Former Ambassadors Speak at IU Bloomington on Afghanistan, India, and Korea

In recent months, Indiana University Bloomington hosted three former U.S. ambassadors to countries that remain very much in the forefront of international politics and U.S. foreign policy. Each official gave public lectures on campus and in the community that attracted capacity audiences eager to gain first-hand knowledge of these countries.

As the first U.S. ambassador to be sent to Afghanistan after a hiatus of more than 20 years, Robert P. Finn was immediately impressed by the changes and sense of hope that he saw when he first arrived there in March 2002. “In the year and a half I was there, Kabul was completely transformed, mostly by the people.” The former ambassador was in Bloomington in mid-January 2004 to deliver a Chancellor’s Forum lecture, with co-sponsorship by the Middle Eastern and Islamic Studies Program, whose director, Nazif Shahrani, provided introductory remarks.

Finn spoke of the positive changes that have taken place in Afghanistan, as well as the continuing challenges the new government faces, among them the lack of infrastructure, especially a system of roads; the need for security; warlordism; the slow pace of foreign investment; the broken educational system; the drug trade; and the resurgent Taliban. On the positive side, he cited the great hunger for education and said the recent Loya Jirga that hammered out a new constitution proved the Afghans’ allegiance to their nation and their seriousness in rebuilding their country. Given its potential, along with the continued backing of an international coalition, he felt that Afghanistan was “a country that could in principle eventually become a viable state.”

Finn is currently the Ertegun Visiting Professor in the Department of Near Eastern Studies at Princeton University. He was also U.S. ambassador to Tajikistan from 1998 until mid-2001 and has had other diplomatic postings in Azerbaijan, Croatia, Pakistan, and Turkey.

In November, the India Studies Program sponsored a visit by Vijay K. Nambiar, India’s Permanent Representative to the United Nations, whose goal has been to argue for India’s place as the sixth permanent member of the UN Security Council. The permanent membership of the council—with only five members—has remained unchanged since 1945 when it was first created. Nambiar gave a public lecture entitled, “A Permanent Seat on the Security Council at the United Nations: India’s Case?”

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Director of the India Studies Program Sumit Ganguly explained that India desires a Security Council seat for several reasons. Some members of the government see the permanent seat as critical to Indian security. Along with the seat comes the power to veto resolutions and proposals, including any that may be brought up by Pakistan over the disputed Kashmir region. The Indian government rests its claims to permanent membership partly on its growing population—the second largest in the world—and its healthy economy.

Before his current appointment, Nambiar held a number of important diplomatic posts for India, most recently as high commissioner to Pakistan (2000–2002), ambassador to China (1996–2000), high commissioner to Malaysia (1993–1996), and ambassador to Afghanistan in (1990–1992). Nambiar’s visit was co-sponsored by the Office of the Chancellor and the College of Arts and Sciences.

Also in November, the East Asian Studies Center at IUB sponsored a visit by former ambassador to South Korea Donald Phinney Gregg. Gregg gave several talks, culminating in a public lecture delivered to the Bloomington community at the Buskirk-Chumley Theatre.

Describing his own experiences in dealing with North and South Korea, Gregg discussed how various diplomatic decisions made regarding Korea, especially the North, have affected the current state of affairs there. “The problem is that North Korea feels vitally threatened by the United States,” he said. Despite past and present frustrations, he still has hopes for reconciliation between the United States and North Korea.

Though he was critical of the current administration’s stand, he felt that problems could be worked out if the U.S. government were willing to enter into serious negotiations that involved a security guarantee and promises of continuing economic assistance.

In a career that has spanned 43 years, Gregg worked for the Central Intelligence Agency and was assigned to Burma, Japan, Korea, and Vietnam. He moved to the National Security Council in 1979, where he was in charge of intelligence activities and Asian policy affairs. From 1982 to 1989, he served as the national security advisor of then Vice President George H. W. Bush and subsequently served as U.S. Ambassador to Korea until his retirement in 1993. He is currently a member of the Council on Foreign Relations of the U.S. Senate and serves as chair of the Korea Society in New York.

for the Rhodes and Marshall competitions, he chose the Mitchell, competing with 244 other applicants from 166 colleges and universities nationwide for the 12 positions. Mitchell scholarships allow Americans to pursue one year of postgraduate study in any discipline offered at one of seven universities in Ireland or two in Northern Ireland. These universities waive tuition and provide housing for Mitchell scholars, who receive a stipend for living expenses and travel through Ireland, the United Kingdom, and Europe.

Named in honor of former Senator Mitchell, who played a pivotal role as chair of the peace negotiations in Northern Ireland in the mid-1990s, the program was launched in 1998 through an endowment established by the government of Ireland and announced its first winners in 2000.

—RMN

www.us-irelandalliance.org/scholarships.html