UN luncheon discusses security issues

By Katie Butler, The Echo

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International security expert Jeff Laurenti spoke at a UCA-sponsored United Nations Day luncheon Friday about the importance of the UN’s role in resolving security issues.

Laurenti outlined the history of UN involvement in holding summits, deploying peacekeepers and intervening in conflicts when actions by the United States or other powerful nations would not produce the same effect from negotiations.

History is full of incidents and facts showing the U.S. cannot do everything on its own, Laurenti said. Even if you don’t want to share decision making, you have to share decision making even if that means compromising some personal goals.

Laurenti, Senior Fellow and Director of Foreign Policy Programs at the Century Foundation in New York City, said the Bush administration has been much more diplomatically focused during its second term, which shows the administration has a new realization of realities.

At the start of the Iraq War, President George W. Bush said it would be irrelevant if the UN did not authorize U.S. military mobilization against Iraq. Laurenti said in an interview after the luncheon that the U.S. government was suggesting the UN was nothing more than a relief organization, taking care of refugees, starving people, poor children and other groups Washington cannot be bothered with helping.

Washington’s attitude toward the UN has since changed. Laurenti said under Bush UN budgets have been expanding again. The force of arms is extremely expensive and doesn’t work anymore in achieving policy goals, Laurenti said in the interview. The slower political dance of diplomacy is less costly and in the end may be even more successful.

A good example of the UN’s unique responsibility in international affairs is what the UN is doing in Darfur, Sudan. While other countries, including America, may have strategic interests in becoming involved in certain situations, Laurenti said, UN peacekeepers work to analyze and act on the circumstances without one or two nations selfish interests in mind.

Laurenti also spoke about the reformation of the UN Security Council, whose five permanent members and ten temporary members have been accused of acting in the better interest of certain nations rather than the whole council while making resolutions during international crises.

The Security Council’s most influential members should be those who contribute the most financial and military assistance to the UN, Laurenti said.
The major difference between the Security Council and other UN branches is while other branches discuss issues and make suggestions to participating nations the Security Council, in matters of international crises, has the authority to make decisions that member nations must comply with.

Japan has been long-discussed as a potential permanent member of the Security Council, but the addition of one nation to the permanent council would require the consideration of claims by multiple countries for permanent seats.

China, one of the five permanent members, strongly opposes Japan’s membership in the council. Laurenti also said there is no way Italy, a 2008 member, would allow Germany onto the Security Council and Pakistan would go ballistic if India were given a permanent seat.

Laurenti compared the makeup of the Security Council to the electoral college in America in that it serves no logical purpose, yet the forces of inertia are so strong that it’s hard to reform anything at all. Junior Christina Williams, a political science major, said the reformation of the UN Security Council is an interesting topic and Laurenti had a good point about the members being chosen according to the amount they contribute to the council.

We’re in the middle of the international drama. Students should become more aware and more knowledgeable about these international issues because we’re the future generation. Williams said. UCA’s third annual United Nations Day luncheon was held in commemoration of the 62nd anniversary of the UN’s formation.

The event was sponsored by Arkansas Model UN, the political science department, the Arkansas Committee on Foreign Relations and the Central Arkansas Chapter of the UNA-USA.

The next Model UN event is the Arkansas Model United Nations Conference on Nov. 16-17 in the Brewer-Hegeman Conference Center.