

A Strategic Practitioner's View of the 21st Century: Challenges and Opportunities

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According to Major General Cucolo, “the world is an increasingly volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous place” so we can't afford isolationism. Trends challenging global stability and US interests include criminal operations that should be treated like threats from other nations; hybrid alliances of interest, which can be described as marriages of conveniences; and economic, ethnic, and ecological concerns. Two permeating trends are that during the recent period of austerity, the government has not been spending the amounts necessary on security. Subsequently, our land force is increasingly US-based. The ambiguous threats to our interests delay decisions and responses. We no longer have the luxury of time to react to such questions as: Where is the crisis? Who are the players? Who do we contact?

In our interconnected economy, we can no longer afford to be isolationists. We are interdependent with other nations in this digital age. Of concern are the rogue actors who are using financial weapons to threaten our security, the weakening of the US dollar, and the loss of the predominance the US economy that could open us up to increasingly effective financial attacks. While financial warfare has nothing to do with bombs or bullets, financial warfare is a great possibility in the future. The challenges to reduce American vulnerability include getting a grip on the deficit, strengthening the dollar, and maintaining a trustworthy market.

The college's primary purpose is to produce skilled critical thinkers and complex problem solvers, and to serve as a “Think Factory” at the worldwide strategic level. The Army is experiencing a strategic renaissance in its approach to impact policy, which requires intellectual and cultural change. The class of 2014 is the second largest class to ever attend the War College with 385 resident students, 369 distance education program students, and USAWC Fellows worldwide. The resident education program includes all branches of the armed forces and civilians, while including 77 international students from around the world.

MG Cucolo's final plea is to “beware of the siren song of quick, easy, cheap, and sterile power projection or warfare.” A balanced joint force with global reach is required for credible national military power. Bullets and missiles may have momentary success, but the economy depends on regional and national security. The increasing complexity and interconnectedness of the 21st century of informational and economic realms are providing a seedbed of instability with the potential to disrupt previous norms. Our threshold of acceptable instability will get lower and lower with the increasing speed of human interaction. The Army must continue to provide options and to be prepared to resolve conflicts of interest to national security as part of this balanced, joint force.

2013-2014 Program Topics / Schedule

March 27	The Role of National Intelligence in the 21 st Century
April 24	The International Drug War and Implications for Foreign Policy
May 15	The Future of the Transatlantic Relationship from a European Perspective

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