



Tuesday, March 25, 2003

Forum offers multiple views on Iraq war

By **Jeff Samoray**, OU Web Writer

An overflow audience from the Oakland University community learned more about the war with Iraq from a knowledgeable panel of OU faculty members in a discussion held in the Oakland Center Fireside Lounge March 25.

The forum, titled "FOCUS: War with Iraq," is the first in a series of monthly discussions OU will offer on topics of significant national and international interest. The format allowed audience members to direct questions to the panel after each member spoke briefly about the conflict. The panelists included Special Lecturer in Political Science Alan Epstein; Professor of Communication and Chair of Rhetoric, Communication and Journalism Shea Howell; Professor of Political Science Vince Khapoya; Visiting Instructor of Journalism and WDIV-TV news anchor Mike Lewis; Assistant Professor of History Don Matthews; and Assistant Professor of Political Science Peter Trumbore.

The majority of the panelists did not feel the war is justified. With a map of Iraq projected on a screen facing the audience, Matthews opened the discussion by stating that the U.S. strategy was to complete isolated air strikes and hope for an internal uprising against Saddam Hussein. That such an uprising has not yet occurred indicates a significant amount of resistance to U.S. forces, he said.

Khapoya, who lived through a political uprising as a boy in his native Kenya, said our troops should fight only when our national interests are at stake.

"I love my country, but fear my government," said Khapoya, who now is an American citizen. "This has been labeled a pre-emptive attack, but it will serve to encourage other countries to arm themselves even more to defend themselves. Many other countries are afraid of the U.S. more than Saddam Hussein. The behavior of the U.S. in response to the action of the United Nations reveals the corrupt underbelly of our culture."

Howell added that international protests against the war have brought about a significant amount of dialogue against the conflict.

"I can think of no more important obligation of our citizens than to protest this war," Howell said. "International protests have brought about an unprecedented amount of activity. Never in my experience has this been achieved. The domestic protests already have affected Bush administration policy."

In contrast, Trumbore was in favor of the military strikes.

"My feeling, which I've come to slowly, is that war is the best option of a lot of really bad options," Trumbore said. "But our military strategy is very risky – it's patterned after the German invasion of the Soviet Union in 1941, which was characterized by deep, rapid penetration in areas that largely do not offer resistance. Yet we leave behind us a long, relatively unsupported supply train."

Epstein countered by dismissing the notion that our forces are at risk and said the real story of the war isn't being conveyed by the American mass media.

"I do not accept our military strategy as 'risky,'" Epstein said. "We are now fighting a country without a viable air force. We're attacking a country about the size of California, not the former Soviet Union. We haven't even seen the most important news coverage – the people who cannot escape the shrapnel and fireballs from our precision weapons. That's where the real risk resides."

Lewis candidly admitted that he was perhaps the only panelist who wished he were in Baghdad.

"As a reporter, I wish I were there. That's what reporters do. But I've chosen to be here with my family," Lewis said. "I still would like to take a moment to pay tribute to the brave journalists who are there covering this war for the world. For the first time in the history of the world, we can see this war live, as it's happening."

Of the many issues the audience raised, much of the discussion centered on media coverage of the war. One student asked about alternative media outlets and if the Arabic television network Al Jazeera were available locally.

"You can pick up Al Jazeera by satellite. It gets very high ratings in restaurants and residences in Dearborn," Lewis said. "They often air graphic images that sometimes are shown on American networks, but we have to remember that the networks often follow each other for competitive reasons to air certain video footage."

Howell also recommended listening to National Public Radio (NPR) news as a media alternative.

"The media is not one thing – there are many alternative voices out there," Howell said. "For example, NPR does not refer to 'coalition forces.' Instead they refer to 'American-led forces' or 'American and British troops.' The notion of there being coalition forces or an allied response is ludicrous."

The discussion drew a large crowd of attendees, which overflowed into the hallway outside the Fireside Lounge. Audience members listened intently and said they came away with a greater appreciation for both perspectives.

"I was glad to see a lot of the discussion centered on issues that have been ignored by the press," said senior political science major Sean Porter. "I respect the opinions of all the speakers and think that, given the limited timeframe (one hour), the important issues were touched upon."

Junior political science major Andrea Carter currently is taking classes from both Epstein and Trumbore and said the panel provided an excellent opportunity for discussion.

"It's hard to find any organized panels that cover more than the surface issues," Carter said. "I thought there was good intellectual coverage of the issues. The rationale and arguments presented on either side of the war represented what democracy's all about. A key component of democracy is accountability, and I think it's totally reasonable to come to a discussion like this and ask for a justification for this war."

The next forum will be held sometime in April, though a specific topic has yet to be determined. For more information, contact the **Center for Student Activities** at (248) 370-2400 or csa@oakland.edu.

SUMMARY

An overflow audience from the OU community learned more about the war with Iraq from a knowledgeable panel of faculty members in a discussion held in the Oakland Center March 25. The forum, titled "FOCUS: War with Iraq," is the first in a series of monthly discussions OU will offer on topics of significant national and international interest.

Created by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Tuesday, March 25, 2003
Modified by CareTech Administrator (webservices@caretechsolutions.com) on Tuesday, March 25, 2003
Article Start Date: Monday, October 13, 2003