

OPINION

Kids master Int'l. Politics 101

As the war in Iraq winds down, the 32 students in my introductory politics class at St. Mary's College of Maryland are charged up. But — save a few vocal exceptions — they are not protesting in the streets.

They're fired up about the future. The class seems to understand intuitively that for the first time in a generation, the college-aged population has a direct stake in America's conduct in world affairs.

More than half know someone serving in Afghanistan or Iraq, so discussion on the pros and cons of globalization is heated.

They worry that their contemporaries in other countries will link them with the Bush administration's muscular unilateralism when they decide to study or travel abroad and eventually enter the global marketplace.

But the prevalent view is far more nuanced. On the midterm last month, only a select few came away as firm believers in any of the schools of thought such as realism or liberalism. The overwhelming majority wrote that their views could not be broken down into clear rights and wrongs, or obvious theoretical paths to a safer, more prosperous world order. Many wondered if there wasn't a way to better combine idealistic notions of internationalism with hard-nosed prag-

Viewpoint

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matism.

There are strong indications that 9/11, the invasions of Afghanistan and Iraq and the Bush administration's controversial decisions over Kyoto, the International Criminal Court and selective use of the U.N. Security Council have eroded the apathy that once easily characterized young Americans.

Foreign language classes here are oversubscribed. The number of undergraduates nationwide choosing to spend some time overseas continues to rise, despite the increased threat abroad, and applications to graduate schools in international relations are at an all-time high.

This wasn't what I expected of freshman and sophomores. I had visions of half the class being unable to find Iraq on a map, or unable to identify North Korea's Kim Jong Il.

How, I wondered, could I get across the idea that Americans' view of the world has changed since I was an undergraduate at the end of the Cold War?

After all, my students were eight years old when the last line in the sand was drawn in the Per-

sian Gulf, and teenagers when the cyber world exploded.

The only world they know is driven by 24-hour news cycles, online chat rooms and the opinions of poorly traveled political leaders who pride themselves on not needing a passport.

Their America was Cold War triumphant, economically ascendant and the center of the global cultural universe.

The overdue engagement of our young people with the world comes just in the nick of time.

Reversing the rising tide of anti-Americanism over the next 25 years is not just going to happen by dropping leaflets on disaffected populations, getting today's message out on Arabic-language television broadcasts or designing Madison Avenue public relations campaigns aimed at developing democracies.

It is critical that the next generation of American leaders grasp the relevance of internationalism and collective security, the benefits and drawbacks of free trade and globalization and be able to listen to the divergent points of view from around the globe.

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