

Lee Hamilton: “A balanced view of American power”



Photo by UGA Public Affairs' Paul Efland.

What do we do with all of this power? That was the question that Lee Hamilton, the co-chair of the Iraq Study Group and former vice-chair of the 9/11 Commission, posed to a captivated audience when he delivered the 102nd Sibley Lecture in March.

According to Hamilton, power is limited. “The United States has an awesome power, paired with an inability to bend the world to our will. This is the current issue confronting America,” he said.

After recalling some of President George W. Bush’s comments on U.S. strength made after 9/11, Hamilton said, “Today talks of transforming the world with America’s power have diminished, and everywhere we turn we see the limitations of American power. Whereas our ability to accomplish things a few years back seemed to be unlimited, it now seems the problems often outpace our ability to confront them.”

The former Congressman pointed out, however, that the United States’ power is diminished, not dissipated. According to Hamilton, America needs to lead on issues around the world so that progress can be made; other world leaders look to the United States for leadership but are not willing to

subordinate themselves in doing so.

He sees changes surfacing in how America uses its power, shifting to a multilateral approach. “The country is beginning to accept that we cannot solve every problem,” Hamilton said. As such, he sees the country turning increasingly to diplomacy.

“Our task is to apply American power pragmatically and skillfully,” Hamilton continued. He applied this idea to the question of when it is appropriate to use American military power.

Hamilton believes the rules of engagement have become clear to all Americans.

While acknowledging that using force does have its place in the war in Iraq, he believes broad international coalitions must be formed for support. “Support on the home front must also be achieved,” he said.

“Our policy position then must be more than what we demand others to do, although that ought to be part of it. It must include what steps we are willing to take to show the world that we are serious,” Hamilton com-

mented about worldwide nuclear proliferation. “Robust diplomacy, not military invasions, should be used to approach nuclear disarmament across the globe.”

In terms of foreign policy, Hamilton feels America needs to show the decency of its people through extended efforts. “It says to those countries we’re on your side. We want to create an alternative system of education that gives you a decent education and not hatred of Americans and hatred of the American system. It says we’re on your side. We want an agenda of opportunity for you. That’s what American foreign policy has to do,” he said.

Hamilton is currently president and director of the Woodrow Wilson International Center for Scholars and director of the Center on Congress at Indiana University. He represented Indiana’s 9th Congressional District for 34 years, beginning in January 1965. While in office, he chaired a number of committees dedicated to foreign policy.

In early 2006, Hamilton was named co-chair of the Iraq Study Group, which was charged with providing a forward looking, bi-partisan assessment of the situation in Iraq and was created at the urging of Congress. Previously, he served as vice-chair of the 9/11 Commission and co-chaired the 9/11 Public Discourse Project to monitor the implementation of the commission’s recommendations.

The Sibley Lecture series is sponsored by the Charles Lovidans Foundation of Atlanta in honor of the life and work of John A. Sibley, a 1911 Georgia Law graduate.

This year’s lecture also helped to commemorate the 30th anniversary of the establishment of the Dean Rusk Center – International, Comparative and Graduate Legal Studies in 1977. The center was created to expand the scope of research, teaching and service at Georgia Law into the evolving international dimensions of law. It is named after former U.S. Secretary of State Dean Rusk, who taught at the law school for nearly 25 years.

– Nikki Girard

**“The United States
has an awesome power,
paired with an inability
to bend the world to
our will. This is the
current issue
confronting America.”**

– Lee Hamilton, co-chair of
the Iraq Study Group and
former vice-chair of the
9/11 Commission