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*The B.C. Lee Lectures*

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## Reflections On U.S.-Asia Relations

*By Henry Kissinger*

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# *B.C. Lee Lecture*

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THE HERITAGE FOUNDATION

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The Asian Studies Center of The Heritage Foundation was established in 1983 to focus the attention of policy makers in Washington on U. S. economic and security interests in the increasingly dynamic Asia-Pacific region. Its purpose is to promote mutual understanding and enhance cooperation between the United States and the countries of the Asia-Pacific region.

The Heritage Foundation also takes great pride in dedicating an executive conference room to the memory of the late B.C. Lee. Mr. Lee was a true visionary. Through his leadership, the Samsung Group contributed greatly both to the economic development and well-being of the Korean people and to the development of mutually beneficial relations between the people of the Republic of Korea and the United States.

## *The First Annual B.C. Lee Lecture*

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*Dinner*

*Introduction*

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*The B.C. Lee Lecture*

*The Honorable Henry Kissinger*

# Reflections on U.S.-Asia Relations

## By Henry Kissinger

This is a complex period for American foreign policy. We have achieved a tremendous victory in the Cold War. If one compares what American leaders said in the late 1940s and early 1950s with what has come about, there is a truly extraordinary correlation. In fact, it is rare to find—I can think of no example—where a nation brought about as closely what it had set out to do or in so short a period of time.

But such a success brings one face to face with a dilemma that was described by George Bernard Shaw when he said: "There are two tragedies in life. One is to fail to fulfill your heart's desire, and the second is to fulfill your heart's desire." That is the challenge for our period, and it comes at a moment when many of the traditional premises of what foreign policy ought to be ought to be re-examined.

The American international experience has been unique. We are the only major country that was populated almost entirely by immigrants; the only major country whose history has a definite beginning which can be dated; the only major country that has never had a powerful neighbor; and, therefore, the only major country that could believe its involvement in foreign affairs was entirely up to it, that it could choose its involvements and withdraw from them at will. Also, the immigrant experience gave rise to the conviction that, by making the world conform to its own domestic experiences, it could guarantee universal peace and the end of international conflicts. The ideas of collective security, self-determination, and world government were largely introduced by Amer-

ica into international affairs. Unchallenged within the United States, they have dominated the thinking of our century.

Now the United States finds itself in a unique position in terms of its past. All its previous foreign involvements were triggered by the perception of some specific threat. Each major effort of the United States was viewed by its leaders as bringing about some sort of terminal point after which the world would live in an atmosphere of reconciliation. Thus, all of the great initiatives of the post-World War II period were given terminal dates. Today, we dwell in a world without a clear-cut strategic adversary. We live also in a world without a specific ideological enemy, or many ideological adversaries, whichever way one wants to put it. We have not yet developed, and we may not be able to develop, a concept of some kind of terminal point toward which we are working. And yet, at this precise moment, we are the strongest military power, the only super power, the most vital economic power, and a nation on whose actions as much depends as it did in the immediate post-World War II period.

Yet, in the immediate post-World War II period, we were re-enacting to some extent the two seminal national experiences of this half-century: overcoming the Great Depression of the 1930s and overcoming our enemies in World War II. In the period into which we are now heading, we do not have such clear-cut agendas or precedents of approach. So there must be a debate in America. It will not be easy to formulate a bipartisan approach under present conditions because the premises are not self-evident. There is a big difference between whether one believes that all problems must be dealt with primarily multilaterally, or whether there has to be a clear definition of a national interest. It makes a difference whether one believes that alliances are still valid or whether one believes that alliances are a vestige of a forgotten or transcended

period and can therefore be largely ignored. I am struck by the fact that in very few of the public statements of our politicians does one find what used to be almost ritualistic statements about the Atlantic Alliance and other alliances. Precisely because they were ritualistic, they provided a fundamental anchor in the days when I was in government, as they did before and after. It would have been impossible to clear a presidential speech about foreign policy if it did not mention the Atlantic Alliance or our relationship with Korea or other allies—even if it made for a very general sentence; today, general speeches which make no NATO reference are the rule. I point this out only to illustrate that a philosophical issue must be there.

The traditional American premise that there was some general principle which could be applied equally in every part of the world —for example, containment or the spread of democracy as the principal goal of foreign policy—is very difficult to apply in the present period. In a way, it is probably what led us into the tragedy of Vietnam, which is to say that, even during the Cold War period, it did not apply fully. In the present period, the United States has to begin with some concept of its national interest in various regions of the world, and that national interest must of course encompass our moral and social values, but it must also relate these to other concerns.

I want to make these general statements before I turn to my discussion of Asia because Asia is the region of the world in which American thinking is in many respects in greatest need of clarification. (I must say that I have read the various Heritage papers on the subject with considerable agreement.)

In Europe, we are dealing with nations exhausted by their experiences in war and unlikely ever to consider each other as enemies; they have become strategic allies working toward some sense of community. But even if they do not fulfill that goal, conflict among them is extremely improbable. In Europe, the real question is where the borders of Europe begin, what should happen to the nations of Central Europe, and what is to be the new relationship with Russia and with the successor states of the Soviet Union.

But in Asia, we are dealing with nations that in no sense consider themselves part of a single community. In Asia, we are dealing with societies each of which is in a process of fundamental transformation determined to an extraordinary extent by national and cultural characteristics. It may be possible to speak of an Asia-Pacific Community in the economic sense but, politically, the relationships of Japan, China, Korea, and Asian Russia to each other, as well as the relationship of all these nations toward Southeast Asia, is not defined primarily by a sense of living in a community. Many of them have closer relationships with the United States than they have with each other. Moreover, the end of the Cold War has affected all of us in very special ways.

Let me begin with Japan. Some Americans have the tendency to believe that all of history works automatically toward our preferred institutions and that conversion to these is the ultimate goal of foreign policy. Therefore, we had the conviction that, after its defeat in World War II, Japan would evolve into a society very similar to ours. In Japan, we thought we saw a permanent feature of the post-war international scene. But that could not be the case. Under the shock of defeat, Japan gave its priority to economics. After the trauma of World War II, it was natural for a country defeated for the first time in its history to attempt to emulate some of the methods of the victor. It was also the quickest way toward re-

covery. Moreover, with only one clear-cut enemy, the Soviet Union, strategic objectives of the United States and Japan were bound to run parallel.

With the collapse of the Soviet Union and the emergence of a new generation in Japan, it seems inevitable that Japanese foreign policy will take a more national turn. It is inherent in the politics of the region and accelerated by the single-focus approach of American foreign policy that has produced one trade crisis after another. To maintain the alliance, which is desirable, requires restoring political dialogue. Yet, when it comes to Japanese culture, producing dialogues of any kind is not exactly an easy assignment. The Japanese communicate by creating a mood. We communicate by asking direct questions. When a Japanese Prime Minister says "yes," it only means that he has understood what has been said, not that he is going to do it. Conceptual discussions of strategic and political issues therefore do not come easily with the Japanese.

And yet the Japanese-American relationship will not prosper unless it is broadened beyond trade issues. Some common conception of the political evolution of at least Northeast Asia, and probably all of Asia, is needed. That dialogue remains yet to be conducted, and really needs to be conducted—not only on the governmental level, perhaps not even primarily on the governmental level, but in the many institutions that were so important in establishing some sort of common approach with the West European nations during the period of the Cold War.

Our relations with China, too, suffer from cultural shock. In China, most provinces have a population larger than the largest European country. And if you ask a Chinese to date something, he will mention a dynasty, whereas a Westerner would give you a date. But most dynasties have lasted longer than the entire history

of the United States, which inevitably produces a difference in time perspective.

What China has wanted from the beginning of our dialogue in 1971 was to have a strategic relationship in the widest sense. They seek an understanding of our perception of the evolution that was going to take place in Asia and preferably in the world, and then to see whether we could come to an agreement—not in the way allies do, but in some fashion leading to a framework to enable us to comprehend their actions.

Having the longest uninterrupted history of any nation of the world, the Chinese have been obliged to deal with many idiosyncrasies, so I think the Chinese can understand, even if they don't agree, that we should have certain moral preferences which need to be taken into account, and that indeed we have every right and indeed need to make those clear. But the key issue in our relationship is how we can bring our various priorities into a relationship to each other that enables us to act on behalf of our mutual interests and in as coordinated a way as circumstances allow. I believe that, in Asia, stability requires a major effort of understanding between the United States and China and, therefore, I have opposed efforts to sanction China even on issues where I have agreed with the objectives of those who recommend the sanctions. It is extraordinarily important the United States and China find a way toward a serious political dialogue which, at this moment, is not taking place adequately.

Having discussed these two major countries, let me say something about Korea. Korea was the first Asian country in which I spent any amount of time. I was there during the Korean War, and I traveled from Pusan to Seoul in a rickety troop train. I have seen Seoul when it was devastated, and all the cities that had been occu-

pied by the enemy troops. It took courage and dedication to rebuild this country at a time when it was conventional wisdom that Korea was doomed forever to being an underdeveloped, somewhat backward Asian society. I have tremendous admiration for what Korea has been through. As a veteran of the Vietnam negotiations, I am also very conscious of what happens in a divided country when one party participates in negotiations, not necessarily to achieve an agreement but to delegitimize the other party, especially when the other party is our ally.

The rule with which we could start in Korea is to do nothing to permit it to become isolated or separated from us. Therefore, in all negotiations involving the future of the Korean Peninsula, we should not talk with the North Koreans without the participation of South Korea; and if the North Koreans are not willing to do this, then I don't think we should talk to them. (There may be issues that are bilateral between us and North Korea which could be dealt with separately.) We should also keep in mind that our interests with respect to Korea are not always the same as those of Korea's neighbors.

I am not happy about the way that the Korean Nuclear Agreement came about. I don't think it is good policy to have an American negotiation in Korea that excludes Seoul, and I am uneasy about our having acquiesced to the nuclear status quo in the peninusula. On the other hand, we have an agreement, and the best that can be done now is to be very cautious about making sure that the obligations of that agreement are rigorously carried out.

I don't want to go through every country of Asia with the same kind of analysis, but my basic point is that Asia is undergoing a tremendous economic revolution. I find the changes in China, which I visit every year, awe-inspiring. I remember what China looked

like in 1970 and even in 1979 when compared with what it is now. I can see happening in China in the next century what happened to Japan in this century as a premier economic power, whatever the political situation.

Throughout Southeast Asia, we face an extraordinary opportunity. The United States is present everywhere, yet to take one issue and make it the test of an extraordinarily complex relationship would be a mistake. Still, in no Asian country would America's withdrawal be welcome. In Southeast Asia, as they pointed out to me, the strategic divisions run along the line of which nations are more concerned about Vietnam and which are more concerned about China. Those more concerned about China are friendly with Vietnam. Those more concerned about Vietnam are friendlier with China.

In conclusion, what does all this mean for the United States? If you ask the nations I have mentioned to list their principal security threat, not one of them would name the United States. Not one. Each of them would refer to some other country of the region. The United States is an Asian power for a unique reason. It is the only major power that not only can afford to but has an obligation to have friendly relations with all of the nations of Asia. It is the only power that can conduct simultaneous dialogue with China, Japan, and both Koreas and maintain a position in Southeast Asia.

So, in this sense, what goes on in Asia affects our perception of international affairs in general. One often hears that this sort of analysis is now outdated and that we should emphasize the environment, population issues, and drug abuse. Those of you who know Asia should ask yourselves this: if this were the only thing we could talk about, how would we handle what I have described in geopolitical terms? Yes, these are issues with some consequence

and, in the decades ahead, they will undoubtedly become of still greater consequence. But what is immediately required is to contribute to a structure of relationships in vital and crucial regions of Asia.

Since World War I, all the great decisions in foreign policy have in one way or another come from the United States. It is a truism to say that this must be so when all the world is looking to us. Yet it must be the case for a few more decades. That is our burden, our obligation, and our opportunity.

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