Cobban On Why We Are Going to War

By Paul Yoder
Staff Writer

International affairs expert Helena Cobban addressed a full Martin Chapel Tuesday evening on the topic of possible war in Iraq.

“A number of people suggested we get to know Helena Cobban because we had some things in common,” said Pat Spaulding of the Conflict Transformation Program, which hosted the event.

Cobban, an author, journalist and researcher, is currently working as Senior Global Affairs Fellow with the Institute for Practical Ethics at the University of Virginia. She is a writer for The Christian Science Monitor and is a columnist for the London-based Arabic newspaper Al-Hayat. She is also a member of the International Institute of Strategic Studies and sits on the Middle East advisory committee of Human Rights Watch.

Cobban spoke about the situation involving the United States and possible war with Iraq. “My experience actually traveling around Washington, D.C., is that a lot of people are concerned about war,” she said.

Cobban addressed America’s general concept of war itself. “Different people have different ideas of what is war and what war means,” The U.S. has not been affected by war like the rest of the world has in the past century. “There is not that same vividness in folk memory of what war is,” she explained. “For Americans in the 20th century, war was an option thing outside of homeland.”

This experience of war as overseas and therefore removed makes Americans not realize the true nature of war. “War is a destructive business. War itself constitutes a massive assault on human rights and human dignity,” Cobban said.

Cobban outlined the shifts in the Bush administration’s rational for an attack on Iraq. Initially, accusations of Iraq ties to al-Qaeda were given as reason to invade the Middle Eastern nation. When these charges were proved unfounded, the Bush administration said that Iraq posed a strong threat to neighboring countries. “The United States’ closest ally in the region never backed up this assertion. “The Israeli government has never asked us to intervene on their behalf,” Cobban said. Iraq’s neighbors want the matter dealt with politically.

Finally, the Bush administration said invasion was necessary because Iraq’s weapons of mass destruction posed an international threat. This reason was discredited because there is not conclusive evidence of such weapons.

The fourth and current rational for attack came into place at that point. It called for a regime change, an ousting of Saddam Hussein, would be good for the Iraqi people. “What we have here is not a problem with a good solution, but a solution with a justificationary problem,” Cobban concluded.

Cobban then identified a number of problems with attacking Iraq. “The unified military is extremely weary about this war,” she said, referring to the fact that Iraq does have weapons that the U.S. supplied it in the 1980’s when the U.S. was backing Iraq in a conflict with Iran. These weapons, however, hardly threaten world peace when compared to “our own capabilities” or those of many other nations, Cobban explained.

Engaging in war with Iraq with the rationale of regime change would also be dangerous because Saddam Hussein’s options would be limited. “By announcing that one wants to go after Saddam Hussein, one is increasing exponentially the problem,” Cobban said. He would have little reason not to “take the whole deck of cards down with him,” she explained.

Cobban questioned the effectiveness of attacks. “Democracy has never been brought to a country on the tip of a cruise missile,” she stated.

Cobban said a war with Iraq would also have very negative effects. “If the United States goes through with this war through inattention by voters, then people around the world are going to feel the effects for more than a century to come. I really do think this thing could be the end of the UN.”

The evening ended with a panel of four speakers from a number of backgrounds providing input. Hill Sanders of Veterans for Peace made an important observation. “If you experience war, you will oppose war.”

The Inside Scoop

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| Thursday, Oct. 17 | 9 p.m. Dinner Theater, 5:30. The Concert Society  
|             | • Iraqi action planning meeting, 7 p.m. C.C. General's ball  
|             | • Noon Recital, Lehman, 12:00 p.m. Recital Hall B  
|             | • Gospel Choir Rehearsals, 6 p.m. Martin Chapel  
|             | • Couples Encounter, $10 per couple for EMU students, 7:30 p.m. C.C. Lehman Board Room  
| Friday, Oct. 18 | 9 a.m. Chapel, “Sant Doo,” 10 a.m. Lehman Auditorium  
|             | • Breaks begins, 5:30 p.m.  
| Monday, Oct. 22 | Women’s and Men’s soccer at Goshen, 5 p.m. and 7 p.m.  

Wednesday, Oct. 24
- Classes Resume, 8 a.m.  
- Chapel “Worldship,” 10 a.m. Lehman Auditorium  
- John Farrell Concert, 7 p.m. Martin Chapel  
- Martin soccer v. Washington & Lee 4 p.m. Home  

Thursday, Oct. 25
- Guest Lecture, Joshua Reubner, 5:30 p.m. with meal plan, $3.50 without West Dining Room  
- Couples Encounter $10 per couple for EMU students, 7:30 p.m. C.C. Lehman Board Room  
- W Soccer v. Lynchburg 4 p.m. Home  
- Field Hockey v. DePaul 4:30 p.m.