

USAWC Strategy Conference: Collaborative approach is key to future U.S. grand strategy

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Richard Armitage, president of Armitage International and former Deputy Secretary of State, delivers the keynote address about America's role in a 21st century world at the U.S. Army War College's 23rd annual Strategy Conference at Carlisle Barracks recently. Photo by Megan Clugh.

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CARLISLE BARRACKS, Pa. – Apr. 16, 2012 – Strategists from all branches of military service, international partners, industry, and academia gathered at the U.S. Army War College last week for a three-day event focused on the future of U.S. grand strategy.

The 23rd annual Strategy Conference, sponsored by the USAWC Strategic Studies Institute, explored challenges and opportunities available as we develop future U.S. grand strategy in an age of austerity.

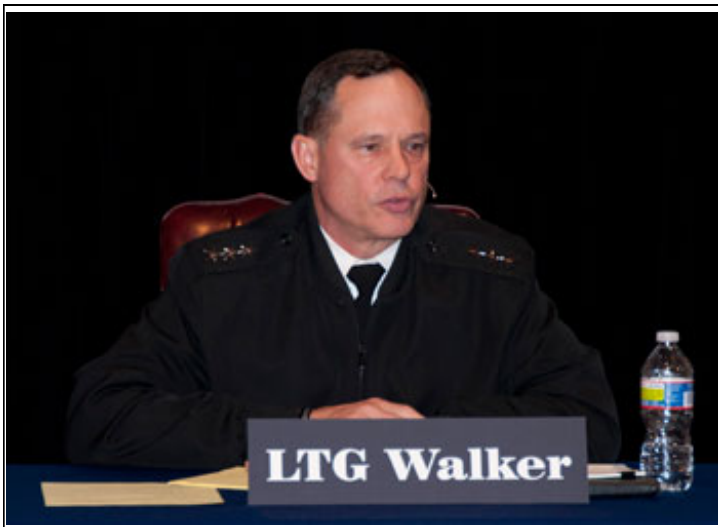
“Coming out of almost a decade of war, we need to develop a national narrative to address changes that will come in a new security environment,” said Maj. Gen Gregg Martin, commandant of the Army War College, in his remarks to open the conference. “We owe it to our most precious resource, America’s sons and daughters who are in harm’s way, to develop new, creative ways to advance and preserve our nation’s security. We have to get it right for them.”

Keynote speaker Richard Armitage, former U.S. Deputy Secretary of State, opened the conference with a call for the United States to remain active in the global dialogue.

“U.S. strategy must find a way to keep us engaged throughout the world,” said Armitage. “America’s role in the 21st century is that we must remain engaged to help other nations see what they can become.”

Armitage focused his remarks on Asia, Afghanistan, and the Middle East and indicated that world events will shape future grand strategy. He addressed also the idea that U.S. defense strategy is shifting toward Asia and the Pacific.

“We never left Asia,” Armitage said. “We are just re-balancing our focus in Asia to address the re-rise of China.



Lt. Gen. Keith Walker, Deputy Commanding General, Futures, U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, and director of the Army Capabilities Integration Center (ARCIC), discusses the Army 2020 concept during a panel discussion on the role of the military in future U.S. grand strategy at the U.S. Army War College’s 23rd annual Strategy Conference at Carlisle Barracks recently.

“Sometimes it seems like China is searching for its own identity on the global stage,” he continued.

“The question is: what are the Chinese willing to do to advance the ‘global good’?”

He talked about how an understanding of history is important as we address strategic issues and that he believes the U.S. is anything but a nation in decline.

“I’m not of the school of American decline. Our system is correcting itself,” Armitage said. “There is no question in my mind that we will continue to be the dominant, indispensable nation in the world.”

The conference’s first panel focused on understanding what austerity is and how it will affect grand strategy. The panelists agreed that austerity is nothing new, that it is an old challenge that must be defined and viewed through a lens focused on the current security environment.

“We have been down this road before,” said Mr. M. Thomas Davis, vice president of strategic planning for the General Dynamics Corporation. “There are just different issues we have to deal with.”

The panel discussed challenges related to thinking about new ways to address an old problem, which all

things appear to run in cycles, and U.S. grand strategy will not be immune to this. One of the keys to future strategy is establishing priorities and ensuring those priorities can be supported in an era of declining budgets.

“We have to debate what strategy is, and define what our interests are,” said Dr. Thomas McNaugher, a senior visiting professor in Georgetown University’s security studies program. “We are buying less with our defense dollars than we used to. So when we have this debate on strategy, we need to have the defense budget to support this strategy.”

A critical component to developing U.S. grand strategy in an age of austerity involves the role of international partners. While many expect the U.S. to continue in a leading role, collaboration based on trust and a vision of shared risk and opportunity will be essential moving forward, according to retired Lt. Gen. Paul Newton from the United Kingdom.

“There is the expectation that you will lead, but you will have to consult and cede some of your power if you want to have real partnerships,” said Newton, who holds a chair in security and strategy at the University of Exeter in England. “What do you want from your partners? Do you want them to be a mirror of your capabilities or do you want them to do something else?”



James R. Locher III, veteran Washington insider and former executive director of the Project on National Security Reform, discusses state of U.S. strategy during an evening banquet at the U.S. Army War College’s 23rd annual Strategy Conference at Carlisle Barracks recently.

Newton also noted that as the U.S. military continues to develop new capabilities, it must be mindful that its tempo could outpace the ability of some of their partners.

According to Mr. William F. Owen, editor of the *Asian Defense Journal*, one of the challenges will be developing strategy that is mutually compatible with goals of international partners, so there must be a common understanding of what strategy is and what it is used for.

“Many different communities have different ideas about the use of force to achieve political ends,” said Owen. “How do you mold your policies to make them compatible with your partners to achieve common ends?”

Complementing the role of international partners, a panel focused on the role of the military in development of U.S. grand strategy discussed the need for our military to adapt so that it will remain relevant and ready to continue in its ability to help the nation achieve future strategic ends.

Speaking as part of the panel, Mr. Robert Work, Undersecretary of the Navy, said that it is time to balance the elements of national power.

“We are at a ‘strategic inflection point’ where the U.S. military will play a different role in future grand strategy,” he said. “Maintaining global freedom of action is critical. Priorities for 21st century defense will be a smaller, more agile joint force that will amplify its capability through the use of technology.”

One luxury that future strategists will not be able to rely on is predictability, according to featured speaker and panelist Lt. Gen. Keith Walker, Deputy Commanding General, Futures at the U.S. Army Training and Doctrine Command, and Director of the Army Capabilities Integration Center (ARCIC). Strategists must be confident that our military forces are adaptive and agile enough to engage potential adversaries across a broad spectrum of conflict and respond to any number of humanitarian crises or natural disasters.

“In the past, defense strategies have had a specific focus arrayed against a single adversary, so we were able to focus tasks, training, and capabilities against that enemy,” said Walker. “Now our potential adversaries are diverse. This is significantly different than what history shows. We don’t have a Soviet Union to line up against anymore. “

Adapting is challenging, but recognizing the need to adapt will be a critical component that guides future strategy, according to Dr. Thomas Mahnken, Jerome E. Levy chair of economic geography and national security at the U.S. Naval War College.

“Challenges exist in areas where the services are not comfortable,” said Mahnken. “They have to think of things they have not traditionally done in ways they’ve not done them with constrained resources.”

Panelists focused on future options for U.S. grand strategy indicated that much of the world will continue looking toward the United States for leadership, so we will have to consider if future grand strategy leads to more or less involvement around the world, especially when it comes to the use of military force.

They posed a fundamental question, should U.S. grand strategy consider reducing military options while requiring our international partners to do more?

“We are unlikely to make major strategic changes in the near future,” said Dr. Christopher Preble, vice president for defense and foreign policy studies at the Cato Institute. “A fundamental shift could focus on whether or not the U.S. will remain the sole global power and are we trying to develop capable, empowered allies who are willing to take a greater role in regional security?”

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