

1996 BARTELS SPEAKER

Jessica Tuchman Mathews

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Delivering the Henry E. and Nancy Horton Bartels World Affairs Fellowship Lecture, Jessica Tuchman Mathews described a crowded stage of "New Actors in a New World Order" April 9 in the David L. Call Alumni Auditorium of Kennedy Hall.

A senior fellow at the Council on Foreign Relations and a columnist for The Washington Post, Mathews drew on her extensive experience in international relations to describe the geopolitical landscape after the end of the Cold War.

Marking 1990 as a critical transition period in history, Mathews analyzed the "global revolution" that has taken place over the past few years, shifting the political center of gravity.

"With the fall of the Berlin Wall, forces that had been building under the ice of the Cold War came together with the information and telecommunications revolution to produce a fundamentally new international system in which, suddenly, nation-states have lost their monopoly," Mathews explained.

Besides momentous political change, Mathews stressed that the technological revolution of the 1990s also brings serious ramifications for post-Cold War nation-states. The speed with which computers, fax machines, the Internet and other electronic communication continue to increase the flow of information has broken governments' monopolies over information and has accelerated social and political change, she said.

"We are living through a technological revolution that is sweeping the globe," Mathews said. "We have not seen a technological change that remotely resembles this in scope, or in speed, ever in history. The Industrial Revolution doesn't even come close."

Another shift in the new world order, according to Mathews, has been the explosive growth in the activity and influence of non-governmental organizations (NGOs). Pointing out that the budgets of some NGOs exceed those of some small governments, Mathews described the global political impact they have had on governmental policy. She cited the influence of NGOs in the debates over NAFTA and the

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1992 Global Climate Treaty as examples of the power such organizations have in setting international policy agendas.

Large private businesses, another group of powerful actors described by Mathews, also pose a threat to national sovereignties, she said. Capital-driven multinational corporations don't consider national interests when seeking to expand their economic base, which results in a shifting of power from nations to the free market, she said.

"In a free global economy, what's needed is not control of territory but access to resources and markets," she said. "States still matter, but their power has rapidly eroded, and it will erode further."

Mathews hastened to interject, however, that the new world order she described does not imply the demise of national power.

"I'm not suggesting that the nation-state is about to disappear or that the balance of power among governments no longer matters," said Mathews. "National governments will remain the most powerful single actors in the international arena in the foreseeable future, but what has changed is that they are no longer the only actors that matter. Now they compete on a crowded stage, with less power."