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OU examines America a year after 9-11

By **Mary E. Iorio**, OU Writer

As taps solemnly rolled out across Oakland University's campus at 8:46 a.m. on Sept. 11 – the moment the first jet struck the World Trade Center a year ago – America's resilience will be measured in its response to the still unsettled out fall of that once unthinkable terrorist act.

On Tuesday, Sept. 10, three Oakland University professors presented their views during a retrospective look at the nation one year after the terrorist attacks on the United States.

The horrendous aftermath of Sept. 11, 2001, leaves an indelible hole in the lives of thousands of families. But for the nation, the mark left by 9-11, crisscrosses the constitution, puts a twist in foreign policy, leaves scholars wondering what they missed and citizens worrying if the war on terrorism is just heating up.

"The most dangerous man in the world today is not Osama bin Laden," said Journalism Professor Jane Briggs-Bunting. "It is not Saddam Hussein. The most dangerous man in the world is John Ashcroft, the attorney general of the United States. He is taking the fear generated by terrorist attacks and using it as an opportunity to decrease civil liberties in this country.... It will be a victory for terrorism if it succeeds in eroding our Constitution."

Since Sept. 11, 2001, Americans have given in to higher security checks at airports. The new Patriotic Act grants the government greater access to once-private transactions, such as records for library book borrowing. It's a slow whittling away of rights, which should concern people of all colors, Briggs-Bunting said. She believes the detention of hundreds of Arab and Muslim men since 9-11 deserves greater outcry.

"Whose to say we aren't next?" she asked. "If it can happen to a person whose skin is brown, black, red, at some point, it can happen to anyone."

Briggs-Bunting cited the case of Rabih Haddad, a well-known leader in Ann Arbor's Islamic community detained last December and held without trial or hearings. Several Michigan newspapers have joined with Rep. John Conyers (D-Mich.) and the American Civil Liberties Union in demanding a public, rather than closed-door, hearing of his deportation case.

The Sixth U.S. Circuit Court of Appeals recently ruled in Haddad's favor. Briggs-Bunting read a segment of the opinion written by Judge Damon Keith: "A true democracy is one that operates on faith – faith that government officials are forthcoming and honest, and faith that informed citizens will arrive at logical conclusions. This is vital reciprocity that America should not discard in these troubling times."

The truth is, said Pete Trumbore of the Political Science Department, "America's strength and America's vulnerability all remain the same since last year. Al Qaeda is not a new phenomenon. We knew about Al Qaeda during the Clinton Administration. It's perception that has changed. Americans were woken up last September to the fact that being the single remaining superpower in the world does not guarantee safety."

The quadruple attacks of Sept. 11, he said, have been used as an opportunity to take action on long-standing foreign policy goals – goals that did not have wide support from the American public prior to Sept. 11. "We can see that shift in the repetitive mentioning of Iraq as the next target in the War on Terrorism," Trumbore said. "We've had our eye on Iraq for better than a decade."

Would America survive another war with that Middle Eastern nation? Trumbore said there's no doubt that the United States would.

"What happens if we go into Iraq? We win. There will be more American bloodshed than in 1991, but we still win and then we occupy that country for a really, really long time. We can't take that risk that Saddam Hussein returns to power," Trumbore said.

Trumbore rejected concerns that Iraq might strike America first. "There is no weapon that Iraq possesses that could threaten the U.S. if we are not in that region. His longest-range missile only travels 300 miles. The idea of a suitcase nuke is not realistic. It's

not possible to shrink it down that much," Trumbore said.

He believes American citizens need to demand a better explanation from President Bush on why it's in our nation's interest to invade Iraq.

America must tread carefully in its upcoming policy decisions related to the Middle East, said Don Matthews, a history professor specializing in Middle Eastern studies. He argued that the Bush Administration made mistakes in its post-Sept. 11 decisions, neglecting to recognize how its one-sided support of Israeli Prime Minister Ariel Sharon would lead Palestinian citizens of Israel to feel isolated.

Matthews believes the tendency of the U.S. government and military to view Islam as an enemy of the West caused a rift between government agencies and the scholarly researchers focusing on the Middle East. "As a result, researchers disengaged from foreign policy debates and failed to predict striking changes in power, such as the fall of the Shah of Iran." Or Sept. 11, 2001.

What happens now, a year later?

"The most immediate foreign policy issue is whether to launch military action on Iraq," Matthews said.

As the government and the people of the United States ponder that decision, Briggs-Bunting said, "I hope that we consider what we're doing to other nations and think about how we'd like them to do the same thing to us."

SUMMARY

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