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Guest Speaker Discusses Unconventional Threats

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Benjamin Riley's job is to stay one step ahead of potential enemies who would adapt technology from the United States to harm its citizens and soldiers.

Riley's prime task as Principal Deputy, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense, is to counter unconventional and time-sensitive threats. Riley was a guest speaker in October at the Naval Postgraduate School Center for Homeland Defense and Security where he discussed his office's mission.

His visit to campus illustrates the importance of CHDS values such as interagency collaboration and drawing on the research expertise of the Naval Postgraduate School. He credits Professor John Arquilla and NPS Department of Defense Analysis research on networks and emerging technology of military operations as serving as a sort of knowledge base for his work.



"We have been able to look at technologies that may be used to address some of the themes that have surfaced in his research," Riley said. "More and more, I look at what they (Arquilla's team) are doing as relevant to the challenges I understand that people in our homeland security and law enforcement agencies have to face. I think we will have to continue to push these interfaces."

In turn, discussing those issues with students provides perspective about the potential of new high-tech tools.

"In my view, in order to effectively maximize the potential and value, you have to put it in some sort of context. You can't just throw new technology out there," Riley said. "So, things out here, the school and the curriculum, become the venues to help us develop that context and give us a better perspective of how you might exploit the potential of new capabilities."

Added Kathleen Kiernan of the CHDS faculty: "The learned experience that practitioners represent can't be duplicated in a laboratory setting. You have to work with practitioners who have experienced the churn of human behavior at its extremes to better understand it and enhance it with technology."

Increasingly, Riley noted, anticipating emerging technological threats requires reaching out to non-military partners to build working relationships with his civilian counterparts.

"We have these bureaucratic boundaries and areas of responsibilities between the law enforcement, homeland security organizations and the military," Riley said. "How do you improve the interface in parts of our government to do the necessary coordination and do it consistently within the laws and policy of governing? I think that is a huge challenge."

In seeking to build those bridges Riley engages federal agencies tasked with similar concerns of defense and security. His office conducts about 80 to 100 technology exercises per year, typically partnering with other federal agencies. Such projects may include working with the FBI on biometrics or working with Customs Border Protection on integrated computer architectures.

For example, his office enlisted multiple agencies for a series of tabletop exercises designed to assess how non-state threats may use technological capabilities through 2025. The goal is to break the "cycle of adaptation;" as

technology is developed terrorists find ways to adapt to it and even enlist it for their use.

"What we want to do is get ahead of that cycle and anticipate the enemy. It certainly doesn't predict the future for us, but it helps our understanding of what we view the future to be and to understand, as we see new technologies come along, give us context into how we might use these technologies," Riley said.

Riley is a retired naval officer and graduated from the University of Virginia. He holds two Master of Arts degrees, from the Naval War College and Salve Regina University.

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