
SECURITY ASSISTANCE COMMUNITY

International Colleagues at the National War College

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National War College President Lieutenant General Michase M. Dunn, USAF, talking with Colonel Ihor Pastus Hyn, Ukraine Air Force at 2005 NDU graduation ceremony.

Carl von Clausewitz proposed that the study of the nature of war be approached in three parts: the people and their emotions, the militia with its tactical creativity, and the government with its politics. In this article, I use a similar three-part analogy to examine the international fellows program at National Defense University (NDU), and specifically at the National War College (NWC): first, the U.S. civilian and military instructors and students; second, American society as a whole; and third, the international students themselves.

Each of the three elements interacts with the others, generating an interdependency that has yielded important and surprising results during the two decades of international student participation. To gain a better understanding of the great benefits and successes achieved by all the components of this modern strategic triad, it is appropriate to examine each in turn.

The program of international student participation at National Defense University began in 1984. To date, 522 officers from different parts of the world have been trained at the component colleges. About half have studied at NWC. As the college is celebrating 60 years of educating U.S. military and civilian leaders, it should be noted that a third of its life span has included the participation of international military and civilian personnel. These guest students have enjoyed academic exploration with their U.S. colleagues, shared life experiences, and exchanged opinions in the classrooms, all of which have generated brotherhood among all involved.

American Instructors and Students

The first element of the triad, the American instructors and students, is the most important since the curriculum is a basic part of the professional career training of both military officers in each of the Armed Forces and of civilian leaders from various U.S. government agencies and institutions.



Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Richard B. Meyers, USAF, congratulates Colonel Salah Afifi, Egyptian Army, at the 2005 National War College graduation.

All U.S. participants arrive with extensive and unique experience and knowledge to share with a diversity of people who, from the first day of instruction, will be their colleagues in the classroom, seminars, research tasks, field trips, and other academic, social, athletic, and cultural activities throughout nearly a year of intense work. This combination tests many qualities such as willingness, patience, leadership, a capability for synthesis, judgment, and many others that will enable students to emerge as leaders capable of handling the delicate responsibilities demanded by future duties and assignments.

American students and instructors share unity and friendship with their U.S. colleagues and even more with the international students. Arriving in a new environment, the international students, with the help and collaboration of their U.S. peers, are able to advance in their studies and complete them. It has become clear that through the international students program, strong, long-lasting ties of

friendship are formed between the U.S. and international students. The interaction that occurs during seminar sessions, with the contributions of all participants, makes the international students feel like valued members of the group who can share their knowledge and opinions about the various subjects that make up the NWC curriculum.

Many of the friendships U.S. students have cultivated with their international colleagues have facilitated training events, operations, and other undertakings that the U.S. Armed Forces have conducted around the world. The contribution of an international colleague, whether a classmate or a graduate of another class year who has maintained close ties with instructors, is often able to satisfy an American friend's need. Many Ambassadors, technicians, specialists, and other personnel from various government agencies and institutions have had the good fortune to obtain assistance in their duties in another country through the help of an inter-national colleague.

Many U.S. officers and their families have shared pleasant experiences with foreign colleagues and their families, creating friendships that will endure for generations. Visits, lasting correspondence, and other examples of affection and fellowship strengthen ties not only between individuals and families, but also between the respective armed forces and countries.

In parallel, the entire staff of executives, professors, advisors, and personnel who handle NDU's administrative, teaching, and academic tasks deserve gratitude and admiration for their effort, dedication, and impartial devotion to the benefit of all students. Full-time guidance and assistance make it possible for all participants to advance in the learning process with sufficient clarity and comprehension of the subjects covered daily. The staff and faculty are a fundamental element in the solid structure and prestige earned over many years by NDU in general and NWC in particular.

United States Society

Since the international students program emanated from the Department of Defense (DoD), it has enjoyed the collaboration and participation of all the entities under DoD jurisdiction and many other institutions and agencies that are involved in the program to varying degrees.

But the greatest contribution is from American society as a whole since the curriculum includes numerous visits into the interior of the United States, where foreign officers have the unique opportunity to become acquainted in detail with various facets of political, economic, industrial, tourist, business, social, and military life. Even more intimate insights come when the officers live with host families as part of a magnificent effort by the Defense Orientation Conference Association, which does an unparalleled job of supporting and strengthening relations between the United States and the countries represented by the students.

The opportunity to thoroughly study each industry, business, farm, household, or tourist location enables the foreign officer to see first-hand and properly understand the U.S. citizen's philosophy of life, from the farmer to the executive, from the high-ranking soldier to the young recruit. This apprenticeship, in addition to that gained academically at the university, serves as a very real point of reference to the hopes, objectives, and goals of the American people, as well as to the negative aspects that must also be analyzed. International students thus get to see both sides of the coin.

These experiences with the broader U.S. society make foreign officers more confident in relating to their American friends, and in turn, U.S. citizens see officers from other parts of the world as being not unlike themselves, with qualities and flaws and feelings of friendship that are common to all nationalities, even when customs, religions, and cultures are diametrically opposed. This fosters a climate of camaraderie, openness, and sincere and lasting friendship. Above all, it generates a commitment from both sides to cement fraternal ties, not only with individuals, but also with their countries.

As an international student, I found it interesting to observe how deep inside the United States, perhaps in the homes of hosts, souvenir plaques were displayed, some many years old, with photographs of inter-national friends who were participants in the program. This was very encouraging and clearly showed the appreciation and fondness achieved in multiple contacts between extremely different cultures. These friend-ships are a multiplier of good will that may one day unite the world in a single entity of peace and harmony.

The International Students

As stated above, over 500 foreign guests have graduated since the beginning of the international student program. Each acted as a student ambassador, representing his country to colleagues, professors, and authorities throughout NDU.



Preparing Brazillian table at an International Fellows luncheon at the National War College.

Insecurity and lack of knowledge of the United States and its customs make foreign students seek out the support and understanding of their U.S. colleagues when they first arrive. In most cases, Americans have shown great willingness to guide their visitors in performing academic and other exacting tasks effectively in a language other than their own. Participating in trips around the country, personally experiencing many aspects of American life, being helped everywhere in an extraordinary manner, and having many concerns satisfied have all created in each foreign student a respect and admiration for the achievements of the United States in all aspects of its national development.

In addition, NDU allows foreign students to participate in athletic, cultural, and social events individually and often with their families, enabling them to always find friendly faces and doors open to any concerns. In this respect, the university's International Students Management Office, with its

excellent staff of highly trained and friendly professionals, plays a major role; tirelessly helping in the varied and often exacting requests of the students under its responsibility.

After completing an exhausting school year and graduating from their respective colleges, international students retain in their minds and hearts this fond and professional tie with everything that involves NDU and U.S. society as a whole. Back in our own countries, the moments we experienced continue to live in memory, and we seek to multiply these positive effects by reciprocating where we can, and making any effort when the opportunity arises as a show of gratitude for everything received during our stay as students.

This article is part of an initiative aimed at capturing the experiences of international students at the colleges of the NDU. It is difficult to interpret the feelings of each individual, but the effort has been made to present thoughts that are generally common to all participants.

In addition, this article is intended to express admiration and appreciation to the National War College on celebrating sixty years of institutional life as a guide and a trainer of military and civilian leaders, a source of excellent professionals, and a teacher of the strategists of new generations who, in common with their international friends and colleagues, will attempt to make the world a more harmonious place, free of the egotisms and problems that so greatly affect humanity.

As long as there is a former NDU student in any country in the world, there will be a friendly heart beating, one ready to be of use to its college, its university, and its eternal American friends. This is the sentiment of all of us who have traveled America's roads and worked conscientiously in its classrooms to obtain the education needed to face the challenges of the future in each of our nations.