Western Way of War:

EPISODE 33: GENERAL (RETD) DAVID PETRAEUS

Moderator: Professor Peter Roberts (questions in Bold)
Respondent: General David Petraeus (responses in Regular text).

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Moderator: Welcome to the Western Way of Warfare season 2. This is a weekly podcast series that tries to understand the issues how to fight and succeed against adversaries in the 2020s. I'm Peter Roberts, Director of Military Sciences the Royal United Services Institute on Whitehall, and every week I'll talk to a guest about the Western way of warfare. Has it been successful? Is it fit for task today? How might it need to adapt in the future? This season we're going to look at the way adversaries are fighting too, and focus just a little bit more on the key facets required to succeed. This is not just about the Western Way of War, but how the concept of how the West fights interacts with how others are plan on using their force of arms. The podcast is only possible because of the kind sponsorship of the good people at Raytheon UK, a subsidiary or Raytheon Technology Technology, a British company that creates jobs in England, Wales and Scotland, contributing over £700 million to the UK economy. To kick off season 2 my guest is someone we've mentioned more than a few times in the past 6 months' worth of discussion. They are also a winner of the RUSI Chesney Gold Medal, which has only been awarded to 3 people who aren't British. The first of those was Alfred Thayer Mahan, the last one was Henry Kissinger, and squarely in the middle sits my guest today. General David Petraeus is intrinsically linked to the adaptation of how to fight a specific type of a war, in Iraq and then in Afghanistan, shifting the national approach and culture of an entire campaign midway through. Now, I think wrongly the name David Petraeus has become synonymous with counterinsurgency alone, and to me this does him a disservice. He is, like Jim Mattis with whom he wrote FM 3-24, he's a soldier-scholar. His experience and service is far broader than just coined CT or intelligence, the latter being clear from his time as Director of the CIA.

He's commended at pretty much every level of military command, holding 6 consecutive commands as a general officer, 5 of those in combat. He's clearly a thinker and an accomplished writer, having articles published in peer review journals since 1983 and completing not just the usual style training but also a PhD quite early in his career. His experiences started perhaps with NATO across Europe and then on operations in pretty much every live intervention that was running, from Haiti to Bosnia. On his 37-year journey with the US Military he worked with some of the greatest leaders of the time, from General John Galvin, and if you haven't heard of him you need to buy and read his autobiography called Fighting the Cold War, to Henry Shelton when he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. In this I think there are many who are guilty of not acknowledging that David Petraeus has experienced great power competition before, and at a time when things like tactical nuclear artillery were very much live on the planning table, and the thinking was of army groups surging across the Fulda Gap. His bio since then is so long we could make a whole episode on it, so let me end this intro with this 1 comment. During his retirement ceremony then-Chief of the Joint Chiefs, Admiral Mike Mullen, compared David to Ulysses S. Grant amongst others as one of the great battle captains of American History. I am, like many others, fascinated by Grant. So, that plaudit, to me, says it all. In retirement General Petraeus is one of the busiest people you will ever meet. I'm delighted to say he finds time to generously support RUSI as our Senior Vice President, which he has done since 2013, and he's a regular listener of our little podcast. With all that in the back of our minds I'm...
really intrigued as to what our guest will make of this first question. So, David Petraeus, what does the Western way of warfare mean to you?

David Petraeus: Well, first Peter thanks very much for the invitation, and thanks also very much for the very kind introduction. I should note I’m also fascinated by Grant and pursue a variety of activities connected with his legacy. Second, thanks for your own service in uniform and thanks for developing this very stimulating podcast, which as you noted I listen to very keenly every episode, and I’m honoured to continue in the path that has been trod by David Richards and my great deputy Graeme Lamb from the surge in Iraq and so forth. Third, thanks to RUSI, it is a truly great organisation that you’re part of, and as you noted I am privileged to be the Senior Vice President there. Then fourth, when it comes to this question I must say that I thought Professor Tony King of the University of Warwick, whose interview with you aired in mid-December, and was superb, I thought he nailed on this question, noting that the Western Way of Warfare is in many respects influenced very heavily, if not decisively, by the US Way of Warfare. So, with apologise my answer, like Tony’s, is US-centric, and not just because I was a US Army officer but because I think that is what, again, largely defines what we describe now as the Western Way of War. To justify this a bit further I should note that the US doesn’t just spend more on defence than all of its 29 NATO allies put together, it spends more than twice as much as all of them together. For perspective the US has spent roughly $740 billion a year on defence in recent years. The UK and France each have spent roughly $50-60 billion. The US typically spends more than 12x that of each of the major, and there’s only a couple of major non-US NATO nations.

Again then, the Western Way of Warfare is very heavily influenced if not dominated by the US way of preparing for and conducting warfare, though again I caution, I do not want to diminish the important contributions of all those in NATO and other allies and partners around the world, having commanded the largest fighting coalition in history, the International Security Force in Afghanistan, which had somewhere around 60 or more countries contributing, an experience that validated Churchill’s observation that the only thing worse than fighting with allies is fighting without them. With that, let me describe the features that I believe distinguish the Western Way of Warfare. First, it focuses on high quality, professional military personnel, and seeks to enable them with the best, most technologically advanced weapons systems with considerable lethality and increasing accuracy in recent decades in particular. Second, it emphasises observation of the Geneva Convention and the Laws of Land Warfare, which stress proportionality and avoiding civilian casualties and collateral damage whenever possible, and the rules of engagement that guide our fighting are based on those conventions and derive from them. Third, it provides capabilities for dealing with the entire spectrum of possible missions, from domestic support to civil authorities, peacekeeping and partner development to stability operations, counterterrorist missions and various forms of irregular warfare, including counterinsurgency of course, as well as full spectrum major combat operations, which is now the focus of the majority of the force, rightly, given that we are in an era of renewed great power rivalries.

Fourth, it also seeks to enable its high quality, professional personnel with substantial leader development programmes built around sequential, professional military education courses, progressive unit assignments and self development. Fifth, it features thoroughly developed doctrinal concepts and literature, currently focussing on training and preparation for multi-domain warfare, now including cyberspace as a domain, with so-called near peer competitors, whilst still conducting a regular warfare against Islamist extremists as well as actions against criminals, other extremists and state entities in cyberspace as well as in the other domains. Sixth, it is overseen by organisations comprised of substantial hierarchical bureaucracies that oversee everything from recruiting, equipping, training, material development to generation of readiness retention and employment of the forces. Seventh, it includes very close ties with the defence industrial complex that develops, manufactures and often helps maintain the increasingly complex and advanced commitment. Eight, it typically conducts training, planning and operations that include multinational forces comprised of numerous allies and partners, albeit typically led and enabled by United States forces and capabilities. Finally, it also includes substantial augmentation of military forces by contractors. Even in combat zones
remembering, for example, that we had more contractors in Iraq, certainly most of them on the bases of course, than we had in the 165,000 American men and women in uniform during the surge. That is so that those in uniform can focus on what only they can do in terms of engaging the enemy and the population outside the wire.

Moderator: (TC 00:10:00) That is a significant list, and it's pretty all encompassing, but what strikes me about it is when you contrast to some of your experiences in the '80s in Europe under NATO some of those have changed quite significantly, and I almost want to say they've changed radically. This is not just about your last point of contractors on the battlefield but also about your second point, obeying the rules and conventions of land warfare. I mean, there were countries not only in the USSR but also in NATO that had different interpretations of those back then, and we were talking less about collateral damage and more about how we would decimate the adversary. I'm guessing you subscribe to this view that this has been an evolution of the Western Way of War, correct?

David Petraeus: Very much so, sure. Gosh, when I was a second lieutenant I was part of an airborne battalion combat team in Vicenza, Italy that was a mainstay of the allied command Europe mobile force land, so we worked with all of the different forces throughout Europe. This is when I went to British jump school, if you will, or jump with a parachute regiment, and again in those days as you'll recall many of the NATO countries still had drafts of various types. Over time, over the decades, it came to be recognised that especially as the drafts kept getting shorter and shorter and shorter, it's interesting to track Germany on this. You get down to less than a year of actual service. I mean, what can you really do with a soldier if the term of enlistment is 9 or 12 months or something like that? Even 18 months. Again, you barely can get a soldier through all of the basic training and the acculturation and into units and then into units and then do a few exercises and the soldier is already leaving the service. So, this process of professionalisation, and of course it was very significant in the US as well, because keep in mind we didn't end the draft until the mid-1970s after the end of the Vietnam War, and the US Military itself, especially the Army which had really in some respects been decimated by Vietnam and lost the non-commissioned officers in particular very substantially, and it was individual, like General Galvin who you mentioned, but many others who brought this army back and who created the professional development that is now a distinct characteristic. Not just, again, of the US Military but of the Western Way of Warfare.

I don't think that there are any countries in NATO that have actual mandatory conscription or service any more, and largely for a good reason. Now, this is separate and aside from the benefits that societies used to get from everyone having to serve in uniform, that's a different issue, but if you are focussed on the tasks of militaries, which is obviously to prepare for, to deter and if necessary conduct war the best way to do that clearly is with a professional force. You don’t want soldier in the ranks who don’t want to be there and who won't be there for long enough to develop the real skills that are so integral to what is now a very, very complex business. When you think of all of the aspects that are brought together now, and all of the intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance capabilities and the fusion of intelligence and all the rest of this that must be brought together, and increasingly is being done by machine learning and artificial intelligence as that evolves, that's going to be, I think, transformative as well over time. I think we will reach a point where the human in the loop, which should always be kept in the loop, but the human in the loop may actually be the human who helps develop the algorithm that specifies the conditions or aspects that the machine must confirm to take certain actions, whether it's autonomous or semi-autonomous or just remotely piloted, if you will, and that's going to be true not just on the ground but of course in the air, at sea, subsea, space and even in cyberspace, where of course the battle is going on at the speed of light if you will, at the speed of algorithms as well.

Moderator: There are 2 points that I definitely want to go down, and the first one is just about the rate of change, because as we've seen the blending of the ways of war into pretty much the US dominated way of war, which across the past 6 months we've seen AirLand Battle as probably being that 1 inflection point
that took everyone into a single way of viewing how they should conduct, manoeuvre warfare in the future. That was the point at which we saw that convergence. But there is a very different pace of evolution between the US Military and everyone else, and the US has been able to accelerate not just with equipment and investment and purchases but intellectually it has accelerated the rate of change for the right fight closer to the right time than the rest of the West has been able to do. Still today we can look at multi-domain operations the way that they're pushing the 5, 6, 7 domains, however many there are going to be, into a single compound C2 arrangement that allows real-time targeting, deployment, fusion of intelligence, linking to the fire so it's no longer a chain, it's a seamless organism that enables you to fight wars. The rest of the West is struggling to get through jointery, where the US is now almost past MDO and is into joint all-domain operations. US Army Futures Command is now looking at what's beyond JADO. We have the rest of the West which is struggling to keep up, and that acceleration, that pace of change, is really different between the 2. Now, somehow you managed to draw that together in Iraq and Afghanistan in particular with that massive change and a huge number of nations that were participating in the coalition. Do you think that the rates of change prevent effective war fighting in the West or do you think it can be overcome?

David Petraeus: I don't, and I'll explain why in a second, but first let me just talk on briefly the transition from active defence as it was at that time, as you'll remember, I think you may have been in uniform during that time, and the idea was that the West, because we're outnumbered 3-to-1 in tanks, 3-to-1 in artillery and 2-to-1 in infantry fighting vehicles, I still remember that from when I was a speech writer for General Galvin at the Supreme Headquarters Allied Powers Europe. Therefore we were going to absorb the blows and fall back slowly, and as the reinforcements were rushed over across the Atlantic from the US and the return of forces and all the rest of this stuff. So, I was in the staff college at the time that AirLand Battle came out, and I remember looking very, very carefully at it and concluding that the impact of AirLand Battle was as much psychological as it was truly operationally transformational, because the truth is we really didn't have the capabilities that you needed to operationalise the ability to strike the enemy throughout the depth of the battlefield. It was a very heavy emphasis on offence, in fact I almost thought of the French, the commitment of the French to offence which turned out not to be all that great of course. So, again, there was a psychological effect to this which was desired I believe because surely those at the very top realised that we couldn't. Attack helicopters would have a very hard time penetrating the very heavy air defences of the Soviet and the Warsaw Pact forces. We didn't have the precision or loitering, none of the capabilities that we have now. None the less it was a very important in a sense ideological, doctrinal shift and it changed the way we looked at it, even though we should have recognised that it was as much aspirational as it was realistic. In many respects, doctrine should be aspirational because it should be guiding rather than following the development of material capabilities, professional expertise and all of the rest of that.

The point about the rate of change is very accurate, the bottom line is again, if you spend $740 billion a year and others spend vastly less there is a gulf between those. You may recall that there was a concern again, all the way back when I was working for the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe that the US was up here and everybody else, then you had the UK and maybe France there and then everybody else below that, and probably that gulf has grown. I do remember in the Battle of Basra for example that the great Lieutenant General Lloyd Austin who's now been nominated to be the Secretary of Defence in the United States, he was the operational level commander when I was privileged to command the surge in Iraq and when that battle was launched, really by the prime minister of Iraq directing 2 Iraqi divisions down there, General Austin and I met that morning, he then went down to Basra to see, get a sense of what was going on because it was a surprise move by the prime minister. He realised immediately that as we shifted all of the drones and other enablers (TC 00:20:00) down there to help the Iraqi forces who very quickly got engaged in very intense urban combat, that we needed to have a US command post down there because we literally couldn't bring the feeds and the controls and all the other aspects of again, what we were putting over top of this new battlefield, which was in the British area, not the US area. So, he deployed his core tactical command post down there, plugged it right into the British command post and that's actually what you do. So, this leads to
what I was going to talk about, what a coalition commander does, I realised especially as the commander in Afghanistan where we had twice the number of forces, maybe almost 3 times the number of forces that we had of different force. Remember, Iraq was dominated by the US, 165,000 American men and women in uniform, maybe I don’t now, 20,000, 30,000 others and they were largely in areas that weren’t the Sunni insurgency and some of the other really difficult Al Qaeda areas. There were problems certainly with the militias, especially again in Basra.

I realised that what a coalition commander needed to do was to assess each national contribution to determine what are the strengths, what are the weaknesses and really to identify the shortcomings and then frankly, to use US capabilities to address the shortcomings and enable that force to succeed. So, what you’re trying to do is with US enablers again, and to give you an example, there was a Scandinavian nation, I won’t mention which one, I think it was non-NATO, because every country has caveats. So, you have to understand what are the caveats, we learned that even the British Army had caveats when we tried to move the forces 3 villages over in Helmand and the next thing you knew, Prime Minister Cameron was out in Kabul assessing what I thought was a tactical level commanders decision or at most operational, not even strategic, but we did not do that. So, you have to understand again, the shortcomings, the caveats, the limitations on what they’re allowed to do and in 1 case they were not allowed to conduct offensive operations. Well, that’s a pretty big limiting factor but we overcame it, we gave them a company or more of 82nd Airborne Division troops from the US, provided an intelligence plug, we often had to provide some special operations capability or at least liaison provided I think aeromedical evacuation and provided tactical air support. Then the US forces would go on in the sense offensive operations and when they got in trouble, this other forces was capable and allowed to come to their rescue. We did that with every single country and then determined how do you capitalise and what it is that they bring. Again, I am a big believer in coalitions, keep in mind that in Afghanistan in contrast to Iraq, out of 150,000 soldier force, we had 100,000 Americans and 50,000 of NATO and non-NATO forces there. So, that was a crucially important component of what it was that we had to work with, but the key is again, understanding the caveat too.

One final note on that, when I was the assistant chief of staff for operations in Bosnia for a year as a 1 star general, I actually had a matrix that I built, that I had under the glass of my desk that had the different types of tasks down the left side and then the nations across the top and a tick in the box whether that nation could do for example, riot control. Could it do the war criminal hunt, could it do counter-terrorism which after 9/11 few people recognised that the first counter-terrorism operation after 9/11 was actually conducted in Sarajevo, not actually in Afghanistan. I was the deputy commander of it in a US hat, I actually had 2 US hats as well, as a war criminal and then the counter-terrorism, but this is modern warfare I think. Now, you can ask how you would do that in say, a major combat operation with a pure competitor and that would be more difficult and that may also be the so called come as you are war, there’s no time to determine okay, what can this coalition do as we had years to develop in Iraq and Afghanistan.

Moderator: So, that’s where I’m going with this question, from what you’ve said it strikes me that there is a danger that other Western militaries become dependent on the US for the enablers, and that there is then a danger that all you’re going to get is very small models of the US teeth element, albeit with probably less capability and certainly less numbers. From a whole multitude of different players with different caveats, and the US required to invest an enormous amount of enablers. I’m not talking about what traditionally was held at division or even at core level, but almost down at brigade level you’re going to have to enable perhaps dozens, scores, maybe hundreds of these types of national deployments. This is a huge problem rather than opportunity surely?

David Petraeus: No, again, it depends on the war but if you are conducting a regular warfare as we were and of course the counter insurgency still consists as any operations do, of offence, defence and stability operations with the distinguishing feature that you often spend much more time on the stability operations and the counter insurgency campaign that you would in a major combat operation where it might be almost
exclusively offence and defence, at least for a certain period of time. No, I think again that you want the coalitions in this, you just have to understand again, what are the limitations, what are the caveats, what are the limitations and capabilities, what are the strengths because I don’t at all want to downplay that different national contingents actually had very unique strengths as well, and you employ them to their best. We had 2 officers from Singapore, now Singapore, they didn’t have much experience with large combat operations, but they were the best educated officers that we had in the entire International Security Assistance Force and we put them in the major headquarters and lo and behold, these 2 individuals resolved problems that the US and other officers and British and all the others actually hadn’t been able to come up with a solution to and they did a brilliant job. So again, it’s about determining how to make the most of the contribution. By the way, you should also acknowledge when you’re conducting coalition NATO operations even, the headquarters are literally going to be at least a third larger than they might if they were just national headquarters because there will be a certain number who are there as what we call net consumers rather than net contributors, and that is okay. In other words, they’re literally improving their, say, English language skills if it’s an English language speaking coalition as NATO typically is. They will be improving their skills and understanding and staff appreciation for all of the enablers that are available all of a sudden and large operations which they’ve never had any experience with. So, again, I think all of this is to be understood. Now, I should also note that of course small nations, medium sized nations, you all have unique national mission sets and national areas of focus.

In the militaries of those countries understandably will focus on those missions first and foremost. They’ll do it in a context again, the Western way of warfare that is influenced very heavily by the United States and then by NATO and all these other again, entities and experiences. At the end of the day they’ll have national missions and they will periodically contribute to international coalitions and missions, the fight against the Islamic State and so forth. Again, having talked to the commanders of those efforts on the ground, so I’m not talking now about the diplomatic level of these which is very important to begin with, to put it all together, but when you’re actually operating and actually trying to defeat the Islamic State and to eliminate its caliphate on the ground and ideally also in the virtual caliphate which has proven much more difficult to put a stake through the heart of. It’s very useful to have all of these different components, except you again note that you have to integrate them, you have to appreciate their abilities, you may have to enable them in some cases. That’s true, even of again, very advanced militaries like that of the UK, as is well known now, it’s all public, 22 SAS was put in a sense underneath the joint special operations command structures that were in Iraq in particular, was Taskforce Black, along with Delta, Seal Team 6 and the Rangers and as one would appreciate and expect, they were spectacular. In part though because they were enabled by a lot of the US capabilities that could get them in the vicinity and then the final mile and all the rest of this and in some cases would use the-, we had so many more helicopters or drones or platforms, AC-130 gunships in the night if you really get in a tough spot can do (TC 00:30:00) an awful lot to help you get out of it and avoid running the Mogadishu Mile and so forth. So, again, it’s how do you put all of that together but noting that in a regular war such as again, in Iraq and Afghanistan, ultimately the fight against Islamic State in northern Iraq and Syria and so on, you’ve got time to put all this together and integrate different coalition contributions in a major combat operation such as potentially in the so called Indo-Pacific arena now. I’m not sure that there would be the time to do that. They’re either going to have to be in existence and working together or it’s going to be difficult to bring additional contributions in.

Moderator: You’ve talked a couple of times there about national agendas and how they play out with the military commander on the ground. Prime ministers, premiers, leaders walking into your headquarters going, ‘Well, I’m not sure about that.’ This is something perhaps that reading General Galvin’s book about his relationship with Prime Minister Thatcher at the time and how he had to explain similar things. Do you think you felt that more, is this one of the ways that the Western way of war is changing? That in fact the military commander is now having to engage more at a lower level with political leaders who are making commitments of troops? Are you having to explain yourself in a way that perhaps we didn’t have to in the old days of NATO where it was just accepted? When a North Atlantic council had made a decision that was
David Petraeus: Well, it certainly is for the commander of the theatre of war. I've often noted that coalition maintenance if you will, or coalition management took enormous amounts of time. I realised one time I was sitting in the conference room at the headquarters in Kabul and here we had a countries prime minister, their minister of defence, I think the minister of foreign affairs even, the chief of defence staff and then their plus ones and everything else, a room full of people. I realised that I was giving them more minutes of my time than they were providing soldiers to the coalition, and that's okay. Now, you don't want to get it too far out of whack because there's only so many minutes in the day, but no, that is hugely important. Look, there's a reason that when I flew from the United States to Iraq to take command of the surge as a 4 star general, having already served there as 2 star and a 3 star commander and then that brief period in the States when we did the counter insurgency field manual and overhauled all of our preparation of leaders, forces, equipment and so forth for these wars, I stopped in London. The reason is I wanted to go to Number 10 Downing Street, I needed to talk to Prime Minister Tony Blair with whom I already had a relationship which developed in an interesting way I might note because my own government wouldn't allow me, my own defence department nixed the idea of actually a meeting with him when I was 3 star on the way over, which he requested. They nixed the video conference and so I finally told the ambassador in the US, the UK ambassador, I said, 'Look, I'm at home on Saturday, if the phone rings I'll pick it up and politely talk to whomever it is, is on the other end,' and it was Tony Blair, and that was the first really substantive conversation we had. That was when I was 3 star getting ready to go back to establish the train and equip mission, the multinational security transition command Iraq, but I stopped in Iraq on the way there as a 4 star because I had some specific asks that were crucially important. Of course the UK was the very much the other main country in that endeavour. By the way, one of the requests was that he extended the great deputy, Lieutenant General that at that time Graeme Lamb, now Sir Graeme Lamb deservedly so, with whom I partnered all the way back in Balkans when he was the director of special forces and I was doing the war criminal, we partnered for that. Then we were division commanders at the same time in the early days in Iraq, we were the only 2 that would raise our hand and say, 'Excuse me Ambassador Bremer, did you really just say what we think you said?' We fired the army, we fired the Ba'ath party and now we're going to fire all the state owned industries, is there anything going to be left, could you possibly sit under a tree until that thought passes?' Then as 3 stars we're both back in our respective countries, developing again, counter insurgency field manuals and overhauling how we prepared our leaders and forces. I very much needed him to be extended because I knew that among the big ideas that was going to guide the surge, the biggest of the big ideas was that you have to secure the human train as a decisive terrain, you must secure the people and you can only do that by living with them. So, we had to clear and then hold, not clear and hand off to the Iraqis, we had to take back control, we had to go back into the neighbourhoods, 77 additional locations we had to fight to establish, just in the greater Baghdad area alone. The second biggest idea was that you can't kill or capture your way out of an industrial strength insurgency, you have to reconcile with as many of the rank and file of the Sunni insurgents and of the Shia militia that we were battling as you possibly can. Ultimately it was 103,000 that we reconciled with, even as you intensify the effort to kill or capture the irreconcilables, the leaders of Al Qaeda in Iraq, the insurgents and the militias. He and I had talked about reconciliation, I'd done reconciliation in Iraq as a 2 star and then it feel apart tragically after several months when I was in Mosul because the Iraqis in Baghdad wouldn't support it. I watched other efforts at it in the interim periods when I was there as a 3 star. Again, they always fell apart because we couldn't get Baghdad. I realised now I'm going to be Baghdad, at least for many parts of the country where there's no real government presence and the prime minister,
he may have a writ but he doesn't much capability. I need Graeme Lamb to talk about how he sat down across the table, I think he was a squadron commander of 22 at the time, from Martin McGuinness and as he described it, Martin McGuinness’s lads had been trying to kill our operators just 3 weeks earlier and here he is, sitting across the table because I was going to have to convince battalion and brigade and company commanders in particular that we need to sit down across the table from people who have our blood on their hands. They're not the senior leaders now, and we believe they truly can reconcile, but that took some persuasion. I needed him, I needed General McChrystal who was there as the JSOC commander, highly respected.

We had an intelligence element that we built immediately to guide us as we did that with JSOC and SAS capabilities because we can deploy those rapidly, we can do whatever we wanted with them. Whereas the request for forces process produced it later on. So, I needed very much Graeme Lamb to be there and to be extended, and it blew a hole in the entire senior officer or professional development programme, but as I told the prime minister, I understand the importance of assignment planning and professional development for your 3 star generals but we're going to win a war and we're not going to lose gracefully, that's not the idea here and I'd like you to support this. I also said I understand the UK can't build up, we're about to add 25,000, it became 30,000 additional US forces, we can't have the UK drawing down at the time, and I loved Jock Stirrup, the chief of defence staff who is sitting there and I could see his face, because they're trying. Well, you had a really serious problem in Helmand and he's trying to shift resources but as I said, we just can't have that. I'm not a political figure and I'm talking about the situation on the ground, but we have to sustain support in the United States and in the Senate, the US Senate was maybe 1 or 2 votes away from that 60 number that would achieve closure as they say, to stop debate and vote on a possible law amendment that could constrain or even defund the war in Iraq. As we have seen happen decades earlier with the war in Vietnam. So, again, the answer to that and sorry for the long explanation, except that this actually has become a very important component, at least of this type of war. I would submit by the way that as we look back at the golden age of NATO and we had these enormous forces and structures, we should recall that they were not actually under the command of the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe. All he had under his actual operational control in command was shape headquarters and the NATO airborne early warning 747's or something like that. Everything else was dependent on the nations committing those forces, which were indeed part of this structure, that exercised, and planned and worked together, but there was always a concern that can you get that commitment if you don’t have a great deal of warning and everyone is in Brussels debating at the North Atlantic council level. So, we should keep in mind that it wasn't quite as (TC 00:40:00) rosey as we look back on it and believe it was.

Moderator: We tend to forget that France wasn't playing in the NATO military committee.

David Petraeus: Exactly so.

Moderator: That there was a good deal of disunity about would we give ground over West Germany as it was then, these were really difficult things. I just wanted to come back for 1 final point of clarification, on this role of almost advisor to the chiefs of country, to the political chiefs of countries, which for you must have been quite difficult because you're quite a hands-on guy. If you look back at your time with the 101st and all the successes that you had in Baghdad and Kabul, in Najaf and then down into Mosul where you really undertook coin, you're very much known for getting out there and being in touch with multiple touch points, on both sides, right? To be forced back into a headquarters, to be in many ways justifying your actions, not just to a single political host but to 60 of them, this must have been a pretty difficult thing for you to make a personal adjustment to? It required a change in personal style, right?

David Petraeus: Well, it was a big deal, it's a very significant challenge and it was vastly greater in Kabul in Afghanistan than it was in Iraq. Keep in mind that Iraq was a US led, US dominated multinational force and I only had 1 chain of command and it went to central command and then to the Pentagon, to the secretary of defence through the chairman of the joint chiefs. The truth is it went to the president because when he
decided to conduct the surge and to send me and Ambassador Crocker to lead it, he also instituted a 1 hour video teleconference every Monday morning at 07:30 Washington time which meant that he was absolutely engaged in this. I've often said there were 2 George W Bush's when it came to Iraq. There was 1 who first say 2003 to late 2006 in a sense subcontracted the war to his secretary of defence and then with the decision to conduct the surge, he took control. It was hugely important by the way, he was a magnificent war time commander for the surge in Iraq and if you ever talk to Ambassador Crocker who would be a great one on here as well, even though he's a diplomat but has been engaged in so many of these, of course he was later the ambassador in Afghanistan. Also having previously been in a variety of other very tough places like Lebanon and Syria where I think they sacked his resident and in Kuwait and a variety of others. I was very fortunate to have in a lot of ways been developed, almost for what I ended up doing. Intellectually with the graduate school experience and even there my dissertation was the American military and the lessons of Vietnam, all of the self study, fascinated by the French experience in Indochine, the US in Vietnam, the Brits in Oman. So, there's that intellectual component, but then in terms of the assignments, I was the aide and assistant executive officer for a chief of staff of the army for 2 years during the Panama invasion and the Gulf War. I was the executive officer for the chairman of the joint chiefs as you noted, for General Hugh Shelton during the continuation of Bosnia, did the Kosovo air camping, did strikes against Saddam Hussein, strikes against Osama Bin Laden, again, an incredible experience during that period. Again, a speech writer for the Supreme Allied Commander in Europe, General Galvin, I worked for him 3 times personally, also when he was the commander-in-chief of US Southern Command as the title used to be.

Even my father-in-law was a 4 star general who's final assignment was the US representative to the NATO military committee, having also had a 4 star command in Turkey which theoretically included all Greek and Turkish ground forces but in the wake of Cyprus there was a little bit of distance shall we say between. So, again, maybe there's a lesson in this as well that again, assignments really do matter and those that are the so-called vantage point assignments. You're not hired because you're political or you're a good golfer or something like that or you tell good stories or listen to your boss, they hire you because you can help them expand their impact. That was what Galvin told me, he said all the way back was I was his aide as a 2 star, he said, 'Look, I take it for granted that you're going to know where we need to go and the chief is going to have a full tank of gas and the driver has got a map and he's not going to fall asleep and all the rest of this, what I need you to do is help me expand my impact,' and he laid out the ways to do that. It was an extraordinary approach actually as opposed to being what we've termed a click-click aide which is the guy who comes over and clicks the lighter to light his bosses cigarette. Or if he pulls his right ear lobe he gets a scotch with 2 cubes of ice or something like that. He didn't care about that, he could do that himself, he wanted someone who could help him think, who could help him write, who could again, help him expand his impact. I used to grade every speech. He was unbelievable, we still did that at NATO although I never put in deficient in a speech at NATO. We had more of an Ivy League grading scale. I actually, one time when he was 2 star truly did say that was failing speech general, I have no professional alternative but to explain to you, you show that you didn't want to be there, you conveyed it very clearly, you looked at your watch repeatedly, you even asked me how much longer do we need to go. It was just, that was completely uncharacteristic because he was a truly brilliant speaker, thinker, writer, solider, scholar, statesman. These positions are hugely important and so I wouldn't say I wasn't coward the first time I went into Number 10, but I sure wasn't intimidated. Again, these had developed and of course over the years as a 2 star Brits use to come. General Sir Mike Jackson, we had a British officer in the 101st Airborne Division, a major, Sherbs was his nickname, he was the brigade operations officer for the main effort brigade in Mosul city and General Sir Mike would come up.

I'd already met him in Bosnia where I noticed the British officers would choose straws to see who had to stay up with him that night and try to keep up with him in various pursuits. In any event these actually helped enormously so that by the time you arrived in these positions, you understand the importance of maintaining the coalition, of managing it and again, how you intellectually approach the idea and understand that there are shortcomings as well as strengths and you have to compensate for those to make those forces capable, enable them to accomplish the mission that you're assigning them.
Moderator: That brings me to onto what must be my final question because I've gone way over the time that you've allocated to me. It's this idea of what advice you would give to officers that are in command now or about to start their command or even NCO's and lanced jacks who are just starting off in their leadership time? You've had this amazing swathe of experience, the bad as well as the good, getting shot in the chest with an M16, breaking your pelvis on a jump, you've had bad experiences as well good ones. To me what struck me from looking at your career was this ability for you to adapt intellectually to whatever it was. It's not just about coin, it's not just about CT, it was about great power competition, it was about massing forces. It was the ability for you to do the intellectual leap. So, what would you offer as a piece of advice from your career on reflection to people starting off in the profession of arms now?

David Petraeus: Well, the first might just be a general comment, it sounds perhaps a bit superfluous almost because it's so obvious except it actually it's not obvious to many of those who are commissioned or non-commissioned and that is that life is a competitive endeavour and you need to embrace that reality and you need to compete. Now, you often compete to be the best team player as well as the best individual, but if you hope to influence your institution over time, you're going to have to progress. The way you progress is by demonstrating to the best of your possibly ability real excellence, and you've got to work that out in your own life and frankly with your family and all the rest of that, but that is not a trivial issue. When I'm asked by cadets at West Point who often when they're not faced with the prospect of immediately going to war as they were for much of the first decade of this century, that transformed them, because typically cadets are too cool for school. They want to get the gentlemen’s B, they half heart it, they think, and all of a sudden they realise they are going to be entrusted with the lives of America's sons and daughters, to lead them in combat, the most awesome of responsibilities, they got very serious. You always need to be serious and I didn't go into courses again, trying just to earn the Ranger tab or what have you or again, if the staff college or something, I was trying to be number 1. I was also trying to be the best team player I could be and that's a crucial recognition as well, but that carries through. If you look at the battalion that we had, it was incredibly competitive at everything and proud to be. We had 3 times more enlisted and non-commissioned officers earn the Ranger tab than any other battalion in the US Army outside the Ranger regiment, and that was because one of the big ideas that guided us was that if you get 20 Ranger qualified enlisted and non-commissioned officers, all the officers are expected to be in a single infantry company that runs itself. This is the approach that you've got to have. Now, and you’re constantly trying to improve and develop yourself even as you are progressing through these different assignments which you're doing the same and of course going to the professional development courses, but there's another one. This is perhaps a bit more profound and a little bit less obvious and that is to seek out of your intellectual comfort zone experiences and General Galvin was the individual who guided me down that path.

There was a really critical juncture after I was his aide where we thought I was going to have to go either to choose between going after to graduate school to go to Princeton or Harvard or to go to the Ranger regiment which is really what I wanted to do. I've gone to that particular fort to do that and then I kept getting delayed by people that wanted to make me his aide for a year. They said, just you can do it after that, then ultimately actually I was picked for the staff college and surprisingly as a captain which they never did again and went off to do that but still had that choice at the end of that. He said, have you ever thought that you might want to raise your intellectual sights higher than the maximum effective range of an M60 machine gun? Which was the longest range organic weapon in an infantry company. The mortar battalion, the artillery, you can call for that and I got it. I said, 'I understand what you’re getting at.' He said, 'Look, you could go to the Rangers, it will be fantastic, you might improve your infantry,' and certainly what we now know as special ops skills by I don’t know, 20%, 30% compared to where you are. If you go to a civilian graduate school he said that’s going to be an out of your intellectual comfort zone experience. He said that because he had experienced this, he used to describe the life of a commissioned officer as one that succumbs to the grindstone cloister syndrome. Where you have your nose to the grindstone and you don’t often look up and outside the cloister. It's very easy not to understand what you find when you go to a great civilian graduate
school, that there are seriously bright people in the world who don’t at all see it the way that we do. That was really an extraordinary experience for me. When people ask me what was it that enabled you to figure out what to do in Mosul in the first year when there was no guidance coming from Baghdad and where all the others didn’t seem to be grappling quite as well. Yes, it was Bosnia, yes, it was Haiti, especially because I was a UN officer, again, that was out of your intellectual comfort zone. I was not dual hatting, I was strictly blue beret. Central America with Galvin and so forth, these are all important, but at the end of the day what really did it was the out of my intellectual comfort zone experience that prepared me for the reality that in life there are people that don’t at all again, see the world the way that we do. Who don’t look at it through the same prism, who worship differently, who have different practices, different cultures, different traditions and all the rest of that.

That’s I think what helped enormously as we were going through it. Then very basic concepts of political philosophy and economics as an example, both of which I later taught economics and international relations. So, again, I think that's what, and frankly I seldom did what the army wanted me to do. So, I did go to the infantry officer basic course and Ranger and airborne and all that stuff, but when it came to go to the advanced course, I said, 'I'd like to go to the armoured advanced course, I'm an infantry guy, I want to experience something different,' and what I did is I did the infantry course by a correspondence ahead of time, so when the orders arrived, I said, 'Excuse me infantry branch, I've already done this, I'd like to go to Fort Knox instead of Fort Benning.' They said, 'Oh okay, fine.' Then I did go to the staff college in part just because we had to go that year that 8 captains that were selected in this 1,100 person class. Then I didn't go to the war college either, I went to a fellowship at Georgetown specifically because it was really 1 or 2 of us there and I could do whatever I wanted to do. Ultimately that also led to me to be deployed, so I didn't finish the fellowship, I got credit for it in the war college but I went to Haiti, the commander designate of the UN force, the US 2 star whom I knew called up and said, 'how would you like to do Haiti instead of studying Haiti, I just got rid of my operations officer and I need a new one.' I said, 'Yes, I'm your man.' So, this is I think what it is that prepares you to deal with what is a reality of battlefields or lots of endeavours, which is deal with the unexpected and to have the flexibility of mind and sufficient intellectual capital on which to draw when again, you are in these unanticipated situations and when you're dealing with a variety of other things that life sends your way as well. So, that I think really there's so many of the ideas did come from General Galvin, but the one that was the most significant was this idea of seeking out of your intellectual comfort zone experiences, I think I emphasised and I believe that I wrote the forward or the preface for his book on his time and his memoir essentially, was the eulogist for him as well and emphasised in that the enormous impact that he had on many of us. Not just on me, but particularly in pushing us out of our intellectual comfort zone.

Moderator: I am going to get in such trouble from lots of our listeners who are going to say I should have asked this question, I should have asked that question, but we are way over time. General David Petraeus, thank you so much, this has been an absolute honour and we’re going to have to get you back to dig into some of that other stuff that we didn't get into.

David Petraeus: Privilege is mine Peter, thank you.

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