

Negotiations, not war, needed with Iran

BY LU ANN FRANKLIN

Times Correspondent | Friday, September 26, 2008

Iran will actively pursue nuclear weapons of mass destruction to deter the United States and Israel from military strikes against its sovereignty. And for humanitarian and economic reasons, negotiations, not war, with Iran are vital to Middle East stability.

That was the consensus of a panel of Middle Eastern experts who participated at Purdue University Calumet's lecture series on global understanding Thursday evening at the Hammond campus.

Panelists included Christopher A. Preble, director of foreign policy studies at The Cato Institute in Washington, D.C., and author of the book "Exiting Iraq: Why the U.S. Must End the Military Occupation and Renew the War Against Al Qaeda." Richard Rupp, associate professor of political science and interim department head of history and political science at Purdue Calumet, also was a panel member, as was Peter N. Kirstein, professor of history at St. Xavier University in Chicago. Kirstein is also a peace and academic freedom activist.

Eli Lake, senior reporter for The New York Sun and a proponent of tougher sanctions against Iran, was unable to attend the discussion due to mechanical malfunctions on the plane he was scheduled to take Thursday morning from New York City.

"We intended on having a panel with different perspectives," said moderator Yahya Kamalipour, director of the Center for Global Studies and professor and head of Purdue Calumet's Department of Communication and Creative Arts. "Eli Lake is on the other extreme side of this discussion."

Rupp said that "the Iranians are hell-bent on acquiring weapons of mass destruction." However, he said that "if diplomacy does not succeed, I would not support a military strike against Iran."

If the United States or Israel tries to attack Iran, the consequences will be catastrophic, the panelists said.

"The effect will be dead babies, just like the U.S. left in Vietnam and Korea," said Kirstein, who described himself as a pacifist. "Dead civilians, dead innocents, needless suffering."

Preble said the economic consequences would be enormous, especially if Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz, an important shipping lane which connects the Persian Gulf with the Indian Ocean.

"Forty percent of the world's oil goes through the Strait of Hormuz," he said. "It would cause massive economic problems if it was closed." In addition, an attack on Iran would unleash Hezbollah, the Middle East's leading radical Islamic movement which would definitely retaliate with terror attacks on the U.S. and its allies, Preble said.

"It is incumbent on the international community to negotiate directly with Iranian leaders," Rupp said. "We've isolated Iran for 28 years, even more than we've isolated Cuba under Castro. It doesn't matter if we get along with Cuba. It matters very much if we don't get along with Iran."

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