

Executive Director's Corner: Dr. James Nathan

The prospects for American foreign policy, such as I can divine these matters, are about as grim as anytime since I have been in Montgomery. I wrote last of the Iraq war before, in these pages, with little enthusiasm, but when there were some larger prospects for long term success than now.

On the positive side, I wish that the command and strategy that is now attempted had been in place from the onset. From all reports, Gen. Petraeus and his staff are first rate. And Bob Gates, now the Secretary of Defense, is smart, a fine manager without the arrogance of his predecessor. Still, it seems to me, the success that was possible some time ago is less likely, though I am reasonably confident troop levels will be dramatically down in Iraq in the next 18 months. The problem is any adversary who is at all alert to the rhythm of American politics knows the same thing.

It's hard to see anything but regional mayhem lurking offstage. Afghanistan has slipped back in the last several years, though there is more hope there. NATO has been pretty firm in its commitment to Afghanistan, and NATO soldiers — Canadian, Italian, French, British, Dutch, Polish — are shouldering some of the weight.

I am off to hear of NATO plans in Afghanistan, Turkey, etc, come March. I am going with a Council

on Foreign Relations study group of some 15 senior, mostly "former," officials — and a few doyens of the academy. We will be in Brussels, Ankara, and perhaps elsewhere. It's nine days over the Spring break.

In January, I was in Washington for the annual meeting of the World Affairs Council of America. It is an astonishingly well attended event. We, in Alabama, were represented by Terry Wofford and your scribe. Terry, to his very real credit, has not missed a single national meeting since I have been director.

I do think Terry is on to something. The national meeting, like AWAC, is a splendid deal. It has a luxurious location, off Rock Creek Park at the Omni Sheraton. I think it's the nicest convention hotel in Washington. One of its features is how close it is to many embassies, and there were a number of receptions for World Affairs Council meetings hosted by senior staff from countries across the globe.

The rather large turn out was divided into several intimate lunches with Ambassadors from different countries. There were the usual luminaries who spoke, most notably Dennis Ross, the rightly famed and very articulate mid-east negotiator in the first Bush and Clinton years. Former Defense Secretary William Cohen also spoke. In the past, we have heard from the President and the Secretary of State. This year, Wash-

ington felt a bit under siege and fewer Administration high flyers showed up. Still, I found it a learning experience, though there were a few transitional issues lingering as a result of a nearly complete staff change since the redoubtable Jerry Leach [the President, who spoke here last year on Turkey] has left. He's in Alexandria, Egypt, teaching, and may soon be in Turkey for a while, too.

In a few weeks, I will deliver a yet to be written professional paper in Las Vegas. The paper is on some research I have undertaken with a long time friend from my days in Beijing. We lived, his family and mine, virtually together, for months at a crack, and traveled together, too. He's a Chinese American and it makes it easier, though I am still trying to get my arms around spoken Mandarin. The paper is on public opinion and foreign policy.

What I did learn from the national meeting is that the World Affairs Council system is growing and the numbers of people and groups touched by the World Affairs system are huge. Our AWAC is a midsize organization by national standards, with great attendance, again by national standards, and a pint-sized budget. By anybody's standards, I think, our programs are outstanding, as good as there are, and we all can be happy about that.

The Briefing

A Newsletter of The Alabama World Affairs Council / Spring 2007

Prince Turki Al-Faisal, Saudi Arabia Ambassador to the US, Draws Overflow Crowd; Latell, Millett Deliver Timely Messages

His Royal Highness **Prince Turki Al-Faisal**, speaking on January 23, brought a message of friendship, support, and solidarity with the U.S. After mingling freely (under the watchful eye of his Saudi security detail) with members at the buffet, he delighted the audience at the beginning of his remarks by reciting “Old Susanna,” a song he remembered from his days in high school in the U.S. He stressed the partnership between the two countries in dealing with the war on terrorism, stabilizing world oil prices, and working for Middle East stability. He said that avenues of communication between our two countries have never been so open, with on-going programs of education and business exchange and military cooperation. He spoke of the increasing sophistication of the Saudi people, e.g., internet use has increased 1000% in the last five years. Asked about reported Saudi support for Wahhabism both inside and outside of Saudi Arabia, he said that Wahhabism has been totally misunderstood and is really a moderate interpretation of the Koran, e.g., Jihad means more of a personal struggle, at most a defensive war, not an aggressive war.

On October 17, 2006, **Brian Latell**, a long-time CIA operative who spent much of his career tracking Fidel Castro and his brother Raul, told us that Fidel was probably on his death bed (Ed. Note: He is still with us). Dr. Latell described Fidel as a charismatic and titanic figure in South America, where Raul is practical, ruthless, 75-years-old, and totally without charisma. His biggest strengths are organizational and pragmatic — he



Prince Turki and Martha Fitzpatrick at the buffet, January 23

dominates the Cuban military, the intelligence apparatus, and the Communist party.

While the dissident movement is small and highly infiltrated, Latell predicted that democracy was likely to come to Cuba in the future, but that the Fidelistas, perhaps 25% of the population and mostly older, would be a force to be reckoned with for some time.

Dr. Richard Millett, speaking on December 12, gave a wide-ranging review of the issues and problems in Central and South America. He noted a pronounced shift to the political left in several countries, but did not consider it anything to become overly worried about at this time. On the authoritarian left are Venezuela, Ecuador, and Bolivia; on the democratic left are Brazil, an emerging economic giant with a gross domestic

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product larger than Russia's, and Chile.

In Nicaragua, recently elected Daniel Ortega, resurrected leftist and one-time leader of the Sandinistas, is sounding much more moderate and pragmatic and does not seem inclined to take the country back to his old ways. Perhaps this is because he does not control either the congress or the military.



Dr. James Nathan, Gen. Charles Cleveland, and Prince Turki confer before the Prince's talk. In the background is Gen. Bowen Ballard.

Finances, Membership Levels Remain Sound

Membership numbers have remained fairly steady, with new members replacing turnover in about equal numbers. AWAC's finances have remained in the black and been strengthened by a fundraising effort lead by Jimmy Loeb. Several generous local corporations and individuals have agreed to sponsor AWAC presentations.

Board Member Profile: Dr. Jeremy Lewis

Jeremy Lewis, Professor of Political Science at Huntingdon College, has been an AWAC Board member since 2002. A citizen of the United Kingdom and the European Union, he also became (following the 9/11 attacks) a citizen of the United States. He holds his MA and BA degrees from Oxford University in philosophy, politics and economics, and his PhD and MA from Johns Hopkins University in American politics and international relations. As a scholarship student while in the Oxford Union Debating Society, his contemporaries included Benazir Bhutto and Tony Blair.

Dr. Lewis has been a huge contributor to AWAC. He is the volunteer webmaster of our website, awac.us, and takes notes at each presentation, posting them on the website. Working with faculty members of the Air War College, he has twice helped moderate the Great Decisions program for local high school students — and is teaching the program again in Huntingdon classes during spring '07. He has also participated in the national WACA conference in Washington and has spoken to the World Affairs Council of Alaska.

In 2006, he was recognized by the United Methodist colleges with the Exemplary Teaching Award. Dr. Lewis, who speaks west European

languages, has travelled widely across western Europe, the U.S., Canada, Peru, and South Korea. He has three times led study tours to the House of Commons and Oxford University, and will take Huntingdon students on a tour to Bavaria in May, followed by a family tour of Switzerland and Italy.

His scholarly writings have been published in political science and intelligence volumes, and he has given conference papers on diverse topics. A veteran of teaching at Wellesley College and Colby College, he has also consulted for the federal government and served as political analyst on television, including *NBC Nightly News*. At Huntingdon College, he teaches all twelve political science courses, plus several interdisciplinary courses. He also recruits, advises and places some 45 students for his classes. His passion is to bring the world of international affairs to young people.

Around Montgomery, he has been an active “ballet, soccer, swim and debate dad” for his two teenage girls; and he has coached teenage sports, judged speech competitions, and spoken to service clubs. He and his wife Connie, who is a senior tech writer in the computer programming world, will soon celebrate their twentieth wedding anniversary. They reside in Sturbridge.

Our web site is maintained by Prof. Jeremy Lewis at Huntingdon College.

awac.us check us out!

Air War College Panel Replaces John Pomfret

On February 4, the bad news was that our scheduled speaker on China for February 6, journalist John Pomfret, cancelled due to a sudden and severe illness. The good news is that he has promised to come back in the fall. The really good news is that three highly qualified Air War College instructors with deep expertise on China agreed to take the podium on short notice. Dr. Lawrence "Buck" Grinter, professor of Asian Studies; Cornelis "Kees" Keur, the senior State Department representative at Air University; Dr. David Lai, native-born in China and a former Chinese diplomat; and Dr. Jim Nathan, who agreed to moderate the discussion, all filled in admirably. Their discussions covered trade, U.S.-Sino relations, economic reform (considerable), political reform (not yet), the one-child policy (effective in big cities, less so in rural areas), the Taiwan issue (neither the U.S. nor China want to go to war over Taiwan, so they both tread carefully), and the Chinese attitude toward Muslims (the Chinese are more tolerant of authoritarian regimes but will try to assimilate Muslims into their own culture). The World Affairs Council owes a great debt of gratitude to the Air War College for providing this excellent program.

**Want to join AWAC?
Call 244-3337.**

Evaluation Sheets Show Strengths and Problems

An analysis of the evaluation sheets from the last several presentations reveals some interesting findings. On average, only one out of four attendees fills out the form. AWAC wishes it were more, although if this were a poll, it would be considered highly accurate.

The great majority of those members responding feel that the buffet ranges anywhere from good to excellent to great. The Museum caterer, Jenny Weller, is demonstrably doing a fine job. Suggestions for eating utensils and bigger plates were incorporated. There have been a lot of complaints about the difficulty of eating the fine food and requests for more chairs and some stand-up tables. The number of chairs has been increased to near the maximum, but we will continue to explore that problem. The Museum does have three small stand-up tables which will be put to use in the future. The eating arrangements will work best if the seats and tables are shared to the maximum.

The auditorium has 240 seats plus a dozen or so chairs that can be put in the back, and that has proven satisfactory for all but one recent event: the Saudi Ambassador. Despite our restricting guests, over 300 people showed up, and the emergency arrangements, particularly the portable sound system for the overflow crowd, did not work well. There is a better sound system on order, and we should be better able to cope with large crowds in the future. There were two or three suggestions that we find a bigger facil-

ity, and indeed they are available. But with plenty of close-by parking, the elegance of the venue, the catering arrangements, the approved cash bar, the cooperation and responsiveness of the Museum staff, and the rarity of overflow crowds all heavily toward staying where we are.

Opportunity Offered By Chamber March 15

The Montgomery Area Chamber of Commerce, of which AWAC is a member, has offered our members the opportunity to hear the president of Shell Oil Company, Mr. John Hofmeister, speak on "How the U.S. can ensure energy supply for the future." The event is scheduled as a luncheon at 11:30, Thursday March 15, at the RSA Activity Center, 201 Dexter Avenue. There will be a \$25 charge. Contact Patsy Guy at 240-9434 or pguy@montgomerychamber.com

Next: AAD, Air War College Instructors

The American Academy of Diplomacy is working to arrange a program in late March. The AWC senior instructors will give their report to Alabama on April 24 after return from their visits around the globe as part of the AWC Regional Studies Program.