

## Great Decisions Starts Off as a Success Once Again!

"Talking to the Enemy" was the title of the first lecture in the 2008 "Great Decisions" series, coordinated by the Bowling Green AAUW and held at the Senior Center on Sat., Jan. 26. About fifty people attended to hear Dr. Neil Englehart, Assistant Professor of Political Science at BGSU, speak about the question, "How do we deal with countries we don't like?" Englehart placed his remarks in the context of the upcoming presidential election, noting that foreign policy is one way to distinguish among the candidates. As we work to choose our next political leader, what kinds of lessons can voters learn from the history of U.S. diplomatic relations?

In order to answer this question, Englehart began with a definition of diplomacy: negotiation between sovereign nations toward mutual benefit. This definition was developed at a moment in history characterized by the Cold War and the end of colonialism, when diplomacy was upheld as a way for nations to cooperate and compromise. However, there are nations "we don't like," according to Englehart, and the U.S. has struggled to develop appropriate strategies for working with these nations without seeming to condone their problematic behaviors.

Englehart provided a model of alternative strategies that the U.S. has utilized to deal with nations that violate human rights standards or initiate hostile actions toward other nations. Then he explained the limitations and benefits of these strategies within a global political context. Finally, through examination of three recent, specific political situations, he demonstrated the relative effectiveness of these strategies and suggested that the advantages of diplomacy outweigh the effectiveness of the alternative strategies.

Englehart noted that the overall goal should determine the best course of action. He asked, "do we want to change a regime's behavior, or do we want to change the regime?" If the goal is regime change, we must acknowledge that it will be almost impossible to engage that regime in diplomatic negotiation, and there will be a high risk of disruption to the general population of the nation if regime change is achieved. If we work toward behavior change, instead, we might see more subtle effects, but we will also see a lower risk to the general population and a better outcome for diplomatic negotiations.

When faced with a nation that does not seem to be a good candidate for diplomatic engagement, Englehart noted that the U.S. has developed eight alternatives to diplomacy, in order of severity: public criticism of the regime; reduction or elimination of economic aid and public diplomacy; institution of economic sanctions; intensification of economic sanctions; withdrawal of our ambassador from the nation; closure of the embassy; elimination of all direct diplomatic contact; and finally, military action. Englehart explained the risks of each of these

strategies, noting particularly the problems associated with economic sanctions. He said that, in order to be really effective, sanctions must be agreed upon by a strong coalition of countries. Otherwise, the targeted nation will simply get their resources from third party nations.

Englehart explained how sanctions might increase public support for the problematic ruling elite. When sanctions hurt the country's general population much more than they hurt the ruling class, the ruling elite can use this disparity to their advantage. In pre-war Iraq, for example, Saddam Hussein explained to the people that their babies were sick because sanctions prevented adequate health care. The people then blamed the U.S. and our allies rather than Hussein's regime for their situation. Therefore, we need to weigh the risk of increasing public support for the sanctioned nation's leadership against the effectiveness of the sanctions.

Three recent examples demonstrate the relative risks and potential benefits of alternatives to diplomacy, according to Englehart. U.S. use of sanctions and elimination of diplomatic contact in North Korea and Iran have been ineffective toward addressing those countries' potential nuclear proliferation. In both countries, the U.S. strategies led to increased public support for the nations' leaders among their citizens and decreased influence and information exchange for the U.S. Englehart said, "Mistrust leads to bad behavior on all sides, and everyone loses."

One example that is often touted as a sanction success story, according to Englehart, is South Africa. He explained that, although the sanctions did play a small role in the fall of Apartheid, the end of the Cold War and the hard work of South African activists, like the ANC, were much more significant.

During the question period, an audience member raised the question of Libya—did sanctions help the U.S. in our efforts to change Qadhafi's behavior? Englehart explained that, indeed, sanctions were one element to that success story. But he reminded us that in Libya, the goal was not regime change. Therefore, diplomatic efforts also had a much better chance for success at the outset.

Another audience member asked what Englehart would recommend for increased U.S. success in foreign relations. He noted the need to increase funding and support for the State Department. When Englehart reported that the U.S. spends more money on military bands than on our State Department, the audience reacted with audible surprise. An expanded State Department staff could help expand our opportunities for diplomacy worldwide, an approach that Englehart implied would work much better than sanctions and diplomatic withdrawal.

--Jeannie Ludlow  
*Legal Advocacy Fund*