

Pi Sigma Alpha

Posted on 25 August 2009

Pi Sigma Alpha is the University's National Political Science Honor Society. There are today nearly 700 chapters nationwide, but the society was founded in 1920 with the establishment of the Alpha chapter at the University of Texas at Austin. The 1920/21 inaugural issue of the *Southwestern Political and Social Science Quarterly* (now the *Social Science Quarterly*) recorded the event, noting that "an honorary fraternity in political science known as Pi Sigma Alpha Fraternity has been established at the University of Texas. The fraternity was established to meet the need for a professional society in Government. The constitution provides for a national organization and local chapters. Membership is limited to students who have done exceptional work in political science."

The Alpha chapter began under the leadership of Herman Gerlach James, Charles Grove Haines, and Caleb Perry Patterson. Emmette Redford, former Ashbel Smith professor of Government and Public Affairs, once said, Patterson "was constantly promoting the organization, trying to get new chapters established. That went slowly at first, but snowballed as time passed." Patterson became very active and interested in the fraternity's promotion, using his connections to get chapters established in Oklahoma and Kansas in 1922. In March of that year the society held its first national convention at the University of Oklahoma. Robert Taylor Cole, who received his B.A. in government in 1925, his M.A. in government in 1927, and was president of the American Political Science Association in 1958-59, was among the first initiates in the Alpha chapter. Discussing the founding, he once said, "You will find the fine hand of Caleb Perry Patterson, mighty oaths of secrecy when we were initiated, and indirect evidence of a missionary zeal to conquer all (first in the University of Texas, and second in the name of 'Government')."

Posted in [Heritage](#)

Five Issues for the United States and Iran

Posted on 25 August 2009

By Mehdi Noorbaksh

The United States faces five issues it must resolve with Iran. These include Iran's nuclear program, Iraq, Afghanistan, the support of the Iranian government for radical groups, and Iran's opposition to the peace process between the Palestinians and Israelis. The United States can ignore recognizing Ahmadinejad's government and pursue its goals without direct negotiations.

With regards to the nuclear program, it is judicious for Washington to internationalize the issue further than had the Bush administration. The International Atomic Energy Agency should be empowered by the United States and international community to directly oversee Iranian activities in pursuit of a legitimate nuclear program for peaceful purposes. U.S. negotiations with Ahmadinejad's government risk remaining inconclusive, both in terms of his demands and also his breach of commitment after a resolution. Ahmadinejad's government is mistrusted and perceived as illegitimate by the Iranian people. It would be very difficult and imprudent to trust an untrustworthy government in any negotiated settlement. If Ahmadinejad breaches a contract, subsequently Washington's credibility will be questioned.

On the issues of Iraq and Afghanistan, Ahmadinejad's options are very limited. He has no other choice but to support the current governments in these two nations. The Bush administration falsely exaggerated the influence of Iran in Iraq. Iran's interests in these nations lie in establishing stable governments in both. Ahmadinejad has neither the will nor the allies in either of these two nations for destabilizing their respective governments.

The United States cannot negotiate with Iran regarding its support for radical groups in the Middle East and elsewhere. Ahmadinejad's government feeds on radicalism and enjoys radicals' support. Relying on radicalism is perceived by this regime as a source of pride and legitimacy. As long as Ahmadinejad and his allies remain in power, the United States must expect to face an ideological confrontation with this regime. Ahmadinejad's government and ideology are undemocratic in nature and expansionist in outreach. From this perspective it is prudent for the United States to stay behind the will of the Iranian nation for fundamental democratic change in that country.

Keeping in mind Hezbollah's losses in Lebanon's recent elections, valuable lessons can be learned. When the forces of democracy are empowered, they may curtail radical influences and establish a viable democratic process, the rule of law, and accountable government. Iranians will be strongly dismayed if Washington gives any encouragement to the current regime in Iran. Historically, the United States aborted the birth of the democratic process in Iran in 1953 by toppling the democratically elected government of Mohammad Musaddiq. Today, Washington must be exceptionally prudent and vigilant to support the democratic movement's achievement of its goal, and not support an unpopular government looking to further stabilize itself.

As for Palestinian-Israeli peace negotiations, Washington must ignore Iran and push for a fair and just settlement between the two parties. Hamas has recently announced its agreement with a settlement that includes the border that existed before the 1967 Arab-Israeli war. Washington would be wise to reject the Israeli drumbeat of confrontation with Iran, focus on solutions which end Palestinian misery, and establish a Palestinian state. Only through a fair resolution of that conflict will the radical tendencies in the Middle East be discredited and its radicals disarmed.

Mehdi Noorbaksh received his Ph.D. in government in 1996. He is associate professor of international affairs at Harrisburg University of Science and Technology.

Posted in [Alumni Insights](#)

Iran's Long Road to Reform

Posted on 25 August 2009

By Jason Brownlee

U.S. media coverage of Iran's presidential election and its aftermath has shown a mix of curiosity and outrage, while obscuring several significant elements of Iran's political debate. It may surprise some Americans to learn that many pro-democracy forces in Iran seek to modify the government without overhauling it. For example, presidential aspirant Mir-Hossein Musavi and his close affiliate, former president Mohammad Khatami, envision an Islamic republic – in practice, not just in name. The state would be democratically led by elected politicians with unelected clergy in symbolic or advisory roles.

Throughout the past decade Mousavi and Khatami have worked to accomplish this goal incrementally. Having lived through one revolution and its aftermath, they dread unleashing another. Thus they have sought to minimize public conflict, even in the face of their principal adversaries, such as Leader Ali Khamenei. So far this approach has brought meager results. Peaceful dissidents have faced state-sponsored thuggery while their reformist patrons have backed down. Protests in 1999 ended when President Khatami, who enjoyed a historic popular mandate, sided with Ali Khamenei. Khatami even chastened the students for threatening public order. Khamenei's paramilitary forces then squelched the riots.

Ten years later, post-election dissent has followed a familiar course. While alleging the vote was stolen by backers of President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad, Mousavi's camp avoided a street battle with Ahmadinejad supporters and instead advocated an officially conducted revote. In response, the hardliners entrenched themselves, permitting a partial recount (and confirming Ahmadinejad's victory) while assaulting demonstrators and detaining thousands. When Khamenei's base began repressing the crowds, Mousavi did not reappear to publicly rally his troops and instead issued instructions and denunciations online—to little avail.

Paradoxically, the latest wave of repression, which succeeded tactically for the hardliners, may amplify the core message of Mousavi's movement. Claims of election rigging remain controversial (the most often cited study erroneously compares Ahmadinejad's reelection with his initial bid for the presidency in 2005). The state's retaliation, however, has been vividly recorded and broadcast to a global audience. Even as Khamenei's forces dispersed the latest cohort of demonstrators they may have sown the seeds for future dissent.

As Iranians wrestle over how to improve their government, Americans can recognize that democracy in Iran has advanced through local efforts, not as an imposition from abroad. Leaders like Khatami and Mousavi have worked for decades at enshrining a more representative government while averting social upheaval. External pressure, particularly when applied by the United States, jeopardizes that agenda and strengthens hardliners' claims that Iran is under threat. The best way for outside observers to support Iran's reformists will be to appreciate their hard-won achievements and recognize the long road ahead of them.

Jason Brownlee is associate professor of government. He has lived and studied in Iran and is the author of [Authoritarianism in an Age of Democratization](#), which explains why Iran's opposition leaders have made greater gains than their counterparts in Egypt and Malaysia.

Posted in [Faculty Insights](#)

Summer in Beijing

Posted on 25 August 2009

By Yuval Weber

Thanks to a generous grant from the Department of Government, I was able to conduct research during May and June in Beijing, China. Peter Trubowitz arranged for Professor Sun Zhe to invite me as a Visiting Research Fellow at the Center for US-China Relations at Tsinghua University. I organized my trip by arranging for interviews with Chinese political scientists, sociologists, and UT's own visiting professor, Liu Xuecheng, whose primary affiliation is as Senior Fellow of the China Institute of International Studies, the think tank of the Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs. I did about two interviews a day, which sounds light, but between preparation, doing the interviews, and then getting around Beijing, those were very full days (and in formal shoes and clothing with unrestrained humidity).

My dissertation is about natural resources, foreign policy, and international security. My main focus is Russia's use of natural resources, including oil, gas, and diamonds, as a foreign policy lever. The purpose in going to Russia was to investigate the energy relationship between China and Russia. Russia has abundant natural resources to export, while China does not have nearly enough to independently maintain its expanding industrial production. My research in China focused on trying to gauge whether the two countries can overcome security concerns for their mutual benefit. I returned from China with a better understanding of the Chinese-Russian security and energy relationships and the international relations of East Asia. It was an invaluable trip for dissertation research, and I will hopefully return for a longer visit after advancing to Ph.D. candidacy.

I set aside two days for tourist activities. The first was for going to Tiananmen Square, because I have a personal project of visiting the graves and mausoleums of dictators and other political figures across the world. In Moscow I have visited Lenin and Stalin, and I hope visiting Generalissimo Francisco Franco of Spain and Ho Chi Minh of Vietnam is not too far off. So I took a cab to Tiananmen Square, which at 100 acres is the largest public square in the world. For comparison, the entire UT campus, from the Drag to I-35 and Dean Keeton to MLK, is 350 acres.

I went through the metal detectors and for all the world I looked like a total narc Western journalist, given my camera and notepads. It was two days before the 20th anniversary of the Tiananmen Square "incident", so the amount of angry, hateful looks directed at me was fully palpable. There might have been more plainclothes police (young, angry muscular guys with earpieces in cargo pants and collared shirts), city police, army soldiers and other uniformed personnel whose organizational affiliations I couldn't divine, than in the entire Austin Police Department.

I went straight to the Mao Mausoleum. Perhaps for occasion of the anniversary or perhaps he wasn't feeling his freshest, but the Chairman wasn't taking visitors – the Mao Mausoleum was closed. The consolation prize was the rest of the attractions. Tiananmen Square is part of a larger complex that includes the Forbidden City, the National Museum of China, the Great Hall of the People, and other government buildings. For Chinese tourists, it is essentially having the entire Washington, D.C. historical and civic tourist attractions in a single area, which is handy.

My other free day was spent fulfilling a childhood dream: visiting the Great Wall of China. The closest portion of the Wall to visit from Beijing is called Badaling, and it was far more impressive in person than I had ever imagined. Designed to protect Beijing from northern invasion, this section of the Wall was restored in the 1950s, and it is an engineering marvel. High up in the mountains, Badaling is so large, tall, and steep that many people there it up more than one kilometer above sea level, the passes day was left behind for some of the coolest and most refreshing breezes I have ever experienced. Looking out on the endless Wall stretching into the distance over the hills, it was one of those rare moments when a dream came true and expectations were fulfilled.

Yuval Weber received his B.A. in the plan II honors program in 2004. He also holds a M.A. from the University of Chicago, is currently earning his Ph.D. in government, and held a H. Malcolm Macdonald Fellowship in 2008-09.

Posted in [Graduate Insights](#)

Dr. Manley Elliot Banks, 1953-2009

Posted on 25 August 2009

It is with great sadness that the Department of Government has learned Dr. Manley Elliot Banks passed away at the age of 56.

Banks earned his Ph.D. in 1987 from the Department of Government and was an associate professor in the L. Douglas Wilder School of Government and Public Affairs at Virginia Commonwealth University. Banks specialized in urban politics – his dissertation analyzed racial political polarization in Atlanta, Georgia over a 13-year period.

The Department extends its most sincere condolences to family and friends.

[An obituary can be read here.](#)

Posted in [Memoriam](#)

The Strategist: Brent Scowcroft and the Call of National Security

Posted on 25 August 2009

By Bat Sparrow

Hours after Iraqi armed forces invaded Kuwait on Aug. 2, 1990, Brent Scowcroft, who was national security advisor at the time, decided that the United States could not let Iraq occupy Kuwait. Scowcroft came to this conclusion before President George H.W. Bush did, before Defense Secretary Cheney had made a decision, and before Secretary of State James Baker realized that it would take the use of force to evict Iraq from Kuwait. Scowcroft persuaded President Bush of what had to be done, over the objections of others in the White House, the resistance of some in the military — still recovering from Vietnam — the opposition of many in Congress, and reservations on the part of much of the public. But Scowcroft's and the President's views prevailed, and the rest is history.

Months after Sept. 11, 2001, as the younger President Bush, the Vice President, and the rest of his administration were gearing up for war against Iraq, as most members of Congress and almost all Republicans were calling for war, and as the media and much of the American public favored attacking Iraq, there was one prominent dissenting voice. In an op-ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal* of Aug. 15, 2002, entitled "Don't Attack Iraq," Scowcroft protested the administration's plans for war. An invasion would be costly, disastrous for a number of reasons, and premature; the United States should wait for definitive proof of Saddam's wrongdoing before taking action. The op-ed piece made Scowcroft, a respected and prominent foreign policy expert, a persona non grata in the Bush White House and estranged him from his former friends, Vice President Cheney and Condoleezza Rice among them.

Years after the invasion of Iraq, Scowcroft testified in the Senate on Feb. 1, 2007, in support of the proposed "surge" of U.S. troops in Iraq. Scowcroft's support for the surge, which would supplement existing forces in Iraq by tens of thousands of additional troops, did little to repair his broken ties with President Bush (43), Cheney, or other top White House officials, while it disappointed those opposed to the war and who had welcomed Scowcroft's earlier dissent.

These three examples reveal key things about Scowcroft. They point to his courage, his independence of mind, his pragmatism, and his patriotism — acting what he believes is in the United States' long-term interest, no matter the cost. They further suggest Scowcroft's continued impact on U.S. foreign policy. Whereas Scowcroft started his career as a policymaker, being Henry Kissinger's deputy national security advisor, and national security advisor in his own right under President Gerald Ford and then under the elder George Bush, Scowcroft continues to participate in and influence the central, important debates over U.S. foreign policy and national security, notwithstanding the fact that he is no longer in public office and now 84 years of age. He writes, gives speeches, consents to media appearances, runs conferences, heads task forces and presidential commissions, and advises policymakers of both parties—including persons in the current Obama administration. In fact, that there is no one more central to the history of U.S. national security policy over the last 45 years, it is fair to say, than the modest, cordial, and mild-mannered Scowcroft. He is probably the most respected voice in U.S. national security policy — one of Washington's few "wise men" — and he stands at the center of the United States' foreign policy establishment. Most importantly, he is trusted — a rare commodity in Washington.

Bat Sparrow received his M.A. in government in 1984, a Ph.D. from the University of Chicago, and is professor of government. He just completed a year as a Woodrow Wilson Center Fellow and is writing a biography of Brent Scowcroft.

Posted in [Alumni Insights](#), [Faculty Insights](#)