

## Rosa Brooks proposes NSS discussion of forecasting, uncertainty, strategic humility

By John Goulette - USAWC Public Affairs 31 May 2022



*Keynote speaker Prof. Rosa Brooks, Associate Dean & Scott K. Ginsburg Professor of Law & Policy at Georgetown University, discussed the importance of strategic humility with NSS guests and USAWC students. file photo*

Carlisle, Pa. -- Future forecasting is a useful tool for strategic leaders, yet subject to changing political and technological developments. So, how should leaders develop a policy that considers the inadequacy of our own understanding? This was the question posed by the National Security Seminar keynote speaker, prompting further discussions by USAWC students and NSS guests.

This week, 160 NSS guests, a cross-section of Americans from various geographic regions and diverse backgrounds, are exchanging ideas with USAWC students in candid dialogue about national security, June 6-9 at the Army War College.

'How best to approach future forecasting' shaped the remarks of keynote speaker Dr. Rosa Brooks. The Georgetown Associate Dean and Professor

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of Law & Policy touched on the importance of humility when attempting to forecast the future.

“If someone from 100 years ago, even 20 years ago, were to future forecast for 2022, they would be completely wrong,” said Brooks. “This is why it is important to be humble and realize that things in our world are always changing.”

Brooks explored four hurdles to forecasting. From technological innovations that have connected the world; to the power and access of democracy; the balance between safety and a potential global catastrophe; and the impossibility of predicting both short and long-term technological change, she introduced caution.

Leaders should not accept future predictions rigidly for domestic or foreign affairs. Her discussion pointed to the need to consider multiple scenarios while being open to the possibility that ‘anything can happen.’

Prof. Chuck Allen shaped the follow-on discussion in his seminar around the fact that military leaders must lead through uncertainty.

“When you have complex issues, with interdependencies and second and third-order effects that you cannot fully project, you need to have clarity of purpose and clarity in communication with yourself, with stakeholders, and members of your organization,” said Allen.

“In short, collaborate to gain information and learn how to adapt and move forward in the problem space. To counter the VUCA environment, you need to be able to shift weight and adjust and adapt based on the terrain you find yourself on while infusing a degree of optimism that we can make things better,” Allen added.

He quoted retired Chairman of the Joint Staff Gen. Martin Dempsey, known for his response to challenge and uncertainty: “Let’s get after it.”

Students and NSS participants in another seminar focused on Brooks’ concept of strategic humility.

“Humility is a misunderstood word that we commonly assume the worst in,” said Nicol Rae, Associate Dean for Applied Research and Development at the University of Arizona. “To me, it means that we must be ready for contingencies and be able to accept that we are wrong. We cannot always hold onto previously held beliefs once they are proved false.”

“Humility does not mean that you are acting in a pathetic or weak way,”

said Navy Cdr. Tom Newman, a USAWC student. "Humility to me proves strength. Being able to accept that you are wrong and need to be adjusted is an awkward thing to admit, and it takes courage to do that."

Opportunities to learn, build relationships.

The weeklong agenda weaved large group lectures, small group discussions, and informal exchanges to impart an understanding of the complexity of national security while engraining the importance of relationships among diverse perspectives. Day 2 was no exception.

The 2nd day of the National Security Seminar included an evening reception at the USAWC's Quarters 1, and a set of four national security lectures from which the guests could choose.

Army War College faculty offered these four special-topic lectures: Prof. Doug Douds explored "The use of time in strategy." Dr. Allison Abbe addressed, "In pursuit of strategic empathy." Prof. Bert Tussing, a national expert in Defense Support to Civil Authorities, discussed, "Defending and securing the Homeland." And, Dr. Lami Kim, a prominent specialist in nuclear issues and East Asia, shared insights on "Security in the Asia-Pacific."

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/](http://www.flickr.com/photos/usawc/)