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## Classroom discussions center on war

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

While American and British forces advanced on Baghdad, many Oakland University students were unsure of their stance on the war with Iraq.

To promote discussion and help students sort out the complex issues behind "Operation Iraqi Freedom," a number of OU professors incorporated war topics in their classes while relating it to course material.

An informal poll taken in Assistant Professor of History Don Matthews' Introduction to the Middle East class (IS 270) revealed that most of his students could not decide if they were pro or antiwar. Of the 40-some students present, 12 were for and 12 against military action.

Matthews took time from his segment on the 1973 Arab-Israeli conflict to address the fundamental issues behind the war. He engendered discussion by asking if the progress or lack of progress in the war affected their attitudes about U.S. policy. The answers and ensuing classroom debate reflected how divided students are on the war.

"We have no business being over there," said one student. "We don't allow anyone to come here and tell us what to do. September 11 was a wake-up call for the U.S. We're not going to just liberate Iraq but instill the U.S. way on them. It's either the United States' way or no way."

"I don't think we should change the Iraqi culture," countered another student. "But there are things we've found there that are internationally unacceptable, such as torture chambers. I don't think anyone's going to say that's permissible."

Another student was uncomfortable with apparent inconsistencies in U.S. foreign policy.

"If President Bush had gone to the United Nations and said his motive was to free the Iraqi people, the whole place would've laughed," the student said. "I don't see any consistency or legitimacy in our stance. Iraq used to be our ally."

Matthews followed this point up by asking students to state their ideas on the Bush administration's motives for war. The list the students compiled reflected their skepticism and questioning of U.S. policies:

- to possess Iraq's oil fields
- to liberate the Iraqi people
- to revive the war on terrorism
- to complete the initiatives of the first Gulf War
- to raise public morale (because the Bush administration lacks a clear agenda)
- to rid Iraq of its weapons of mass destruction
- to make a preemptive attack on Saddam Hussein
- to force Iraq to uphold U.N. resolutions and abide by international law
- to strengthen the American/Israeli relationship

Matthews closed the class by relating the conflict to the Arab oil embargo of 1973. Arab nations cut oil supplies to the United States because of the administration's backing of Israel. As a result, oil prices shot up 400 percent and nations such as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Kuwait and the United Arab Emirates gained enormous wealth. Matthews left his students with the thought that oil often is seen as a source of power as well as a fuel source.

Assistant Professor of Political Science Peter Trumbore also asked questions of his students in his U.S. Foreign Policy class (PS 115). He began discussion on the uses of military force in U.S. foreign policy by providing a link to the "National Security Strategy of the United States" document on the White House Web site.

"This document outlines how the Bush administration wants to use our military power to promote the goals of the United States," Trumbore said. "But since the collapse of the Soviet Union, we no longer have a need to contain a rival superpower. Still, the question of containment as a doctrine or strategy has held on from the Cold War. This was a U.S. policy for 50 years. But now,

with the Soviets gone, what should we do with American military power?"

Students offered up commonly heard reasons for the military presence in Iraq: to rid Hussein's regime of its weapons of mass destruction, to combat terrorism, and to establish a democracy in Iraq and create a "domino effect" among other Middle East nations.

"The U.S.'s stated goal is to be able to fight two regional conflicts simultaneously and be able to win both," Trumbore said. "The State Department also came up with the concept of the 'rogue state,' or states that seek to develop weapons of mass destruction and challenge national security interests. Countries on this list include Iran, Iraq, North Korea and others."

Classroom debate began when Trumbore asked students if the desire to create a democracy in the Middle East is genuine. Trumbore also asked if it were possible to establish a democracy in Iraq. He also left his students with other questions to consider:

- Is the spreading of democracy an important policy goal?
- Should we use our economic power to establish democracies instead of military force?
- Do our national security needs require us to act preventatively toward "rogue states?"
- Does the strategy of preemptive attacks make sense?

"I'd like you to think about the inconsistencies in American foreign policy in dealing with Saddam Hussein's regime," Trumbore said. "To some antiwar people, our inconsistencies makes the war unjustified. One justification some have used is that Iraq may not pose a threat to us now, but it could be an opponent five years from now. Some have seen this as the problem with North Korea. However, we know they already have nuclear weapons, and because of that, we can't touch them at present without paying a much greater cost."

Trumbore concluded the discussion by pointing out that the U.S. policy of pursuing a regime change in Iraq came during the Clinton administration, and that Al Gore was a strong proponent of removing Hussein from power.

Paul Licker, professor of management information systems and chair of the Decision and Information Sciences Department, gave his students an international, technology-based perspective on the war. Prior to coming to OU this semester, Licker spent five years teaching at the University of Cape Town in South Africa, 23 years at universities in Canada and also has taught in Thailand and the United Kingdom. He asked his students in his Issues in International Information Systems class (MIS 480) to consider how the war will impact different facets of international information technology.

"What does the war mean for IT? What does IT mean to the war?" Licker asked. "Some of the issues that business always faces but are exacerbated by war are logistics, fulfillment, human resource shortages in IT, economic uncertainty, and corruption and greed."

Another issue Licker addressed is international supply chain management and how the war will affect it.

"There is some talk that Canada's stance on the war could affect the flow of goods across the border, which could affect the production of automobiles locally," Licker said. "Companies also should be very worried about computer viruses and denial of attacks. Major Web sites of major U.S. suppliers could be targeted by Iraq regardless of the outcome of the war. Companies must have a contingency plan in case of such an attack."

Licker also emphasized that efforts to rebuild Iraq following the war will have an impact on the careers of those entering the IT profession, for example, an increase in the already large shortfall of skilled IT professionals.

"What will it take to get the IT structure back in Iraq after the war? What will 'business as usual' be like in Iraq?" Licker asked. "In some way rebuilding Iraq will touch each one of you in your future IT careers."

Licker also listed new issues engendered by the war, including espionage, government security measures, new laws, political divisions in society, and possible physical violence by emotionally disturbed veterans. He concluded by examining the ethical dimension of the war and asked his students to consider whether IS promotes or deters war, if IS is neutral in the conflict, and if IS workers are prone to support one side or another.

"In each class session, Professor Licker brings up more IS issues that will be impacted by the war," said senior MIS major Karl Borgquist. "He offers his own personal opinion, but at the same time he gives us a more holistic view. He puts everything into perspective as to where we're headed as individuals in IT. Because he spent some time teaching in South Africa, he offers a perspective on how others outside the U.S. view the war. It's a useful way to base your own opinion and a way for validating your own thoughts."

For more information on the war with Iraq, including answers to commonly asked questions and links to helpful resources, visit the [OU Emergency Procedures & Information](#) Web page.

**SUMMARY**

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