

Peter Singer at Army War College: Disruptive tech & the future of warfare

By Carol Kerr, Public Affairs Officer 01 July 2022



Dr. Peter Singer, national security futurist, discussed AI challenge, opportunity, and ethics with Army War College Distance Class of 2023, June 30 at Carlisle, Pa.

Carlisle, Pa. -- Provocative, surprising, challenging: these words describe today's artificial intelligence environment as well as the technology and cyber futurist who spoke with the Army War College Distance Class of 2023 during its mid-program First Resident Course at Carlisle, Jun. 30. His lecture and the follow-on seminar discussions reflected the Distance Education curriculum developers' intent to expose students to experiences not easily replicated online.

Peter Singer told absorbing and challenging tales of the strategic surprise looking right at us. Far from an unimaginable 'black swan' development, artificial intelligence is the ugly gray rhino that motivates us to look away. Singer urged the student body to focus attention on that ugly rhino. Hardware, software, and connecting networks are fundamentally change before our eyes, he suggested.

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Singer acknowledged that we are changing how we understand and employ AI. But, he asked, have we changed our thinking enough?

We have questions to wrestle with, he suggested. Among them: How to deal with the low barrier to entry for AI, not limited to governments? How to consider the advantage it lends to competitors? How to plan for the proliferation to other actors?

“Professor Singer gave an incredibly thought-provoking lecture that spurred a lot of discussion in our seminar, said student Stephen Siao, Congressional staff member. “Not only did he lay out the emerging technologies and future of warfare, he challenged all of us to think more creatively and critically about the future and how the U.S. can maintain its competitive edge.”

In 20 fast-moving minutes, he noted dozens of AI examples currently employed and in development, from massive battlefield robotics to microscopic ones, from single drone employment to operational options for a swarm. In doing so, he demonstrated the power of narrative to convey complex ideas – and the student body responded with several questions about communicating through story.

Other students probed his thoughts about the moral perspectives that accompany AI use. With historical anecdotes, he noted that technology has always changed our notions of bravery and honor, adversaries’ perception of our honor and ethics, and individuals’ ethical responses while using technological advances. The U.S. military, he said, is forward leaning on ethics and AI, having adopted the **DoD Five Principles of AI**.

Dr. Singer’s contribution to senior officer development

Dr. Peter Singer is a technology and cyber security futurist, described by the Wall Street Journal as “the premier futurist in the national security environment.”

“I enjoyed listening to Peter today, and I’m taken by the fact that he just also spoke to our two-star course two weeks ago,” said Commandant Maj. Gen. Dave Hill. “We recognize that he helps us to think, wherever we are in our development as a senior officer or strategic leader.

“He and I had an interesting discussion before we came out here. He talked about useful fiction today -- the power of narrative and storytelling to communicate complex issues,” said Hill. “I shared with him that one of our six institutional learning outcomes is ‘communicating effectively and

persuasively to any audience about complex subjects . That particular topic resonates with students, with faculty directors that are course directors and developing the programs that we have to offer our students.

“With our Secretary of the Army is challenging us to be more data-centric, and recognizing the power of social media, of information, and advancing technologies in the wars playing out around the globe today, [Singer’s] grounding in those topics from a scientific perspective and his ability to challenge us to think creatively about the future ... is invaluable,” said Hill.

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