Amos (Joe) Jordan received his B.S. from the U.S. Military Academy, and attended Oxford University as a Rhodes Scholar, earning B.A. and M.A. degrees in philosophy, political science, and economics. He received a Ph.D. in international relations from Columbia University.

Jordan was President of the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) in Washington, DC from 1983-88. He headed its Asia-focused, Honolulu-based subsidiary, the Pacific Forum, CSIS from 1990-94. He is currently a Senior Advisor at CSIS and counselor at the Pacific Forum as well as a Senior Fellow at the Wheatley Institution at BYU.

Jordan served in the U.S. Eighth Army and the U.S. Economic Aid Mission to Korea from 1954-55. He was a Professor of Social Sciences at the Military Academy at West Point for 17 years, responsible for its political science and economic programs. While there, he also served as the Special Political Advisor to the U.S. Ambassador to India (1963-64), spent a sabbatical as a Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, and was detailed to short special assignments to the White House, the Secretary of Defense, and the Commander of U.S. Forces in Vietnam.

He retired from the military in 1972 as a Brigadier General to become Director of the Aspen Institute. In 1974, he was Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for International Security Affairs, and in 1976, he became Deputy Undersecretary and Acting Undersecretary of State.

Dr. Jordan has been a consultant to the National Security Council, the Agency for International Development and other organizations. He has also served as International co-chairman of the Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) and co-chairman of the Korean-American Wiseman Council. From 1989-1993, he was a member of the President's Intelligence Oversight Board. His most widely used publication is American National Security: Policy and Process (Johns Hopkins, 6th Edition, 2009).
It’s Half-Time in America: Major International Challenges Ahead

At the 2012 Super Bowl Clint Eastwood said, “It’s halftime. Both teams are in their locker rooms discussing what they can do to win this game in the second half. It’s halftime in America, too. People are out of work and they’re hurting, and we’re all scared, because this isn’t a game. . . . The fog of division, discord, and blame makes it hard to see what lies ahead.” Then he went on to assert that we can and will find a way, pulling together to win in the second half. He added “We find a way through tough times, and if we can’t find a way, then we’ll make one.” Despite the formidable challenges now facing our nation, I share Eastwood’s basic optimism. This evening I will discuss several of those outstanding challenges and ways to meet and master them.

The first and most immediate challenge, the overwhelming challenge facing us, is getting our national house in order. This task has a number of dimensions. I will tackle only two of them, the most urgent ones: the nation’s fiscal mess and the status of our K–12 education. Other important ones, such as chronic high unemployment, the growing gap between the rich and the poor in our society, and our decaying national infrastructure also merit attention, but we do not have time to tackle all of them right now.

Our fiscal problem stems from the fact that, as a nation, we have, for about three decades, been spending more dollars than we have been taking in through taxation and other revenue measures. We have been making up the very large shortfalls by borrowing, in many cases from abroad, mostly from China, as well as from American bond buyers. These years of the locust have produced a national debt that is almost overwhelming in its dimension. It is approaching 17 trillion dollars.

Now I do not know about you, but I have a hard time grasping the idea of a “trillion.” I can think in terms of millions, maybe billions, but I just cannot get hold of the idea of a “trillion.” President Reagan had the same problem, so he had his aides
provide a metaphor. They told him that if he had a stack of one-thousand dollar bills four inches thick, he would be a millionaire. If that stack of one-thousand dollar bills was 300 feet high, he would be a billionaire. To be a trillionaire, the stack would reach into the stratosphere, some sixty miles. To measure our current national debt, the pile of one thousand dollar bills would have to reach about a thousand miles deep into space. That illustration does not exaggerate our problem.

We have been annually adding about a trillion dollars of further deficits to that huge debt. Just now, thanks to sequestration this year (2013), it will not be quite that bad, but these imbalances simply cannot be allowed to continue. Otherwise, the value of the American dollar will plunge, foreign trade will implode, and we will no longer be able to find other nations willing to cover our borrowing. We must get our fiscal house in order.

But our political system refuses to face the facts. Spending cannot be reduced substantially without cutting huge, for now politically untouchable, entitlements — Social Security, Medicare, and Medicaid. Controlling escalating health costs for Medicare and Medicaid is particularly important. Unfortunately, the new health care system, so-called Obamacare, finesses—does not meet—this problem of escalating costs.

Facing the challenge of increasing revenues is equally or even more difficult than cutting spending. Politicians and tax increases simply do not inhabit the same universe. The only time you hear a politician talk about taxes is when he is talking about cutting.

It is clear that we have to have a complete reworking of our tax system. Eliminating or sharply curtailing “tax breaks” that protect various groups or interests from taxes is one of the most important things that has to be done. It would not only permit overall lower rates, but would also promote fairness. But every tax break is guarded zealously by the favored groups or interests and their expensive lobbyists.

Still, with political courage and effort the challenge can be met. In 2012, President Obama appointed a bi-partisan commission, named after its cochairs (generally called the Simpson-Bowles Commission) to
tackle the fiscal problem and to lay out a balanced program to sensibly manage a transition to solvency. The commission did so. But sadly, its recommendations were shelved—they quietly disappeared—because political courage was in short supply.

A renewed effort akin to Simpson-Bowles is needed. We have to bite the bullet, not only for the present, but for the future national solvency that your generation will need. Your political leaders, particularly your senators and congressmen, should hear from you about deficits and debt.

Putting our national financial house in order is also required because our national position in the international system rests on our economic strength. That economic strength is the basis for our military and political strength. Our ability to secure our interests, both at home and abroad, rests on economic strength. Our ability to provide aid to allies and to meet the threats that are constantly arising; all such prime interests are underpinned by economic strength. National economic health is absolutely essential.

Turning to the topic of education: there is now considerable attention to education arising out of a growing awareness that our national system of K–12 education does not provide students adequate preparation for college or for careers in a globalized world—a world in which graduates from Provo High will not be competing for jobs with Seattle High but with Shanghai High or Singapore High. Those foreign graduates are the ones that we have to be aware of and competing with.

Moreover, the quality of our K–12 education varies wildly in this country, from state to state. Students in West Virginia or Mississippi, for example, are generally shortchanged badly when compared with students from Oregon or New York. Our international ranking for K–12 education puts us in the middle of the international pack, next, I think, to Bulgaria. We cannot continue to be a world leader if we are in the middle of the pack. A coalition of educators, business leaders and state governors has developed a national program to meet this challenge. This is recent. It is called “Common Core.” The Common Core standards provide a series of academic benchmarks that set the minimum skills a student should acquire at specific grade levels.
Although all but four states have adopted Common Core, there continues to be scattered opposition and confusion, partly arising out of misperceptions and the erroneous idea that with Common Core, teachers across the nation will be required to teach a uniform curriculum from common materials and common course work. But Common Core does not require that level of specificity. We will still have local control of education; it will just be measured against benchmarks that will show us how well we are doing.

Putting our national house in order in terms of finances and education—which at first blush seem to be largely domestic challenges—are ones with enormous international ramifications. These are not the only priority tasks before us; there are a host of other first-order challenges: coping with climate change or countering terrorism, for instance, that also demand our attention. But I am not going to tackle all of those right now.

Let us look at a different kind of challenge, one that is provided by various nation-states. Again, the list of possible challenges to examine is long. From the list I have chosen two, China and Iran, that pose particularly interesting problems.

China leads the list of states that we need to examine. Its size—one billion, three hundred million people—is about four times our size. Its remarkably rapid economic growth, its booming international trade, its vigorous search for energy and other national resources, its seat on the United Nation’s Security Council, its growing military strength, its vigorous diplomacy, its status as the second largest economy in the world—second only to ourselves—all these combine to make it a primary force in the international order. We must also focus on China, for it will become an even more important actor in the future. Its economy is growing now about three times as fast as the U.S. economy. It has recently slowed down, but for three decades it increased its gross national product about 10% a year. Now that growth is down to 7.5%, still about three times our rate.

I was asked at one juncture, a few years ago, to be part of a group of international experts to come to Beijing for two weeks to examine China’s next five-year plan. Because I had been lecturing and writing widely
about international energy topics, I was invited to join as the group’s energy expert. I have a strong interest in China, have had for many years, and have visited there many times, so I jumped at this opportunity to get to know the current planners and the new plan.

After ten days of working with and analyzing the five-year plan and its planners, our group was asked to debrief China’s top leadership on our findings and recommendations. I was to focus on energy. The debriefing room was relatively small so that when I stood up to debrief Deng Xiaoping, who was the undisputed paramount leader of China, I was only three or four feet in front of him. I said in my report that the plan called for coal production and consumption to rise rapidly over the next five years. Given that Chinese coal is mainly of low quality and full of sulfur, I told Deng Xiaoping that burning more of it would result in major pollution, both in China and in Korea and Japan, where acid rain would be falling. I urged him to have China develop its natural gas, which was being neglected. It could be an alternative to coal—at least for household consumption. I was not thinking then of global warming, which I probably should have been. But global warming obviously would be a major danger as well.

Deng Xiaoping’s vigorous response to my report was surprising. He was holding an eight- or ten-inch-long ivory cigarette holder with a burning cigarette in it. He excitedly and repeatedly jabbed at me with it while he was exclaiming, “You Americans burned coal when you were industrializing. Your railroads burned coal while you were industrializing. China will burn its coal as it industrializes and as its railways expand.” That of course is what it has been doing and I am sure will continue to do.

I read recently, I have not had a chance to check the facts yet, but I have just read that China is now emitting as much greenhouse gas as the rest of the world combined. I suspect that is true, given the speed of its industrialization and given the quality of its coal.

Because of its coal, not exclusively but largely, China has a major environmental crisis on its hands. Its air and rivers are badly polluted; no one swims; no one eats river fish. You may recall that because
of pollution China shifted a number of factories out of Beijing at the time of the 2008 Olympics.

In view of these pollution facts, it is not surprising that an environmental movement has begun to develop across China, but it has an uphill battle. Some limited ground may be won by those pushing environmentalism, but the increase of pollution will continue unless and until a combination of external pressures and popular distress will build a sufficient counter force.

The development and application of counter-pollution measures and technology is an arena in which the United States and China could readily share experiences and cooperate. We need to seize such opportunities for collaboration. In the first instance, we should do so because we have a number of common problems and common interests that can best be tackled jointly, such as pandemics, global warming, piracy, and so forth. We should also do so because we need to put our relationship with China on the basis of coevolution, not just episodic cooperation. The term “coevolution” is borrowed from biology. It means two entities evolving together in a way that is mutually beneficial. Adopting this concept for the United States–China relationship does not mean that we will somehow, to some extent, submerge our national interests. Rather, we can continue to stand strongly for those interests while we seek for a commonality of dealing with growing interests with China. Coevolution means we are prepared to negotiate and cooperate continually in search for mutuality of interests. Whenever we do not have an underlying conflict, it should be possible to find ways to cooperate. The world needs us to do so.

In all our dealings with China we need to remember that its leaders view it as a rising power and the United States as a declining power, but a dangerous declining power. The Chinese leaders are hard-headed realists. They are men of substance. They are men that have been tested. China has a meritocracy system within the Chinese Communist party that is amazing. Had it been applied in the United States in 2008 or 2012, I do not know who would have been chosen as president, but it would not have been Mr. Obama. In view of his relative inexperience, he would have been running at most a province in
The Chinese view the world differently than we do and will take every opportunity to shape that world favorably to China, either by direct or indirect means. We are dealing with supremely qualified, driven leaders intent on making China number one. We can have no room among our analysts or our policy makers for panda huggers. We need hard-headed realists such as China has.

Beginning about three years ago, China adopted a much more assertive, even aggressive, foreign policy. It is now at loggerheads with Japan over a number of tiny, rocky islands in the East China Sea. More importantly, it has been increasingly assertive about its claims for dominion over the South China Sea and all the resources beneath the sea. Now that is a large body of water and China has only a weak historical and geological basis for its demands for control. But despite this weakness, it has labeled control of that sea as a “core interest.” “Core interest” is a policy-laden term, one that it uses for Taiwan and Tibet. That claim for control is already causing ship-to-ship collisions and conflicts between Chinese naval vessels and Philippine fishing boats.

The international community, including the United States, insists that the Sea is an international waterway, as it has always been, and that claims regarding it have to be negotiated multilaterally.

Senior Chinese have responded officially that if we insist that the waterway’s nature is multilateral and claims concerning it have to be settled multilaterally, that insistence is tantamount to a declaration of war against China. We are in a situation where we cannot back off. It is hard to predict how this will evolve, but we can be sure that the South China Sea will be a future danger zone.

In addition to problems arising from China’s assertiveness on the South China Sea, we have a relatively new significant problem of increasing Chinese cyber-attacks on American business and government. These have been escalating. China denies responsibility for these, but the evidence—even pointing to a specific building in Shanghai as the source of the attacks—is conclusive. This is not a matter of individual unofficial hackers: this is China.

We should also note that to back up its recent assertive diplomacy, China has begun a large-scale military
modernization program. By its nature, that modernization is clearly aimed at pushing the United States out of the Western Pacific. It is also aimed at disabling American military forces by blinding them, if open conflict should occur. Last year China shot down one of its dead space satellites to demonstrate its ability to cripple American forces which are heavily dependent on space communication. Of course, the American military is preparing measures to counter possible Chinese offensive actions. Despite China’s attempts to conceal much of its military modernization efforts, American intelligence has largely pinpointed them and their vulnerability to Western countermeasures. China’s military muscle flexing will be a source of continuing and probably broadening and escalating tension, I suspect for decades of your lives.

We have strengthened various defense cooperation measures with our allies in the Western Pacific, to include stationing a small marine force in Australia. The countries of East Asia, and particularly of South East Asia, are anxious to develop joint military exercises with us and otherwise strengthen defense cooperation with us as they sense growing Chinese pressure.

Now let us turn briefly to a second country: Iran. It presents perhaps the most urgent, pressing challenge we confront. The international community, including the United States, is strongly opposed to Iran’s apparent drive to become a nuclear weapon state. Iran insists that its development of nuclear energy is purely directed to peaceful purposes. While it has a pair of small nuclear reactors, those do not begin to require the amounts of enriched uranium that Iran’s centrifuges are now spinning and producing. Moreover, Iran has recently added a further number of centrifuges to those already in operation.

Despite its on-again, off-again cooperation with the watchdog International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), it seems plain that Iran is building the capability to become a nuclear weapons state. Whether it will proceed to that point is an open question. But given its malign activities in its neighborhood, including in Syria, and its sponsorship of terrorists worldwide, it is hard to take seriously Iran’s claims that its nuclear activities are
solely peacefully directed. I should note that Israel views a nuclear-armed Iran as an existential threat, which is not surprising, since former Iranian president Ahmadinejad once declared that Israel should be wiped off the map.

Bringing Iran to the negotiating table is difficult at this juncture, but the effort must continue, for otherwise disaster looms: Israel will surely attack as soon as it believes Iran has fashioned an atomic weapon, just the first bomb. To meet this danger, the United States is leading a further effort to strengthen sanctions on Iran. Sanctions aimed to persuade Iran to cooperate on nuclear issues are already having a disastrous effect on the Iranian economy. At the same time it pursues tough sanctions, the United States and its allies should mount a major public diplomacy effort to convince all Iranians that pursuing nuclear weapons will likely bring a devastating war.

There are some signs of hope on the horizon. We know that ultimate power in Iran is held by the Ayatollahs in Qom, not the politicians in Teheran. So the recent election of a relatively moderate president may weigh little. Yet his recent comments that he has the authority to negotiate with the West are most hopeful. The Ayatollahs may have concluded that perhaps the future of the theocracy is at stake. The Iranian public’s obvious yearning for peace and economic relief may also be a factor. Even so, the adversaries—Iran and Israel—are far apart, and war may in fact come. We should try to hold Israel back from early strikes while we strive to help the IAEA and the international community to find a viable compromise.

I began this lecture by citing an unlikely philosopher, Clint Eastwood. Let me close by citing another somewhat more renowned philosopher, Winston Churchill. He was speaking during the dark hour for England in its conflict with Nazi Germany. He said, “Never give in, never give in, never, never, never.”

As you face the challenges that I have listed and others that you will discover, I hope and trust that you will push forward. Never retreat. Never, never, never.
Notes

