Editor’s Corner

by Mackubin T. Owens

In Memoriam
Harvey Sicherman

Harvey Sicherman, president of the Foreign Policy Research Institute (FPRI) passed away on Christmas day. He was always the very picture of health so his passing has left all of us who knew him in shock. He will be missed.

We will devote the summer issue of Orbis to Harvey. We hope to include a number of his own splendid articles as well as tributes by those who knew him best. For this issue, however, permit me to make some remarks that, heartfelt as they are, do not do justice to this remarkable man.

Ours was primarily a professional relationship but a warm one nonetheless. Harvey invited me to become a senior fellow of FPRI several years ago and I was honored when he asked me to become the editor of Orbis in 2008. Unfortunately, I only got to see him during my editorial meetings in Philadelphia every few weeks or so or during periodic FPRI events in Washington, D.C. or Philadelphia. But he always left an impression.

As a number of those who knew him better than I have remarked—and I certainly agree—the first thing one noticed about Harvey was his impressive physical presence. He stood 6' 2" and carried himself like an athlete. He dressed impeccably, often carried a walking stick, smoked cigars and drank single-malt scotches. He was a “character” who looked like he was visiting from a more refined era.

Harvey was a true gentleman of the old school: funny, charming, amiable, and generous, “an unforgettable raconteur and joker” in the words of another of his colleagues, who could bring down the house with his one-liners. He was a graceful and elegant speaker and writer, skills that served him well as a speech writer and senior adviser to three secretaries of state—Alexander Haig, George Schultz, and James Baker—during the Reagan and George H.W. Bush administrations and as the public face of FPRI.

No one surpassed him as a serious student of diplomacy and national security. His analysis of serious issues was always nothing short of brilliant. He held strong views and, relying on sharp analytical precision,
advocated them in a very forthright manner. However, as another friend of his noted, he never “personalized” his disagreements with others over foreign policy.

After his stellar service in Washington during the Reagan and Bush administrations, Harvey returned to Philadelphia in the early 1990s to become president of FPRI, an organization then facing a great deal of adversity. Under Harvey’s guidance, the ship was righted and FPRI reestablished its status as an influential source of incisive thinking about national security affairs as well as education about the topic.

Thanks to Harvey’s initiatives, FPRI now sponsors policy-oriented scholarship and conferences on grand strategy, politico-military issues, and regional affairs, as well as an innovative history program for high school teachers. In addition to Orbis, FPRI distributes “E-Notes” designed to address policy issues in a timely manner.

It is hard to believe that Harvey is gone from among us. He left us far too soon. It does not ease the mournful burden borne by Harvey’s family and friends to observe that his legacy will long outlive him. He was truly suis generis. R.I.P.

In These Pages

This issue of Orbis features two clusters of articles based on presentations at two conferences cosponsored by FPRI and the Reserve Officers Association (ROA): The Foreign Fighters Problem: Recent Trends and Case Studies, took place in Washington DC September 27–28, 2010; and Regional Security in East Asia, also in Washington, D.C. on November 1, 2010.

Barak Mendelssohn addresses emerging trends in the foreign fighter problem, arguing that although the problem persists, several developments have combined to reduce the value of foreign fighters to those engaged in jihadi operations. His overview is supplemented by three case studies. David Shinn, a former U.S. foreign service officer examines the case of Al-Shabaab, as it affects Somalia. Brian Williams examines the same topic with regard to Pakistan and Afghanistan. J. Peter Pham does the same for the Islamic Maghreb.

T.J. Pempel kicks off the second cluster by examining Japan’s competing objectives and policies in response to the regional security situation in East Asia. Richard Bush looks at the impact of Taiwan’s security in the context of East Asian regional security as a whole. Victor Cha examines the prospects for, and likely consequences of, Korean unification. Finally, Gilbert Rozman considers the impact of China’s strategic thinking on Northeast Asian multilateral regional security.

The issue concludes with J.L. Samaan’s essay on the impact of changes in relative naval power on the security of the global “maritime commons” and Karl Walling’s review essay of several books on America’s approach to foreign policy and international relations.