

Wichita Committee on Foreign Relations



Mission Statement

“Founded in 1956, the Wichita Committee on Foreign Relations promotes a continuing dialogue between civic leaders and policy makers concerning key issues shaping U.S. foreign policy and international affairs and works to generate public awareness about American strategic interests.”

The World Comes to Wichita

In October of 1955, Hugo Wall, the Dean of the Graduate School at Wichita University and long-time professor of political science, was contacted by the Council on Foreign Relations in New York City about the possibility of establishing an affiliated group in Wichita. Joseph Barber, the Director of the Committees program at the Council, was investigating the possibility of establishing such groups in the Midwest. The potential for such a group in Wichita had been first raised by the Secretary of the Seattle Committee on Foreign Relations, and Professor of Political Science at the University of Washington, Dell Hitchner, who had earned his B.A. in political science from Wichita University as a student of Wall's. Upon further inquiry, Barber learned that the Executive Secretary of the Albuquerque Committee, Dale Caron, had a good banker friend, C.Q. Chandler III, President of the First National Bank of Wichita. Caron contacted Chandler about the project, while Barber contacted Wall. Although it is doubtful that Chandler and Wall had collaborated on the project at this point, they both had a common acquaintance in the person of President Harry Corbin at Wichita University. In subsequent correspondence with Barber, Corbin assured him that interest existed in forming a local committee, and that "we will have a small group of top level and very interested people to share with you and with us in the formation of a good committee." He added, "I think the project will be an invaluable one for the community and we will give it vigorous support." With Corbin's enthusiastic response in his hip pocket, Barber proposed a visit to Wichita to meet with a core of six or seven like-minded individuals in the Wichita community "who might feel disposed to sponsor a Wichita Committee on Foreign Relations." The purpose of such a committee, Barber indicated, would be to "assist in the maintenance of a nucleus of a well-informed opinion so that when there is an occasion for the men to express their views elsewhere, they may do so upon a basis of previous reflection and study." Corbin put Wall to work setting up such a meeting. On December 6, 1955, Barber visited the city, and a luncheon was held at the Lassen Hotel to brainstorm about the potential of establishing the Wichita Committee on Foreign Relations. Barber had suggested that it would be important to include "not only men who are leaders in the various professions and occupations, but also men of varying points of view," although he also acknowledged that "one must not push the latter aspect too far, since a congenial atmosphere is essential." Corbin's letter of invitation was sent to Marvin Harder, Fred Reimold, Herb Lindsley, Henry Amsden, C.J. Chandler, and C.Q. Chandler. Everyone except C. J. Chandler attended the meeting. Although there is no record about the discussions held during the meeting, Barber went back to New York clearly impressed with the core of interested persons with whom he dined as well as with other potential members whom he met during the course of his two day visit to the city. As he wrote to Corbin upon his return to New York, "In retrospect, it is perfectly clear that it [his visit] got us off to a flying start, and this was apparent as I moved about town."



Hugo Wall

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With approval from Barber to proceed with the organization as one of twenty-eight affiliates of the New York Council on Foreign Relations, an Executive Board comprised of the attendees of the December meeting with Barber (Fred Reimold, Chairman, with Henry Amsden, Harry Corbin, C.Q. Chandler III, Herb Lindsley, and William Thompson) met in an organizational session in early February to establish the by-laws of the local committee. Following guidelines set forth by the Council on Foreign Relations, the by-laws were quickly adopted, including the provision established for all of the committees around the country that the discussions must be held on a "not-for-attribution" basis in order to encourage the freest possible comments by the invited speaker and discussion by the members. While such mundane issues were quickly disposed of, one issue unique to Wichita provided a heated debate. By tradition, most of the other committees had established a cocktail hour before dinner so that informal conversation might be held between the speaker and members prior to the dinner meeting. The liquor laws in Kansas made such social gatherings more difficult to arrange, however, and some of the original mem-



Harry Corbin

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bers objected to the very concept of a cocktail hour. As the minutes of the Board meeting recorded, two members objected that it seemed "utterly unnecessary," and "it will prove an embarrassment and sign of compromise to many of the members, if this fledgling [organization] must move off to the tune of a social custom which many of us despise." Nevertheless, agreement was reached that at least for the first meeting a social hour would be allowed, and that the Board would revisit the issue at a later date. It was decided that those who imbibed in the cocktails would place a dollar in a paper box at the drink table, and that there would be no charge for soft drinks.

With all of the preliminaries resolved, the first meeting of the full Wichita Committee on Foreign Relations was held at the Lassen Hotel on March 15, 1956. The first speaker sent to Wichita by the Council on Foreign Relations in New York was Samuel K.C Kopper, counsel for the Arabian-American Oil Company and former chief of the Middle East Division of the Department of State. Ironically, the topic for discussion was "The Deteriorating U.S. Position in the Arab Countries and What Can be Done About It," a topic that has been revisited in one form or another dozens of times since that inaugural meeting.

The first full season of meetings for the Committee began in September 1956. Forty-five members paid dues of \$15.00 to attend the seven meetings that season. Hugo Wall served as Executive Secretary at the behest of Harry Corbin, although newly minted political scientist, David Farnsworth, did most of the work behind the scenes and, indeed, in 1958 took over the reins of the committee as Executive Secretary. It was a post that he held until 1974, when he tapped a newly

appointed historian, John Dreifort, to assume the position. Dreifort has held the position since that time. For historical and logistical reasons, it made sense to keep the administrative operation of the Committee on campus where it has continued to enjoy the support of succeeding presidents and deans. By 1957 the membership included a cross-section of Wichita's prominent professional and business classes such as businessmen Henry and Floyd Amsden, and Herb Lindsley, attorneys Robert Braden, Robert Foulston, and William Robinson; bankers C. Q. Chandler III, Dale Critser, R.H. Kilgore, and Paul Woods; investment brokers C. Howard Wilkins, and Fred Reimold; physicians John Fulton and Thomas Luellen; academics Harry Corbin, Hugo Wall, Marvin Harder, and David Farnsworth; Senator Charles Guilford, petroleum engineer Harry Litwin, oilman R. Potter Hill, judge William Kandt, and Bishop Carroll to name a few. In the years that followed, the membership grew steadily, peaking in the late 1980s at 100, which represented the cap placed on membership. Other prominent community members became active in their participation. Anna Anderson, John Barrier, Scott Colby, Justus Fugate, Willard Garvey, Dan Glickman, Ken Kitchen, George Neavoll, and Martin Umansky could be counted on to participate in an active fashion. The diversity of opinion and strong personalities kept the meetings lively for the speakers and the membership alike. Sparks often flew when Willard Garvey and liberal attorney James Johnston attended the same meetings!

Not only was the Committee membership limited as to numbers, but it was restricted to males only, as were all committees around the country. Once a year, usually at its final meeting of the season, the Committee designated a "spouses night" for women to attend. Finally, by the mid-1970s, at the prodding of Dreifort and a few other committee secretaries, the Council on Foreign Relations agreed to permit women as members of the committees. Many of Wichita's women professionals have made important contributions to the Committee's deliberations. Anna Anderson, Margaret Bangs, Peg Browning, Marian Chambers, Rosalyn Gore, Thelma Menaker, Susan Menking, and Virginia Robinson were important participants at the meetings and served on the executive committee of the group. In 2004, the stature of the Committee benefited from the willingness of Senators Sam Brownback, Nancy Kassebaum, and Pat Roberts, along with Congressman Todd Tiahrt and former Congressman Dan Glickman, to join together to form a Distinguished Board of Advisors to the Committee. With an open invitation to address the Committee on issues of importance to them, Senator Roberts took the opportunity to brief the members on intelligence matters in the post 9/11 era. The others expressed similar interest in providing insights and communicating their views about foreign affairs issues of significance to Kansans and the nation, while also seeking the opinions of the informed membership of the Wichita Committee.

In the course of the fifty years of the Committee's existence, more than 400 speakers have met with the Committee, some famous, others not so prominent. They have come from a wide variety of backgrounds, viewpoints, and national origins. Foreign and American statesmen, journalists, politicians, think-tank intellectuals, and academics all brought their expertise and engaged in stimulating discussion with the Committee members. David Rockefeller, Stansfield Turner, Elliot Abrams, Winston Lord, John Bolton, and Senator Pat Roberts were complemented by such foreign speakers as Sergei Khrushchev, Japanese Ambassador Yoshio Okawara, Indian Ambassador N.A. Palkhivala, Australian Ambassador Nicholas Parkinson, and Egyptian President Anwar Sadat's chief advisor, Osama El Baz, to name a few.



Secretary David Farnsworth

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and University Archives, WSU
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Council on Foreign Relations

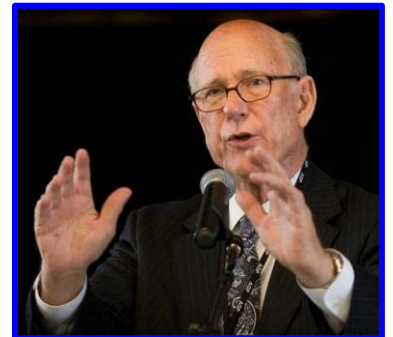
The Wichita Committee on Foreign Relations began its existence as one of nearly thirty similar Committees around the country affiliated with the Council on Foreign Relations in New York to promote the serious discussion of international affairs by leading citizens in widely separated communities. Immediately after World War I, a small group of thirty leading bankers and lawyers met at the Metropolitan Club in New York City under the leadership of Elihu Root, who had been President Theodore Roosevelt's secretary of state. Concerned about the climate of isolationism that was sweeping the country in the aftermath of the war, the group sought to reassure foreign friends that such sentiment was not unanimous. When the treaty-making process at Versailles revealed how poorly the diplomats, military men, bankers, and technical experts were prepared to conduct the difficult negotiations, several frustrated foreign policy advisors who had accompanied President Woodrow Wilson to the group to establish a permanent organization for the study of the United States' international problems. The resultant Council on Foreign Relations was incorporated in July 1921 as a non-profit, non-partisan organization dedicated to improve the understanding of American foreign policy. The membership roster consisted of 66 members of the original Council and 31 others, most of whom had played a part in the Paris Peace Conference of 1919. A year later, there appeared in print the first volume of *Foreign Affairs*, a quarterly published by the Council that developed into the preeminent journal in international affairs which frequently initiated a national dialogue on foreign policy issues of the day. An article published by George Kennan in 1947 that advocated "containment" became the most famous piece the journal ever published and helped to shape American security policy during the Cold War.

From its inception, the Council was internationalist and elitist. The bankers and lawyers who were its initial members opposed the isolationism that kept the U.S. out of the League of Nations. They were determined to provide a place where men deeply concerned about American foreign policy could discuss their ideas, criticisms, and suggestions freely, here foreign-policy makers, including foreign heads of state, could speak informally, and where the only requirement for participation was substantive knowledge and intellectual detachment. Such candor was assured by a strict not-for-attribution policy for the discussions among the members only audience. It sought no consensus, took no position, and did not lobby for specific policies. As one of the very earliest organizations devoted to such an approach, the Council quickly emerged as an exciting and intellectually stimulating institution. Leaders from other professions were quickly drawn to the Council, perceiving it as a useful neutral forum for the free exchange of ideas, policies, and concepts for Americans and foreigners alike. The Council attracted many notable speakers, including successive secretaries of state. Henry Stimson floated his "non-recognition" policy in the face of Japanese aggression, and it was at a Council dinner in 1954 that John Foster Dulles announced a policy of "massive retaliation" against Soviet aggression anywhere in the world. Many foreign leaders like Ramsay MacDonald of England and Georges Clemenceau of France as well as, more recently, Desmond Tutu of South Africa and Hosni Mubarak of Egypt spoke to the members.

The Committees on Foreign Relations Program

By 1937, as the clouds of war began looming once again, the Council began to transform itself from a New York club for men of affairs into a national networking organization of men interested in foreign affairs. By promoting serious discussion of international affairs by leading citizens in widely separated communities in the United States, the Council recognized what future Council President Peter Peterson later acknowledged, "There are awfully sophisticated people out in the country who care about foreign policy." The Council sought to provide such citizens with the same opportunity as its New York members to hear the views of foreign policy experts from the U.S. and abroad. The local groups would adhere to basic rules similar to those of the Council:

- Each group would be an autonomous committee
- Membership would be limited
- Freedom of discussion would be assured
- Discussions would be on a not-for-attribution basis
- Committees would not sponsor particular policies



Speaker Sen. Pat Roberts

A grant from the Carnegie Foundation was used to select the appropriate cities and organize the proposed committees. By the summer of 1938, the first eight Committees on Foreign Relations had been organized in Cleveland, Denver, Houston, Louisville, Des Moines, Detroit, St. Louis, and Portland, Oregon. Each committee had an executive committee and a secretary, and the executive committee would select a chairman to conduct meetings. The secretary would act as liaison between the committee and the Council and would be in charge of local arrangements for speakers, many of whom were invited by the Council. During World War II the Committees Program of the Council flourished, with no less than a dozen new committees joining the program. Eventually some thirty-eight committees would be established, including the Wichita Committee as the twenty-ninth in 1956. More than 3,800 committee members participated in local discussions as the Committees on Foreign Relations Program became an important outreach activity of the Council under the guidance of former Foreign Service officer Rolland Bushner, who succeeded Barber as director of the Committees Program. Not only did the committee members benefit from the disparate views presented by a wide variety of speakers, but the speakers also profited by being able to sense the mood of the country during their discussions.

The American Committees on Foreign Relations (ACFR)

As American interest in foreign affairs deepened during the Cold War, the Council's membership continued to read like a "Who's Who" of the foreign policy-making establishment. Men like Henry Kissinger, Winston Lord, Cyrus Vance, and Zbigniew Brzezinski moved back and forth from the Council to policy-making positions in various administrations in Washington, D.C. But such public foreign policy interest also

created new competition for the Council. New organizations such as the Harvard Center for International Affairs, the Brookings Institution, the Georgetown Center for Strategic and International Studies, and Johns Hopkins School for Advanced International Studies, to say nothing of more specialized regional organizations that focused on Asia, Latin America, or the Middle East, began to develop their own claim to foreign policy, security, and trade expertise.

With the end of the Cold War, the mood of the country changed. Many citizens mistakenly believed that foreign affairs no longer demanded their attention. The Soviet Union no longer represented a threat, and the world seemed to be a more benign place. They were wrong. But in the short term the changed atmosphere led the Council to re-think its mission and the Committees Program. In 1994-95 differences emerged between the secretaries of various committees and the Council over such issues as the quality of speakers being provided by the Council, as well as the cost of operating the program. Under the direction of new President Leslie Gelb, the Council placed less importance upon its outreach beyond the Washington-New York-Boston corridor. Consequently, at its annual meeting of the Committees in New York in 1995, Gelb announced that the Council was terminating its long relationship with the Committees. Faced with the loss of such a rich source of dialogue and information concerning foreign policy and international affairs, the committee secretaries and their members decided that it was important to preserve the program. Many, indeed, realized that the world was in fact a much more complicated and dangerous place than it had been during the bi-polar days of the Cold War, and that a well-informed citizenry would be even more important in the future to deal with the looming threats to American security.

In August 1995, therefore, the committee secretaries met in Dallas and agreed to launch a new organization. Named the American Committees on Foreign Relations (ACFR), the new organization would be based in Washington, DC. Its sole function would be to provide high-quality speakers to the member committees. Contributions from each committee along with a severance payment from the Council on Foreign Relations allowed the fledgling organization to get off to a flying start. A new Executive Director, Kenneth Jensen, was hired to oversee the operation, and highly qualified speakers made the rounds of the committees during the 1995-96 season.

ACFR has exceeded the greatest expectations of the original founders in 1995. With additional new committees formed in southeast Connecticut, Orlando, Princeton, and Nevada, the program has more than 3,000 members nationwide. The mission of the ACFR committees, including the Wichita Committee, has not changed: it is to provide an informed dialogue between interested citizens, civic leaders, and policy-makers. In doing so, the organization aids in the development of a public consensus on a wide range of foreign policy issues such as the war on terrorism, globalization, the global economy, safeguarding of human rights, protection of the ecosystem, and nuclear proliferation to name a few. Without a national public consensus on such weighty matters, effective policy is impossible. On a monthly basis eminent foreign affairs speakers, American and foreign, are provided to the local affiliated committees to address such matters from wide-ranging perspectives. Each spring, the membership of the affiliated committees is invited to attend a major three day conference in Washington, D.C. focused on a substantive issue of foreign policy. Eminent public policy officials and experts offer their varying perspectives in discussions with attending committee members. A highlight of the meetings is a formal dinner held at the Department of State, where a high-level foreign service official updates the committee members on an important issue of the day. ACFR also sponsors periodic study tours overseas for its members. Upon request, the members may also participate in the ACFR News Group, which is a thrice-weekly e-mail distribution of essays, columns, and opinion pieces from American and foreign journals, newspapers, and reports. ACFR also maintains an internet website (www.acfr.org) for its members and other interested parties that contains electronic links to news, opinion, and resources about foreign affairs.

The Future of the WCFR

The Wichita Committee on Foreign Relations continues to bring serious community attention to key issues of U.S. foreign policy, defense policy, international trade, global ecology, and other issues that help to shape our world. So that it can maintain the high level of candor and intellectual rigor among its members no matter what their political persuasion, professional background, or socio-economic status may be, the Committee does not seek high public visibility. As speakers have often commented, Wichita Committee members continue to impress them with their knowledge and analytical sophistication concerning matters of international affairs. This is undoubtedly a reflection of the fact that the members are individuals who have established themselves in their careers and bring with them varied backgrounds, education, and experiences. The Committee has counted among its membership executives and board members of key industries, large and small; senior partners in major law firms; prominent members of the medical profession; administrators and faculty of local universities; members of Congress, state legislators, and local government officials; publishers and editors of newspapers and other media professionals; and leaders and influential members of important civic service organizations. It is a membership of citizen leaders who have already made significant contributions and of younger people who hold great promise for the future. They continue to show that critical thinking and informed opinion about matters of international affairs are not the sole province of those inside the Washington-New York-Boston corridor. As an incubator of ideas, the Committee continues to seek to enlarge the vision of its members and to expose them to a broad spectrum of new and controversial ideas beyond their own professions, and through its discussions strives for a better world for succeeding generations. It is a mission that has served the Wichita community well for fifty years.

Our Founding Fathers

Henry Amsden
C. Q. Chandler III
Harry Corbin
Herb Lindsley
Fred Reimold
William Thompson
Hugo Wall

The Wichita Committee on Foreign Relations

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