

4-1-2002

Global Challenges

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Recommended Citation

Stewart, Jim '76 and Register, Charlie (2002) "Global Challenges," *Furman Magazine*: Vol. 45 : Iss. 1 , Article 55.
Available at: <https://scholarexchange.furman.edu/furman-magazine/vol45/iss1/55>

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GLOBAL Challenges

By Jim Stewart

America's role in the international order. The Axis of Evil. The mounting tensions in the Middle East.

The topics covered the world for an all-star panel consisting of journalists Jim Hoagland and Robin Wright and Georgetown University professor John Ikenberry. And they proved that they were up to the task of following former Secretary of State Madeleine Albright, the headline opening act of the Richard W. Riley Institute's two-day conference on "National Security in a New Age."

The March 21 program in McAlister Auditorium engaged the audience as effectively as did Albright's lecture the night before. Deftly guided through a range of issues by moderator Phil Lader, the former United States ambassador to the United Kingdom, the three experts offered a forthright and provocative analysis of international affairs.

A number of themes emerged during the evening:

■ The United States must play a role in brokering a ceasefire in the Middle East. Without an American presence in Middle East negotiations, the United States cannot expect support from the Muslim world should it decide to pursue military action against Iraq.

■ President Bush's Axis of Evil comments could have both positive and negative consequences.

■ Even after the events of September 11, the world may not be in as bad a shape as people might think.

Ikenberry, author of two books on international relations, voiced this last view early in the program, pointing out that dire post-September 11 predictions of violence, social decay and backlash against American power have not happened. As he said, "The world hasn't fallen apart."

Instead, there is still a base of order in the world, and the United States has rallied

EXPERTS IN INTERNATIONAL AFFAIRS HOLD FORTH ON THE OBSTACLES AND OPPORTUNITIES FACING THE UNITED STATES — AND THE WORLD.

support for its efforts to confront the first "ism" that isn't attached directly to another great power (as opposed to Nazism or Communism, for example). "Most major countries are united with us in this cause," he said.

Furthermore, Ikenberry suggested that the world order established since World War II has led to more physical security and prosperity for more people than at any other time in history — something, he said, we do not always appreciate. This new, transformed international order, he argued, is relatively stable and somewhat institutionalized, and it features elements of interdependence, integration and collective decision-making. "It provides a foundation upon which to construct foreign policy," he said.

But how do we continue to build a cooperative foreign policy when, as Wright said, the United States is not good at seeing the bigger picture? She asserted that America tends to act forcefully "when it comes to committing money and troops and dealing with such issues as al-Qaida, the Taliban and Saddam Hussein." Where the U.S. falters, she said, is in dealing with the larger questions of "how to make the peace, how to build coalitions and how to transform societies."

This seems especially true in the Middle East, where the Bush administration initially appeared to respond slowly to the crisis. Hoagland, however, pointed out that the Middle East is such a quagmire that it is difficult to develop a viable plan that includes an "American presence."

"That's such a vague term," he said. "What does it mean? A military presence? A diplomatic one?"

Hoagland, a *Washington Post* columnist and two-time Pulitzer Prize recipient, went on to say that, in his opinion, significant movement toward sincere negotiations in the Middle East would not

occur until the Arabs and Israelis search for new leadership and Sharon and Arafat are gone. "They are part of the problem," he said.

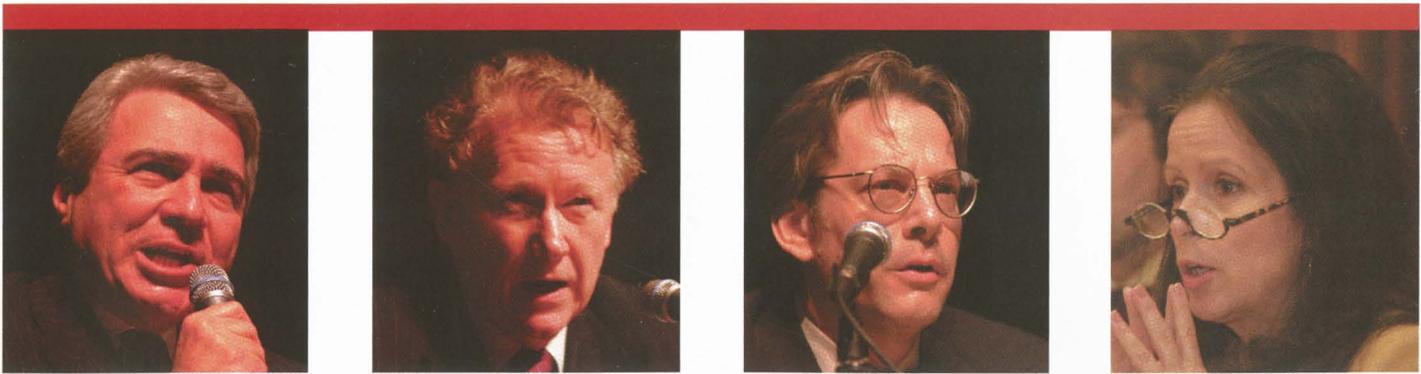
Wright, an award-winning *Los Angeles Times* correspondent, contrasted the approaches of the Bush and Clinton administrations to the Middle East. She described Clinton and his first Secretary of State, Warren Christopher, as almost too deeply engaged, to the point that American clout was actually diminished because the administration would respond too expectantly to every overture. Once Albright became Secretary of State, Wright said, the United States was not so available.

Bush, on the other hand, was more distant initially, and made a mistake in suggesting that there should be "no linkage" between settlement of the Arab-Israeli conflict and possible U.S. military action against Iraq. Wright, who has written books on militant Islam and on the Khomeini era in Iran, said that Muslims, and most of the world, "see a direct linkage, and Muslims would not support U.S. action against Iraq unless the U.S. had done something to ease the Arab-Israeli situation."

All seemed to agree that American involvement was essential to establishing a framework for peace in the region. As Ikenberry noted, "It's a trouble spot where a solution would unleash opportunities to focus our energies elsewhere. Using the full might of the U.S. to find a settlement would go much further toward creating security in the U.S. than the focus on Iraq."

The panel split on the impact of Bush's Axis of Evil speech, in which he put Iraq, Iran and North Korea on notice because of their development of weapons of mass destruction — and the potential for those weapons to fall into the hands of terrorists.

Wright said that Bush's use of the Axis of Evil phrase raised concerns among a



Phil Lader

Jim Hoagland

John Ikenberry

Robin Wright

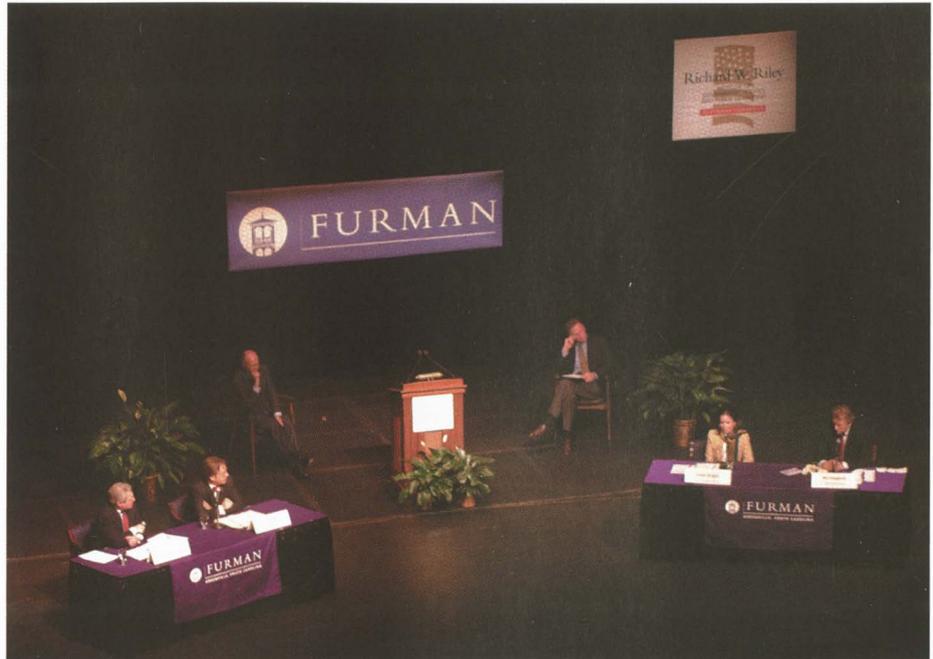
number of countries who feared that the president's comments would be counter-productive. She pointed particularly to Iran, where many took part in candlelight vigils after September 11 and expressed their sympathies to the victims. Since the Bush comments, she said, the mood in Iran "has shifted dramatically. It's a different environment now. Iranians are worried about the U.S., where they were previously interested in reconciling."

Ikenberry, who throughout the evening emphasized how America's status as the world's superpower afforded it an opportunity to build coalitions and "make power less provocative," was also concerned that the Axis of Evil concept would alienate different groups: "This kind of rhetoric sets us back."

Hoagland, however, found the president's comments less disconcerting. For one thing, he said, the speech helped Bush "settle the debate within his own administration that Saddam Hussein would be removed from power on this watch. That view is now accepted within the administration, and planning along those lines is proceeding. He also laid down very clear warnings not only to Iraq, Iran and North Korea, but to any other state, not to provide terrorists with support or harbor, and certainly not with weapons of mass destruction."

After the panelists sorted through other subjects — nuclear deterrence, the Japanese economy, the legacy of Clinton's foreign policy — moderator Lader asked each of them what advice they would offer the Bush administration.

Ikenberry said that the president should be aware of long-term structural shifts in the world economy. "Eighty-five percent of the world's wealth is concentrated in the democratic industrial world," which, he said, creates a dangerous level of international economic inequality. "The



The Richard W. Riley Institute is planning to convene another national conference during the 2002-2003 academic year, this one on the topic of "Women in Politics."

rich countries are getting older and their populations are shrinking, while the poor countries are getting bigger and younger. There's something deeply destabilizing about this, and it will be interesting to see how these inequalities are manifested."

Wright agreed that the economic divide could fuel extremism. She encouraged the administration to focus on "winning the peace," and particularly on "the aftermath of where we venture militarily, which will be our legacy of involvement in these regions." She urged the government to develop policies designed to help rebuild and transform societies — physically, socially and economically. In doing so, she said, we will "do much to insure our own peace down the road."

The last word was left to Hoagland, whose suggestions included:

- Develop an energy policy to dramatically reduce reliance on Persian Gulf oil;
- Develop an alliance with India to counterbalance China;
- Reconcile with Iran, which could lead to a solution for Iraq;
- And, echoing Albright's remarks from the previous evening, make education and educational diplomacy part of American foreign policy, "and name Dick Riley to head that initiative so those of us in Washington will have the pleasure of having him back in D.C."

Hoagland's final comment brought down the house while bringing the evening — and the conference — to a most appropriate conclusion. ●