner of his department. That didn't take place in the CIA. He remained a sort of a chief clerk over all of the agencies, even though his title was Director of the CIA. President Bush, 43, started to take steps to consolidate the intelligence community. And, that got an impetus from the 9/11 Commission after 9/11.

It resulted in both a House bill and a Senate bill, and they were very different. The Senate bill gave the new Director of National Intelligence great power, power of the purse, power over personnel. The House bill, again, made him simply the presider over this collection with ambiguous authorities.

This was in 1974, and Congress was going out of session. So, in a hurry that they wouldn't go home and have this bill just languish, they mashed them together in wonderful U.S. fashion, and produced a *mélange*, where the actual authorities of the DNI are not clear. And, in practice, they have-- he has not been able to be an effective-- effective in the manner of the Secretary of Defense, for example-- effective controller of the intelligence community. And, I'll just quit there.

ALAN BJERGA: You were a harsh critic of the invasion of Iraq. But, with Saddam Hussein gone and soon, fewer than 50,000 U.S. soldiers in Iraq, might President Bush's policy be a plus, in the long run?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: It might be. And, well, it depends whether the costs are worth the reward. And, you know, if everybody can calculate their own cost. But, I think we're not-- It's not over, yet. And, that's part of what worries me. Militarily, I think we're doing quite well. The Iraqi army is showing increasing ability to control situation. What you read every day are stories of suicide bombers, assassinations, killings, bombings, and so on.

Still, the security situation is getting much better. But, the political situation, so far, is not. This is a bitterly divided country. And, I think it makes a difference if they resolve their political struggles while the United States is still there. We don't have to have a lot of troops.

But, if they're dealing with their divisions in the embrace of the U.S. presence, they're more likely to be willing to do tradeoffs, compromises, the kinds of things that make it possible to put together a governing structure in a divided country. If we have left, what I fear is it will be a zero-sum gain. And, the toughest or nastiest person will win. And, that would be a shame after all of our sacrifices.

ALAN BJERGA: Given the presence of tyranny and violence occurring in both Iraq and Afghanistan, what different approaches may be needed to make peace in each nation?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: I'm not sure there's an answer to that question. As I say, a lot of these cultures are undergoing something of a revolution. The whole region, indeed the whole world, is undergoing a revolution of globalization. Now, for most of the world's history, the average individual knew little more than what was going on in his own, and maybe the neighboring village. And, he didn't care much. All the struggles of empire didn't affect the average person.

But now, almost everyone in the world is within earshot of a radio or eyesight of a TV. They see what's going on, and they respond to it. Why can't I live like-- Why can't I live like they're living? How could they say that about my country, myself? And, it's brought about this, in part, this turmoil.

And, in the Muslim world, there is an assault by western value systems, by TV, movies, the kinds of things that are considered by some purists an assault on their whole moral system. And, they want to go back to the seventh-eighth century. These are the kinds of things we have to struggle with.

But, I think, what we have to do to deal with the issues of Afghanistan and Iraq, is go back to fundamentals. And, that is-- We're not going to win the struggle against terrorism by killing terrorists. We're going to win it by drying up the swamp from which terrorism rises.

Why does it make people want to strap explosives around their waist and blow themselves up? That is not a native human instinct. Those are the kinds of things we have

to work on, whether it's education, whether it's self worth, whether it's dignity, that's what we need to work on. And, it's a long and probably never-ending struggle.

ALAN BJERGA: Eliot Cohen today, in the *Wall Street Journal*, stated that the administration currently is making a dangerous world even more so, and that it has managed to convince most countries around the world that we are worth little as friends, and even less as enemies. Your thoughts on that?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Why don't you ask Eliot Cohen. (laughter) Yeah. We have been through a tough period. You know, 9/11 was a great awakening for the United States. It was a rude awakening, because wars don't happen in the United States. We haven't had one since the Civil War, really. World War Two, but that took place out in Hawaii, which really, we didn't think as part of the United States.

We fight wars, but we fight them somewhere else. This was at home. And, I think it was a tremendous shock. And, I think following that shock, we first said, "Gee, the world is really a tough place. We need to do something about it." And right now, we have all this strength. We're stronger compared to anybody else in the world, to a degree that probably the world has never seen, at least since the days of the Roman Empire. We need to use that strength to set the world straight.

Well, we started on a lot of things which didn't work out exactly that way. And, we're having a tough time. But, I think Eliot is wrong, in this sense, that we still are who we are at heart. And there's still, in a world that is-- where power is fragmented, we are still the only country who can lead, who can be the sort of gathering point, the magnet for people of goodwill on behalf of great enterprises.

The Chinese can't do that. Russians can't do it. Europe, maybe eventually, but not right now. We're the only ones who can do it. And, with the right spirit, we can still move the world. But, we can't use it by saying, "You're either with us or against us." Or, "Be with us or get out of the way." We've got to reach out, and we've got to explain our values and our goals in ways that people of goodwill around the world will join us. (applause)

ALAN BJERGA: You mentioned China in your last response. Do you consider China to be a threat or an ally? And, does our economic interdependence with China offer any assurance of future cooperation and stability?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: I would say that the most successful foreign policy of the United States over the last 30 years has probably been China. Because, since Richard Nixon went there in 1972, every American President, Democrat and Republican, liberal, conservative, some of them starting out with very radical ideas about China, have come to the conclusion, before they have left office, that broadening and deepening our relationship with China is an important interest to the United States.

I think-- I think we've been right. China is a very different country. We have different histories. We have different cultures. We could not be more different. But, do we have conflicts which are inevitable? And, I don't see them. As China grows and reaches out around the world, we will come in contact with them in a variety of different and more complicated ways. And, it won't always be smooth. But, I think, with some forethought, broadmindedness on both parts, we can draw closer together.

I don't think that economics-- Economics doesn't keep people from going to war. I think World War One, where Germany and Great Britain were each other's best commercial companies, keep people from conflict. But, they certainly build ties, and they build understanding.

And, one of the things that we need to do, very much, with China, is both sides to build greater understanding of each other, and what motivates us, what our heritage is, so that we can cooperate better.

ALAN BJERGA: Last week was the 21st anniversary of Tiananmen Square. And, I'm wondering your thoughts of the development of China in the 20 years since then, putting yourself in the position you were on June 4th, 1989. Would you have expected the relationship between the U.S. and China to be where it is today? And, would you have expected China to become a more western style democracy by now?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: I think China has moved dramatically since 1989. I think, in the development of China, though, that is less significant than I would say was 1978, when Deng Xiaoping decided that the communist regime was most likely to be able to maintain itself in a stable country if it increased the standard of living of the Chinese people year by year.

And so, they scrapped the Marxist economy and built a state capitalism economy, if that's what you want to call it. And, it's been enormously successful. Now, my own judgment is that it is outrunning the political system. And, the Chinese don't know exactly what to do about it. They are very fearful of instability. And historically, instability has been a bane of China.

So, they want to preserve stability. They, I think, know they need to change. And, they are searching for ways to do both. We ought to help where we can, encourage always. I don't know what the future holds for the Chinese system. And, I doubt that the Chinese do either.

What we see is the enormous consequences of the Deng Xiaoping economic revolution. What we don't see are the problems that China faces now, and there is problems-- economic problems, social problems, rich versus poor, agriculture versus industry, pollution, all of these are enormous costs, are enormous problems for the Chinese to face. We need to hope that they will be successful, in the best sense of that word.

ALAN BJERGA: A major national security concern for the U.S. in East Asia is North Korea. China and South Korea fear the economic impact that a collapse in North Korea would have in their countries. And, in 1994, you pushed the Clinton administration to take military action against North Korea. Would that still be your advice? Would the world be a better place had Clinton listened to you then?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: No, probably not. That was a very different circumstance and a very different time. And, as I recall, what I proposed, at that time, was that we take out the reprocessing plant, which was not a war against North Korea, but simply demonstrate that we were serious about them stopping their nuclear program.

We have moved a long way since then. And, so have the Chinese. And, I think we're grappling with the problem, now, that we have a North Korea that is insipient, if not actual, nuclear power, with a very unstable government. And, neighbors, especially China but, in part, also South Korea, very worried about a collapse of that system and what its consequences might be.

And, I think that is what is vexing China at the present time. I don't think China wants North Korea to have nuclear weapons. But, they're very fearful about a collapse with millions of North Koreans flooding across the border into China. They are worried about a collapse and what the ensuing political structure would be on North Korea, a very sensitive border from them. And, a peninsula which has been a cause of great power conflict by every power interested in the region over the last century.

So, it's a very complicated situation. It is less perilous, I think, than the Iranian situation, because of North Korea's position in the world. But, I think I don't see any reason to give up. And, I am cautiously hopeful that U.S./Chinese cooperation or the six power talks can produce some success.

ALAN BJERGA: What grade would you give the Obama administration, at this point, for its handling of foreign policy and national security issues?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: I haven't taught for a long time. I don't give grades anymore. (laughter) I think-- I think the Obama administration has done a great job in changing the mood of the country and the mood toward the country. When he came into office, the Pew Polls, for example, Pew Foundation goes out and does policy polls, takes policy polls around the world of attitudes towards the United States.

Never were they more negative, in my memory, than at the time he came into office. In a series of speeches, he changed the mood dramatically towards the country. And, one of the most dramatic was his speech in Cairo. I was in the region shortly after. And, there was almost a sense of euphoria. Here is somebody who understands us, who understands our problem. And, he's going to do something about it.

Now, his problem is to move beyond the rhetoric toward action. And, that is a difficult and a complicated process. But, I would say, you know, the start was great. Now, we need to move.

ALAN BJERGA: A recent controversy within the military has been repealing the Don't Ask/Don't Tell policy regarding homosexuals in the military. What complications could you foresee in the military should that be repealed?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: I'm thinking Helen Thomas right now. (laughter) I tell you, let me answer it this way. I was a young man in the military at the time that African-Americans were integrated into the armed forces. And, there was a loud battle cry at the time the decision was made. It went smoothly, seamlessly, and I see no reason that it has to be different this time.

ALAN BJERGA: We are almost out of time. But, before asking the last question, we have a couple of important matters to take care of. So, if you just wait for just another moment. I know you put your head to your chair, but we have to keep you on the spot for just a couple moments after these announcements. And plus, it's worth it. You get a prize at the end. (laughter)

First of all, let me remind our members and guests of future speakers. On June 9th, just this Wednesday, we have Ashley Judd, the actress, who will be discussing the controversial practice of mountaintop removal coalmining. The next day, June 10th, Steven Chu, the Secretary of Energy, will talk about accelerating innovation to help meet our energy and climate goals. Also, a plug, for those of you on July 17th in the area, the National Press Club is having its Charity 5K. So, get yourselves in shape. The Beat the Deadline Race benefits the Eric Friedheim National Journalism Library, and you can register at www.press.org.

And now, the prize. We've always been thrilled at the Press Club to have the relationship with the President Gerald R. Ford Foundation and with the speakers that it brings here every year. So, thank you, again, for that, Mr. Ford and Mr. Calvaruso. And, for Mr. Scowcroft, we have the famous National Press Club commemorative mug. (laughter/applause)

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Thank you very much. I'm glad it's Press Club mug, because the Ford Foundation can't afford it. (laughter)

ALAN BJERGA: Our final question goes back to the original topic of your speech, which was the Ford administration and your reflections upon it. Noting the foreign policy challenges that were faced, as well as some of the domestic challenges that were taking place, much of what President Ford is remembered for is the pardoning of President Nixon, which you acknowledged. What would you say is the legacy of the Ford administration, beyond that pardon, beyond the events of the day?

BRENT SCOWCROFT: Well, I think it's sort of what I tried to say. Ford was a great healer. He relished debate. He was a strong person. He wasn't wishy-washy in any sense of the word. But, he was a healer. He tried to bring people together in a way which would advance the national interest. So, nobody was completely satisfied. But, it was progress. And, I think that's what makes our system work.

You know, our founders, to my mind, didn't construct a political system designed for efficiency. It was to protect the individual against attempts by government to dominate individuals. But, it did it by setting up roadblocks everywhere between the executive to legislature, the executive to judicial, judicial and legislature. It's easy to block anything from happening in our system. What makes it work is cooperation.

And, President Ford understood that. You get people together. You sit down. And, you talk reasonable, and you hash out your differences so that, in the end, you have progress. We have to remember that now, especially because we're in one of those periods when it's easier to shout at each other than it is to say, "Let's sit down and see what we can work out," which moves this country forward. Thank you.

(applause)

ALAN BJERGA: And thank you again, General Scowcroft, for coming today, as well as the organizers from the President Gerald R. Ford Foundation. We would also like to thank the National Press Club staff, including its library and its broadcast operations center, for organizing today's event. For more information about joining the National Press Club, and on how to acquire a copy of today's program, please go to our website, www.press.org. Thank you very much for coming, watching and listening today. This meeting is adjourned. (Sounds gavel.)

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