

Army War College hosts competition to test participants policy skills

By John Goulette, USAWC Public Affairs 04 May 2022



Army War College Commandant Maj. Gen. David Hill stands with the National War College team, winners of the first Strategy Competition. The Strategy Competition was held at Upton Hall on April 30 and involved 10 teams from 5 different universities.



The University of Texas at Austin team, along with their French team member from the Ecole de Guerre, stands in front of Upton Hall following the event. The U-Texas team would finish second in the Strategy Competition.



The National War College posing after their victory in the event. The wooden award being held will belong to NWC until the next Strategy Competition, where the next winner will then take possession of it.

While student teams of five 'war colleges' competed in twelve sports to earn the Jim Thorpe Sports Games Commandants Cup, April 28-30, a parallel competition tested students' ability to apply their understanding of national security. In the Strategy Competition, each team spent a full day of analysis and strategizing and presented their recommendations, April 30. U.S. Army War College Commandant Maj. Gen. David Hill announced the winning team in conceptual competition: National War College.

The purpose of this competition goes much further than just the classroom, as real-world military leaders had an opportunity to practice how they would react to a highly volatile situation under a time constraint. The teams only discovered what the scenario for the competition would be when they



USAWC Commandant Maj. Gen. David Hill (middle) shakes hands with NWC President USAF Lt. Gen. Michael Plehn (right) after NWC won the competition. This event was organized by Dr. Celestino Perez (left) and his

arrived at the CSJWC approximately two days before the event.

Six-person teams represented five colleges for the competition: the USAWC, National War College, Naval War College, the Clements Center from the Lyndon B. Johnson school of Public Affairs at the University of Texas Austin, and the Ecole de Guerre, the French war college. The scenario used for the competition was the Russian invasion of Ukraine, an issue which the students considered being of the utmost global interest and importance. The college teams were tasked with formulating a concise and coherent policy plan about how the situation should be dealt with, which would then be presented and evaluated by judges whom were selected due to their national security knowledge.

The Ecole de Guerre participants were in a unique position as the only fully foreign team in the competition. Their first-hand knowledge and their Eurocentric lens which they viewed the scenario gave them a unique perspective. Their proposed policy was focused on the importance of the transatlantic relationship and how the United States and Europe could cooperate to attempt to neutralize the Russian threat. This included an increased participation on NATO and the European Union.

In addition to the six-member French teams, six of their colleagues participated on other teams. These students were invaluable to their American counterparts by bringing their perspective, and it should be noted that the first and second place teams each had a French member. The Ecole de Guerre team would end up placing third in the competition. The French instructor stated the importance of the importance of the French-American relationship

“It’s always been important for officers to engage with their allies and, in this case, American counterparts, and I think it’s all the more important today because the uncertainty,” said Emilie Cleret, Director of Debate for the Ecole de Guerre and fellow with the Royal United Service Institute. “If there isn’t that rapport that’s created, then I think when they do have to work together it will be far more difficult. The day they will have to engage together in operations or supervising operations, they will have a common ground to work from.”

The Ecole de Guerre was not the only team who had an outsider’s perspective, as the U-Texas team had virtually no military planning experience. Coming from a civilian academic perspective, these students did not have the same hands-on experience in decision making as the other teams had.



"It was interesting to see now every team had central common goals, but with different directions on how to reach them," said Ilayda Dussetschleger, a U-Texas student in the final year of her master's program.

The U-Texas student team, along with their accompanying French student, primarily focused their policy on the different forms of soft power that they could use. This included an emphasis on a public diplomacy campaign that would use celebrities to speak against Russia's actions and bring the issue to the attention of those who would normally not care. There was also an emphasis on cooperation between the US and the Europe, perhaps because of the team's French member. The U-Texas team would end up taking home second place in the competition, proving that they could compete with the senior service schools regardless of their military background.

"We have been studying crisis scenarios like this all year, so now we can attempt to apply the educational framework that we were taught into a real-life policy that could be viable long term. While we were only given a short amount of time to complete our policy, I believe that time-crunch could be beneficial to real world situations", said USAF Lt. Col. John Conner, NWC student.

National War College won the competition because of their focus on strategic planning and forethought, which the judges rewarded with a victory. The level of planning that the NWC team had was considered exceptional by their peers. They had considered the potential success and failure of all their actions and used visual aids to show how the different policy outcomes would affect each major actor. Focusing on economic and diplomatic strategies, they emphasized trade and negotiations to help ease the situation.

Dr. Stephen Biddle, foreign policy expert and Professor of International and Public Affairs at Columbia University, was one of the judges of the competition. Biddle emphasized the importance of coherency and cogency to the participants by saying "your decisions do not occur in a vacuum, you need to consider the implications of everything you do". Biddle was assertive during the panel question portion of each team's presentation, dissecting the flaws and logical gaps presented.

The other judges on the panel were Dr. Risa Brooks, military policy expert and professor from Marquette University, and Dr. Sonya Finley, Professor of Strategy from National War College. They both honed in on the importance of using different types of strategy to accomplish an objective, and were quick to question whether certain policies were thought through

completely. “You absolutely need to consider what impacts your choices have, not just on the group that you want it to affect but to the peripheral groups,” said Brooks, during her final evaluation.

Hosted by the USAWC, this is the first strategy competition among senior service colleges. It was developed in partnership with Cleret by USAWC Professor and Chair of Executive and Strategic Leadership, Celestino Perez.

“The level of enthusiasm among the students – and faculty – was very high, and even after it had concluded, the faculty were strategizing for how to approach the competition next year,” said Dr. Carrie Lee, chair of the sponsoring Department of National Security and Strategy.