

# Strategy Conference tackles definition of war

*Thomas Zimmerman, Army War College Public Affairs Office*

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*The Army War College hosted the 21<sup>st</sup> Strategy Conference April 7-9 to encourage dialogue between the military, academia and the civilian sector of strategic issues. Here, panel members Dr. Brian M. Linn, Dr. John A. Lynn, Dr. Antulio Echevarria, II, Frank Hoffman and moderator Dr. Conrad C. Crane, discuss the historical context of war. Photo by Megan Clugh.*

*Videos from the conference are at [www.youtube.com/usarmywarcollege](http://www.youtube.com/usarmywarcollege)*

April 7, 2010 – More than 150 experts from the military, academia, research labs and think tanks gathered at the Army War College April 7-9 for the 21<sup>st</sup> Strategy Conference to think and debate about the changing nature of war.

The conference, “Defining War for the 21st Century” was designed to stimulate intellectual discourse, to foster informed policymaking processes, and to develop effective U.S. strategy in the post-September 11 world, in order to clarify the issues, outline the debates, and generate strategic options.

Dr. Martin van Creveld, an Israeli military historian and theorist, was the keynote speaker for the conference and focused his remarks on the definition of war, historical perspectives on war, distinctions between Western and Eastern definitions of war, and how the termination of war has changed.

“Historically, wars were an organized activity with strict and specific rules,” he said. “Today, those rules are changing and not always for the better.”

Van Creveld pointed to the situations in Sierra-Leone and East Timor when talking about what can happen when conflicts arise and the rules of law aren't followed.

"Without these clear and agreed upon rules you don't have a war, you have a massacre," he said. "That's why this is such a timely conference on a very important topic."

The changing concept of what war is, especially in the context of current operations, was a large topic of discussion during the question and answer period.



*Dr. Martin van Creveld, an Israeli military historian and theorist, was the keynote speaker for the conference. Photo by Megan Clugh*

Conference attendees and panel members participated for a variety of reasons.

"My focus is projecting what we need to plan for 30 years down the road in terms of strategy and equipment," said **Air Force Col. Chris Kinnan**, Air University Center for Strategy and Technology. "The questions of what will war look like 30 years from now and how will we fight it are the same issues we discuss here at the conference."

"This is so valuable because the U.S. military doesn't always do a great job in planning in terms of looking at it from a long-term perspective," said **Dr. Martin Cook**, panel member and Stockdale Professor in the College of Operational and Strategic Leadership at the Naval War College. "These types of conferences help us do that."

"I can't think of a better place to come learn about strategy and strategic thinking than the Army War College," said **Edward Straub**, conference attendee.

"One could argue that a cyber attack against another country is an act of war," said **Dr. James Carafano**, Heritage Foundation, during one of the panels. "The definition of war is changing. The structures and rules are changing. We need to be able to define these problems and debate them."

“I truly believe that when you learn to start thinking at the strategic level, you need to re-charge your batteries and refresh your thinking constantly,” said **Maj. Bob Dixon**, strategic planner at MacDill Air Force Base, Florida. “For me, I can’t think of a better place to recharge and refocus than here at the Army War College,” said Dixon, who served here in the early 2000’s.

Dixon noted the benefit of collaborating directly and frankly with the expert staff and faculty of the college.

“When you’re in the field or out doing your job, you read studies by Dr. [Steven] Metz or Dr. [Antulio] Echevarria that really make you think and bring up issues for discussion,” he said. “When you come to this conference you have the opportunity to sit down and talk to them and discuss them further. You can put a price on that value.”

“It’s great to bring together academics, government and uniformed military in one place to see what the state of thought is on these important topics,” said **Col. Daniel Pinnell**, G-3 for the Future Force Integration Division at Ft. Bliss, Texas and USAWC Class of 2009 alumnus.

Pinnell said that the discussion on the rule of law and ethics were particularly of interest to him.



“I think that these are the toughest issues to deal with as leaders, especially in the counterinsurgency environment we are operating in,” he said.

“I came to learn more about the Army and how they plan to tackle transformation and modernization,” said **John Groevein**, Penn State Research Lab. “The changing nature of conflict is an important issue going forward and I enjoyed hearing all of the different perspectives on how to adapt.”

***Former USAWC Commandant retired Maj. Gen. Robert Scales was a guest speaker for the strategy conference banquet.***

Panels composed of three to five distinguished experts who framed the discussion and facilitated a dialogue with attendees added to the conference experience.

Transformation was discussed by the first panel, with **Dr. Brian M. Linn, Dr. John A. Lynn, Dr.**

**Antulio Echevarria, II, Frank Hoffman** and moderated by **Dr. Conrad C. Crane**.

“The Army is looking at ways of hybrid fighting,” said Hoffman. “I think that may be the answer to fight current and future conflicts. I think we have learned some great lessons from Iraq and they key will be to apply them.”

“Unfortunately you’re not going to see the lessons learned until we get to the next conflict,” said Linn. “That’s just the way the cycle operates.”

The panel discussions tackled the following questions:

- Why does it matter how we define war?
- How does a nation know it is at war?
- Will all "wars" have discernable start and end points, or will some "wars" have no definable end?
- What are the political and social implications when the political elite and general policy differ in their interpretations?
- What are the dangers of misusing or overusing the "war" label?
- Must a new "theory of war" be developed?
- What are the dimensions of war -- unrestricted war, lawfare, hybrid war, cold war, asymmetric war, cyber war?
- What are the challenges in defining victory?

"The U.S. Army War College's Annual Strategy Conference is widely regarded as the premier event of its type," said Prof. Douglas Lovelace, SSI director. "Consequently, the USAWC enjoys a privileged position in being able to attract the best scholars and most accomplished practitioners to address perplexing national security issues. The presentations and conversations that comprised this year's conference clearly demonstrated the USAWC's commitment to increasing the body of knowledge that underpins our educational and research missions."

U.S. Army War College Archives - News Article - 09 April 2010