



## FROM THE DESK OF **JOHN B. COBB, JR.**

President Joseph Biden  
The White House  
1600 Pennsylvania Avenue, N.W.  
Washington, D.C. 20500

President Xi Jinping  
Central People's Republic of the  
People's Republic of China  
Zhongnanhai Ximen, Fuyou Street  
Xicheng District, Beijing 100017  
The People's Republic of China

October 1, 2021

### **Dear Presidents Biden and Xi,**

The habitability of the planet can no longer be taken for granted. Both of you have done, and are doing, much to counter the profound threat to the future. We are at a crossroads. The two of you have made possible an historical change that might save us all from unimaginable disasters. PLEASE lead us into the new possibility you have created.

I served in the U.S. Army for three and a half years in World War II and in the occupation of Japan. I awoke to the self-destructive practices of the modern world in the late 1960s, and I have worked to replace the individualistic materialism and militaristic nationalism that have been leading the world to utter catastrophe with an understanding of the mutual relationship of all things. The recognition of our dependence on one another calls us all to work for the common good. I am a member of the American Academy of Arts and Sciences. Now, at 96, I am distressed by the prospects faced by my five grandchildren and seven great grandchildren.

Beginning in the early seventies I have led a number of conferences on the ecological crisis, including some for Chinese. My conference career climaxed in 2015 in "Seizing an Alternative: Toward an Ecological Civilization." Among the two thousand participants, three hundred came from China.

I have published some fifty books. In 1970 I wrote a little one entitled "Is It Too Late?" Since then, I have looked on with deep pain as more and more has been irretrievably lost. I speak now for millions of concerned people who are grateful to the two of you for reviving our hope and are asking for you to build on what you have achieved.



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President Xi, you have committed China to becoming an ecological civilization. That inspired the title of the conference mentioned above. China still has far to go, but your progress is amazing. You evaluate your provincial governors as much by their improvement of the environment as by their contribution to economic growth. You are eliminating extreme poverty. You have ended population increase in China. You are developing the rural villages, and more people are now moving to them from the cities than are leaving them for the cities. You are cutting back on coal despite your lack of oil and natural gas. You are ready to help other countries to move forward.

President Biden, your commitment to stopping climate change before it destroys civilization is clear in both your words and your actions. In your address to the United Nations, you call for giving this task top priority. In your actions at home, you are implementing your commitments. You know that unless the world's peoples and their governments prioritize dealing with the global problem, we will all suffer terribly. You recognize that the United States must take a leading role globally, but that it must do so in partnership with others. You are willing to set controversies on other issues aside to make such partnerships possible. You know that the most important of all such partnerships is with China and you have already reached out to explore possibilities.

The whole world is indebted to both of you. But there is a danger, a terrible danger, that established policies and commitments will block the wonderful possibility that the two of you have created. The United States still names China as its number one enemy. Unfortunately, this is not idle rhetoric. American foreign policy, military policy, and even financial policy are affected by this declaration of enmity. It is not possible for China to have the necessary trust to collaborate wholeheartedly with a nation that treats it as its primary enemy. Nations can disagree on many topics and still respect one another and work together. If the United States wants to influence China's policy on Hong Kong or Tibet, the chance of doing so would be far greater if it made suggestions as a friend than if it makes demands as an enemy. What the world needs, desperately, is for the United States to offer China its friendship as a context of working together for the salvation of the world.



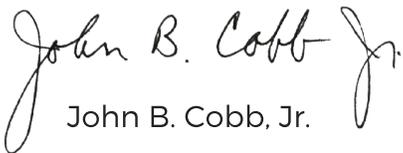
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Although we understand, President Xi, that you cannot collaborate wholeheartedly with a country that treats you as its enemy, we beg you, for the sake of the planet, to respond to any gesture of friendship on the part of President Biden. It is hard for him to change deep-seated prejudices and suspicions, characteristic of many Americans, or to act against them. It may turn out that the friendship so urgently needed will grow in face-to-face meetings. It may be better to hope for friendship as an outcome than to demand it as precondition.

Of course, the rest of the world must cooperate. Even if you together take leadership, there is no guarantee of success. However, if you both give primacy to saving civilization, other nations will join you. If you continue to give primacy to competition for dominance, the positive initiatives of others have no chance. The fate of human civilization is in your hands.

We know that there are many people who like to have an enemy on whom to project all evil. Some of them do not recognize that we are heading for disaster. They will not understand your cooperating with the erstwhile enemy, and they may attack you viciously. We are asking you for courage, even heroism. Our shared cause transcends us all. Only you two can lead us.

**Sincerely yours,**

  
John B. Cobb, Jr.