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Albright Q&A

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ALBRIGHT Q&A



After her talk, Madeleine Albright took questions from Furman students. Among her comments:

In response to a query about whether the United States has lost support among its European allies by focusing on terrorism beyond Afghanistan (for example, in Iraq):

"I meet regularly with former colleagues and former ministers as they come through Washington, and they are concerned. They do not share the same views about some of the problems that Saddam Hussein has posed. Vice President Cheney had a very difficult trip [to the Middle East] and was not able to get the support of the Arab countries around Iraq, which is very necessary if we are going to carry out any campaign against Saddam.

"While I actually do believe that Saddam Hussein is a serious problem and needs to be dealt with, I think it is essential at this point to keep our eye on the ball and to do the job in Afghanistan. While I do think that Iraq is evil, I do not think that the framing of the issue as the Axis of Evil has been particularly helpful.

"Iran is a neighbor of Afghanistan and is important to us in dealing with Afghanistan. Besides, it's not totally monolithic. There are different trends within Iran and by putting it in this Axis of Evil I think it complicates the problem. The Clinton administration always thought North Korea was dangerous, which is why we had a policy review to deal with North Korea. Former Defense Secretary Perry offered a fork in the road — they could either have confrontation with us or go down a road to where they would negotiate to get rid of their missile technology. And I went there and had fairly decent talks, and I think we were moving toward a verifiable agreement. But that has all now been jettisoned by this Axis of Evil."

In regard to balancing tactical and strategic approaches in the Middle East:

"Our administration spent more time working for peace in the Middle East than any other single issue. I made it a huge point to try to get to know the Palestinian delegation very closely and also to understand the legitimate needs of the Palestinian people.

"I think the saddest part for all of us in the administration is that we were not able to bring peace at Camp David [in the summer of 2000]. I also think that it is absolutely essential in a long-term view to understand that there is no way to achieve peace in the Middle East unless the United States is involved in it.

"This administration stayed out of it too long. I'm very glad [special envoy Anthony] Zinni and Vice President Cheney were forced into seeing the connection between what is going on and the anger of the Arab countries and their disappointment that the Palestinian issue has not been considered in a consistent way. The tragedies going on there are an abomination to everybody."

To a question about the role of foreign aid in nation-building and winning the peace:

"I wish I could banish the words foreign aid. Because 'foreign' and 'aid' is like trying to sell some terrible disease. Everybody thinks that the money is completely misused and that there's endless corruption.

"We should call it national security assistance. Whenever you say national security it kind of raises the level of interest.

"The shocking part is that basically out of every federal dollar, only one penny is spent in national security assistance. The new Bush proposals, which do not come into effect until 2004, might actually make it a penny and a quarter. It obviously depends on the size of the federal budget as we get to 2004.

"This kind of assistance provides educational possibilities and helps in terms of building small businesses and providing infrastructure. At the same time it helps psychologically by indicating to the people of a country that we are interested in their social and economic lives, in their intrinsic value. That then changes the view they might have about the United States.

"I have been involved in a survey where at the end of the year people around the world would be asked what they thought about the U.S. The results were that they do like American culture and American technology. What they don't like is that we don't share it, that we're selfish, and that the gap between the rich and the poor is growing."

In regard to how to raise Americans' understanding of the importance of foreign policy beyond terrorism:

"How do we all learn our news? I find it shocking that news programs are being taken off and substituted for late-night humor. News about foreign countries is not entertainment. It is serious; it affects people's lives. You can't expect people to understand what's going on if they don't see it.

"What I found at the UN was that CNN is the 16th member of the Security Council. When CNN put something on the news, people were aware of it and suddenly had to do something about it. But the war in Sudan was never on the news. There was fighting in various parts of the world that never made it.

"Our media have a responsibility to have longer news programs. I got pretty good at sound bites, but they don't get you anywhere and don't really allow you to explain things. Whenever you get a chance to be on television and get out three sentences before you're interrupted, it's a big deal.

"In addition, we must make sure that our immigration policies stay supple and open. This is a country of immigrants, and students at universities will be poorer if we decide we will not have foreign students coming in. We have to be careful about what we're doing with immigration laws and tightening immigration systems.

"I don't think anyone should be on a student visa who isn't a student, but we should allow foreign students in. If not, American students will be the poorer for it. We must understand that the U.S. can only be secure in a world where we understand the problems in other countries."