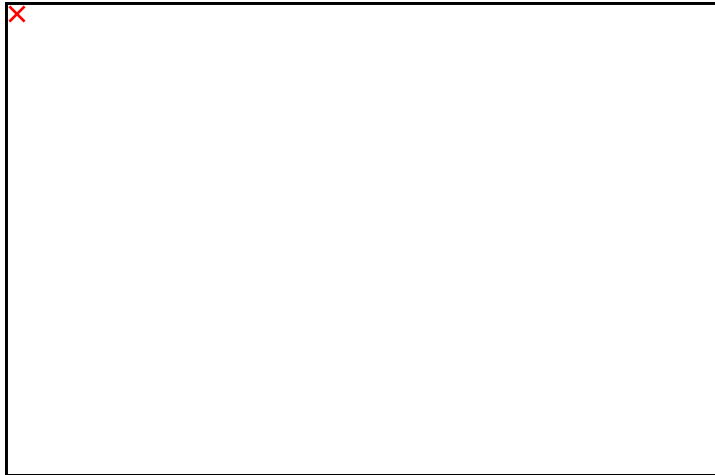


Africa symposium shines light on region

Thomas Zimmerman, Erin O. Stattel, Army War College Public Affairs Office

Africa symposium shines light on regional challenges, opportunities



Maj. Gen. William Garrett III, commander, U.S. Army Africa spoke about the mission of U.S Army Africa and the strategic challenges and opportunities in the region during the Africa Regional Symposium that brought together members of military, government, non-governmental organizations and regional college faculty at the Army War College Nov. 24-25. Photo by Thomas Zimmerman.

Dec. 1, 2009 -- The Africa Regional Symposium brought together members of military, government, non-governmental organizations and regional college faculty at the Army War College Nov. 24-25.

The symposium provided an overview and baseline understanding of the relationship between issues affecting Africa's security situation and their linkage to US National Interests.

Guest speakers and classroom discussion highlighted the growing importance of Africa to US National Interests. Divided into three sections, the symposium focused on the African Security Environment and the International System; Governance, Political Development, Cooperation and Conflict; and the US Army and Africa.

One of those speakers was Dr. William Reno, Northwestern University, discussed Conflict drivers, security challenges and the U.S. role in the 21st century in Africa, in Bliss Hall Nov. 24.

"This symposium sounded like an excellent education initiative and at the sister war college, we don't have anything like this," said Amb. David Dunn, Deputy Commandant and International Affairs Advisor, National War College. "Dr. Reno's presentation was very interesting and he mainly focused on countries in conflict, whereas earlier today we had a more general overview but this has been quite an interesting analysis of the current state of affairs in Africa."

Dan Pike, Office of the Secretary of Defense's Africa Policy, said Reno's presentation was representative of a new focus on the region.

"This event is huge if you compare it to attention paid to Africa by war colleges in the past," Pike said. "These 21st century issues are being presented to the right audience to address this because they are going to be the leaders to deal with those issues."

USAWC student Helen Lardner said the symposium helped educate her about the region.

"I enjoyed listening to information about the different African regions and the different resources available," she said. "It was interesting to hear how he related a COIN strategy for the different problems and how it could be applied in certain areas and situations."

By bringing together so many diverse backgrounds the symposium inspired discussion among the participants.

"We didn't just get a State Department or DoD perspective," said USAWC student David Jenkins. "It was an interesting mix."

"The African perspective tends to be underplayed in military studies but it is growing in importance," said Jennifer Cooke, director of the Africa Program for the Center for Strategic and International Studies. "I was happy to share my perspective. This seminar has helped give others a completely different take. It's fun to engage about these issues."

"We are hearing distinctly different views from what we get from the open media," said USAWC student Tom Pagan. "This is very beneficial to many of us in dealing with what will come in the future."

Amb. Donald Yamamoto spoke about the challenges and dramatic changes his embassy faces while tackling sub-Saharan issues in Ethiopia.

"I have been in Africa for the past 14 years and there have been dramatic changes," he said. "Things in Africa are dynamically changing, and we need to be a part of that."

USAWC student Lt. Col. Tarn Warren said he found Yamamoto's comments gave him a clearer picture of the issues and

challenges of the region.

“This was certainly insightful and interesting and his way of describing the vast differences in military expenditures and the state department’s efforts to do work was great. He hit all the right notes and with a bit of humor,” Warren said. “My takeaway today is the importance of interagency operations and why it needs to be flatter. We can’t wait for things to come down the stovepipe, we won’t get anything done. Trust and cooperation from an interagency point of view is really key.”

Another guest speaker for the symposium was Maj. Gen. William Garrett III, commander, U.S. Army Africa. Garrett spoke about the mission of U.S Army Africa and the strategic challenges and opportunities in the region.

Education really seemed to be a vital part of the symposium according to Col. Stephen Mariano, Army Africa Assistant Chief of Staff.

“This is a whole new way of thinking,” he said. “This command is less than two years old and we want to help educate people on what’s going on and how they may fit it.”

U.S. Army War College Archives - News Article - 03 December 2009