

Army leaders discuss decision-making process at Senior Leadership Seminar

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Col. Lew Irwin, Senior Leader Seminar participant, engages Gen. Bob Cone after the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command commander's remarks to the 85 Army colonels and senior civilians selected for the Army's one-week program. Photo by Carol Kerr.

There's a point at which select Army officers and senior civilians are in positions to make things happen and set the conditions for the Army's future if they are prepared to do so. Twice a year, the Army's Senior Leader Seminar (SLS) triggers that preparation by exploring the information needed for decision-making in a changing environment.

Eighty-nine Army colonels and DA GS-15s convened for the January seminar in Shepherdstown, W. Va., to explore issues presented by Army leaders during the second iteration of this Army Leader Development initiative. Executed by the Army War College's Center for Strategic Leadership, the SLS educates and broadens senior leaders selected by the Senior Leader Development office.

"This is exactly where we need to put our emphasis in leader development," said TRADOC Commander Gen. Robert Cone who spent several hours in SLS dialogue about Army Leader Development from TRADOC's perspective and from his own personal perspective.

"This program stems from systematic analysis of how we develop leaders," said Cone. "We identified this cohort of leaders and wanted to ensure that we provide the breadth and depth of understanding about the strategic environment that they'll deal with.

"It's important that they understand the full context of the peacetime world - team play, sharing information and building coalitions," said the TRADOC commander.

"It's about team play at this level," said Cone. "For most of their career, they've focused on their own lane. Now the job is to understand external relationships."

Cone's focus complemented that of Gen. Raymond Odierno, Chief of Staff of the Army, who emphasized these leaders' responsibility to lead change in a changing world and at a time of fiscal constraint.

The Army leaders who addressed the group were candid about creating consensus for complex challenges. Sharing insights from positions of responsibility and experience were Gen. Odierno, Gen. Cone, Third Army/USARCENT commander Lt. Gen. Vince Brooks, Inspector General Lt. Gen. Peter Vangiel, and the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy Michele Flournoy.

The seminar included experts' guidance about the high-visibility, high-expectation world of the strategic leader.

Dr. Don Snider identified the definitions of the Army Profession campaign as a precursor to future Army "build-down." Col. Mike Meese, professor and head of the Department of Social Sciences at West Point shared the economic literacy needed for strategic decision-making. Professional Congressional Staff Member Bill Sutey joined with the Chief of Legislative Liaison Maj. Gen. "Ben" Hodges to clarify what Members of Congress need and expect, and why that understanding matters. The mysteries of interagency coordination were deconstructed by representatives of the departments of Homeland Security and State, DHS Deputy Assistant Secretary for Policy Alan Cohn and DoS Minister-Counselor Karen Aguilar.

Gen. Ray Odierno, Chief of Staff of the Army, spoke to the group about the leaders' responsibility and challenge to lead change in a changing world and a time of fiscal constraint



Emerging themes included the value of relationships, skill in seeing the Army from outside perspectives, and the need to survey personal skills and knowledge to recognize and develop blank spots in a leader's skill set.

"I value the simple fact of knowing what others are thinking," said SLS participant Col. J.T. Thompson, commander of the 160th Special Operations Aviation Regiment. "Rarely do we get the opportunity to reflect on the issues facing the military in the next three to five years, and allow us to brainstorm."

"This is exploratory learning," said Thompson. "You get an appreciation for the enormity and diversity of the

situation ahead of us. There is no silver bullet. You appreciate what is ahead. To be a part of that among all these people? I'll take that," he said about the cohort of SLS leaders who will set the conditions for the future.

"This is important in that it guides my self-development," said participant Col. Bruce Antonio, 4th Infantry Division Chief of Staff. "To hear what senior leaders are thinking about is valuable. As I hear the issues important to senior leaders, I know where I'll want to put more attention in personal development."

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