

Distance Education students maximize resident phase opportunities

By Robert Martin 26 June 2019



Retired Gen. George Casey, Army Chief of Staff 2007 - 2011, discussed with the distance learning class of 2020 the importance of strategic leadership and how vision, courage and character are required leadership traits. Carlisle Barracks, June 17.

June 26, 2019— The Distance Education students in their first resident phase here explored strategic instruments of national power through a series of expert speakers, with follow-on in-depth seminar discussion, and Baltic States case studies and exercises.

Dr. Clay Chun, Distance Education director, welcomed 392 students to the midpoint of their two-year graduate program in Strategic Studies. The first of two resident phases, each two weeks long, gathers a diverse student body of US and international military officers, and interagency civilians at Carlisle Barracks.

The two-week June resident phase is carefully designed to maximize experiential learning and exposure to multiple perspectives about the strategic application of Land Force. Expert speakers and in-depth seminar discussions are complemented by case studies and exercises. The Baltic States Strategy Development Exercise, for example, challenged the

students in a matrix game linked to the expert regional knowledge presented by Ambassador Deborah McCarthy, retired Army Col. and Pa. Senator Doug Mastriano, and Dino Mihanovic of Croatia, the European Union Representative to the United Nations.

Led by war college historians, the Antietam Battlefield staff ride addressed the Civil War senior leaders' challenges to assess tactical considerations such as terrain and relative combat power, and strategic influences related to politics, economy, and the will of the people. A few days later, the students explored parallel influences on national security today during a staff ride to the National Capital Region, visiting leaders and planners in 25 embassies as well as federal agencies, Congressional offices, media headquarters, and think tanks.

Every expert engagement and seminar discussion wove in themes of ethical, informed leadership in an age of change and complexity.

The speaker roster is a richness of expertise and relevance: Peter Feaver on Civil-Military Relations; Dr. Hal Brands on American Grand Strategy; USAWC Prof. Kevin Weddle on Strategic Leadership in History; USAWC Dr. Joel Hillison on NATO; Dr. Shannon French on Ethics; Dr. Michael O'Hanlon on the Future of Landpower.

Additional, elective noontime sessions featured interactive sessions with Army War College faculty and researchers Dr. Con Crane on history; Prof. John Tisson introduced the Leadership Feedback program; S. American security with Dr. R. Evan Ellis; Dr. Chris Bolan on Iran; Dr. Leonard Wong on Generations; Col. Veronica Oswald about Women, Peace and Security; Col. J. Sindle's insights on the National Security Council.

Strategic Leadership

The program's keynote speaker, Retired Army Gen. George Casey, U.S. Army Chief of Staff from 2007 to 2011, established the context of leadership in strategic complexity. Today's VUCA leadership environment is a volatile, uncertain, complex and ambiguous world, he said. That requires leaders who can restore stability amid chaos and inspire confidence when people are anxious about the unforeseeable future.

To be successful, leaders need to focus their intellectual and emotional energy on areas of high payoff, he said. Casey made recommendations for developing vision and strategy; building high performing teams; setting internal and external conditions for success; preparing for the future; and, sustaining yourself.

Military ethics expert Dr. Shannon French contrasted the tone of enduring ethics debates with the urgent questions today about artificial intelligence. A senior associate at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, she addressed the ethical implications of artificial intelligence in military decision making. She identified both liabilities and opportunities, and the imperative to approach AI in an ethical and practical manner.

French brought up thought provoking questions: Will autonomous weaponry diminish the military's Warrior Ethos? What are the ethical implications of the rise of AI and the marginalization of humans? And, what is the role of human interface if, or when, AI is given authorization to kill?

The great push for AI is the belief that it will decrease errors in military decision making, she noted. Some support AI-enabled decision-making because they believe humans are too emotional to be trusted to make the right decisions in combat. French disagreed with this premise.

American Diplomatic, Economic, Informational Power complement, interact with Military Power

Are diplomats and diplomacy still relevant? Ambassador Daniel Kurtzer explored the question through examples of diplomatic triumphs over the years, e.g., the creation of NATO, Middle East process, post-cold war reunification of German and the Dayton Accord.

He suggested the value in looking back on noted theorists of diplomacy, to recognize how applicable they remain. And, he addressed the significance of the fact that when leaders speak, they articulate policy; whether in a tweet, slogan or speech, when the president speaks, everyone listens. Students focused his attention during the question session on preparing Foreign Area Officers for embassy duty, among other topics.

Dr. C. Richard Neu, Pardee RAND Graduate School Professor of Economics, discussed the economic power the nation wields in his Bliss Hall interaction with the full student body.

The United States leads the world with respect to banking and finance, legal systems, tech innovation, among others, said Neu. As to continued international economic leadership, he warned against thinking of China as a singular threat. He proposed that attention to domestic issues will be key to creating the policy coherence and national confidence necessary to maintain growth, prosperity and economic leadership. At students' request, he discussed inflation, taxation, and currencies among other topics, as

they applied their personal experiences and interests to the “big ideas” that Neu introduced.

Addressing information as a strategic national tool, well-known journalist Joseph Galloway championed the U.S. commitment to a free press that holds power accountable to citizens, and shared anecdotes of his actions to that end. In an energetic exchange with students, he urged them to find media sources that will accurately and reliably inform their decision-making.

American Grand Strategy

Dr. Hal Brands spoke of complex trends that are changing global politics and what it means for American grand strategy. Brands started with a brief description of international order which has been anchored by the United States for over 75 years as where there is international free trade, democracies are geo-politically and human rights are observed.

He described ways that this order is under attack, from the resurgence of Russian authoritarianism and aggression to the emergence of China as a potential, illiberal, peer competitor.

Brands recommended that the United States rebuild situations of strength, resist coercion short of war; align geo-politics with geo-economics; take up the ideological challenge; wage political warfare; pursue realistic cooperation; avoid distraction and win the contest of systems.

Future of Land power

Michael O’Hanlon, senior fellow at the Brookings Institution, addressed the future of landpower by describing conflict scenarios that future military leaders are likely to face and the implications for planning force structures and strategies. Through the examples he gave, he dismissed notions that future wars will be mostly conventional and said that “messy” stability operations are not going away anytime soon.

There is a lot of good happening the world, he said, but the progress is fragile and cannot be taken for granted. Progress will requires a strong United States, a strong Army, strong ground forces and broad U.S.-led coalitions of partners, allies and like-minded countries working together in common pursuit of goals they agree on in principle.