

First Annual Harry Middleton Lecture
by President Jimmy Carter
March 6, 1995
Lyndon B. Johnson Library

W. Tom Johnson:

The eighth floor of the Lyndon B. Johnson Library houses a replica of the presidential Oval Office in the White House. There, visitors may hear a tape recording, which President Johnson made at the end of his administration, as he reflected on his presidency. "I did the best I could," he says, now across the passage of an entire generation. "As to how successful we were, the people themselves, and their posterity, must ultimately decide."

He was speaking for all of the occupants of our highest office. Only 42 men have held it in the more than two centuries of the life of this republic, and the democratic process that elevates them has done something quite special, probably not foreseen by our founding fathers. It has transformed our presidents into historical figures who are subject, in the assessment of their service, not only to their contemporaries, not only to their peers, but to the judgment of history.

And uniquely to them, history's judgment is slow in coming. Time must pass. Passion and preoccupation with detail must give way to perspective, before history's hand will finally write its verdict. Only 14 years have elapsed since Jimmy Carter left his presidency. If it is still too soon to know with precision what scholars will say about him 50 years from now, it is not too early to recognize some factors that history will take into account in its assessment of him.

As the dusk of that time begins to settle, some towering monuments stand very secure. Jimmy Carter was the first American president to make human rights a centerpiece of this nation's foreign policy. In his inaugural address he said, "Our moral sense dictates a clear-cut preference for those societies which share with us an abiding respect for individual human rights."

Then he let the world know just how serious he was. In a speech to the United Nations a few weeks later he said, "All the signatories of the United Nations Charter have pledged themselves to observe and to respect basic human rights. Thus no member of the United Nations can claim that mistreatment of its citizens is solely its own business. Equally, no member can avoid its responsibilities to review and to speak when torture or unwarranted deprivation occurs in any part of the world."

Under President Carter's leadership the United States did not hesitate to review and to speak out. If we did not bring about change everywhere, we did attract attention. Because of President Carter, this nation and indeed the world will never again be able to turn a blind eye on tyranny and political oppression anywhere.

President Carter in his time did not wage war; he waged peace. He waged it with perseverance, and with persuasion, and with success. When the guns and the passions that inflamed the Middle East are finally stilled, it will be remembered that the first concrete steps toward peace in that troubled land were taken by two former enemies walking together at Camp David, where President Jimmy Carter persuaded them to meet and finally to agree.

As the whole world knows, his dogged pursuit of peace has continued into his retirement, and he is dedicated to bringing peaceful resolution to major crises in Haiti, in Bosnia, and in North Korea, to mention just three. These are monuments that will not erode or disappear. I know that I am rushing history a bit but I do it with confidence: Jimmy Carter will be remembered as one of the great American presidents, and if any man of peace deserves the Nobel Prize for Peace, it is our speaker.

(Applause)

Today he comes to us as the first distinguished lecturer in a series endowed by Lady Bird Johnson in the name of Harry Middleton. Harry has been this library's splendid director for 25 years. He is the dean of all the presidential library directors, a devoted friend, and one of the finest writers and public servants of our time.

President Carter does great honor to the lectureship by launching it this way. Ladies and gentlemen, the 39th president of the United States, the Honorable Jimmy Carter.

(Applause)

Jimmy Carter:

It is a pleasure indeed to be back at The University of Texas and to be in the Lyndon Baines Johnson Library once again. This is an environment within which I feel quite at home; I've been a professor at Emory University for 13 years. It is an ambition I had for a long time. When I was a young boy, if

anyone asked me what I wanted to do, my first choice was to go to the Naval Academy; my second choice was to be a college professor. Thanks to Ronald Reagan, I got my second choice four years earlier than I had anticipated.

(Laughter)

But I have indeed enjoyed working with young people at Emory, and I still relish that vibrant aspect of my life, when I have to confront them in the classroom and in the lecture hall.

I enjoyed listening to Tom's introduction. I didn't know what to expect; quite often a former president gets credit for things that surprise him. For example, when I first began running for president, some people thought that a man from the Deep South, even if he couldn't get elected, at least would know a lot of funny stories to tell.

(Laughter)

And indeed, while I was president, I admit that my jokes went quite well. But then I left the White House, and my ability as a raconteur disappeared—

(Laughter)

--until I visited Japan in 1981. I went to make the graduation speech at a very small college near Osaka. I might add that I made this speech without any fee.

(Laughter)

The Japanese still looked on me with great respect because I had been in the White House as president less than a year before, so everybody was rather tense. I was nervous too. Accordingly, I reasoned that although it takes a long time to translate things from English into Japanese, I would tell a joke to break the ice. And instead of telling my funniest joke, I selected my shortest one, one that I told when I was running for governor. The audience collapsed in laughter. It was the best response that I've ever had to a joke. I couldn't wait to get to the end of my speech so I could ask the interpreter, "How did you tell my joke?"

When I asked him he was very evasive; he ducked his head and looked the other way. But I persisted: "No, you've got to tell me how you told my joke." Finally he admitted, "I told the audience 'President Carter told a funny story;

everyone must laugh.”

(Laughter)

One of the great advantages in having been president is that I was invited to make the inaugural lecture in this series, which has been endowed by Lady Bird Johnson to honor Harry Middleton. But another reason I came here is to pay tribute to Lady Bird Johnson. Of all our first ladies, none has made such a tremendous impact on the beauty of our country as has she. (Applause)

The beauty of her character and her strong yet gentle will have made a notable contribution. When I ride through the countryside in any of the 50 states, I do not find it very difficult to see the direct results of Lady Bird's beautification program. All of us are indebted to you, Lady Bird, for what you have done for our national landscape.

Another purpose of mine this afternoon is to express my admiration for and appreciation of a remarkable president, whose sound judgment and political courage permitted him to forge a proper marriage between the admirable conservatism of the South and the West with a progressive program that fought poverty, hunger, deprivation, and racial discrimination.

I will never forget a certain moment in my life, in March 1965, almost precisely 30 years ago. I was in the Georgia state Senate, sitting in a room with a group of Georgia senators, watching President Johnson make a speech to a joint session of the Congress. Remember? He said, "Really, it is all of us who must overcome the crippling legacy of bigotry and injustice." He paused for several beats, and then added, "And we shall overcome." I will never forget the emotion of that moment, when I saw tears shed by Georgia legislators who had lived their lives in a society of which we had not always been proud.

That speech transformed our country, and it also, in a very direct way, transformed my life. Had it not been for the Voting Rights Bill and the Civil Rights Bill that were the legacy of President Johnson, I, a man from the Deep South, could never have been a serious contender for the presidency.

Tonight, I have been asked to speak briefly about international mediation, and afterward I will be glad to take your questions.

International mediation always has been an important subject, but it has never been more important than since the end of the Cold War. It seems an anomaly, yet the collapse of the Soviet Union and the failure of Yugoslavia

have liberated, in a negative way, centuries of pent-up animosity concerning ethnic and religious differences, and political differences, and struggles for land, and contests for political control. And this is not the only reason for the increase in international violence. With the rapid increase in the world's population, and the deterioration in environmental quality, wars have broken out as simple people have struggled for the basic necessities of life, especially for food and for fuel with which to cook it.

Every day at The Carter Center, we monitor all of the world's conflicts. There are more than a hundred of them, including almost three dozen major wars. We do this work with undergraduate and graduate students who focus on each war; they listen to the news broadcasts and read the newspapers from that region, as well as the New York Times and other periodicals, to see what is going on that day in each conflict. Thus, we stay abreast.

The character of these roughly 32 real wars is even more depressing than you might expect. They are much more vicious than most previous wars between major nations, because almost all the present wars are civil wars. The total absence of international standards for human rights protection means that innocent people suffer much more, and human rights are ignored much more completely, in these civil wars than in a major war between two countries, where more formalities exist. By almost a 10-to-1 margin, it is the innocent who perish in these struggles. The most vulnerable are the old and the very young, the children and the aged. They die not only from bullets and bombs and land mines, but also from deliberate deprivation of food, shelter, and medicines.

Another very disturbing aspect of these civil wars is that they are often not susceptible to ready remedies, not by the most powerful superpower on earth, nor by the United Nations. The reason is that it is improper, in most cases, for any member of the United Nations or any ambassador of the United States even to communicate with revolutionaries who are trying to change or overcome or overthrow a government that is a member of the United Nations, or to which the U.S. ambassador is accredited. This means that these wars are basically unaddressed, although diplomatic niceties are not the only impediment preventing our country from being more aggressive in dealing with them.

Since the governments of even powerful nations have difficulty dealing with these conflicts, there is a growing need for nongovernmental organizations to play a role. This is one of the major purposes of The Carter Center. Other universities around the world are performing this service as well. At Harvard there is a program on negotiation processes, and particularly in the

Scandinavian countries similar efforts are under way.

In recent years, we have come to realize the unique contribution that nongovernmental or private unofficial diplomats might make to the alleviation of suffering by ending wars. At The Carter Center, for instance, we are completely free to go into countries like Nigeria, or Liberia, or Sudan, just to name a few in Africa, and to work not only with the ruling government, but also in the bush with the revolutionaries who are fighting against the ruling government. This is potentially a wonderful contribution, but it is not always realized.

Remember that the agreement that was worked out two years ago between the Israelis and the Palestinians was consummated by a private social science organization in a university complex, which had gone into the West Bank and particularly into Gaza, gotten to know the Palestinians, explored and found an avenue for possible talks, and then with the backing of the Foreign Ministry of Norway, finally concluded a wonderful agreement. Unfortunately, most countries are not as willing as the government of Norway to use unofficial avenues when official ones are closed.

An especially troubling situation exists when our own country is allied with one side in a war or other serious international disputes. In such cases, the American people often build up an intense animosity toward the side with which we do not agree. Our allies and friends are angels. Those with whom we disagree are devils; nothing they do is right; they may be even characterized as subhuman. This happened in the First and Second World Wars, in Korea, and in Vietnam. We developed an intense abhorrence of the people against whom our soldiers were in battle.

It still applies. Think back to the three cases that Tom Johnson mentioned in introducing me, plus Somalia. A few months ago it was not appropriate to mention any sort of avenue of communication with General Aidid, who was hiding in the streets of Mogadishu, and whom we, with the United Nations, were seeking to find, arrest, or execute.

Even a year ago, how hard it would have been to envision direct talks with President Kim Il Sung in North Korea, or General Raoul Cedras in Haiti, or the Bosnian Serbs. Our minds become almost closed to the possibility even of communicating with such despised adversaries. Despite our escalating confrontation with North Korea, for instance, and despite the fact that this is the 50th anniversary of the Korean War — it still has not “officially” ended — and despite the fact that there was the threat of the North Koreans’ developing a nuclear arsenal, there was a law in our country, passed under

President Reagan, that forbade talks in Pyongyang with any official of the North Korean government. For three years, President Kim Il Sung and others urged us at The Carter Center to come over and provide some avenue of communication between them and the U.S. Government. But for three years when I asked for permission to go, we were turned down. It was only when the situation became critical, and we were threatening sanctions against North Korea, and a war in the Korean peninsula was imminent, that we were given permission to go. On the basis of that trip we had very fine negotiations, and we have an agreement — still hanging in the balance, but I think basically and increasingly accepted by Democrats and Republicans, liberals and conservatives, as a step in the right direction. When Rosalynn and I went from Seoul to Pyongyang and back, it was the first such trip by Americans in 43 years.

From the time of the coup in Haiti following the 1990 election there, both the coup leaders and President Aristide urged The Carter Center to offer our services to mediate the dispute. But we could not get Washington's permission to participate. Only when we had 30,000 troops assembled off the shores of Haiti, and an invasion was pending, were General Colin Powell and Senator Sam Nunn and I authorized to go to Haiti, at the last minute, to avert a tragedy.

The so-called Contact Group in Bosnia-Herzegovina, comprised of the foreign ministers of the United States, Great Britain, France, Germany, and Russia, decided in August 1994 that they would have no more contact — although they are named the "Contact Group" — with the Bosnian Serbs. The Bosnian Serbs asked us to give them an audience, and I got permission from President Clinton for three of their representatives to come to our home in Plains. Subsequently, we went to that war-torn country and met with the Bosnian Serbs, worked out an agreement that has resulted in a cease-fire that is still holding today, and opened up the opportunity for the Contact Group to begin negotiating with both sides. The point is, it is very difficult to break down these barriers once they are raised.

I might hasten to add that in these, and in all other cases, we participated only after we got the personal approval of the president of the United States. We are meticulously careful that everything we do and say in such an effort is within the policy of our country. Every agreement that we try to consummate must be approved in advance by the White House. We are very careful about that.

Despite that, these activities of The Carter Center have been the most difficult, the most controversial, and the most criticized and condemned, of

anything that we have ever done there. It is very interesting to see how intensely many people oppose a good-faith effort at peacekeeping. It is not easy even for me — a total nonpolitical, let me assure you, at least at this time in my life — even to mention some other nations, like Libya, or Iraq, or Cuba. The names of those countries don't resonate well in the minds and hearts of the American people. Even to propose ways to deal with the tension that presently exist between us and them is not an easy thing to do. We find it difficult even to mention a settlement between the baseball players and the owners.

(Laughter)

Most of the work at The Carter Center is devoted to health and humanitarian causes, and conflict resolution or international mediation only comprises about 10 percent of our total efforts. But we will continue to pursue this as a major interest.

We live in strange times, when for many people perhaps the most important issue is cyberspace, while for most other people in the world the most pressing concern is firewood. At this moment, there are more wars on earth than at any other time in history. The search for ways to understand the causes of these conflicts and to resolve them, and for efficient and effective ways to prevent new ones, is a very important part of my life.

I recently wrote a book called "Talking Peace," which describes the complex causes of conflict and also some of the mediation techniques that I use — not only direct negotiations, not only distant negotiations, not only mediation, not only arbitration, but the importance of holding democratic elections. I wrote the book for college students and senior high school students. I hope it contributes to understanding the process of conflict resolution. Mediation is both a science and an art that will become even more important in years ahead. It is a challenge that confronts us all, and I hope it is one that you will not forget.

Audience: I wonder if recent maneuvers by a Republican-controlled Congress to usurp a bit of the president's foreign-policy power tie into what your organization does; that is, an entity outside the executive branch of government which seems eager to take some of the president's initiative in foreign policy away from him.

Carter: I'll repeat the question and maybe modify it to suit myself a little bit better.

(Laughter)

The question was, does the recent effort by the Congress to usurp some of the president's power in foreign policy in some way parallel what we are doing at The Carter Center, and should it be seen in a similar light?

Let me point out first of all that an effort by the Congress to take foreign policy away from the president is nothing new.

(Laughter)

It was certainly there when President Lyndon Johnson was in office, it was present when I was there, and probably all the way back to the early months of this republic's existence.

I, having been president, am very aware of the sensitivities of the White House and of the State Department. But I am not always willing to defer to them. When we at The Carter Center have an intense feeling about a particular case, as we did in the case of North Korea, when I was convinced that a war was imminent. And let me be clear, when we later got to North Korea, we found that the North Koreans had been planning to go to war. If their country had been branded an outlaw nation, and their worshiped leader as an international criminal, they were prepared to go to war. When we became convinced of this I went directly to President Clinton and asked for permission to go to North Korea. It was only after he gave me permission, and after I had received intense briefings by the CIA, the State Department, and the White House, that we went to Seoul first and then to Pyongyang. We stopped in Seoul to meet with South Korean President Kim Young Sam and his foreign minister to make sure that what we did in North Korea was compatible with the South Korean position.

The State Department did not agree with this trip and was very critical of our going. I had to make a difficult choice, and we went nonetheless. If we waited until we got unanimity in Washington on this or any other subject I probably would never leave my hometown of Plains again.

(Laughter)

Afterward there were long negotiations between our government and Kim Il Sung's successors about consummating the details of what we had agreed to. After Kim's death, which was unexpected, his son sent me word that he would honor all the commitments that his father made to me. And they have done so.

In the case of Haiti, again we did not have the support of the State Department, where there was intense opposition to the visit that General Colin Powell and Senator Sam Nunn and I made. We went, however, with the full support of President Clinton, who had asked us to go, and in that case even provided an official plane for the trip.

In the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, the State Department did not object, at least as far as I know, to our going there. Again we based our trip on a request made by President Clinton. When the three Bosnian Serb emissaries came to my home in Plains, I had some very strict prerequisites that I presented to them before I would agree to go to Bosnia. While they were still in my breakfast room, I phoned President Clinton and outlined the commitments that I had from them. Only then did he authorize us to go.

There are a number of places in the world now where we have invitations to go and mediate disputes. We will never go unless it is completely within the authority given to me by the president of the United States, though perhaps not always with the full unanimity of his staff or the State Department.

Audience: First, how should the United Nations change the way it operates in these disputes? Secondly, do you think the current bitter partisanship in Washington is getting out of hand?

Carter: Partisan politics always has been present in Washington, although I think the vituperation and negative aspects of the last campaign are perhaps greater than any I've seen in my lifetime. But when I read the history of the era of Andrew Jackson, or even earlier in the case of Thomas Jefferson, I know that the personal attacks on those leaders would equal or surpass anything we have seen in recent years.

As far as the United Nations' peacekeeping efforts are concerned, under Boutros-Ghali the United Nations has blossomed forth into a much more aggressive peacekeeping and peacemaking entity. It was successful in the Iran-Iraq conflict in stopping one of the bloodiest wars in history. In the case of Bosnia-Herzegovina, our experience was that the most highly qualified, and balanced, and effective people in Sarajevo were the U.N. representatives there. The U.N., though, is handicapped because Boutros-Ghali has to deal with almost 190 different countries; and the U.N. can go into a country, no matter how bad the situation is there, only with the approval of the ruling government officials in that country. No matter how bad the human rights violations are, no matter how much suffering there is in a war, the U.N. can only send in an official with the approval of the

incumbent government. It also is handicapped by the lack of funds and support in some cases.

In Haiti, at the end of this month the United States' domination of the peacekeeping force will end. We have 6,000 U.S. troops there now who are doing a superb job. They will be drawn down at the end of this month to 2400; we will no longer be a majority there. The policies of the peacekeepers will be established by the United Nations. Then, at the end of another year, in March 1996, after a new president is inducted and sworn in, the U.N. troops will withdraw. Without U.N. participation, there would be no hope at all for Haiti to have a stable, civil, peaceful, and democratic society. Whether it will be all those things, no one knows. But the U.N. at least is giving them a chance. So although there are mixed feelings in the American public about the U.N., I believe the U.N. must remain a major player in the arena.

Audience: You mentioned Cuba and the brick wall, which appears whenever any mention is made of coming to some agreement with that country. Do you think there is any hope for an agreement in the near future?

Carter: There is hope at least that there will be. But there is such a powerful political force in Miami among the anti-Castro Cubans that any rational approach to Cuba is almost impossible. And this is bipartisan. At the time of the boatlift this past year, the United States did find that it was possible at least to talk to Castro's representatives at the United Nations headquarters and bring an end to that particular crisis. The main thrust in the future should be for the democratization of Cuba. The first step would have to be toward a free enterprise system.

An issue that I didn't mention in my talk — I was trying to be brief — is the devastating effect of American embargoes against nations in order to punish oppressive leaders or to require them to change their policies; it doesn't work. Haiti's devastation now—the high unemployment rate, the total loss of their industries, even small businesses—is directly attributable to the three-year embargo that we had against Haiti.

There is still a very intense debate about the best way to bring about democracy in Cuba, where the people are suffering because of an American embargo. Is it better to isolate Cuba completely, as we are trying to do now, and deprive its people of food and medicine, and a chance to make a good living so severely that they will overthrow Castro? It hasn't worked, in 35 years. Or is it better to try to open up Cuban society by allowing free visitation, to let the Cuban people get an image of what democracy, and

freedom, and human rights can mean? I think that the latter is the best approach. One of the first things I did after I had been in office for only about a month, in March of 1977, was to lift all travel restraints from American citizens so that they could go anywhere in the world they wanted to. I think that is one of the freedoms that Americans ought to enjoy. But when President Reagan came in office he immediately closed down the gates and refused to let any Americans go to Cuba except under extreme circumstances.

We are now on the verge of trying to punish any country that trades with Cuba. There is pending legislation that would prevent Americans from buying television sets from companies that also sell TV sets to Cuba. Last year in the United Nations, every country in the world voted against our Cuban policy except two: the United States and Israel. So we stood condemned because of our policy, a policy that is actually working against our ultimate goal of bringing democracy and human rights to that country.

Audience: You mentioned the wonderful agreement that took place last September between Israel and the PLO. Yet almost two years later those talks have all but broken down completely, and despair in the region is at an all-time high. What do you foresee the future of these arrangements and agreements to be?

Carter: I don't quite agree with your premise. The talks are not completely broken down. The prime minister and the foreign minister of Israel, and the PLO, are still committing themselves to continuing the effort to bring about proper change in the West Bank and in Gaza. And secondly, I don't at all think that the despair in that region is at its utmost now. There were times when I first became president when the despair there was almost absolute. We had had four major wars in 25 years. There has not been a major war since the Camp David Accords.

I don't know what's going to happen there in the future, but the United States ought to stay involved. I understand that Secretary of State Warren Christopher is now preparing another trip to the Middle East. It is very likely that an agreement can be worked out between Israel and Syria in the near future about the Golan Heights, I hope this year. So although there are extreme difficulties, and the talks don't have any certain, positive, and final result, the effort is still being made in good faith. We just have to keep trying.

Audience: You mentioned cyberspace earlier and how your students used the news media. What effect, if any, do the global news media like CNN have on

what you do in conflict resolution?

Carter: They affect what we do and what the United States government does intensely, intimately, and consistently. When I go to any president's private quarters, in Ethiopia or in Bosnia or wherever in the world, they always have the TV set in the office turned to CNN. That is what they watch; that is how they know what is going on.

When we had a problem in Mogadishu in communicating with General Aidid, CNN questioned me about what our policy should be. I responded on the air, knowing that Aidid was listening, because he traveled around Mogadishu with his own private TV antenna. He stayed at a different house every night because we were trying to find him and capture him or kill him, but he would only stay in a house that had a TV set. And the first thing he did when he got in the house was to put his TV antenna on the roof and focus it on a satellite, hook it up to the TV, and sit there and watch CNN. We knew he was watching it; his people had told me that.

The Bosnian Serb delegates gave me commitments on six things that they would do, but I didn't want a private agreement given only to me. I relayed it, in their presence, to President Clinton on the telephone, and they heard me. I told Dr. Radovan Karadzic that he would have to repeat his agreement to a global audience. Then I got in touch with Tom Johnson of CNN, who had Judy Woodruff call Karadzic in Pale, in the mountains of Bosnia-Herzegovina, and Judy gave him a 30-minute grilling everybody in the world could watch. Karadzic made the same commitments to CNN that he had made to me and President Clinton. It is much more important that he gave them to CNN, by the way, than to me.

That is the kind of thing that CNN can do. CNN is objective, fair, and inquisitive. They have earned a great deal of trust around the world. In this world of cyberspace and almost instant communication, this is very important. My wife and I were in Kazakhstan a couple of years ago, in Alma-Ata, which is about 2,000 miles, mostly east, from Moscow. The president of Kazakhstan told me that when the coup leaders took over Moscow and claimed that they had overthrown Gorbachev, Gorbachev was in a villa on vacation that weekend. The coup leaders called Kazakhstan's president and said, "We have now taken over authority. We want your pledge of allegiance to us, because we are the government." The president of Kazakhstan replied, "That is not true, because I have just seen on CNN that Gorbachev is alive and well, and he has not deferred to your agreement." CNN certainly has had a beneficial impact, with its instant and accurate reporting on matters that concern us all.

Audience: Regarding our case at home, it seems that guns and violence pose an insurmountable barrier to peace in America. Today's New York Times reports that states are striving to pass concealed weapons laws, and Texas Governor Bush has already promised he will sign one here. What can we do to thwart the flourishing of guns in this nation, and do you have any other comments or suggestions on this topic?

Carter: I think one of the greatest threats to America's societal structure is the unlimited sale and possession of weapons.

(Applause)

In Georgia, which is embarrassed, in my opinion, by being the major source of illicit weapons sales throughout the entire Eastern Seaboard, the NRA was successful in getting a law through the state House of Representatives this year that would cancel all local laws restricting the ownership or sale of weapons. The law swept through the House easily. But when it got to the state Senate, Mrs. Oliver, the courageous chairman of the Judiciary Committee, stopped that law. She is a very tough lady. I just autographed one of my poetry books and sent it to her in appreciation.

Let your views be known to your own leaders in the state legislature and the governor's office; they will have an impact. Write letters to the editor that would have a major impact. Particularly, let it be known that as young people you are deeply concerned about the future of your state. Too often the only voices heard are the slick advertisements of those who want to legalize the sale of automatic weapons.

I happen to be a hunter myself. I enjoy hunting; I have since I was a child. I have several guns. But I don't see any reason why armor-piercing bullets, concealed weapons, and automatic weapons should be sold legally in this country. They are only used to kill human beings. They should be stamped out.

(Applause)

Audience: There seems to be a growing sentiment, currently fostered by a number of political leaders, toward a greater degree of American isolationism. Some have alluded to the idea that the United States should keep its cake and only promote its recipe, so to speak. Do you believe it would be cogent policy for the United States to pursue isolationism in the coming century?

Carter: No, I really believe that would be a cowardly thing for a great nation to do. The world is eager — not unanimously, but overwhelmingly — to see the United States take a strong and consistent role of leadership in promoting peace, preventing wars, alleviating suffering, opening up avenues of trade and commerce and understanding and communication, and visitation between global neighbors. For us to become isolationist and write off the rest of the world would be a travesty on the greatness of this country, and a craven act. I believe we are not that selfish. Yet when we get involved in bringing peace to a troubled country, or in helping people overcome environmental degradation, or in correcting a horrible human rights abuse, that is not only compatible with the highest ideals of Americans, it is also directly beneficial to us. So I don't believe that the effort toward isolationism by some — even the chairman of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee — is going to be successful. I predict that President Clinton will see that adequate control of foreign policy is maintained by the White House, which our founding fathers expected us to do.

Remember that presidential authority is very limited. In domestic affairs it is about a 50-50 deal between the president and the Congress. In economic affairs the president has a much smaller role than 50 percent, because there is also the Congress, and the Federal Reserve Board, and the enormous free enterprise system, plus global markets and supplies, all making economic policy. But in foreign policy the president is still basically in charge. It would be almost inconceivable to me that a president would insist on being isolationist. So I think you need not worry about these threats. I don't worry about them.

(Applause)

Audience: Would you speak about the work that you and your people do at The Carter Center to influence policy making in Washington?

Carter: Of course, we don't have any authority at all. One of the first things I tell the election council when I go to a country to monitor a democratic election, as we have done in Panama twice and in the Dominican Republic, and in Haiti, and Zambia, and Guyana, and so forth, is that I that come there without any authority whatsoever. I don't represent my government; I represent only The Carter Center. I'm just a professor at Emory University, a private citizen.

I do reserve the right to call the leaders of our country to offer my support when I think they are right. I consult with them, and sometimes they seek

my opinion — and sometimes I give it in an unsolicited way.

(Laughter)

There are three basic premises on which The Carter Center is founded. First, we don't duplicate what anyone else is doing. If the World Bank or the International Monetary Fund or the United Nations or the U.S. government is doing something, we don't do it. We only fill vacuums.

Secondly, we are totally nonpartisan. Usually when we have any sort of controversial issue to consider, we bring in a prominent Republican to join as my equal co-chairperson to deal with that sensitive subject.

We don't undertake programs merely for their academic interest, although I know this is a very important role for a university. Unless there is the prospect of a direct-action component, we don't take it on. Those are the three basic principles that guide us. That is the policy of The Carter Center.

Incidentally, we also are committed to the eradication of disease and to immunizing children. All the children in the world are immunized under the direction of the Task Force for Child Survival and Development, located at The Carter Center. Within that task force are the World Health Organization, UNICEF, the United Nations Development Program, the Rockefeller Foundation, and others. We study every human illness. We also are concerned about food shortages, and we have about 150,000 farmers participating in a program to produce more grain in Africa. These are the kinds of things we do.

This past September, we merged The Carter Center with Emory University. When Rosalynn and I are no longer active, the Center will be an adjunct, or partner, with Emory. We have our own separate board of trustees; half of them come from the Emory Board of Trustees, and half are chosen by us. So we'll be an independent entity with our own character.

It is a very enjoyable life, and may I say that if any of you are looking forward to being president, you might look forward even more to being a former president.

(Laughter and applause)

