

US "a superpower in decline" hotly debated

by Van Le

America's position as a world power was discussed and questioned at a forum on campus.

The panel consisted of professors L. Arosens, History; L. Pratt, Political Science; and E. Schaffer of Economics. The three discussed America's military and economic influence on the international scene.

Arosens and Pratt began the debate. As the first speaker, Arosens argued that America's international position "has changed but not declined." His argument was mainly a comparison of present day policies with policies circa 1945.

In 1945, America was "the world's greatest economic and military power," said Arosens. "She commanded considerable respect from the rest of the world and had the will to exert this power." Most importantly, "many countries wanted close relations with the U.S.," he said, citing its role in the formation of NATO.

Since this time, however, conflicts such as the Vietnam war, the energy crisis, and double digit inflation have "economically exhausted the U.S.," he said, adding that "there has been a rebound and the U.S. is in their sixth year of recovery."

Militarily, the U.S. now has "the highest peace time buildup of arms,"

giving them "an enormous advantage" and "a lot of cards to play in the SALT talks."

As for international relations there are "strains with NATO but (America) is in a much better position now," since the Pacific Rim countries are more favorable to (its policies)."

Finally, Arosens said that "Americans have won the propaganda war" in winning the Third World and promoting the "mass consumer society." It seems that most countries are shifting toward the American model and not to the Soviet model of government, he said. "America remains the only country in the world where people are fighting to get into."

While Arosens saw only change, Schaffer saw decline. "Decline, yes," he says, "but whether (America) is finished as a world power, the answer is no." He went on to outline this decline and like Arosens, spoke on the two themes of economic and military force.

Schaffer said that the "U.S. became a world power after World War One and the world power after World War Two... its peak of power, to influence world events the way it wanted to," he continued, "was in Iran in 1953, and Guatemala in 1954."

Symptoms of the decline can be

traced from this time, said Schaffer. They include the Cuban revolution and American attempts to influence it, the Cuban Missile Crisis and the failed economic embargo placed on Cuba to cripple it economically, the economic revival of the Soviets, and the Vietnam war.

Vietnam, says Schaffer, showed that "Americans had lost the ability to control the world the way (they) would like to," and that trying to "blast them all to hell" with American's "technological superiority" didn't work.

Economically, Schaffer disagreed with Arosens and said that the "economic revival (is) doubtful." "Military buildup has endangered the U.S. economically," he said, by seducing top brains and entrepreneurs into the arms race. Furthermore, America's has lost its ability to compete internationally because many businesses have come to rely on "government handouts." The West Germans and the Japanese, said Schaffer, have done the opposite and have taken the markets away from Americans.

Schaffer concluded that the U.S. was no longer as powerful on the international scene and commented generally during the question period that this was good because it resulted in "a more civilized world

where no one dominates."

As final speaker, Professor Pratt decided not to give another opinion on America's position but instead review the literature on the topic.

"Most of the literature on the decline and what it implies... has been very economic," he said. While he agrees that economics is a major force, he feels that the literature written "mainly by Marxists and liberals" has exaggerated its importance.

Pratt stated instead that "military power is the basis of international politics," and quoted Machiavelli's The Prince, saying "a state with its own force" is powerful player and does not have to depend on mercenaries but can take care of its own interests.

Pratt said that the importance of force has been underemphasized for reasons such as "the defeat of U.S. in Vietnam... (that) brought about a defeatism in strategists." This attitude was reinforced by the Carter administration's dealings with the Iranian revolution.

"Yes, economic interdependence (is important)," he continued, but in cases of rivalry and conflict, "armed force is the arbiter of last resort." He quoted Hobbes: "when nothing else comes up, clubs are trumps."

Though he emphasized the key role of military force, Pratt noted that "constraints on the use of force are growing." One example is the

growing dissension on the arms expenditure between Congress and the Presidency, and also seen in the Soviet government. Another restraint is that "the cost of running the empire outweighs the gains." However, from looking at Central America and the Persian Gulf, said Pratt, one can see that military force is still a strong mark of American foreign policy.

As a final note, Pratt spoke of the situation in Nicaragua, saying that one of the core policies of the Reagan administration "is (to) destroy the Nicaraguan government."

"Time is running out for the Sandinistas (and) a peaceful settlement," said Pratt, adding also that the Reagan administration "knows it is on the way out."

Pratt said in conclusion, "Do not depreciate the role of force in conventional politics."

The forum concluded with a question and answer period and the crowd proved to be fairly knowledgeable. While most questions continued on the debate on America's position as a world power, there was also some discussion on American trade policy. In reply, Pratt suggested that Americans were moving away from a multilateral trade and concentrating more on bilateral and unilateral agreements, and it is becoming more of a Fortress America economically."

The forum was sponsored by the International Relations and Strategic Studies Club.

More money for Alberta Universities

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budgets of the Universities, as "both are absolutely essential."

Prior to the current infusion of \$21 million provided by Advanced Education, and a previous \$18 million provided last November, the endowment fund was severely backlogged, with some matching requests up to five years old.

The additional money has cleared up almost all of the backlog, according to Jane Simmons, the Communications director of Advanced Education. "The \$21 million" should take care of all applications received till the end of the fiscal year."

Exact details of which monies the U of A will receive for which programs are not yet available, according to Simmons.

Interrelated

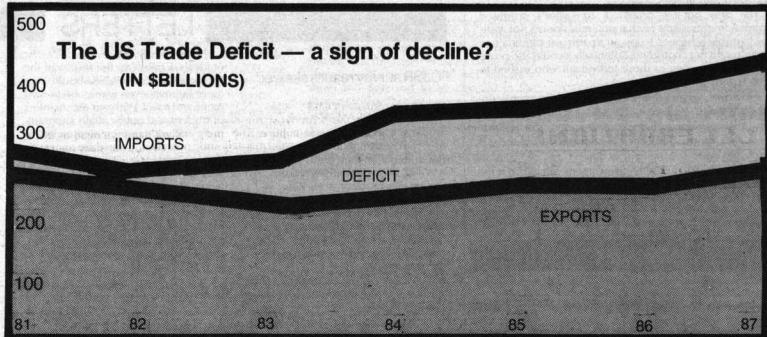
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and we must change our belief that we are "lords and masters of the earth", in order to save it.

Also, Watson says, we have to develop an economic system that recognizes that the resources of our planet have to be saved for future generations; not just five years down the line, but five million. Finally, Watson claims, we have to develop a more ecological perspective in political life, citing the Green Party as an example of how this can be done.

Paul Watson has confronted tear-gas and machine guns, but to risk his own life, he says, is not unusual. He says "in this century, over 100 million people have died in wars over real estate. I think it's a much more honourable thing to protect a habitat or a species that has taken hundreds of million years to evolve. I would die quite happily knowing I was dying for a fight that really had to be fought."

Watson will be speaking in SUB Theatre on March 29 at 8 pm. He outlined some of his goals and history in an interview with CJSR radio.



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