

## From the Woodrow Wilson Center

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**A**t a dinner earlier this year marking the 30<sup>th</sup> anniversary of the Wilson Center's Kennan Institute, Secretary of State Colin Powell jokingly recalled the instructions he received as a young officer assigned to guard Germany's Fulda Gap: "Lieutenant, you see that tree and you see that tree? Well, you guard between those two trees, and when the Russian army comes, don't let 'em through."

The story sent me back to one of the more remarkable events in my life. A little more than 13 years ago, I had the privilege of boarding a helicopter at the United States (US) military base in Fulda and traveling along the border between East and West Germany at the very moment bulldozers were ripping down the fence that separated the two countries. From aloft I watched in awe while entire families rushed from the Communist side into the arms of their West German compatriots. As Secretary Powell observed, it is just such near unimaginable changes that we must recall if we are to dream of a better future.

The Wilson Center has seen dramatic changes of its own in recent years, and many of them have occurred outside the walls of our Washington home. To respond to the world's new realities and to help build the better future of which we dream, we have ambitiously expanded our efforts abroad.

Because Mexico and Canada are neighbors of vital importance to the United States, we've established two new institutes at the Center focused on those nations. Both have substantial programs in Washington, and both are also active across US borders. The Mexico Institute regularly conducts seminars in Mexico, in partnership with local institutions, and provides a forum for discussion of US-Mexico issues. The institute is part of our Latin American Program, which has also gathered scholars and others in the Dominican Republic, Colombia, Argentina, and Brazil. The Center's Canada Institute has held seminars and conferences in Toronto, Montreal, and Calgary, and in February, we launched—in Toronto—an important annual lecture series on US-Canada relations. In the fall, former Canadian Prime Minister Joe Clark will come to the Center to spend several months in residence as a public policy scholar.

The Center's work extends across the oceans as well and across a range of topics from practical policy to high politics. In June, for example, Jennifer Turner, of our China Environment Forum, led a study tour in China for American, Japanese and Chinese experts seeking to identify lessons in environmentally sound river basin governance that can be applied in that rapidly growing country. And in September, the crisis in transatlantic relations will be the prime topic of discussion when Samuel F. Wells, the Center's Associate Director, travels to Bonn to convene a meeting of European alumni of the

Center's residential fellowship programs—an influential group of nearly 700 scholars, journalists and public figures.

No arm of the Center has done more abroad than the Kennan Institute, whose staff members' work often takes them to Moscow, St. Petersburg, Kiev, and other cities in Russia and neighboring countries. Of particular note is the Institute's role in the administration of nine new centers established at regional state universities in Russia to help maintain the vitality of higher education and to integrate Russian scholars into the international academic community. This is an undertaking of immense urgency and ambition, and we are proud that the Kennan Institute has been assigned a key role in it.

In the years ahead, we intend that the Center's international presence will continue to grow. As Woodrow Wilson concluded in 1919, there is in the international arena no "absolute guaranty against the errors of human judgment or the violence of human passions." But a tradition of globally shared and globally informed dialogue may at least serve to limit the errors and temper the violence. Which is why the Wilson Center is determined not just to draw the world into the conversation but to take the conversation to the world.\*

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\* *Editor's Note:* This article originally appeared in the Summer 2004 edition of the *Wilson Quarterly*. It is reprinted by permission.