Moderator: Welcome to the Western Way of War. This is a weekly podcast series 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 war. Has it been successful? Is it fit for task today? How might it need to adapt 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. Over the last 40-odd episodes, we've had a balance, really, of military, academic, diplomatic, political and journalistic guests sharing their viewpoints. What's interesting is that one of the things listeners keep asking me for more of is politics as part of this discussion. Not the party political stuff, the Republican-Democrat, the Tory-Labour divide, but discussions about the higher levels of civilian military interaction that determine grand strategy. Many of the emails, text messages that I get seem to think that it would be difficult in getting guests with suitable experience to talk about this on the show, and I've got to reassure people that we're not short of politicians willing to come and talk, but rather we're quite exclusive and picky. I only want to bring you people who I think will add to the conversation. Whilst we've had a couple of senior people come and talk from national perspectives, I think it would be more useful if we have been able to find someone who can walk a supranational political agenda. You might think, 'That is an impossible mix,' but for you, dear listeners, anything is possible.

Today, I'm delighted that my guest is Madeleine Moon, former British MP, and President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, 2 quite different but interrelated positions. As an MP, Madeleine represented the people of Bridgend in Wales, between 2005 and 2019, serving in parliament for almost as long as she worked in social services for Mid Glamorgan County Council. She made her transition from social work to politics by way of Swansea County Council between 1996 and 2002. At the UK parliament, Madeleine held a number of positions, but people in our realm will remember her best as the incisive inquisitor on the House of Commons Defence Select Committee, the body that scrutinises the military, the Ministry of Defence and government policy on all things defence and security. She chaired 2 subcommittees during her time with the Defence Committee, producing reports on the safety and welfare of armed forces personnel on training exercises and a really important one on the defence in the Arctic. Madeleine was a member, as well, of the UK delegation to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, which she started in 2010, and then became Deputy Head of the UK delegation in 2015. In the NATO PA, she served on the Defence and Security Committee. A vice-chairperson of the Subcommittee on Transatlantic Defence and Security Cooperation, she was later elected as rapporteur for the Subcommittee on Future Security and Defence Capabilities to produce reports on NATO and the future role of naval power in 2016, in 2017, on the space domain and allied defence, and then on NATO special forces in the modern security environment in 2018. Given such success and the content of those reports, it was not a surprise to those of us who watch such matters that she was elected President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly at the assembly's annual
session in Halifax, Canada in November 2018, becoming the first woman elected by the assembly as a whole to the position of President.

I get that not many of you will know or understand the role or make-up of the body of the Parliamentary Assembly, so let me give you a quick dummy’s guide to the NATO PA. The Parliamentary Assembly was founded in 1955. It’s made up of 266 legislators from all member states of the Atlantic alliance and provides a link between NATO and the parliaments of its member states. Delegates from the annual session represent 29 member states, 12 associate countries, the European Parliament and 4 regional partner and Mediterranean associate member countries. The annual PA is quite something to behold. Madeleine hosted the 65th session in London, in October 2019, as the alliance was celebrating its 70th anniversary. Whilst the assembly dealt with Iran, Iraq, Ukraine, and Afghanistan during the session, Madeleine spearheaded a new approach that actively engaged with communities and young people in a markedly different way, something the alliance is really trying to continue, even now. With some time to reflect on both her service to UK parliament and her time as President of the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, I thought this was a really good moment to get Madeleine off the Welsh beach (ph 05.15) and onto a microphone to share some of her thoughts. Madeleine, welcome to the show. I want to start situating you as part of this wider conversation by asking the following question. What does the western way of war mean to you?

Madeleine Moon: I've always seen the western way of war through the prism of NATO, so very much alliance-based, a democratic way of warfare, which means parliamentary oversight and scrutiny of the armed forces and the security forces, parliamentary accountability to spend, based on the rule of law, based on scrutiny by the media, and with a vibrant third-sector engagement. It's very easy to think of politics as being nothing to do with defence, but NATO is a political-military alliance, and I think that alliance of the 2, decision-making and capabilities, is critical to the western way of warfare.

Moderator: That's a beautiful definition, because, in many ways, we separate so often what we think about modern politics from defence, when in fact NATO does bring it together in this beautiful way. It is political and it's military. In many ways, people try and divide NATO out in those ways. There's the military part of NATO and then there's the North Atlantic Assembly and the Parliamentary Assembly, and they feel very separate, but actually they are perfectly interwoven. It's one of those few bodies where they really do form a symbiotic relationship. It is an incredible thing to watch. I'm always surprised that more people don't know about the role of the Parliamentary Assembly, and the role of politics, in the alliance itself. They think it's just a military thing. It always surprises me that that's not more widely known.

Madeleine Moon: That's very true, but more importantly, the reason it's not more widely known is we have forgotten about public engagement. We have failed to particularly reach out to the older members of the alliance, who have taken NATO for granted. When I go into the new member states, it was fantastic to see how very present NATO was. During the 70th anniversary, everywhere I looked there were flags, there were flowerbeds, there were celebrations. Yet in London, did you notice, last year, any NATO flags flying? There was nothing. We have to engage with the public. We particularly have to engage with young people. The Canadian NATO assembly put out a wonderful Ipsos Mori poll, and the findings were quite horrific. They found that 71% of women and millennials had no understanding of NATO and what its mission was. 3% thought that NATO was a member of the Justice League of America. That is really frightening, and that should tell us how vital it is that we not just talk military to military, and politician to politician, but we talk to our publics, and get them to understand, particularly now that the public are on the front line with the grey zone threats, that they understand what defence and security really is and how we're dealing with it.

Moderator: In the older members of the alliance, the original states, not only do we take NATO for granted, but we treat it that way as well. There's an assumption and a presumption that it's just a good thing, and this terrible thing that happens in British dialogue, about defence, that NATO's the cornerstone of the alliance, and it's genuinely lip service. Everything about writing doctrine, and everything else,
genuinely, between elections, puts NATO in a corner and just says, 'Yes, fine, whatever.' It is really vital, as you say, in describing this way of war, understanding that we don't have the scale to meet modern threats, or to coerce individually, that we need the alliance. In order to engage young people, do you think we need to rebrand it? Modern advertising companies would tell you, 'Go away, rebrand it, come up with a new name, repackage it, and then sell it again.' Do we need to do that, or is that the wrong way of thinking about it?

Madeleine Moon: I don't think branding matters. NATO's a great brand. What we need to do is tell the public (TC 00:10:00) about it. I came from a background as an educator, so I believe very firmly in going into schools, going into universities and talking to people. The desire out there to understand, the desire to engage and to understand how the world is moving is huge, but we are arrogantly not engaging. There is nothing better than going to a meeting, whether it's sixth-formers, whether it's a community group, whether it's a university group, and outlining what NATO is about, how it works, and then saying, 'What do you want to know?' We did that in London before the session, and we brought youngsters from across London, from every ethnic community, from every religious and racial divide, and it was stunning. We had an amazing session. When it finished, my colleagues left, and I stayed, and for another 40 minutes, youngsters were surrounding me, saying, 'How do we get more of this? What can we do? How can we engage? How can we trust what we're being told?' The desire is huge, and we're just not meeting it, and we have to get better at that.

Moderator: Many of those access points do exist, but they're not well-known about. My staff and I go out, and we speak to sixth-formers and universities, and we go and do gigs wherever and whenever we can, but sometimes it's quite difficult for schools to say, 'We actually want this. Send someone to talk to us.' Some schools really are very nervous about bringing in people who talk about defence, and war, and death and destruction, and explain the realities of what it's like in Aleppo, or Mosul, or Raqqa, and they bring these things home to life. It's quite an uncomfortable position for schools and young people to be in, but I sense, like you, that there is a great appetite for this.

Madeleine Moon: Do you know, Peter, it's not for the kids. It's not a problem for them. I had the RAF presentation team come to Bridgend, and I got this huge venue, and I said to them, 'I'm inviting hundreds of 10 and 11-year-olds.' They said, 'No, Mrs Moon, it's too frightening for them.' I said, 'Frightening? Have you seen the war games they're playing every night on their computers? You're not going to frighten them at all.' I invited the usual chain gang, and the local community people, but we had all these youngsters, 10- and 11-year-olds. The RAF had said they were going to put on an exercise afterwards, where they talk about building radar stations with the youngsters, which was great. The schools poured in, they gave their presentation, and they said, 'Any questions?' A hundred hands went up from these youngsters, and the first question was, 'Is Russia a real threat?' The second question was, 'Is the RAF a good place for women to go and work?' They couldn't believe it, and they changed their mind about what we need to do. Before I lost my seat, I'd set up, with your earlier colleague, Elisabeth Braw, to hold an event here in Bridgend, where we would have diplomats, Elisabeth and myself, and 17- and 18-year-olds, and we'd talk about resilience, and we'd talk about how resilience is done in the Nordic and Baltic states, and engagement of young people, and ask them, 'Would you like this? Is this something you would like to be engaged in?' It's no good parliament having a policy if it's not going to be attractive to young people. Unfortunately, the election and COVID got in the way, and that's never happened, but there is a desire, we just have to get out there, and we have to be more proactive about it.

Moderator: I promise you that, post-COVID, I'll bring a team from RUSI down, and we'll come and do it in Bridgend, and we'll do the same. Whilst we could probably do it with you, we tried to hold a series in Scotland and the SNP were really not very interested in having a defence conversation. They found it a much more difficult thing. You have to bypass and find your route through to market, but I think there is this appetite. Whilst we say we're surprised how engaged kids are with this stuff, when I came and gave evidence to the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, I didn't think that the legislators that I saw at the Parliamentary Assembly would be as engaged as they were. Not just from the US and the UK, but from
Turkey, Poland, Germany, everywhere in Europe, across the alliance, they were genuinely really engaged and passionate about what they do. It was one of the most demanding evidence sessions I think I have ever been to. The Parliamentary Assembly really is something, and it genuinely is a group of very engaged, very diverse people who are asking some pretty searching questions.

Madeleine Moon: It's an organisation with no power, but huge influence. One of the things that people forget is how critical the NATO Parliamentary Assembly was, via what were called the Rose-Roth seminars, in bringing in what NATO calls 'the former captive states', I love that term, the former Soviet states, into the democratic family, via membership of NATO. In 1991, there was a Rose-Roth seminar in Latvia, and they talked about what was going to be needed to actually move Latvia towards democracy and for the Russian troops to leave. One of the problems was the Russian troops didn't want to leave, because they didn't want to go back to Russia, because the accommodation in Russia was not very good, whereas in Lithuania, they had very good accommodation. Homes were found to rehouse the military leadership of the Russian forces in Lithuania, and they went home, and Lithuania started on a track towards democracy. Those Rose-Roth seminars are always reaching out, going into places like Bosnia-Herzegovina, going to Ukraine, going to Georgia. They're important because they are saying to people who are aspiring, 'This is the route. Let's work with you. Let's talk you through what you're going to be needing to do.' Oddly enough, Peter, the hardest part of moving towards democracy is not the military, the military are up for it, it's the political, and it's our politics that's our real risk at the moment, I think.

Moderator: I want to come to that in a minute, but reflecting on what you said, what's clear to me is that the part that politics play in the western way of war has been absolutely crucial in recent years. When we talk about converting former Soviet states towards democracy, drawing them out, part of the western way is very Sun Tzu, it's very Thucydides, it's war without fighting. It's the ability to bring states across to your side, to coerce them with soft power. The NATO Parliamentary Assembly, the Rose-Roth seminars, all this is a really vital part of the western way of war, i.e. the western way of not war, of preventing the war that comes about, but it feels like that was a day when politics was able to do it. It was a softer politics, a more respectful politics. It was a time in which difficult conversations could be had without people getting too excited. Today, the politics feels very much more excitable, excited, feverish, populist and slightly unhelpful. Looking back on the changes in politics since you were in parliament, and your time at the NATO PA, do you think that those changes that we see at national levels are reflected in the supra-national or the internal machinations of politics at the moment?

Madeleine Moon: I think you start from an understanding that authoritarians thrive on division, they thrive on putting people into separate camps, and the fight back has to be through trust, building coalitions, building friendships and building communication. That's one of the things that the NATO PA is great at doing. I have seen the political changes across Europe reflected in the NATO PA. When I first went there, the 3 critical voices were the French, the Brits and the Americans. Then Macron came along, and the new breed of French politicians that came in with En Marche, they had no concept of the NATO PA, they had very little knowledge of defence, so they slid quietly into a learning mode, (TC 00:20:00) and then you saw others stepping forward. The Dutch delegation became much more assertive, the Norwegians, the Germans, and it became a different conversation, but still a vibrant one. The leadership of the delegations also matter, because the day I was elected as President, a non-NATO member came to see me, and said, 'We have a problem with this country. They’re doing this, and it’s causing us huge problems. Can you help?' I went to see the leader of the delegation, and I said, 'This is happening. I don't like the way it's impacting on the way the NATO PA is coalescing. Can you look at it for me?' He went off, he went back to his capital, he came back the next day, and he said, 'Sorted. The problem's gone.' There's a diplomacy that's at that very quiet level, that's personal, it's built on trust, it's built on a belief in the joint mission of keeping the Parliamentary Assembly operational.
In London, we had a situation where there was a lot of anger about Turkey's decision to go over the border and into Syria. There was a lot of anger. I said to the Turkish delegation, 'You’re going to go into every meeting, and you're going to be held to account. Are you up for that?' They said, 'Yes, we're up for that.' They went into every meeting, they answered every question, sorted. What could have been destabilising became something that was actually extremely helpful, because all of the fantasies, all the misinformation, all the concerns were aired. That was helpful for Turkey, that was helpful for all the other members of the alliance, and we moved on. It's interesting, because it can seem like, because of the lack of power, it's unimportant, but what is important is the influence it takes back to the capitals, and the information it takes back to the capitals, the personal relationships. Throughout COVID, I've been in touch with colleagues across the alliance, saying, 'How's it going with you? What's happening there? This is what's happening here.' Those conversations make you feel less isolated and more as if you've got friends and allies that you can reach out to when you need the truth.

Moderator: It is interesting to understand this dynamic between power and influence and impact. Even at a national level, the House of Commons Defence Select Committee really almost has no power apart from producing reports, and yet it is hugely influential, depending on who the Defence Secretary is, and the Prime Minister, but it is a hugely influential body. Again, you see the reports that come out, the requirements of Defence Secretaries, the Ministry of Defence, to respond to those questions in a coherent way, and the fact that some of these then run on and on as questions, that letters continue to be exchanged, that it really unearths stuff. Inside the MOD, you can see there's a flurry of activity in ensuring it's there. What's always struck me, however, is the difference in which different personalities react to it. Some Defence Secretaries, for example, will find the conversations actually helpful. You see people, particularly when they're new in the role, go to the Defence Committee, and they go, 'Yes, this is a genuinely useful conversation.' There are others who find it almost obstructive to what they do, and they find it a chance for a great battle, and not as useful. Did you feel similar things there? Did you recognise those who were coming for a helpful conversation and those that weren't?

Madeleine Moon: Good grief, yes. That's a very real situation. I can remember a conversation I had quite early on, with a very senior military figure, that sums it up really, because he very patronisingly, after I asked a question, said, 'If you talk to your male colleagues who've served in the military, they will explain to you.' I said, 'Actually, you are required to explain to me in terms that I understand, having not served in the military, so that I can then pass that on to my also not served in the military constituents, who are paying for all of this. Can we go back again to the question, and can you give me the answer?' Apparently, that caused uproar in the MOD. He gave me the answer, because if we're not explaining things, in clear terms, to parliamentarians, this is a huge risk in parliament. You have to work at this. You have to be willing and want to understand the military mindset and the military way of doing things. It frightens people off, and that's not good for democracy.

I can remember going to a dinner, and I had to meet a senior military person, walk them through the Commons and take them to the dinner. Later on, I saw a colleague who said, 'I saw you with that admiral.' I thought, 'I haven't seen an admiral this week.' There was no understanding of the difference between uniforms. That's really worrying. It's not good for democracy. It's not good that we cannot engage the whole of parliament in a deeper understanding of the importance of defence and security, which everyone will say, 'It's the first priority of government, but let's not spend any money on it.' That is really frightening, especially right now, because we're moving into a whole new development, a whole new operational mode, and looking at new weapons systems down the line that are going to change an awful lot of the way that we fight and we think. I have a big obsession about further cuts to personnel, and I'm not a Member of Parliament, but I'll be fighting that as much as I can from the sidelines.
Moderator: You're absolutely right about the language. The language that's used by the military becomes more and more boutique every year. The language seems to be almost a matter of pride, that they can speak in something other than English, and then they lament the fact that they are no longer connected to the community, and they spend a lot of money on trying to understand why. They can't speak in a way that is decipherable, is digestible to anyone, let alone that explains their way. I'm absolutely with you that our inability to articulate defence and security problems in plain English is a real hindrance to making the case for the military and defence spending and understanding our security role (ph 27.48). I think the Defence Committee do a really good job of forcing the military to start speaking in that way, although there's always a danger that the Defence Committee becomes so experienced that they're just as happy to talk about RDEL and CDEL as the military themselves, which often doesn't help with the rest of people. There is a difference between how the military engage with the Defence Committee and how the politicians engage with the Defence Committee. I think what's interesting is to reflect on that versus what I saw at the NATO Parliamentary Assembly, where you had military officers, particularly not from the big 3, as you said, not from France, Britain or the US, but from other states, who were engaging with their parliamentarians in a very different way to the way you would get in either the UK or the US. It's not related to power, influence or anything else, but you saw the Estonians and the Italians, and the Greeks and the Lithuanians, who were having different conversations with their politicians, a very much easier relationship, based on, I think, a common language that wasn't technical. Would you say that's an accurate representation, or did you see it differently?

Madeleine Moon: I agree with you, absolutely. I think there are 2 things there. One is it's really dangerous, when you're in Westminster, to think that's how the rest of the world runs. You have to get out of your comfort zone, because those NATO PA reports and presentations, from people like you, are their equivalent of the House of Commons library. They don't have the research and the think-tanks. They don't have the same level of investment, and they can't do it, so they have to work together. The reports and the conversations are so much more important, and checking that you're hearing the same messages, that's critical. It's something that the PA was fantastic for me for, conversations with those from the captured states, the former Soviet states, (TC 00:30:00) who would say to me, 'We struggle every day with the democratic mindset and thinking, "Am I allowed to think this? Am I allowed to say that? Will I end up in trouble? Could I be arrested if I say this?"' Your brain being compartmentalised about who you're going to trust, and how you're going to express ideas, and whether or not you can criticise, it's a struggle that we, in the west, don't understand. We don't have that nervousness about expressing our opinion and being forthright in our expressions and our ideas and our demands for change. Other countries are still working on that and struggling with that. Somewhere like the PA, and being caught up in that sharing, is also a lesson in communication and the right to communicate.

Moderator: Madeleine, that's a really strong point to end on, and we've got to because we're over time already. We'll have to get you back. We'll do another episodes to dig into this more. I genuinely think it's fascinating. Thank you very much. You can find our show on all major podcasting platforms, including iTunes and Spotify. Your downloads regularly place us in the top 5% of nearly 2 million podcast shows globally, and more and more of our first-time listeners seem to go back and dig into previous episodes. Why not? They're free and the guests are superb. The show is produced by Peppi Vaananen and Kieron Yates, and is sponsored by Raytheon UK. Finally, I'd like to take this opportunity to remind you that RUSI is a membership organisation and a charity. As springtime approaches in the northern hemisphere, you might want to consider freshening up your thinking and revisiting some of those concepts that form the basis of our presumptions and assumptions about how we fight and engage. RUSI membership can help you with that. Why not exercise your mind and sate your curiosity by becoming a member of this august institute. For less than 15 bucks a month, you can get access to some of the most insightful and influential research on militaries that's available. That's according to Prospect magazine, who know their stuff and recently voted RUSI as their Think Tank of the Year. Details are at RUSI.org/membership. Thanks for listening.