

African Symposium sheds light on complex issues, challenges

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Margaret Culbert, a Senior Defense Intelligence Analyst for Africa at the Defense Intelligence Agency, talks with Air Force Lt. Col. Chuck Bowes during a seminar discussion during the African Symposium Feb 1. Photo by Megan Clugh.

Feb. 1, 2011 -- The Army War College dedicated two days to bring together government, civilian and military experts to talk over the issues, challenges and potential success stories for the African continent during a regional symposium Feb. 1-2.

“This symposium was designed to shape and inform the discussion of the complex issues facing the African continent,” said **Col. Tom Sheperd**, USAWC director of African Studies. “The goal is provide an exposure to some of the underlying key strategic factors that play a role in shaping the way the United States achieves its national interests in a regional context.”

Guest lecturers Margaret Culbert, Dr. Jeff Herbst, Col. Tom Galvin, Dr. William Reno, Joshua Eisenman, Amb. Vicki Huddleston and retired Amb. Lou Nigro each brought their unique perspectives to the diverse continent of Africa.

“This region presents a nuanced set of challenges that will help shape the future of stability and security not only for Africa, but the entire world,” said Sheperd, to the student body. “You will find these same themes continuing throughout the rest of the year as you continue to wrestle with the ‘wicked problems’ of national security.”

“The game has changed, he added, later. “When these students leave they will be encountering these complex issues and challenges.”

This was especially true for USAWC student **Lt. Col. Kristin Baker**, who will assume a position in AFRICOM after graduation.

“This was a great opportunity to enhance my knowledge of the issues and challenges facing the region,” she said. “Each of the speakers brought their own unique perspective to the topics discussed which creates a great discussion.”

“The symposium really challenges you to think about the challenges that the African continent faces, and what the implications may be for the rest of the world,” said student Marine Corps **Col. Terry Trenchard**.

“What really makes it valuable for a nation like Georgia that is so far away is that it helps to show how truly universal these issues are,” said Georgian Fellow **Col. Bondo Maisuradze**. “A nation’s problems don’t always stay within their own borders. It can spread to other areas, so we need to be aware of that and be prepared to help.”

The symposium comes after the completion of many of the USAWC core courses and challenges the students to apply their skills.

“This is an opportunity for the students to sit, listen and apply the critical thinking skills we’ve been emphasizing all year in relation to strategy, policy and the operational environment,” Sheperd said. “Then we hope they use these skills to get to the crux of how these issues shape and affect the U.S. during the seminar discussion sessions.”

Given the current context of civil unrest in Tunisia and Egypt, Sheperd said that one of the symposium objectives was to help explore how one incident in Tunisia, no matter how small at first glance -- such as someone setting himself alight -- may have far-reaching effects.

“It’s easy sometimes to see how a large incident has a big impact on the strategic environment,” he said. “But it’s sometimes more important to see that seemingly small things, under the right circumstances, can have a huge effect on the long-term strategic environment. We hope the students are able to take a longer view towards complex issues and regions.”

Culbert, a Senior Defense Intelligence Analyst for Africa at the Defense Intelligence Agency, focused her remarks on how factors like demographics, population growth, urban growth and climate change will shape the region’s future.

“It’s important that schools like the Army War College are taking time to focus on Africa,” she said. “If you are going to be deployed to Africa then you really need to have a grasp of the multiple concerns on

the continent, no matter whether you are there for military, human rights or other reasons.”

She also said that the complex nature of the problems necessitate the use of all of the elements of national power.

“When you are building these professional military institutions, they have to be built simultaneously with political, social, judicial and penal institutions,” she said. “You have to build an environment in which democracy can grow.”

Herbst, president of Colgate University, spoke of the effect that decolonization had for Africa and how it at times receives an incorrect label as an unstable region.

“If you look at the changes in boundaries in Europe and the former Soviet Union in the last 50 years there has actually been more change there than in Africa,” he said. “What really hurt the region was the destruction of the existing military structure when the continent was decolonized, which has helped to create the instability we see now.”

Herbst also discussed the potential challenges that the recent South Sudan’s referendum for independence and the still unstable Somalia may pose for the region.

Eisenman, senior fellow for China Studies, American Foreign Policy Council, brought a unique perspective to the region when he focused his remarks on China's interest in Africa and what that could mean for the world.

"There is a dearth of information about why China is interested in Africa, and what they are trying to achieve there," he said. "Resources are a key, but there are diplomatic and trade advantages for them as well. How this situation unfolds could say a lot for the future of the continent."

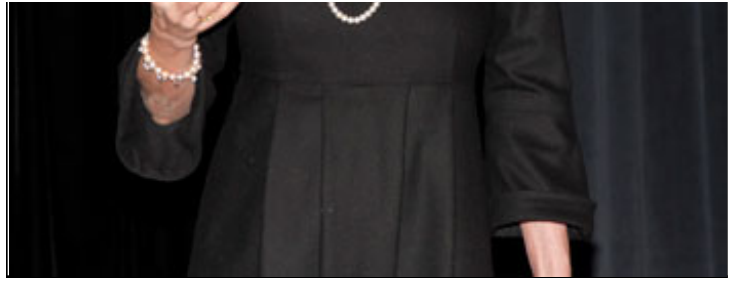
Galvin, chief of the AFRICOM Commander’s Action Group, provided students with a wealth of information about AFRICOM and what security challenges face the region.

“It’s important to remember that African problems are global security challenges,” he said.

Amb. Vicki Huddleston, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Africa in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, talks in Bliss Hall during the African Symposium. Photo by Megan Clugh.



Galvin said that AFRICOM activities like supporting partner counterterrorism efforts, promoting interoperability and balancing ground, maritime and air capabilities have led to success. He said that lessons about the importance of partnership, executing a resourced comprehensive approach and communications strategically have already been learned and applied to future operations.



Huddleston, Deputy Assistant Secretary for Africa in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, spoke about the need for building African capacity.

“We’re there to reinforce and enable the African states – militarily, through training, as well as through civilian assistance like health and education,” she said. “As President Obama says: Africa for Africans.

African military under civilian control allows them to protect their citizens and defend their borders,” she said. “If it’s well done, as with Egypt and Tunisia, the military is the friend of the people, the constitution and the state.” In large part, that’s “because of experiences with the US military, like the US Army War College.”

Nigro, a former Ambassador to Chad and DNSS faculty member, spoke about the challenges facing AFRICOM.

“AFRICOM is still a new organization, evolving,” he said. “We really need to ensure the integration of State, DoD, USAID and other agencies, like Justice and Agriculture, across the spectrum of the US government to achieve our national goals. Resources are never enough if we don’t integrate and synchronize and harmonize efforts.”

He also touched on the importance of the establishment of the nations militaries.

“African militaries will develop as their societies develop,” he said. “A state acquires legitimacy when the military and law-enforcement elements of the state are [at an equal pace] with the development of the state itself, and when the society is willing to hand off control of their lives to a state they consider legitimate.”

In seminar later, students discussed the difficulty of finding agreement among nations about, what is security and where does it come from. The dialogue considered the challenges of achieving the regime’s security, territorial security and human security.

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