



Remarks by Ambassador Jon M. Huntsman, Jr. at the Barnett-Oksenberg Lecture

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(as delivered)

It's great to be back in Shanghai. I have fond memories of my countless visits here over the years. I stayed down the road at the JinJiang Hotel in 1984, when I was helping to prepare President [Ronald] Reagan's trip to China. At that time, Deng Xiaoping was in charge, Jiang Zemin was a local politician, the Peace Hotel was a hang-out for local party cadres, and Pudong was nothing more than a collection of rice paddies.

During that visit at the Jinjiang, I wandered down to the original Chinese Communist Party auditorium and imagined what it must have been like to be present when President [Richard] Nixon and Premier Zhou Enlai signed the Shanghai communiqué in February 1972.

From where we stand today, it is easy to forget just how turbulent that time was. The scars of the Korean War remained fresh in our nations' memories, China lost 400,000 of its men, including the son of Mao Zedong, the Vietnam War was still raging at the time of the Shanghai Communiqué, and China was still embroiled in the Cultural Revolution.

Balance-of-power politics and the threat from the Soviet Union provided the spark for a resumption of contact. Our shared strategic interest in a secure, prosperous, and peaceful world transformed that initial spark into a robust bilateral relationship.

The first months and years of our warming relations were very much guided by a mixture of pragmatism and optimism. Nothing about U.S.-China relations was preordained back then, and the prospect that in just three decades this relationship would become the most high-profile, important bilateral relationship in the world was virtually unimaginable.

But that is where we find ourselves today, thanks in no small measure to the tireless work of visionaries, some right here in this room, such as A. Doak Barnett and Michel Oksenberg. These individuals and others like them in both my country and here in China, who had the audacity to see potential where so many others only saw limitations.

They had the wisdom to see common interests where areas of disagreement were so much more obvious. And they possessed a unique determination to push the relationship forward despite the strong historical and ideological currents running against them.

Their efforts were aided immensely by the National Committee on U.S.-China Relations – a driving force for the development of this relationship. The Committee's fingerprints can be found at every historic point, from the ping pong diplomacy of 1972 to subsequent exchanges between artists, academics, and sub-national leaders, and for that, we are grateful.



Today, from the vantage point of the heights to which these predecessors have brought us, I would like to share a few observations on the path forward for the United States and China.

We have come a long way since 1972, but more will be required of all of us if we are sincere in our commitment to elevate this bilateral relationship above and beyond our current challenges and help both countries reach their full potential.

Taking Stock of Where We Are

Three decades ago, not even the most optimistic idealist could have predicted how fast and how far relations between China and the United States would develop.

The frequency of interaction between our two great nations, whether official, academic, scientific or commercial, has been unprecedented. Habits of cooperation have formed that have brought the best of both of our nations together for the advancement of common interests. To personalize this a bit, I hardly visit a corner of this country without seeing evidence of these common interests in the work that each is doing: I saw the fruits of our shared efforts on HIV/AIDS prevention when I visited a joint U.S.-China treatment facility for HIV negative injecting drug addicts in Xinjiang last year. Inside that clinic I spoke to a recovering heroin addict, one of thousands we are helping to break free of the horrific cycle of addiction and abuse and destructive behavior from which both countries are learning important lessons.

I know from visiting the Yushu earthquake site on the Tibetan Plateau last year that U.S. humanitarian assistance has saved Chinese lives. When we travelled there we walked the streets of what had once been a thriving community, stood next to the ruins of a Buddhist monastery and listened as one man after another told us how his village had been destroyed and his culture threatened by the devastating earthquake. I also saw families eating food provided by American relief workers and children using school supplies donated by the U.S. Embassy.

I have seen U.S. and Chinese experts work together to improve public health and prevent pandemic disease outbreaks. Twenty years ago, more than a million Chinese babies were born with severe neural tube birth defects like spinal bifida. That's almost 300 babies every day. But more recently, Chinese doctors, working with researchers from the U.S. Centers for Disease Control conducted one the largest studies ever on spinal bifida.

Based on that research, they determined a simple increase in folic acid could save and improve thousands of lives. The results were as stunning as they were indicative of what we can accomplish when we work together: in rural China birth defects fell up to 85 percent, and the lessons learned have become the gold standard for prenatal care around the world.

I have watched U.S. and Chinese scientists jointly conduct advanced research on clean energy technologies -- technologies that are fueling innovation and job growth in both countries. Projects that would have been more difficult just on their own



And I know that when financial tremors shake world markets, the United States and China come together to stabilize the international financial system. When urgent needs loom or major crises strike, like it or not, the eyes of the world turn to the United States and China.

Destinies Linked

This is not to say that, alone, the United States and China can solve the world's problems. But it does mean that unless our two countries are committed to working together and finding solutions for global concerns, it will be much more difficult for all of us to find a way forward.

And so my challenge – our challenge – is to find ways to strengthen habits of cooperation between our countries for the benefit of our citizens and for peoples far beyond our borders.

Cooperation Needed

Although the logic of our shared destiny should compel joint action, it doesn't always work that way. Too often, divisions dominate our discourse and sap our ability to work together. Of course, it is natural for two great countries to have differences, and our differences on some issues are profound and well-known.

It should come as no surprise, for example, that the United States will continue to champion respect for universal human rights, which is a fundamental extension of the American experience and a bedrock of our world view.

Long after I depart Beijing, future Ambassadors will continue to visit American citizens like Dr. Feng Xue, who was wrongfully convicted of stealing state secrets and is now serving an eight-year sentence in prison far from his family in the United States. They will continue to speak up in defense of social activists, like Liu Xiaobo, Chen Guangcheng and now Ai Weiwei, who challenge the Chinese government to serve the public in all cases and at all times.

The United States will never stop supporting human rights because we believe in the fundamental struggle for human dignity and justice wherever it may occur. We do so not because we oppose China but, on the contrary, because we value our relationship. President Hu and Premier Wen have both acknowledged the universality of human rights. By speaking out candidly, we hope eventually to narrow and bridge this critical gap and move our relationship forward.

At the same time, I know China also has strongly held views on certain issues that differ from ours. And it would be a mistake for us not to listen to their opinions and to try to understand the Chinese perspective. We not only need to listen but we also need to hear each other. Cutting off dialogue and suppressing the news media does not help us understand each other. If specific differences, no matter how sensitive at the moment, are allowed to define the entire relationship, then we all will suffer.

Instead, where we have differences, we owe it to ourselves and to future generations to speak respectfully but also candidly and honestly. And the best way to do this is to maintain a consistent dialogue at all levels throughout the highs and lows in our relationship.



Turning the relationship on and off in reaction to unwelcome events is inconsistent with the objective of a positive, cooperative and comprehensive relationship that our leaders have set out to achieve. Canceling meetings as a sign of displeasure will not encourage greater respect for each other's views. Avoiding direct engagement on sensitive issues will only undermine the respective interests of both of our countries. We cannot move forward if, when differences emerge, only one of us is fully committed and fully engaged.

Global challenges will not pause to wait for upturns in our bilateral relationship; just the opposite -- they will only worsen while we remain disengaged.

Challenges like financial instability, transnational crime, and potential nuclear proliferation by Iran and North Korea are real, they threaten both of us, and their solution demands our continuous joint efforts.

The true test of our relationship lies in how we rise above our differences to meet these challenges. Effective cooperation on global challenges would improve the lives of Americans, Chinese, and those beyond our borders, and in the process would also help us to transcend some of the bilateral challenges we confront.

Cooperation is not a concession, but rather a sign of confidence: confidence in each other; and confidence in our shared ability to strengthen the global economy, to improve the health of the global environment, and to promote peace around the world.

I believe that as China continues to move in the direction of the political and economic reforms that some Chinese leaders have articulated so eloquently, its sense of confidence will only grow. And as that confidence grows, so too will our ability to work together.

This is my hope, this is my expectation, and it is also, I believe, imperative because, just as cooperation can create a virtuous cycle, an absence of cooperation can produce the opposite effect.

Leadership Needed

But how do we encourage a positive evolution in our relationship that is durable and sustainable? First and foremost, leadership will be essential, and it will soon fall to our younger generations to provide that leadership. Today's leaders may struggle with the legacy of outdated ideologies or past differences, but the next generation in both countries will carry with them a profoundly more global outlook.

These future leaders will need to be as farsighted about the bilateral relationship as those that came before them. Just as before, the future direction of U.S.-China relations is not preordained. It is in our hands – and soon will be in the next generation's hands – to guide, shape, and to lead.

They will need fortitude to avoid the temptation to blame the other country for the challenges they face. They will need confidence to think creatively and act boldly. They will need vision to focus attention on the shared benefits of a cooperative U.S.-China relationship. And they will need determination to develop the relationship even during those inevitable periods of bilateral tension.



I have had the distinct honor as United States Ambassador to China to meet with thousands of Chinese teenagers and university students. I am particularly pleased to see some of China's youth here today, and I hope they will forgive me for offering some humble and unsolicited advice.

I believe there is a very good chance that some of you, one day, will be helping to lead this country. I am certain, however, that you and your cohort will have a profound impact, not only on the people of China, but on the people of the United States and the rest of world.

As a former businessman, former politician, former diplomat, and perhaps most important-- 30-year student of this relationship, I have four simple recommendations for you as you focus on the broader, more bedeviling challenges of U.S.-China relations in the years ahead.

1. Invest in people-to-people interaction. iPhones, iPads, Twitter and all the other new technologies that are beginning to define the way we communicate are all only tools; and they cannot replace real-world relationships. We cannot rely on even the most advanced communications technology to improve U.S.-China relations. Only people can do this because in the end, it's good old fashioned heart-to-heart and mind-to-mind contact takes us beyond the headlines and helps deepens trust. Increasing people-to-people exchanges between our countries is the most important long-term investment bar-none.

The more that Americans get to know China and vice versa, the broader the support will be for the continued development of the relationship. For in spite of the immense scale of our relationship, the simple fact remains: individuals – including all of you present today – shape U.S.-China relations. In order for our relationship to have the strength to advance shared goals, it cannot exist solely between governments. It requires the support of every segment of society.

So, use the tools we have available to us, including, especially, the Internet. But use them to share information, increase understanding and build relationships, not to erect barriers or foment distrust.

2. Respect culture. Our two countries have different histories, customs, and political traditions that inform how we engage each other. We all should appreciate this fact and dedicate more mutual effort to cracking each other's code, so to speak, by understanding the elements of our two societies that influence and inform our behavior.

If we want to communicate a shared vision for the future, we need first to appreciate how much our different histories, culture, geography and political systems impact how we pursue our goals today.

3. Humanize the relationship. Your generation will have the technology and the reach literally to bring the bilateral relationship into the home of every American and Chinese family. When you do, I hope you do it in a way that highlights the benefits – and not just the tensions – that each of us derive from productive U.S.-China relationship. Humanizing or bringing down to earth the highly complicated U.S.-China relationship- from the interactions among our leaders to those among our businessmen, scholars, artists and athletes – will make a seemingly vast and complex and distant relationship feel closer and more tangible.

Citizens on both sides of the Pacific will need to better understand now they directly benefit from a strong U.S.-China relationship if it is to succeed beyond your generation because citizens will be increasingly in a position to make their feelings known.



4. Tackle misperceptions. Misperceptions can be corrosive. Left unchecked, they can take on an aura of reality and even shape our policies toward each other. At base, misperceptions are fed by a lack of mutual trust. As you reach positions of authority, be brutally honest with your American counterparts about China's concerns and aspirations. Trust is born out of such honesty and, ultimately, trust will be the fuel that takes this bilateral relationship to ever higher heights.

Later this month I will return to the United States, but our work will continue. The bilateral relationship will keep evolving. Challenges and opportunities will continue to emerge. Others will watch our every move as well they should.

As I prepare to step down as U.S. Ambassador to China, I leave this country more certain than ever before that there is no relationship anywhere in the world, that is so full of potential as this one- potential to do good if we focus our energies, potential to do harm if we let this opportunity pass us by.

With the world in such desperate need for leadership, we should all set our sights ever higher.

Working together, the U.S. and China should help relieve human suffering relief in regions of the world unreachable by others. We should strive to find cures for diseases like cancer and AIDS. We should lead the world in innovating clean energy technology that can create jobs while improving quality of life.

Together, we should be lifting the world.

There is so much to do but so few who can do it. Those of us who are able, need to stand up and make a difference. I have every confidence that the U.S. China relationship is poised to lead the challenges and opportunities. It is all made possible by first understanding each other even better than we do today. This is something we all should embrace. Thank you very much for having me.