



IPJ Speaker Series

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Ambassador Dennis Jett

“Why Politicians and Peace Sometimes Don’t Mix”

Ambassador Dennis Jett is Dean of the International Center and Director of the Transnational and Global Studies Center at the University of Florida. A former career diplomat, he served as Ambassador to Peru and Mozambique, on the National Security Council and in Argentina, Israel, Malawi and Liberia. He has a Ph.D. in international relations and his dissertation entitled “Why Peacekeeping Fails” has been published by Palgrave. He has been interviewed on Jim Lehrer News Hour, CNN, NPR and other national news programs and has written over numerous opinion pieces for major newspapers.

The Joan B. Kroc Institute for Peace & Justice (IPJ) welcomed Ambassador Jett as a guest speaker on Wednesday, February 23, 2006 for a group of students, faculty, IPJ staff and visitors. He mentioned that he had gotten to know IPJ Executive Director Joyce Neu during her time at The Carter Center, where he had his last posting in the Foreign Service. Until the current presidential administration, the U.S. Foreign Service had a diplomat posted to The Carter Center.

At about the time he was at The Carter Center, Ambassador Jett finished his Ph.D. thesis, “Why Peacekeeping Fails.” Ambassador Jett also spent some time involved in a peacekeeping operation in Sierra Leone, and when that operation later fell apart, Ambassador Jett was asked to write an op-ed piece for the Atlanta Constitution. He has now written 72 op-eds. The following is a paraphrased summary of his lecture, “Why Politicians and Peace Sometimes Don’t Mix.”

Ambassador Jett joked at the beginning of his lecture that “the great thing about not being in government is that you have no responsibility,” so you can critique current policy openly.

For the students in the room, Ambassador Jett emphasized how study abroad and peacekeeping fit together. Jett grew up in Mexico and is now in charge of study abroad for the University of Florida, sending 2,000 students abroad each year. Why does study abroad matter? First of all, every employer these days is looking for international experience in dealing with other cultures and all of the things that fit cultural patterns (amount of personal space, how people behave in group settings, cultural manners, etc.), but also, by getting outside your own culture, you realize that people not only behave

differently, they also think differently. For instance, just because everyone says they like peace doesn't mean they really want it.

Looking at the 40+ countries south of the Sahara, Ambassador Jett explained that each country's current state of development can be correlated to which colonial power occupied it before independence. The British tried to train people for self-government, perhaps out of missionary zeal, perhaps out of economic self-interest. Belgians and Portuguese, on the other hand, left Mozambique and Angola totally unprepared for independence. In Angola, 90% of the Portuguese left and left nothing behind.

As Jett wrapped up a relatively successful peacekeeping operation in Mozambique, he saw a mirror image in Angola. He recommended Another Day of Life by Ryszard Kapuscinski (Vintage International, 2001), about the transition to independence in Angola. The peace treaties were signed with the help of three parties, and the resulting peace lasted in Mozambique, but not in Angola. The success of the treaties in obtaining a durable peace was influenced by three factors: resources, regional influences, and the actors in the conflict.

The success or failure of a peace treaty is not directly related to the effect of a peacekeeping mission. In UN peacekeeping missions, the UN can control the mandate, size, composition and training of the force, which are usually dictated by New York. Operations can be expensive, ranging from small to large, and it is easy for the UN to make mistakes. For instance, during the ECOMOG peacekeeping operation in Liberia, Liberians called it "Every Car or Moving Object Game," because Nigerian peacekeepers looted the country. But that is not what makes peace treaties succeed or fail.

There are two types of peacekeeping operations depending on whether the wars are between countries, usually over territory, or within a country. A long-running example of the former is Cyprus, whose conflict, since the 1990s, has been hard to solve. Focusing on conflicts between countries was typical of early peacekeeping, although the only example today is between Ethiopia and Eritrea.

There are three options for politicians in inter-country conflict: accept defeat, which is difficult politically, fight, and status quo peacekeeping. In Ecuador and Peru, for example, there were a series of border skirmishes over a small piece of wilderness and politicians kept fighting because it was seen as a matter of national pride. They finally agreed on the solution to make a bi-national pact. Ecuador currently has a 99-year lease, but the jungle is officially Peruvian territory. The two countries will probably go back to war after 99 years. Some politicians, rather than helping move peace forward, capitalized on the conflict to gain support, playing to nationalistic emotions by saying, "They're giving away our patrimony."

Comparing the Angola and Mozambique situations, which were both internal wars, the differences in resources led to different results. In Angola, diamonds were best friends for those wanting to start civil war (they have a high size to value ratio, are easy to transport

and difficult to trace) and the rebels had control of most of the diamond area. Likewise, the government had oil and could spend lots of money on weapons. So a lot of politicians had incentives for continuing the war. Mozambique's resources, on the other hand, mainly consisted of cotton, cashews and shrimp, so neither side had cash to fund a war.

In terms of political influences, in Angola, both sides had a vested interest in keeping the conflict going because politicians there were either in power or out of luck. In Africa, if a politician is out of power, there is no think tank or university or private sector in which to find employment.

In Mozambique, the peace treaty was signed in 1992. I arrived in 1993 just before the scheduled elections. An election is often a major milestone in the peace process; its legitimacy is frequently disputed by politicians who define free and fair elections as one they win. In a civil war, people are not fighting over territory, they are fighting for power. One way to enhance power is to kill people on the other side, especially civilians, because they cannot shoot back. Disorganized forces and light weapons complicate resolution of internal conflicts.

As the U.S. is learning in Iraq, the losers of elections are not always happy and the winners are not always generous. The post-election process of disarmament or reintegration means a loss of power for one side. In these situations, what a politician says is not necessarily what they do. Watch carefully what they do, because in a conflict situation, it is very important to understand the culture and how people would react.

Audience Questions:

Q: If not politicians, who are the most influential agents of change that affect the long-term peace process, for example parents, religious leaders, NGOs, etc.?

A: Civil society. For example, in Peru, they have achieved a durable peace partly because there are 50 human rights organizations. In Mozambique, there are two, both infiltrated by the government. In Peru, the press had an active role in reining in politicians and supporting peace. In Mozambique, on the other hand, there is little private or independent media.

Q: The U.S. Congress has cut the budget for Cyprus peacekeeping; how will it impact the operation?

A: Peacekeeping operations are funded by the UN, about \$100 million a year. The U.S. had been paying $\frac{1}{4}$ - $\frac{1}{3}$ of that amount. Each country makes troop commitments to peacekeeping missions on a case-by-case basis but since 1983, when U.S. troops were killed on a UN peacekeeping mission in Somali, it has become politically impossible for the U.S. to commit large numbers troops to these missions. In Darfur, the AU [African Union] force is too small and weak to protect the population. When it comes to the training and equipment level of military troops, you get what you pay for. Many African nations are willing to send their troops on these missions because the UN pays the

country more per soldier than that country spends on each soldier. The country usually keeps the difference rather than investing it in improved training. Kofi Annan, Secretary-General of the United Nations, recently met with George Bush about getting more and better troops into Darfur, and Bush's response was "yes, NATO's got to do it," which means the U.S. will not commit large numbers of U.S. troops to the peacekeeping mission there.

Q: Is there any initiative underway to make sure there is not a repeat of a post-colonial situation in terms of the lack of preparedness for self-rule?

A: East Timor is a good example where the U.N. ran the entire country for a while and built capacity for self-governing by developing institutions like courts and the legislature. Australia provided 25% of forces at the beginning, since East Timor is a regional neighbor and they wanted to see it stabilize. That was a good example of total nation-building. Usually total neglect exists because the people in power do not want the UN or other nations looking over their shoulder. In Mozambique, right after elections, Mozambique's government said "bye" to the UN peacekeeping forces. Guatemala was also an exception where peacekeepers or a similar force stayed around to make sure the process worked.

Q: It seems that in Southern Africa, many struggles were proxy wars for the superpowers, the Soviet Union and the United States. Are there things those countries are doing now that make things better? For instance, are they making any efforts to reduce the traffic in small arms?

A: No and no. The NRA [National Rifle Association] has an interest in keeping millions of dollars in dues coming in from their members. They do that by creating "threats" to their member's "right" to bear arms, i.e., the UN controlling arms sales. So they will not allow that to happen.