

Foreign Policy

A quartet of internationally known experts weigh in on issues of war and peace, diplomacy and armed intervention, terrorism and security.

C in a Time of Crisis

BY CAROL J. BURR • PHOTOS BY ROBERT TAYLOR

Six times since 1997, they have come to the campus of the University of Oklahoma in what has become a steady stream of ambassadors, cabinet secretaries, intelligence experts, statesmen, journalists, advisors and decision makers—past and present, domestic and foreign. They have offered views on international affairs, formally and informally, responded to questions, visited with students, interacted with faculty and, yes, learned a bit about Oklahoma and their host institution.

But this sixth edition of OU's Foreign Policy



Conference, held in Oklahoma Memorial Union on April 1-2, 2003, was more than an academic exercise, more than an opportunity to see and hear world figures. With armed forces from the United States and its coalition partners at war in Iraq, blatant nuclear threats emanating from North Korea and the ever-present Israeli-Palestinian hostilities lurking in the background, the distinguished visitors came to Norman in a time of high anxiety. Their presentations seemed somehow more penetrating, the audience's questioning more pointed, the replies less guarded. *continued*

Leading off the two-day event, “America’s Foreign Policy in a Time of Crisis,” was President’s Associates dinner keynoter James A. Baker III, who served as President Ronald Reagan’s secretary of the treasury and George H.W. Bush’s White House chief of staff and secretary of state. The following day, luncheon attendees again filled the Union Ballroom to hear Georgie Anne Geyer, nationally syndicated columnist, foreign correspondent and “Washington Week” commentator, while the afternoon session in Meacham Auditorium featured Vadim Bakatin, former KGB director and Russian interior minister.

Former Secretary of State Madeleine K. Albright then spoke at the academic convocation in Catlett Music Center’s Paul F. Sharp Concert Hall. Both the convocation and Bakatin’s address were open to the public. Preceding the conference’s closing Associates dinner, Albright and OU President David L. Boren held a dialogue and took questions from the audience, as did the speakers in each of the preceding sessions.

As in past years, overflow crowds were the norm at each venue; still, broad participation was emphasized, particularly from students. The Associates events were simulcast in alternate rooms in the Union with Boren escorting the speakers to each site before the meal.

A select group of student leaders joined Baker and Geyer at an informal pre-conference gathering at Boyd House. Members of the student honorary group Crimson Club, who act as on-campus ambassadors, served as personal hosts for each of the participants throughout their campus stays.



For the past eight years, David and Molly Shi Boren have made a habit of bringing to the campus national and international figures, such as former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, center, to share their expertise with the University community. The most successful vehicle for these visits is the Foreign Policy Conference, the sixth of which was held April 1-2, 2003, in Oklahoma Memorial Union.

The Foreign Policy Conference, the centerpiece of OU’s International Programs Center and co-sponsored by the OU Speakers Bureau and the Office of the President, is privately funded. The 2003 lead underwriter was the Ethics and Excellence in Journalism Foundation, founded by the late Edith Kinney Gaylord.

The executive director of IPC and the William J. Crowe Chair in Geopolitics is the distinguished career diplomat Edward J. Perkins. Perkins, who came to OU to establish the Center in 1996, was the United States’ first African-American ambassador to South Africa and held similar posts in Australia and Liberia. In addition to serving as director general of the Foreign Service and the Department of State’s director of personnel, he was U.S. ambassador to the United Nations and U.S. permanent representative to the U.N. Security Council.

Setting the Agenda

In opening the conference, Boren shared with the audience the conviction that never in his lifetime—which includes more than 30 years of public service as legislator, governor, U.S. senator and university president—has there been a greater challenge facing the United States and the international community. In the new world created by the end of the Cold War, he wondered aloud just what today’s Americans wanted their legacy to be, posing a series of rhetorical questions.

“How can we act unilaterally when the situation demands it,” he asked, “and still build international cooperation? How do we regain the credibility we are used to having? How do we put NATO and the UN relationship back together?”

“How do we rebuild the delicate balance of power in the Middle East,” he continued, “and how do we dispel the

notion that we are fighting against Islam? How do we attack the underlying causes of terrorism?"

The president's next question was to be stated and debated by the conference speakers: "How do we restart the peace process between Israel and Palestine?"

Winning Peace as well as War

James Baker's address focused on the problems of reconstructing Iraq even as combat there continued. While claiming no military expertise, he expressed no doubt as to the successful outcome of a war made more difficult by the desire to limit civilian casualties and preserve infrastructure. "We have to win the peace, and winning the peace will be tougher than winning the war," he said.

The veteran diplomat warned against the imposition of a political solution from the outside, stressing that the Iraqis must take charge as soon as possible to form a constitutional government committed to fed-

"How can we act unilaterally when the situation demands it and still build international cooperation?"

eralism and at peace with its neighbors. The United Nations, he insisted, must have a role, especially in meeting humanitarian needs.

"This will be an opportunity for nations who stood on the sidelines during the war to redeem their prewar criticism of the United States with equal postwar generosity for the Iraqi people," he suggested. "Let us have no illusions, my friends; a lot of the cost of rebuilding, just as a lot of the cost of the war, is going to fall on the American taxpayer."

Ambassador Edward J. Perkins, executive director of the sponsoring OU International Programs Center, takes the Foreign Policy Conference podium to introduce nationally syndicated columnist and foreign correspondent Georgie Anne Geyer.



While conceding the right of the United States to express disappointment in the failure of France, Germany and Russia to support the intervention in Iraq, Baker contended "we cannot let disappointment cloud our judgment. They are important allies in the war on terrorism."

At the end of the war, Baker foresaw a window of opportunity to negotiate an Israeli-Palestinian peace. As the only nation that Israel trusts—the only one committed to its integrity—the United States must act as the honest broker in this effort, he said, and the solution must be political dialogue, not military action.

"Israel will never enjoy security as long as it continues to occupy the territories," he added, "and the Arabs can never achieve their dream as long as Israel doesn't feel secure."

Baker expressed optimism that a political solution can be mobilized to deal with North Korea. "North Korea is exhibit A that appeasement doesn't work," he said. "North Korea is out of control today because we allowed ourselves to be blackmailed in 1994. North Korea never complied (with that agreement) while we did." But he cautioned that a successful solution would require leadership.

"Leadership is not about making easy or popular decisions," he concluded. "Leadership is about making the right decisions no matter how difficult or unpopular they may be."

A Journalist's Concerns

Georgie Anne Geyer candidly admitted her lack of enthusiasm for the war in Iraq. Fluent in five languages, Geyer has spent 40 years covering international affairs, acquiring a first-hand, in-depth understanding of global politics and developing contacts worldwide.

"The original political and ideological assumptions behind (the war) were faulty," she said in her conference presentation. Stating her belief that the U.S. government was determined to invade Iraq whether or not Saddam Hussein had weapons of mass destruction, Geyer contended that the Iraqi dictator was not linked to al-Qaida and the September 11 attacks.

"Saddam, for all his brutality, is a secular president," she said. "He hates Islamic

“The American people created freedom from scratch. But even the U.S. cannot force freedom (on others) unilaterally.”

fundamentalists, and they hate him.”

Geyer holds no illusions about dictators like Saddam Hussein—and she has known quite a few. “I’ve really interviewed some very nice people,” she quipped, “but everyone just wants to hear about the dictators—these absolute nutcases.”

She recounted her 1978 meeting with the Ayatollah Khomeini weeks before he came to power in Iran. “I had the feeling of waves of evil coming from this man. I’d never felt that from anyone before.”

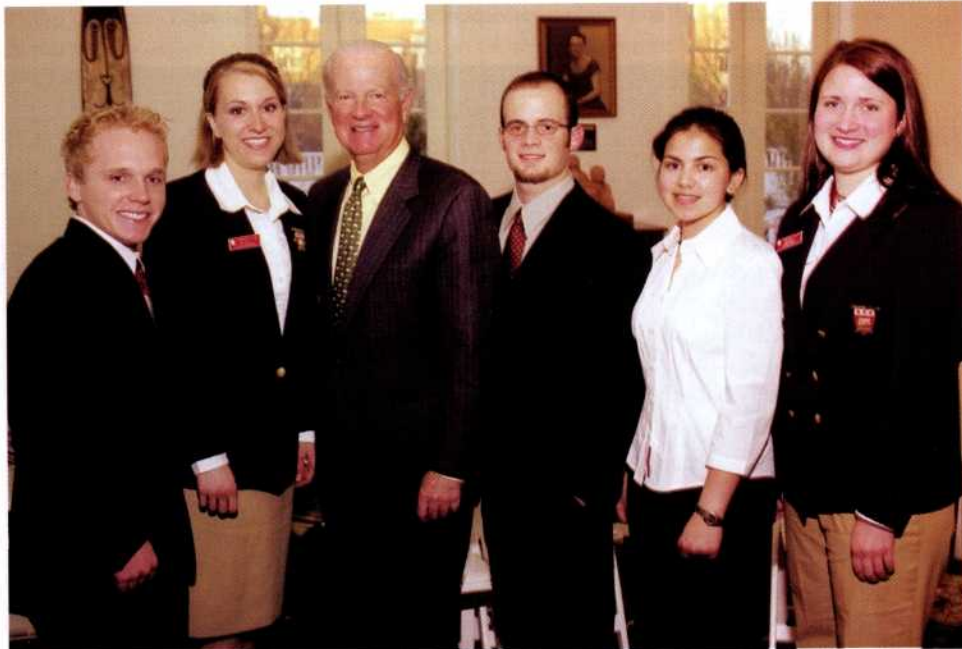
Interviewing Hussein in 1973 before he had gained complete control was a similarly chilling experience. She recalled that the Iraqi, whom she characterized as a “sociopathic personality,” showed absolutely no emotion at any time during their four-hour conversation—not even when she asked him why he had killed his enemies. “Well, sometimes when you’re in an underground movement, you’ve got to do things you don’t want to do,” Hussein replied.

Geyer feels that Iraq should have been dealt with through diplomacy. “The last thing we should do is go to war. As someone who has covered other cultures, we can never underestimate nationalism and a people’s determination against an outside invader.”

The journalist is troubled by some of the changes in Americans since 9/11 and notes that George W. Bush, the charming Texas governor she interviewed four years ago about compromise and coalition building, seems to have undergone some religious or ideological conversion



Joseph J. Ferretti, right, senior vice president and provost at the OU Health Sciences Center, shares a laugh with a good-natured Vadim Bakatin, who had just received an OU-themed gift from his student hosts following his Foreign Policy Conference talk in Meacham Auditorium. Ferretti met the former KGB director on an earlier trip to Russia. In 1991 Bakatin was charged by Mikhail Gorbachev with reforming and eventually dismantling the KGB, making some internal enemies by seeking U. S. cooperation.



Several of the University’s student leaders attending an informal Foreign Policy Conference reception at Boyd House took the opportunity to have their photo taken with one of the keynoters. From left are Nathaniel Scott, Megan Schaubman, former Secretary of State James Baker, Richard Moore, Melissa Ireland and Becca Edington.

and views the war as a sort of calling.

"I think this war and the planning for it has put our nation on the edge of a vast unknown, facing a world in which our principles, our values, our traditional allies and our role are coming into question," she said.

The United States should have learned more from the end of the Cold War, she insists. "We have the system and the story that the world was waiting for."

Repairing Strained Relations

Vadim Bakatin, the man charged with dismantling the Soviet KGB at the end of the Cold War, underscored for his Norman audience the necessity of re-vamping cooperation between Russia and the United States in the aftermath of the Iraqi war that his country opposed.

Speaking through an interpreter who often struggled to keep pace, Bakatin nevertheless made clear his desire for a more satisfactory relationship between the two nations. "There has been global cooperation between Russia and the United States," he said, "but we want this cooperation to be tangible, not just declarative." While acknowledging a growing frustration on both sides of the alliance, he insisted that the leaders of the two governments would not allow a return to Cold War animosity.

"I sincerely wish for your victory," he said of the conflict that led to the current strained relations, but he also took issue with the United States' "winner-loser philosophy" that led to war in Iraq. "This war has not been unavoidable. The U.S. has not been able to find a diplomatic solution to the crisis."

A political ally of Mikhail Gorbachev, Bakatin was named head of the KGB, the Communist Party's Committee for State Security, in 1991, with responsibility for reforming and eventually dismantling the organization. Following the uprising that brought Boris Yeltsin to power and ended the U.S.S.R., Bakatin splintered the KGB into five separate services at the top and ceded power from the Soviet center to the Russian Federation and the 11 other remaining union republics.

Bakatin sought genuine cooperation with the United States, turning over to the American ambassador the KGB blue-

prints of the massive electronic eavesdropping system implanted in the new American Embassy building, a gesture angering many Soviet politicians.

"The U.S. is a great nation," Bakatin said. "The American people created freedom from scratch. But even the U.S. cannot force freedom (on others) unilaterally. Freedom is possible only by joint and cooperative efforts."

Criticizing Current U.S. Policies

While describing herself as unwilling to question the way the Iraqi conflict was being conducted, former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright was free with ques-

not being more patient in building an international coalition, she said, the United States left the impression that "we don't care. The transatlantic partnership is essential. We cannot allow Saddam Hussein to do what the U.S.S.R. could not: drive a wedge between the U.S. and its allies."

Albright, the first woman to be named secretary of state and the highest-ranking woman in U.S. government history, expressed concern that this country's preemptive strike against Iraq might become a doctrine, one that other countries, including those with nuclear capabilities, might adopt. She particularly was troubled that North Korea, which she



Of all the Foreign Policy Conference participants, none seemed to enjoy her OU stay more than columnist Georgie Anne Geyer, right, who mixed her keen sense of humor with equally keen observations on world affairs in her formal presentation. Ever the journalist, however, Geyer took advantage of a break in the schedule by grabbing pad and pen to interview fellow speaker James Baker.

tions about both the prelude to war and its consequences. "I understand why we are fighting in Iraq," she told the Foreign Policy Conference convocation audience. "Saddam Hussein is a terrible dictator. He is the reason the Iraqi people have suffered. . . . My problem is why did the war have to be right now when we have a far bigger problem with North Korea."

By ignoring the United Nations and

called the "greatest threat to peace in Asia in 50 years," might draw the wrong conclusion from the war.

"North Korea is as dangerous as it is poor," said Albright, who reminded her listeners that she is the only American who has negotiated personally with the current North Korean dictator, Kim Jong-il. "They have no way to make money except by selling weapons. Missiles and



President Boren's insistence upon student involvement when VIPs visit the campus brought this group of student leaders to Boyd House for an informal session with former Secretary of State James Baker, to the left of Boren, and Georgie Anne Geyer, at right.

bombs are their cash crop."

Albright urged the Bush administration to engage in direct talks with North Korea to halt its nuclear weapon development. She also advocated an international dialogue to develop a global network of anti-terrorist cooperation.

"I find it crazy that we have become so isolated. I do not think the allies are like the Lilliputians being tied down by Gulliver. We are stronger with our friends."

Echoing the recurring sentiment of the conference speakers, Albright said that nothing would do more to combat terrorism than an Israeli-Palestinian settlement. "Arafat rejected the best deal he will ever get," she said referring to the proposal brokered in the late 1990s by the Clinton administration. If Arafat had agreed, Albright contended, Palestine today would be in the United Nations, and Palestinians would travel freely.



James Baker and David Boren renewed acquaintance from their federal government days in Washington, D.C., where Baker served as advisor to three presidents—Gerald Ford, Ronald Reagan and George Bush—and Boren was a leading member of the U. S. Senate.