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Dr. Jim MacDougall opened the geopolitical panel of National Security Seminar, June 3, with encouragement to learn from The War College faculty speakers and take full advantage of the question session. The three panelists focused on 'looking out' at some of the major developments since the end of the Cold War.

The chair of the National Security and Strategy teaching department, MacDougall offered the 'looking out' and 'looking in' construct to give sense to the week's design: To try to understand the world we operate in (looking in) and to understand the resources, element of power and how we organize them to interact with the world (looking out).



“At the end of the Cold War, we felt we won,” said MacDougall, recounting the bi-polar nature of Cold War international power. The post-Cold War was less clear, he said, referring to Charles Krauthammer’s anticipation of the uni-power moment with the United States as that single power. “In the ensuing time, Russia has consistently talked about developing a multi-power world. Now the question is, with the economic challenges we face and the last 10-12 years at war, What kind of world are we in? Are we approaching a multi-power world?”

This panel focuses on 'looking out' – some of the major developments since the end of the cold war, said MacDougall, in introducing the faculty experts who offered insights as to the Russian, Chinese, and Arab view of international power.

Dr. Craig Nation, Army War College Professor of Strategy since 1996 is the director of the College's Russia/ Eurasia program. He is fluent in Russian, and holds a PhD from Duke University.

"What does the Ukrainian crisis tell us about how Russia sees the world in the 21st century world order?" Nation asked.

(l to r) Dr. Craig Nation, Dr. Jim MacDougall speak for NSS geopolitical panel.

"Russia is traditionally difficult to decipher," said Nation. Its geopolitical situation makes it a significant player. Power tradition, military tradition, great resources, rich history and culture, permanent member of the UN Security Council, a country that can attack and destroy the U.S. in a matter of minutes -- it has all the attributes of a national power, he said.

"Post-soviet Russia is the world's 8th largest economy but it is struggling with growing inequality, corruption, challenges of diversification, demographic challenges," he said, and then noted the tension between economic visions and its authoritarian background.

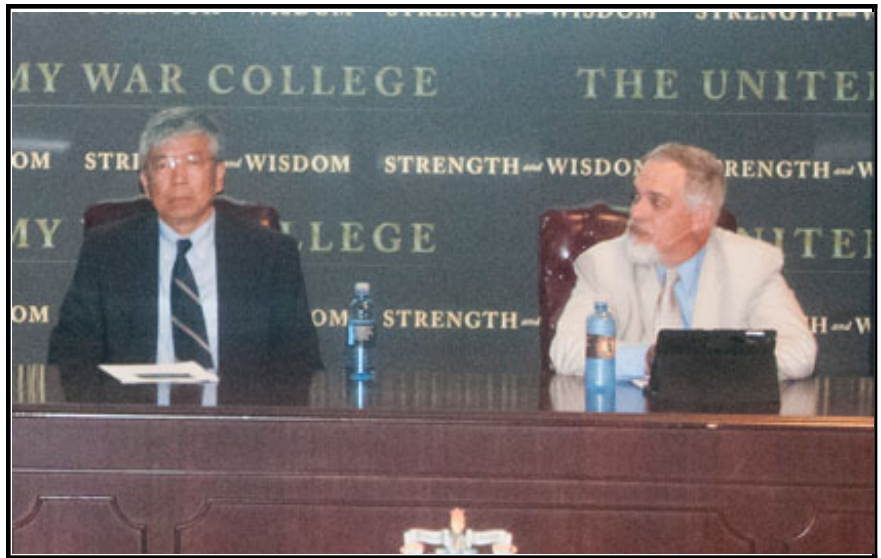
There is an agenda that Putin's Russia is following: unapologetically reconstructing a strong state with strong centralized government, said Nation. Russia speaks of the United States with reference to 'the anaconda strategy' -- that a U.S. goal is to subvert or weaken Russia.

"Does this imply a hostile relationship with the United States? I may be optimistic, but it does not."

Russia's biggest challenge is economic, he said. It needs to work cooperatively with the US and other western nations. And, this is where the Ukraine crisis comes into the picture. Russia seized control of Ukraine, secured their strategic position on the Black Sea, positioned themselves to avoid a boiling pot in Ukraine." However there is a big price attached to these tactical gains, he said. Russia's economy has already been damaged ... its isolation has been increased.

Legislative action that's currently under consideration redefines Russia as an enemy. "Is that what we want?" asked Nation.

"The crisis has this kind of negative outcome implicit inside it, but not inevitable."



Dr. David Lai is a research professor of Asian Security Studies with the USAWC Strategic Studies Institute. Born and raised in China, he earned his undergraduate degree in China and additional degrees in the United States. Lai speaks Chinese fluently and was recognized by Henry Kissinger as a resource for his book.

“The rebirth of great power politics -- nowhere is this more apparent than in the Asia-Pacific region,” said Lai.

Since the final decades of the last century, the strategic shift of the power center has been from the Atlantic to the Pacific. Many states in the region are striving for peace and development but this is counterbalanced by many unsettled territorial disputes and, on top of this, the precarious US-China relationship, said Lai.

Dr. David Lai, Dr. Larry Goodson speak to USAWC student body and new members of National Security Seminar, June 3 in Bliss Hall.

Great powers have a tendency to get together to form an international system to establish order and expect other nations to follow the rules, and as long as the great powers have control of this system, they do not fight amongst themselves, said Lai.

But economic development affects the balance of power. “A rising power initially unhappy with the system, thinking the system worked against them, causes this rising power to confront the other powers,” said Lai.

“With China’s rising, I will submit that China is an undisputed contender in this system,” said Lai.

Dr. Larry Goodson is the USAWC Professor of Middle East Studies and holds the Gen. Eisenhower Chair of National Security. He earned his doctoral degree at UNC-Chapel Hill; he’s traveled extensively through the region, writes prolifically, and has consulted at the highest levels of the US government about Afghanistan and Western Asia.

Providing a historical context on the relationships between Russia, China and the U.S. where it concerns Afghanistan and Syria, Goodson framed his remarks using a “great game” analogy, where there are no rules, all players play not to lose and that nations have no permanent fiends or allies, just permanent interests. Today, the great game is a global game, and a nation can’t focus on a single regional dimension in a world where Interests intersect, he said.

For both Afghanistan and Syria, Goodson argued for continued engagement and U.S. interest.

Despite political pressure, the U.S. cannot afford to completely pull out of Afghanistan. While the U.S. has taken an interest in Afghanistan since the 9/11 attacks, China and Russia have had long-standing relationships with the nation and its neighboring countries. China is one of the main military suppliers for Pakistan, and Russia has a history in the region dating back to the days of the Cold War and the “great game” between Russia and Britain in the 19th century.

In contrast, the situation in Syria is more complex; support for the Assad regime from Russia and China directly conflict with U.S. and NATO policy, according to Goodson. While the U.S. may not have direct national interests in Syria, the U.S. needs to stay engaged because of national interests from allies like Israel and Turkey, he said.

US interests have always been minimal in Syria, where Russia and Iran have always taken a keen interest, he said. For example, the only Russia port outside of the former Soviet Union is in Tartus, Syria. China’s interest in Syria is more indirect, but the country does not wish to see further interventions that affect sovereignty as in Libya, he said.

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