

## Resigned Foreign Service Officer Speaks Out

# We Stand for Something Different

By Ann Wright | June 2, 2005

*(The following is an edited transcript of remarks by Ann Wright at a panel on the Global Good Neighbor Initiative held May 19, 2005 at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace in Washington, DC. She was introduced by panel moderator, George Vickers of the Open Society Institute. The transcript of the entire panel can be found at: <http://www.irc-online.org/content/ggn/index.php>)*

*George Vickers: First will be Ann Wright, who is a career foreign service officer—or should I say, was a career foreign service officer—who resigned from the U.S. Foreign Service on March 19, 2003, while she was serving as the Deputy Chief of Mission at the U.S. embassy in Mongolia. She resigned in disagreement with the Bush administration's decision to go to war in Iraq without the authorization of the UN Security Council. She joined the Foreign Service in 1987, served as Deputy Chief of U.S. Missions in Sierra Leone, Micronesia, and briefly in Afghanistan. She received the State Department's Award for Heroism for her actions during the evacuations of people from Sierra Leone during the civil war there. She also had—before entering the Foreign Service—an extensive and quite long career in the United States Army and Army Reserves.*

America is facing right now throughout the world a great anti-American feeling, the belief that the United States is all for itself and nothing for anybody else, and will run over anybody, militarily and economically.

I think just the term good neighbor—I mean, just the fact that you all have come up with the term—or maybe it was FDR that came up with the term. You added “Global” to “Good Neighbor.” That in itself just says so much.

Just the fact that you all have presented this type of concept right now, to me, is a miracle. It's a miracle we need. It's a miracle that the world needs to know. Indeed I think subconsciously they do know that at least half of the American public does not agree at all with what the current administration's policies are on virtually anything.

So I think it is so important that you all bring out a document titled like it is, saying that we want a dialogue in this country about what our country should really stand for. That we stand for major change. That we stand for—well, we stand against virtually everything that I've worked for 35 years with for the U.S. government. We stand for something different.

It's hard for me as a longtime federal bureaucrat to say that many of the programs that I've worked on for three and a half decades—both in the military and in the foreign service—were wrong. This is my mea culpa, in a way.

For me, it started with Grenada. Going into Grenada, and you call it what you want: the intervention, the invasion, the rescue mission. The interventionism, the militarism, that the United States has been the axis of evil that still is a part of the Caribbean axis of evil, that still is a major part of U.S. foreign policy—of, well, really the only link that's right now is Cuba. Nicaragua and Grenada have fallen away in their own ways. Really, they didn't go their own ways because of U.S. interventions.

I was in the U.S. Southern Command after I was in Grenada. At the Southern Command library in Panama, I started reading many of the books that the IRC staff has written about Central America and the Caribbean.

It's not a monolithic U.S. government. There are many people that are in the government—both in the military and in the Foreign Service—and I will say that I was one of them. I didn't fall hook, line, and sinker for the Reagan administration's policies, but I didn't feel so strongly that I resigned. Other people did. And it's a clue for us to think about that right now, the title of what your policy statement is very important to the good people that are serving the American public in the government right now. There are lots and lots and lots of people that are in the government that are horrified about what's going on right now.

When I resigned, two years ago, in opposition to the war in Iraq, in the first two days after my resignation I

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received over 400 emails from Foreign Service officers and members of international organizations. Most were saying that we are so glad that I had joined two other Foreign Service officers who didn't want this kind of mess on our karma. It did take me 35 years to finally kind of see the light on some things. See the light and after having been involved in a lot of other types of things through my diplomatic services. In Somalia, as head of the United Nations Justice Office in Mogadishu, setting up the police judicial system, prison system. In Uzbekistan and Kyrgyzstan, opening up embassies there. Then in Sierra Leone and Micronesia. Then re-opening the U.S. embassy in Afghanistan in December of 2001 and staying there for four months.

Then going on to Mongolia, which turned out to be my last assignment. And there in Mongolia, seeing the—seeing in spades why America is so despised right now. I saw the extortion that the Bush administration is using on the world to wage his war on Iraq. when you extort small little countries like Mongolia by telling them that you're going to cut off all their economic aid, you're going to cut off all their aid—they were only getting \$10 million dollars in economic aid—and all their military aid, which only was peacekeeping training for their tiny little military—unless they voted with the United States on the Article 98 provision of the International Criminal Court. So vote against the International Criminal Court, and tell us how many soldiers you're going to put into the Coalition of the Willing.

Such a contrast with the Global Good Neighbor Policy—we need to be moving in that direction.

The Mongolians are tough people. They say, “We were the last ones in Baghdad before you all,”—remember Genghis Khan. Well, the Mongolians were very good diplomatically; they kept us at bay. Having to go in as a diplomat to say, “If you don't vote against Article 98, you know, we'll have to cut off your aid.” That was part of the puzzle that forces you finally to say, “I have had enough, I am not going to do any more of this stuff.”

This extortion was also true with on of the items you mention in the Global Good Neighbor Ethic for International Relations—the Millennium Challenge Account. Well, the Mongolians were rising to the top tier of those countries that possibly would be eligible for part of this \$5 billion in this new development account.

We were always wondering what in the world was the Bush administration of all administrations doing kicking five billion dollars into international aid? Why was that? Well, looking back on it, I think it truly was from the very early days of the administration—it was going to be used as a bargaining tool on the war in Iraq. And indeed, they created it for that purpose, so that they could, for little countries like Mongolia, that maybe they would get 100 million dollars out of this big pot of money. It was a major, major, major deal for the Mongolians to finally say and to move off their principles of initially saying we think the International Criminal Court is a very good idea and we don't think going to war in Iraq is a good idea.

When they were extorted by our administration, by our country, by the government that maybe half the country elected. That's horrible stuff. We are the bad neighbors that we are, and I was a part of it, tragically, in way too many ways. The world needs to know America stands for something different. Americans need to know that we stand for something different, and I think your document does a very, very fine job of getting us moving in a dialogue that will help us try to move out of this horrible predicament that we're in right now.

I do have one minute left, and I will cede that one minute to the next speaker, so that we can move this dialogue on what I—as a good neighbor—I intend to give my minute to someone else.

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*For more information about Ann Wright, see her biography and contact information at: <http://www.irc-online.org/content/ggn/bio.wright.php>.*

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“A Think Tank Without Walls”

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p. 2

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