

Twenty Years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall

Written by student intern reporter, Julia Paslavska, January 30, 2009

The Scowcroft Institute has a reputation for hosting distinguished conferences and attracting exceptional guests. On January 26, 2009 the Institute, along with the European Union Center, the Bush Presidential Library Foundation, and the Glasscock Center for the Humanities offered one of the finest events of the academic year. Titled *The Cold War Is History: Twenty Years after the Fall of the Berlin Wall*, the conference brought together some of the country's best historians and scholars to discuss the fall of the Berlin Wall and how the significance of the event has changed over time.

The symposium featured Dr. Chen Jian of Cornell University, Dr. Melvyn Leffler of the University of Virginia, Dr. James Sheehan of Stanford University, and Dr. William Taubman of Amherst College. Dr. Engel, the interim director of the Scowcroft Institute, remarked on the quality of the panelists at the conference, stating that this was one of the most prestigious symposiums the Institute has put on since his time at the University. Griffin Rozell, the assistant director of the Institute, added "The Scowcroft Institute is delighted to have individuals of such caliber come and share their knowledge." The diverse backgrounds of the panelists only added to the success of the conference.

During the daylong convention, the four scholars addressed the meaning of the events of 1989 in retrospect to four key geopolitical areas: China, the United States, Europe, and the former Soviet Union. Dr. Jian, an expert in modern Chinese history, Chinese foreign policy and security studies, and Sino American relations discussed how the fall of the Wall influenced and shaped China's policies. Dr. Melvyn Leffler, a professor of American History at the University of Virginia and a former President of the Society of Historians of American Foreign Relations, used his expertise in American History to address the events from the US perspective. Speaking about the impact and significance of the year on the history of Europe was Dr. James Sheehan, a professor of Modern European History at Stanford University. And lastly, completing the panel of the outstanding speakers was Dr. Williams Taubman, a professor of Political Science at Amherst College and an expert on Soviet and Russian politics and foreign policy.

The conference began with the four panelists presenting their respective papers to a group of professors and scholars. Following the presentations, five commentators formally remarked on the papers. The group of commentators included Professor Frank Gavin of the LBJ School at the University of Texas, Professor Gale Strokes of Rice University, Professor Randy Kluver of Texas A&M University, and Ambassador Larry Napper of the Bush School at Texas A&M. After the morning session, the panelists held a question and answer session open to the public. According to Dr. Engel "The public discussion in the afternoon demonstrated just how great the speakers were."

The panelists are currently working together on a book, which will address the issues discussed at the symposium. Oxford University Press will publish the book in November of 2009 with Dr.

Engel writing a chapter and editing the final copy. According to Mr. Rozell, "Having the name of the Scowcroft Institute attached to a book of such quality will raise the visibility of both the Institute and the Bush School in the international affairs community".

When asked about the benefit of the conference to the students of Texas A&M, Dr. Engel responded "One of the main goals of the Scowcroft Institute is to bring the world to Aggieland and to bring Aggieland to the world. This conference brought history of the Bush Administration to the University and the published outcome of the conference will be a product of Texas A&M University. As a result, the Scowcroft Institute and Texas A&M University remain two key centers for thought in the field of international relations in the 21st century."

The panelists, formal commentators, and attendees agree that the conference exceeded all expectations and was nothing short of a success. Similarly, the sponsors are honored to have hosted such a significant event as well as be able to contribute to the scholarly work which is set to publish in November of this year.