Moderator: Welcome to the Western Way of Warfare. This is a weekly podcast that tries to understand the issues around how to fight and succeed against adversaries in the 2020s. I'm Peter Roberts, Director of Military Sciences at 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, and now might we need to adapt it in the future. The podcast is only possible because of the kind sponsorship of the good people at Raytheon UK, a subsidiary of Raytheon Technology, a British company that creates jobs in England, Wales and Scotland, contributing over £700 million to the UK economy. We focus in this podcast on how the West, led by the US in contemporary conflict, fights. In doing so, we focus considerably on the military element of doctrine, politics, weapons, technology, planning, alliances and operations, yet in doing so, we've downplayed the importance of the key elements of how the West coerces others, the role of diplomacy and grand politics in waging war. This has been an oversight on our behalf and something we're going to correct this season by inviting some different voices to participate. Surely, no-one would imagine warfare happens in isolation, but there's a strange commentary made by many today that security used to be the sole preserve of the military but now it includes everything and everyone.

This conceit of the present is often associated with discussions over modern deterrents, and the idea that political leaders today are for the first time thinking about economics, society, demographics and trade in a way that previous generations never did. Amazing hubris. Take, for example, how important the role of the balancer is in great power politics, in preventing warfare, but remaining a core part of war, per Clausewitz's definition, specifically in periods of competition between belligerence. Great Britain played such role in the affairs of Continental Europe in the 18th and 19th centuries and before, balancing the respective power of Germany and France to prevent a single dominant view from tipping the scales too far in either direction. The US has been performing that same role in the Middle East since the 1960s, increasingly releasing Britain of its role since the 1956 Suez crisis, but the US had a more complex test there. Not balancing just 2 powers but several, depending on how you view it. The competing interest and views of Iran, Iraq, Saudi Arabia and Israel, amongst others, or the competition between religions, or between sects of one religion has required deft handling to keep war from becoming kinetic on more than a few occasions, and in managing competition during conflict, too. Perhaps the most instructive theatre for examination, my guest today has been an active player in the Middle East since the 1980s.

Ambassador Ryan Crocker has served in various positions with the US Foreign Service since 1972, almost all of his career has been related to the Middle East. In a distinct difference from UK civil service roles today, where deep expertise is often frowned upon in favour of breadth of experience, Ryan started his service in Iran at the start of a 37 year career, and subsequently covered all of the Middle East, over a remarkable period in history. Surviving the 1983 bombing of the US Embassy in Beirut, and the marine barracks coming, to having his residence stormed by an angry mob in Syria in 1998. Ryan Crocker has served as Ambassador to US Presidents George H. Bush, Bill Clinton, George W. Bush and Barack Obama.
He is, perhaps, the best informed person about the Middle East you could meet, serving in different appointments as Ambassador in Lebanon, Kuwait, Syria, Pakistan, Iraq and Afghanistan. Colin Powell once described Crocker as one of our very best foreign service officers. G. W. Bush called him America's Lawrence of Arabia, but David Petraeus summed it up when he said he was honoured to play as Ryan's military wingman. As you might expect, he holds more honours and awards than you can shake a stick at, but as an indicator of the level of respect and sacrifice he's made during his career, he was presented with the US Presidential Medal of Freedom in 2009.

There are few accolades that could improve upon that, but being named as an honorary marine by the USMC in 2012 must be one of those. For all that, my guest today is not full of hubris, there's no sense of self-satisfaction. Ryan embodies an ethos of challenge that strives to understand the environment and potential impact from actions as they occur, not as we wish them to be. In 2002, Ryan asked his staff to write a paper on the risks associated with the US invasion of Iraq. That paper, Perfect Storm, was spot on, but despite his reservation, Ryan is a public servant, and a self-admitted crisis junkie. He continued to serve knowing the risks and the dangers it entailed. There is a huge amount to get through with my guest today, so let's kick off, Ambassador Ryan Crocker, what does the Western way of warfare mean to you?

Ryan Crocker: So, you have just covered the waterfront already on the nature and meaning of war, Western and Eastern. I would just add a couple of reflections to all of that. You used the term balancing several times, Britain as a balancing power, until World War 2 roughly, and then the United States, subsequently. It's a word worth reflecting on, balancing in the international arena. I would offer a slightly different interpretation. For the first half, roughly, of the 20th century, the great powers of the world, mainly the powers in Europe did follow a balance of power system. The leadership would change, the nature of the coalitions and alliances would change, but fundamentally it was a balance of power system, which works wonderfully until it doesn't work any more. That's what got us World War 1, and after less than 2 decades, it got us World War 2. Any time I hear balance in the context of international security, I get really worried and I'm very worried right now, because that is what I see the world slipping back to. World War 1 and its aftermath, Woodrow Wilson was there at Versailles, he was already ill though, facing isolationism back home and he didn't play that much of a role even though Versailles was centred around his famous 14 points.

The main reason he didn't play a major role was because Britain and France didn't want him to, they had already carved up the Middle East between them, Sykes-Picot in 1916, and weren't about to let these upstarts from across the ocean move into their domain. So, what do we get? A 2 decade truce in the middle of 1 horrific World War 1. Franklin Roosevelt, and then the improbably Harry Truman were determined that the aftermath of World War 2 were not all of the same script, that is why, while the war was still on, you saw the San Francisco Conference that established the United Nations. You saw the Bretton Woods Agreement, that moved the world from the gold standard to the dollar. Bretton Woods is Bretton Woods New Hampshire, it's not Bretton Woods, France. From before the guns had even fallen silent, you saw American leaders looking for a very different role for the United States. That era of, not American domination, I would say American ascendancy, the determination to lead the world in a way that brought us no further cataclysms. Obviously, the rise of the Soviet Union had a great deal to do with this, but there was a subtext. These dark things have come out of Europe, and not all about the Cold War, it's about the hot wars that preceded the Cold War. Neither we or the world would want to go there again, and for better or worse, Republican administrations and Democratic administrations broadly speaking followed this policy. We had some bad moments, Vietnam for us, as well as Iraq, but overall, it prevented global conflict.

We've moved away from that now, you saw it first not with President Trump, you saw it with President Obama before he was even elected, talking publicly about our so-called allies in the Middle East, the free-riders with NATO, effectively using terms that President Trump also used. It was the beginning of the backing away from that era of American ascendancy. I saw it most graphically in the aegis refugee crisis a few years back, we all saw the horrible images of tiny kids, their bodies washed up on beaches in Turkey as they made
that desperate effort to get to the Mediterranean and get to Europe. The US did not play a role in that under President Obama, the greatest refugee outflow since World War 2, not our problem, a European problem, a Middle Eastern problem, African problem, not an American problem. That to me, in addition to the humanitarian nature of that decision, its indifference to values that we (TC 00:10:00) were sworn to uphold, not just for us but for everyone, it signalled a major step away from that era of American ascendancy. President Trump put it on steroids, pulling us out of the Trans-Pacific Partnership, the Iran Nuclear Deal, Earth Climate Accord, that was a return to the battle days, in my view. That's where we are on a hinge of history right now, the advent of the Biden administration, President Biden, someone I've known well over the years is a very strong internationalist, and that is a very good thing.

Very different from the president he served for 8 years as a Vice President, and not dissimilar in outlook to Hillary Clinton, so wait and watch, let's see what he can do. The world in many respects has moved on, especially over the last 4 years, it's not like welcome mats are out everywhere, please step up and step into this, and of course he's dealing with huge problems here at home in terms of political division, but mainly the pandemic, so let's see what happens. I would suggest to you and your listenership that what occurs in this first Biden administration is going to very much impact the world at large, and in particular whether it is a world that can use diplomacy, economic policies to resolve issues, or whether we do slide back into a dog-eat-dog balance of power. In the Middle East, of course, we're already seeing moves in that direction, so that is my overlong take on the nature of war in the Western World.

**Moderator:** That is a really brilliant way of looking at it, in terms of understanding the US role not as balancing but as leadership, you could say, whether it's enlightened or whatever it was. That happened during America's ascendancy and then it's rise as the sole superpower and all the rest of that stuff. In trying to get back to that place over leadership, it's in a slightly different context than it was able to do so beforehand. The competition with the US and China, and Russia playing a significant part in trying to extend its role both in wider Europe, but also in Africa and into the Middle East, and then in the Pacific as well. This is quite a difficult take then, because if anything, it's the Chinese ascendancy in economic terms that we've got now. How do you think that might manifest itself, in terms of that competition?

**Ryan Crocker:** On Russia, obviously, we take Russia very seriously as a nuclear power that could destroy the world, but Russia also has some very grave weaknesses they've had for quite some time, primarily economic. When one looks at recent actions involving Russia, most notably their intervention in Syria to prop up the one Arab leader who still actually likes Russia, Bashar al-Assad, we saw him play a pretty bad hand brilliantly, but it's still a bad hand. It's a bad hand, of course, because of the extremely grave economic conditions in Russia. In this sense, the Russia of today in my mind resembles a bit the latter days of the Soviet Union itself. The economy of the Soviet Union could not sustain policies of the Soviet Union, and could not even sustain itself in the long run, Russia today is not in a much better situation. Yes, they did manage to get their one and only aircraft carrier through the Straits of Bosphorus, where it promptly broke down. Russia, for all of its posturing under Putin is no longer a great power. Very dangerous, because of its nuclear capabilities, but I would suggest certainly in the Middle East, you see Russia now at full extension. They can't go further into the Middle East because they can't afford it. We've seen statements from Putin, for example, on moving into our part of the world, maybe he would intervene in Venezuela, to that I say please intervene, don't send a brigade send a division. Send 2 divisions, because it's really expensive.

Like Star Wars in the Reagan era, probably never a viable programme technically, but it served its main purpose, which was to bankrupt the Soviet Union, that's for Russia. For China, I would simply say you don't just turn a switch to go from a state that is internally focussed and focussed in its external relations on economic gain. You don't turn that approach overnight into the large, carefully structured, co-ordinated effort the US is able to make. Chinese diplomacy, you don't grown a different diplomacy overnight. Colleagues that I always made a point to get to know over the years, Chinese Ambassadors, it's not the same thing. Obviously, there are exceptions, but broadly speaking, China's foreign policy was, and I'd suggest still
is, mainly an economic policy. In one sense, one could say that a very bad case would be China elbowing the US aside to begin an era of Chinese international ascendancy. The worst case though is that China isn't and can't, it will not be running the world in anything like the way it was managed over the decades with the United States. I don't see stronger and stronger players elbowing the US out of its prior ascendant role, it's much more of us abdicating and no-one to take on that role, and that takes me back to my mantra on balanced power.

**Moderator:** It really does feel like a moment where the US picks to either refill the vacuum it left in certain places, or we see the chaos, not really chaos, the confusion that has resulted from the US walk away. Is that where we're getting to? It's this critical moment, this turning point where the Biden presidency must decide if it is going to play that role and reach out again, before we then go on to talk about whether that is with a military arm or with diplomacy and economics.

**Ryan Crocker:** That is a very important add-on point, the nature of war has fundamentally changed since World War 2. I would stay with that, that was the seismic shift into an era in 1945 of US leadership ascendancy. Not domination, not total control, simply an ascendancy because we offered a better deal in terms of working with others for broader economic prosperity as well as security and stability. What does it mean now? Again, I hope we're not going to fight any more total wars anytime soon, that means the wars we do fight in the West or by the West are going to be complex affairs, just as we've seen in Iraq, Syria, Afghanistan, where military force doesn't settle the issue, I think this is an extremely important point. We saw that first in 1990-1991, the first Gulf War. President George H. W. Bush had put together this amazing military coalition, led by us, of course, but everybody was in. Egypt and even Syria had divisions in Saudi Arabia, but that war ended what I call now or others call the CNN effect. The images of not even a retreating army, a disorganised rabble running for their lives. The soldiers, Iraqi troops that had been in Kuwait, and we call it shooting fish in a barrel. We were decimating them, in the literal sense of the word, as they tried to flee, that affected Bush's decision to stop the war then and there. That means that you cannot in this age, short of international cataclysm, you're simply not going to see victories won by force alone.

We needed to put an exclamation point on that, we did so and are doing so in Iraq and Afghanistan. That fundamentally requires a complete re-evaluation of our mindsets, what does the military do and what do the other instruments of power do?

**Moderator:** You had this very much, your experiences with David Petraeus when you were in Iraq and again in Afghanistan, it felt like, reading all the accounts of that period, that you were a finely honed team. It wasn't diplomacy on 1 side, military on the other and come together for occasional meetings, you were hand-in-glove. This was a real sense of a partnership, and not just you and General P at that national level, but you had the support of the President, you had the Secretary of State, Secretary of Defence. It felt like it was a really well moulded, driven focussed group of people, you weren't limited to diplomacy in the same way that General Petraeus wasn't limited just to the military. There was a crossover, a genuine bleeding across of ideas, that's what it comes across like. Do you feel in retrospect that it was like that?

**Ryan Crocker:** I think it (TC 00:20:00) absolutely was, reflecting on the time I spent in Iraq with General Petraeus, I cannot remember a single moment or incident where we were at odds. We might have started out that way, but as we thrashed it through, we always came to a common position and overarching those common positions was the belief that we both so deeply shared, that while there is no guarantee we would prevail in Iraq if we worked together, there was an absolute certainty that if we did not, we would fail. It was General Petraeus who really started that conversation at the end of 2006, he was still at Fort Leavenworth in Kansas, I was Ambassador to Pakistan, he initiated what became a series of secure phone conversations and that was the overarching theme. We have got to do this together, otherwise the outcome, sadly, is pretty much ordained. What I have found in my experience is that in our military, officers who rise to 4-star rank, in almost every case understand the limits of US military power in terms of effecting fundamental change to America’s benefit in the areas where we intervene. They got it, Dave wrote the book on it, but I
saw the same thing with General Odierno, who succeeded General Petraeus in Iraq when I was there. I saw it in General Allen, and I saw it earlier in a very interesting way which involves Britain. I saw it in the early going into Afghanistan. I went out to open our embassy after the fall of the Taliban, John McColl, then a Major General was the senior officer on the ground.

We were operating then, the United States 2001-2002 under the Rumsfeld doctrine, which basically meant use the minimum amount of force to get the job done, then wind it up, to not go into anything further. That meant many things, 1 was there was no overall US military commander, so John McColl, again, leading the predecessor organisation of ISAF, was the one I paired up with. We would go together to see Chairman Karzai at the time and other critical meetings, because it was clear to both of us that civilian and military we, was going to be crucial to getting it right in Afghanistan down the line.

Moderator: It's often something that's really hard to achieve, we see it time and time again particularly for medium powers not the US. People at the top, there feels to be a political and military drive. The British way of war was go early, go hard, go in, go home, there was no sustained engagement. It still feels like that, there's a roulement of people, almost too quick to immerse themselves in the reality of what a long-term change for good would mean. It feels as if people think they can write a strategy and that's the answer, rather than investing time, expertise and people in it with a lasting commitment to the region. It strikes me from your career you had this in the Middle East. This was you right from the get-go, you were there, deeply involved in every facet of the Middle East for 37 years. It's not as if you flitted away one way then another way, you were deeply focussed in that. That must have helped in terms of building a deeper understanding, of understanding that we couldn't just go in, go home after the job's done, that it would require a long-term sustained effort.

Ryan Crocker: Very much the case. My own background is maybe a little bit out of the ordinary for American diplomats in that I grew up in a military family. My father served in World War 2 and in Korea, so that was part of my life, growing up. A knowledge of military culture, the way expeditionary forces managed, I graduated high school in Turkey, my father was assigned there at the time. I had that in my genetic make up, an understanding and appreciation of the American military, and what I saw as I entered my own career in the Foreign Service was how important that was, particular in a post-Vietnam world. The time I was in Kuwait as Ambassador, from 1994 to 1997, 3 and a half years, really allowed all of that to fall into place, for me. In October of 1994 Saddam Hussein indicated he was about to re-invade Kuwait, thinking maybe that a Republican president, George H. W. Bush wouldn't stand for it, but maybe a Democratic president, Bill Clinton, would let it go. We saw all the indicators, multi-division movement south, and in the movement configured not for training but for combat with weapons loads and necessary reserves, such as fuel. Saddam was coming back. General Binford Peay at that time was Commander of Central Command, I spent a couple of days with him in Tampa before I went out as Ambassador, it had been only a few months earlier. I felt that we had really connected, he had played a huge role in the first Gulf War as a Major General, and had got him and his units halfway to Baghdad before the whistle was blown, so he knew the arena, knew the theatre.

He and I were on the phone, the secure line, non-stop once those indicators arrived. He convinced President Clinton to respond immediately, to send in troops to fall in on pre-positioned armour that we had in Kuwait, and President Clinton, to his great credit, did it. The whole time I was working with General Peay, I wasn't working very much with the State Department. Not by intention, not because I held some views that I needn't bother with them, but simply what we were focussed on then, it had to be all about US resolve to use military force against Saddam a second time, and our ability to get it on the ground. That's when it really came home to me, this absolutely crucial nexus that I was fortunate enough to find and develop under General Peay.

Moderator: It's hard to do, isn't it, there's lots of discussion in the UK about fusion doctrine, embodying the idea that you had in Iraq in 2007, this beautiful teamwork. European powers seem to be finding it
increasingly hard to make it work in anything but the most simple scenarios, even for the UK. The Skripal poisoning is the 1 thing where the UK says we did fusion doctrine really well, but it has not done as well when it comes to more complex problems. What, from your prospective, has been the secret to making this work?

Ryan Crocker: I think I would have to say personalities and personal experience plays an absolutely preponderant role. There is no play-book, at least not one I've ever found worth reading, about the doctrine of fusion, as you would put it, civil and military co-operation as we use it in the States, it just didn't happen. I had pushed late on tour in Iraq, I pushed the George W. Bush administration on this, thinking that the experience they had accrued over 8 tough years of involvement in Afghanistan and later in Iraq, they would be the ones to do it, they didn't. I think they were just out of gas, administrations often, particularly if it's a 2-term president, often end about a year before they actually end just because everybody is suddenly tired. To this day there is no play-book, so personal experience and some knowledge and respect for the other's culture is absolutely crucial. Dave appreciated the civilian culture, one of his great initiatives that he put on the table and that I endorsed before either of us ever got to Iraq, was creating a joint strategy assessment team, co-chaired by a military officer and a civilian. He chose Colonel H. R. McMaster and I chose our finest Arabist and Middle Eastern specialist, David Pearce, later Ambassador Pearce. They put together a team down the line, military and civilian, to review our predecessor's Iraq campaign plan, and then to make recommendations to us as to what our joint campaign plan should look like, that was the goal.

The real intent more than anything, was to create a truly integrated civilian military structure that worked, and that would send the message to civilians and military up and down the line involved in Iraq, that this is how it's going to be. We're going to do this stuff together, we're going to figure out each other's cultures and find a way to weave them together as seamlessly as we can.

Moderator: I find this a fascinating idea, the idea that you can reach the level of civilian military co-operation that you achieved, almost through picking the right people and the sheer force of effort. The leadership that you and Dave provided in terms of making sure this was understood right throughout theatre that this was the way it would be. You contrast that to some of the other experiences, there's a famous saying from UK Prime Minister David Cameron, who said to his military chiefs in 2011 about Libya, 'You do the fighting, I'll do the talking.' This feels so much more separate than what you were doing, an absolute fusion of minds together in a single way ahead forward. We're running out of time and want to get this final question in because you have so much to offer. My final question is about what advice you'd give to military personnel in relation to their Foreign Service counterparts. How do they build those relationships akin to what you and Dave had, and the others you've mentioned. Ray and (mw 30.48) and others. How do they build that? How do they start to engender that, no matter where they are in their careers?

Ryan Crocker: We already have some of the answer, mainly some of Dave's activities. I was speaking to soon to be military officers as we have both done at West Point, and at the Naval Academy Indianapolis, telling the cadets and midshipmen that their future isn't going to be a replay of World War 2, it's going to be the kind of complex, messy, multi-faceted very difficult challenges, such as we have seen in Iraq and Afghanistan. Those on your left and right may not be in uniform, but they will be as critical to you and to our nation as those who are wearing the uniform and carrying the gun. That requires the reverse, that young civilian officials, young foreign service officers, both have the opportunity early on to work with the military, and to get the message that it's not us and them, it's all us. We've got to figure out who's got the ascendancy, who has the competency, how best to fuse together for a particular purpose the whole of our efforts. I think that is crucially important going forward. Finally, this is not entirely new, we had a diplomat, Robert Murphy. Robert Murphy was a fluent French speaker, he maintained our diplomatic presence, moving from Paris to Marseilles under the Vichy government, then to North Africa. He, more than anyone else was the one who worked with the French forces in North Africa, which had not been required to surrender or acknowledge
that a German ascendancy persuaded the commanders that they had to be part of an operation to secure North Africa or we would all lose the war.

He did that, that's Operation Torch, our first major offensive in the Second World War that could have utterly failed. If we hadn't have got Torch right, there might never have been an overlord, and Murphy's role in convincing the French and then helping them to stay convinced was absolutely central to our eventual success in North Africa and globally.

Moderator: Thank you so much for sparing the time, those are great words to end on. This is not new, and I think that is a suitably poignant place to leave this.

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