

AEI Fellow talks cost of credible combat power, the questions and complexities

By Elena Patton, Public Affairs Office 07 June 2022



Mackenzie Eaglen, Resident Fellow at American Enterprise Institute, shares her insights with students and NSS guests to help them think through the cost of credible combat power, June 8.

Policymakers and military senior leaders are thinking about how to establish a sustainable strategic path amidst uncertainty, a priority set by the Secretary of Defense. The Army War College's National Security Seminar keynote speaker, Day 3, discussed the framing questions and complexities that can help students and guests think through the cost of credible combat power.

This year, 160 NSS guests, representing a cross-section of geographic regions and diverse backgrounds, were invited to exchange ideas with USAWC students in seminar discussions about national security issues, June 6-9.

Mackenzie Eaglen is a Resident Fellow at American Enterprise Institute, a think tank that focuses on national security issues. Eaglen's research centers on military strategy and budget. She has worked on defense issues

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in the House of Representatives, Senate, Office of the Secretary of Defense, and Joint Staff. Her opening remarks focused on the strategic, budgetary questions surrounding the different types of deterrence.

How do government officials and military leaders balance pacing threats with immediate threats? How are the capabilities needed for war determined and financed? How do leaders decide how much funding each service branch receives? What is the role of armor in a rapidly modernizing force and battlefield? How do all these decisions impact integrated deterrence efforts, and are they working?

After setting the foundation, Eaglen invested most of the session in questions from students and guests. She addressed questions about—

The pivot to the Pacific, future security in the region, and if and how all the services should pivot their focus

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The premise of her presentation was that policymakers and leaders do not have time to research the bigger trends and future challenges because they are immersed in the challenges of the day -- the tyranny of the now. Think tank researchers grapple with these questions to help government and military leaders think through the challenges around the next corner and how to deter and/or address them, she suggested.

Her presentation provided context for an in-depth seminar discussion. In one seminar, students and guests talked about the tensions affecting decisions about military strategy and budget. Balancing national interests with shared values presents certain challenges that are further complicated by strategy and policy. One must spend money to justify getting more money, time constraints and policies limit how and when the funds can be spent. If money is incorporated into one capability, what capability is it been taken away from and what factors contribute to that decision?

As the discussion unfolded, striking similarities emerged. Leaders in the civilian, corporate world must navigate similar challenges and limitations as those in the government and military when making decisions about strategic forecasting and budget.

“It helped me to see things that outside the military you just don’t get: a real sense of the tension between the military, policymakers, bankers, budget restraints, long-range planning, citizen’s interests,” said NSS guest Noble Wray. The retired police chief of Madison, WI is currently an executive level instructor for Fair & Impartial Policing, LLC. “For the military, there is always that sense of urgency and expectation to function like any other federal agency. In policing, there is always that same tension, have the budget together, be a good partner from the standpoint of another city department, report to a mayor, and meet citizens’ needs.”

“Hearing the outside perspective is incredibly valuable to our learning experience here,” said Army Special Forces Col. Ned Marsh, USAWC student. “I will always have empathy for other people’s perspectives and interests when it comes to military matters and decision making.”

For more about the National Security Seminar experience at the Army War College: See links on this page. Find photos at www.flickr.com/photos/usawc/