

**A BRIEF LOOK BACK AT OUR COMMITTEE  
BY MARK T. ORR, PH.D.**

*(Prepared in 2003 on the occasion of the 30<sup>th</sup> Anniversary of the Committee)*

During a tour of duty in the Pentagon in the early 1960's, I was the action officer charged with establishing the Air Force Research Associates Program. Bright young Air Force colonels with superior academic as well as military backgrounds were assigned as Visiting Fellows for one year periods to six major research centers, popularly known as "think tanks." One of the first such arrangements was made with the Council on Foreign Relations in New York.

As a frequent visitor to the Council, I learned about the Committees on Foreign Relations and brought the idea with me when I came to the University of South Florida as Director of International Studies and Programs. However, I failed to find an enthusiastic collaborator until I met Jack Bierley. With the Council's approval and Jack's initiative and leadership, and the strong support of our Founders and Chairman H.L. Culbreath, the Tampa Bay Area Committee on Foreign Relations came into being.

In the thirty years since our first speaker, General Maxwell Taylor, the Committee has heard some 280 speakers address the critical foreign affairs issues of the day. Our visitors have included journalists, scholars, diplomats, politicians and military leaders. I recall Dr. Sergo Mikoyan, then a Visiting Fellow at Princeton, discussing his work as Secretary to his father, Anastas Mikoyan, a onetime Chairman of the Presidium of the Supreme Soviet. Andrés Pastranas spoke to us during his tenure at Harvard; later he became President of Colombia.

Committee members have actively contributed with events and speakers. A diplomatic and attendance milestone was the special visit of Chinese Ambassador Han Xu, China's first ambassador after recognition. Hosting him was Stanley Young, his friend of fifty years. Later, we heard Dr. Peter Trubowitz, at the suggestion of member Rick Edmonds.

A Russia seminar at the University of Tampa featured our own "inhouse" Russian experts and Greg Treverton, then of the Council, and later Vice-Chairman, National Intelligence Council. Tom Hegarty of UT and his Russian-born wife Louisa created an authentic and festive celebration.

Another memorable visitor was Egyptian Ambassador Osama El Baz who spoke to us on June 22, 1983, less than two years after he witnessed the assassination of President Sadat. His visit brought together his personal friends, General Robert C. Kingston, Commander-In-Chief of the Central Command, and Wilbur Landrey, our member and foreign correspondent for the St. Petersburg Times.

An outstanding biennial event is the Committee briefing and tour at MacDill AFB with Central and Special Operations Commands. Early organizers included our members Generals Gleazer, Michaelis and Conway with continuing coordination by

member Don Dvornik. We were so impressed by General H. Norman Schwarzkopf's eloquence and mastery of detail when he briefed us on the role of the Central Command, only twelve months before the Gulf War, that we gave him the only standing ovation I can recall. General Anthony C. Zinni, then current CINC at CENTCOM, briefed us in detail on the Embassy bombings in Kenya and Tanzania. More recently, Deputy Commander in Chief, U.S. Central Command, Lt. Gen. Michael DeLong, explained the war in Afghanistan and troop build up prior to Operation Iraqi Freedom.

We felt very close to the action when President Bush, Sr. and President Clinton called one of our speakers, Ambassador Robert B. Oakley, then an Associate at the Institute of Peace, out of retirement, and dispatched him as Special Envoy to Somalia. Ambassador Oakley has been described as a diplomat who served in every hot spot outside of Russia. He was our guest a second time in 1996 and continues to serve on the Board of Distinguished Advisors of our national organization.

Under the aegis of the Committee's outreach program, many of our speakers have been shared with the University of South Florida, the University of Tampa and other area institutions where they have participated in luncheon colloquia and afternoon symposia with faculty and advance students.

An important event in our history took place in 1995 when our Committee, along with twenty-nine other Committees and the financial support of the Council on Foreign Relations, formed The American Committees on Foreign Relations, "dedicated to dialogue between local and regional civic leaders in the United States and U.S. foreign policymakers." The ACFR, devoted exclusively to serving the Committees, is governed by a board of Committee representatives and based at DACOR House in Washington, D.C. Our Committee Director, Richard Jacobson, played an important role in founding the new organization and served two terms as its national President.

In conclusion, I would say that our Committee has a proud tradition of contributing to the understanding of U.S. foreign policy and international affairs by promoting the free exchange of ideas in the Tampa Bay area.

### **Post Script**

More recently, the Committee has been privileged to host major foreign policy figures, including: Ambassador Franklin Sonn, Ambassador of The Republic of South Africa; James F. Hoge, Jr., Editor of Foreign Affairs; General Anthony C. Zinni Commander in Chief, U.S. Central command; Edward G. Abington, Washington, D.C. counsel to the Palestinian National Authority and former American Consul General in Jerusalem; Ambassador Jamsheed Marker, Special Advisor to the Secretary General of the United Nations, former Pakistani Ambassador to the United States; James Woolsey, former Director of the Central Intelligence Agency; Martin Baron, Editor, *Boston Globe*; Dr. Stephen Flynn, Jeanne J. Kirpatrick Senior Fellow in National Security Studies Council on Foreign Relations; Ambassador Donald Gregg, Chairman, Board of the Korea Society; H.E. Baron Frans van Daele, Ambassador of Belgium; Charlayne Hunter-Gault, CNN Johannesburg Bureau Chief; General Bryan Brown, USA

Commander, United States Special Operations Command; His Excellency Christian Blickenstorfer, Ambassador of Switzerland to the United States; H.E. Professor George Obiozor, Nigerian Ambassador to the United States; Dexter Filkins, New York Times correspondent in Afghanistan and Iraq; Admiral William J. Fallon, Commander in Chief, U.S. Central Command; Col. Lawrence Wilkerson, USA (Ret.), Secretary of State Colin Powell's former Chief of Staff; former United States Senator Bob Graham; Walter Russell Mead, Henry A. Kissinger Senior Fellow in U.S. Foreign Policy.

It is also noteworthy that the ACFR Annual Conference in Washington D.C. continues to thrive, featuring Embassy receptions, fine technical sessions and the closing dinner in the elegant Franklin Dining Rooms at the Department of State.

Given the continuing strong support from the ACFR and the active participation of our Committee membership, comprised of 200 opinion makers from the region, we look forward to engaging dinner table discussion, followed by presentations by world-class diplomats, respected international specialists and scholars and major military figures.

Finally, we offer a special thanks to Mark Orr, a member and one of our Founders, for his role in founding and funding the Mark Orr Foreign Affairs Fellows, our student membership program. We also recognize members Phil Adler and Jack St. Arnold whose financial support make possible our student scholarships to the ACFR Annual Conference in Washington, DC.