



★ FORTRESS ON A HILL

Ep 67 transcript

SPEAKERS

Danny Sjursen, Chris 'Henri' Henrikson, Keagan Miller, Larry Wilkerson

Danny Sjursen

All right, listeners. tuning in again, in a crazy, crazy moment. We're recording now, on June 2.

Danny Sjursen

In the early afternoon, and, you know, we have so much to talk about. And our plan today is not to make it all about the Floyd protests in the current moment, but we have to cover it and to help us do that, but really look at the bigger structural and also foreign policy connections to the Empire come home. We have another phenomenal guest. I mean, the lineup has been unbelievable, and I was just so kind of fanboy excited when, when Colonel retired Larry Wilkerson agreed to come on the show. So it's a real treat. And I first met Larry in person at the all volunteer force forum. We had a sort of a national convention down in down in Texas last year. General Dennis Leach, this is another one of the CO leaders there and, and frankly, just you know, sharing is literally actually you remember Larry, with you

Danny Sjursen

was was pretty exciting, because I first, I admit, sort of embarrassingly came upon you through the Why We Fight documentary in 2005 that you're a part of. I've been following his columns work and interviews which have really exploded, I think, especially again, you know, they were obviously massive right after Larry left the administration, the Bush administration, but you know, they've stayed steady, and now they've kind of jumped again, because his voice matters. So I will say that Larry's performances or appearances and writing kind of shook me at a key moment when I was in Iraq, 2006 and seven, when I was still kind of a wavering believer, and I think that's because of the platform and the credibility that

he has. So just very briefly on bio for those of you who don't know, Lawrence Wilkerson is last positions in government whereas Secretary of State Colin Powell is chief justice.

Danny Sjursen

From 2000 to 2005, he had also been Associate Director of the State Department's policy planning staff, which was then under the directorship of Ambassador Richard House. And some of you may know him, obviously, he had worked during the Reagan years as well.

Danny Sjursen

And he was a member of that staff responsible specifically for East Asian Pacific, and political, military and legislative affairs. And that was 2001 or two in the real opening of the Bush administration. And I think probably some of the formative years of the moment that we're in now, the genesis for it. So before serving at the State Department, some of you may know that he served 31 years in the US Army. During that time, he was a member of the faculty at the US Naval War College, and that was in the late 80s. He was special assistant to General Powell, back when he was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff throughout the entire George Bush one HW Bush administration. For some really key moments. Obviously, we're

Danny Sjursen

We're talking Panama on the Gulf War and some of the, you know, peace dividend or not cold war stuff, post Cold War stuff. And he was also director and Deputy Director of the US Marine Corps War College at Quantico, Virginia. And that was from 93 to 97. So really the first term of the Clinton years, Larry was retired from active service in 1997, as a full Colonel, and began work as an advisor to General Powell. He has also taught national security affairs in the Honors Program at George Washington University in DC. And he's currently working on a book about the first George W. Bush administration. Larry, we're so excited to have you on and really thanks for taking the time to be with you.

Larry Wilkerson

Danny. It's a pleasure.

Danny Sjursen

Well, you know, jumping in So okay, as the as the common military jargon goes, and I know you know it, let me begin with some housekeeping right, so to speak. You know, like I mentioned, we don't intend to make this episode all about George Floyd all about the pros.

Danny Sjursen

Trump's response. You know, in fact, we're gonna start with some broader structural stuff surrounding foreign policy in your experiences, though, we will undoubtedly, eventually shift to get some your general thoughts on the present moment, which we think is just essential, given your experience and sort of typical clear headed eloquence on these complex matters. So, jumping in, you know, forgive the cliché, but starting with a bit of background. Now we vaguely know each other through, you know, various facets of the, quote unquote movement, such as it is, and, you know, we've read and comment on each other's work, but I wouldn't pretend to speak for your full background and experience. You

know, however, if I may, you know, given the broad contours of your career and some of the folks you've worked with and for, it seems safe to assume that you didn't exactly spring from a hippie background or plan to you know, enter the world descent from the outset. So perhaps you could give the listeners a sense of your personal professional background and just you know some of the key way points in your intellectual evolution on the core issues that you most often write and speak about.

Larry Wilkerson

Well, I didn't have my epiphany as fast as you did I know you insinuated that it was a little bit longer, perhaps. But mine was an awfully long time. My father was a b 17, heavy bomber pilot in World War Two, my father in law was with Patton's Third Army, my family had all the way back and all served. And when I was at Bucknell University in Central Pennsylvania in 1965 66, I, I said to myself, hey, what am I doing here? I'm a rising senior, I guess is the terminology that kids use today. I'm going to be a senior I've completed my junior year and one of my best friends is killed in Vietnam, fraternity brother of mine, that I become fairly Close to he was a year ahead of me, graduated ROTC commissioned and lasted about as mostly tenants did. If they...if they bit the dust about two or three months, gone and I said I need to get out of here I need to go. So I volunteered, volunteered for Airborne Ranger infantry, with the army and no one else would take me because I didn't have a college degree. And didn't get any of that wound up. Becoming a star 95 on a very snow covered em 60 machine gun range and at Fort Dix, New Jersey, and my students already came up to me Take me one time out there in the snow and he said, Would you like to go to OCS? I said, Will it get me out of the snow Sarge? So long story short, I became an officer and you know the rest of the story. Vietnam was my seminal experience with regard to killing people for no goddamn reason. But I didn't realize it probably until I had been out for a while out of Vietnam for a while, and began to read and study and to understand the conflict I've been involved in a little bit better. And probably, again, slow learner. I didn't understand it really well until I began to study it later as a lieutenant colonel and the colonel versus a student at the Naval War College and later on, on my own. And I began to realize that a lot of the things I was told a lot of the things indeed, that I was still being told in the military and then others were being told we were still fighting in distant theaters were simply preposterous. It had nothing to do with freedom and liberty and justice and the American way. And all the things we were told it had everything to do with such seedy things as oil and commercial interest and economic welfare, if you will. It had to do with all manner of things that did really had no real rhetorical tinge to them at all. They were all basic predatory capitalist purposes. And that got me to thinking about what presidents do when they decided to send men and women to die for state purposes and something we forget all the time to kill other people first aid purposes, the United States by my own calculation, and certainly by conservative estimates from the Department of Defense since 2001, it's probably killed about half a million people, if not more in the world and put another five to 7 million, maybe even 10 million into diaspora into boats crossing the Mediterranean or, or crossing the Red Sea from Yemen into Sudan or, or whatever. So it's not a pretty picture, but it took me a while I didn't come to that realization quite as swiftly as you did. You're better educated.

Danny Sjursen

Well, I...I appreciate you saying that. I fear that a lot of us have the sense later that we waited too long. You know, a lot of times in interviews, I refer to my lapsed Catholic penance when I talk about the

current work, because, you know, it really does feel always like, like you should have known earlier and I understand that feeling. So, I have a follow up that I mentioned, but I just wanted to jump in with something brief that I didn't plan on. And and that's Vietnam, because I haven't heard you talk a whole lot about Vietnam in the past. Although I know you do sometimes. And there's all this talk about because you know, you're in the mix. Reagan years and in the bush years, right. And then of course later, but there's all this talk about the Vietnam syndrome. And and I'm reading you know, Leo, Leo grants William Leo grants, like massive tome on Central America right now, from my sense, and talking about the proxy wars. You know, the thing that comes up in every chapter is this Vietnam instrument how the military responded to all these different levels. And so to what extent did your Vietnam experience inform your you know, even before you've had your, you know, total epiphany? To what extent did the Vietnam experience inform your time in government, both in the late part of your army career and then sort of early civilian government career?

Larry Wilkerson

Well, it certainly informed what I would call my tactical experience, which is to say, watching Americans shoot other people, other under other than what I call law of war parameters, and that is to say slaughtering the gooks whatever term you might want to use to make the enemy subhuman, to make the enemy vile and evil and so forth. That appreciation came on me quite quickly, even as a first lieutenant and then a captain in Vietnam because I had people around me who like the famous Lieutenant Calley at me live but not on that scale. We're doing things that were, in essence war crimes. And as a as a commissioned officer, it was my responsibility when I saw them or when I had an opportunity to prevent them to do so. And so that that epiphany, if you will about Americans are not necessarily the people they claim to be. came home and quite early. The larger epiphany came on me over time and was this is curious for me, I'm, I'm dealing with it even now, as I think about I'm 75 years old, but I still think about this. Part of the reason I did not come to a realization of such things, as I'm describing earlier, was because I had really terrific leadership in three or four different seminal positions in my career. One Navy Admiral, another army two star, and then of course, Colin Powell, a few others in there, but those three stand out...in a sense, their ethics, which were solid and quite high their personal integrity, their character shielded me from a lot of what I would have known otherwise had I just been the standard grunt down there still beavering away where the rubber meets the road. Instead, I was up in the ether. And I got to hear all of I spent 12 years in Joint Service duty working with all the services and working with some of the highest ranking officers, first that unified commands and then of course in Washington, and I was shielded from some of the stuff that goes on at the bottom. That's not a rationalization or an excuse. It's just a statement of how much I was captured by the high character and personality of the people I was around. One of the things I'm having a problem with in the manuscript I have now which is approaching 1000 pages is that I am taking apart the most seminal character and individual in that area. Experience cold and power. And it's a it's a very wrenching thing for me to do to admit that his naivete, his hubris, his arrogance, and his sense that he could do anything at any time and more or less accomplish the mission, more or less come out on top, hurt him badly, and marred his character badly. It's almost like a Shakespearean tragedy, if you will. And it hurts me as much as I suspect if I ever get this thing out. It's going to hurt our relationship if not separated completely. But it's an interesting thing for me to do to study this man or a client has said man's fate is his character or his character is his fate. And I think that's true. And if it is true, then the fate of great

men to a certain extent, at least is the fate of nations. And I do consider pal to have been in the panoply of great men that this country has produced. So you're looking at a man whose character and the flaws in that character actually reflect what's happening to a certain extent to the country right now. And it makes it even more poignant that he's a black man. And he's a black man who took the white man's coin, if you will. I think it was Wellington to call it Nima wala, which was an Indian term for taking the king's Penny, taking the king's coin. And that's what Powell did. And it makes it even more excruciating to look at how he basically abandoned the principles that we're seeing right now. Right in front of us on the television screens almost daily now that he wants was considered sacrosanct. They were they were the principles of black people everywhere. You always stuck to those principles. Well, that's not the case anymore. I sit here wondering where is going bow? Why haven't we heard his voice on television, why haven't we heard him come out and speak not just on behalf of blacks who were being treated, treated so horribly and have been treated so horribly, for two centuries plus, but on behalf of his nation, where is he and I have to conclude that, more or less what I've crafted in this manuscript, as a picture of his character is more accurate, perhaps an even I thought, and that's very, very disappointing, and it's very disquieting for me. But that helped me. It helped us write words from seeing clearly some of the things that you obviously have seen much earlier than I did, because I had such good leadership. I had such quality people around me and above me. And that shielded me to a certain extent because you sit there and you rationalize and you say, Well, if this man if this woman believes the way they believe in if they're truthful with me being truthful with me, then how can I do out this, I must be seeing it wrong. I must not be analyzing everything correctly, I must not be high enough in my perch to see what they see. And now I realized that you could go as high as you ever wanted to go. You could be president, you could be commander in chief and you'd still be corrupt as hell, you'd still be sick. you'd still be the disciple of empire and an empire that in its Imperial actions today is reprehensible in a word.

Danny Sjursen

You know, Larry, what you say? What you just said is so resonant with me and I imagine for so many of us who have become skeptical. I didn't reach anywhere near the highs that you did, but I know the feeling, you know, shout out to Brigadier General bandwagon. You know, right now, who's still serving over in England with NATO? And, you know, there were years where I was able to also sort of, you know, justify staying when I was totally against every war we were in because I would have run through walls for that man. And I still would. And yeah, I realized sort of, as I think you did the limits of, you know, working within the system. And it's interesting what you say about power, because I'm going to press just a little bit more, if you may, for some, some more detail of your conclusions. To the extent you're comfortable. But, you know, he said, Where is Colin Powell right now, and, and as proof of the power of his voice? You know, I know it was mainstream, and I know that Obama led a lot of us down, but I remember how influential his voice could be, when he spoke up about, you know, the grave of the Muslim American soldier, you know, I think it was during the election, you know, and how we have to be careful about, you know, where I came from, when it was we have to be careful about you know, denigrating Muslim Americans, and it was powerful and people listened on both sides of the mainstream aisle. So if you'll allow me, you know, I want to follow up with you know, what's first and observation and I think you've laid it out pretty clearly. But of course, please correct if I'm misreading you, you know, having followed your appearances and writing for, you know, coming up on 15 years now, which is so crazy, you know, I've always found you poignant and consistent twice. So it's not that

you've, you know, jumped off the rails, but ever so slightly, just as a listener and a reader, I've detected a shift not dissimilar to my own, or an evolution towards more systemic critiques, like you just mentioned with Empire, right, that that word, and what our detractors would probably call more radical critiques, right, quote, unquote, and in a gradual way, as you mentioned, I sent Steven you know, before you mentioned it for a couple years now, and increasingly critical assessment of your old boss and so, you know, and I'm of two minds about myself. So, if you would, if you could, you know, tell me if I'm in the ballpark, which it sounds like I am and just kind of, you know, maybe explain some of the evolution on your view of Howells role over the last 10 or, or even more years since you've kind of left work with him.

Larry Wilkerson

Believe it or not one of the most...how shall I say it? One of the most effective means of waking me up to a certain flaw in his character was his wife. And I'll go back and relate an anecdote that might illustrate it as powerful as anything I could say. Um, one of the things that I was told when I first started working for him in 1989, was to be aware of his naivete. And I asked the young lady who told me that. She'd been around him and work for him for some time. I said, Marybelle...what do you mean by naivete? And she said, Well, he can be awfully trusting. He can stick with things be loyal to things far longer than he should. So just be aware of that. Well, one of the things that happened when we were moving through 2004 in early 2005 at the Department of State and as you will recall, I'm sure you were probably in it moving through a time period when the Secretary of Defense was saying, "Don't use the word insurgency, there's no insurgency. It's just a little disordered democracy." And all of us who had had any experience whatsoever, particularly those of us who that experience in Vietnam knew damn well, we were looking at an insurgency. During those very, very tight, tense times, he and I began to drift apart considerably, so much so that by the time he's giving me an award at the end of our tour there early 2005, we're hardly speaking. And it was all I could do to stand there and let the camera take a picture of him giving me an award. We'd come to that because of such things as this little anecdote. I'm gonna relate to you. I had bet him a year out from the 2004 election, November 2004. I had bet him that if George W. Bush was reelected, that Condi Rice would be the Secretary of State. And he had come back at me, reminding me vividly of what marybel had said to me about his naive day. And he had said, Oh, absolutely not the case. I don't know where you're getting your information. But that's absolutely not the case. She's sick and tired of this administration, too. By the way, this is an administration that the Deputy Secretary of State Richard Armitage referred to repeatedly in my presence presence as the Nazis. The Gestapo, he called david addington cheney's lawyer over the Vice President's office member, the shortstop of the SS, the premier Nazi. This is how the Deputy Secretary of State was referring to the Vice President's office, but he just said Oh, no Condi, sick of this. She's a sick of it as we are. She's leaving, she's going back to academia. She's going back to Stanford. No way. I said Want to bet boss 50 bucks. put your money where your mouth is. Ah, he said, No, you're wrong. You're wrong. That's a bet. He bet we shook. About a month before the election. This was maybe seven or eight months before about a month before the election, I reminded him of it. And he again poo pood it completely so that absolutely impossible. And all of a sudden, I said, you know, quickly and made him angry. How about doubling the bat? He just dismissed me and told me to get out of the office. Of course, Condi become Secretary of State. Well, the woman who told me through my wife that she knew that all along and had been trying to convince him and that was his wife, Alma. Alma went through a different experience as a black person. She went through the experience of her father,

for example, being the principal of not one but two schools in Birmingham, Alabama. And remarked to me with great pride that you could eat off the floor of either of his high schools, that if you brought any kind of weapon...a shiv...a sharp instrument, whatever, let alone a gun, and one of his high schools, you would quickly be snatched up by him your weapon confiscated and you'd be read the riot act and never do anything bad again, for at least a decade, that you could come in through any door in either of his high schools and feel safe, that there was no security issue really associated with either one of his high schools. She talked about the black church and what a great place it was for blacks to go for relief and for comfort and so forth. She talked about her time at Fisk University, the historical historically black college is probably the premier black college. HBCU...can't even get the acronyms right anymore in America... and she talks about Mahary School right across the street from Fisk and she talked about our first date with a prospective doctor from the medical school when she had on a formal dress with white gloves almost up to her elbows and the person who was looking after her. She's a freshman at Fisk tells her, "You got to be back by 10 o'clock and everything and she said, there's no way I would have violated that curfew, and so forth. And long story short, what she's telling me is that blacks in America had a better life before they were turned loose, as it were, that is to say, how and all the people who made it, who had gotten to Harvard or gotten to Yale or gotten to him, in his case, City College of New York into the military and made rank and so forth, that they didn't really get it. That it wasn't all that bad back there when blacks had something to turn to and they had something to gain comfort from and so forth and so on. And what she was telling me what she had a different understanding about this experience. And I increasingly saw the difference in her understanding and in his understanding, and the only way I can excuse some of the behavior I'm seeing today and put it down in my book without just cringing it putting it there is that you he wasn't the same sort of black person that these other people were, who understood the black experience far better than then he did, because they had lived that experience, at least partly, if not entirely, and his wife personified that for me, no question in my mind that she has a different appreciation of the black experience in America than he does. So maybe that's part of the explanation for why he comes out as Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, even in the sense that he's in uniform still in 1992 when we had the Rodney King incident at Los Angeles, the bad times there, but ultimately winds up doing what is present. And the last thing to do is chairman because that's his character, because he's loyal. And he was a duty bound military individual. And fortunately, it didn't get out of hand too badly. And the time now where I'm saying, "Where is he? Why isn't he making some comments? These are his people. These are black Americans who've been treated like shit for centuries. And he's not saying anything. It just doesn't make any sense to me. And every day that it goes by without him saying something, so I don't care if he's 82 or 83 years old. You know, I know that's old. But I saw him on the Memorial Day concert, and he didn't say anything. And I told my wife I turned away from from his visage on the TV screen and I said, this is this is disgusting. This is terrible. He's talking about all this hokey ass stuff that always goes along with Memorial Day. The best thing you could say for Memorial Day is if you want to honor the troops, everybody out there listening to me. Stop letting your president kill them. That's the best thing you could say. But I knew damn well, he wasn't going to say that. Because that's not who he is. Now. That's not where he is now. And I'm not sure and this makes me so disappointed. I can only talk about it. That's not I'm quite sure where he ever was. It was just an act, and that's very disquieting.

Danny Sjursen

Absolutely. I can't imagine what the experience for you must be like having to having to write about it having to come to that point, because I'm certain it's obviously not where you want it to be. Well, I don't I don't want to I don't want to, you know, isolate it to this issue, but I'm a southern boy from South Carolina. You know, I should I stood on my dad's shoulders and watch from Thurman campaign for his first job in government.

Larry Wilkerson

And when I joined Powell, who taught me so much about the black experience in America, and he taught me so much about particularly blacks in defense of America, that is to say the black sheep fought in every war American ever fought in the only one they didn't really go to in a big number was the Mexican War, which even Ulysses Grant said was a despicable war, but something that we should have been doing. In any event, I learned a lot and his knee about the black experience. Now I asked myself, did I learn that because he wanted to teach a white man from South Carolina about that experience? Did he want to make sure that I interviewed 750 total black veterans for the work I was doing for him for the speeches I was writing and so forth. Did he want that to happen or was all this just a part of a shot? Was all this just part of teaching the white boys About the black experience in America because that would make him write better speeches. But what he did was he taught me about the black experience to the point where I now am questioning why he isn't standing up for his own people.

Danny Sjursen

That's a it's it's fascinating and just a little obscene. And, you know, you mentioned not, you know, drilling down to make it just about Powell, although I do think he's instructive, especially in this moment, but you know, I'm gonna go against all my verbose instincts and turn things over to me for a second because I know he wants to talk about sort of the senior military officers in a general sense. Please.

Chris 'Henri' Henrikson

Hi, Larry, I'm Henry. I'm a Army veteran. I did two tours in Iraq Military Police. I'm building on what Danny asked and what you were mentioning about the atmosphere post 9/11 there at the Pentagon in the State Department. I was wondering if you could broaden up a little bit for us and talk about how did the general officers that you dealt with during that time see the President's movements towards war? Was there any visible dissension or at least concern behind the scenes? Was anybody accused of disloyalty if they weren't immediately on board with going to Iraq? And how did they see the choice by General Shinseki to when he gave his testimony about mobilizing 200,000 troops for the invasion.

Larry Wilkerson

Most rationalize the experience and they rationalize it in different ways. But the most prominent way was they said, Norman Schwarzkopf signed a ceasefire agreement with Saddam's generals in the desert. At the end of the first Gulf War. We have owned the upper one third and low One third of the rack for the past year since that C spot. Indeed we have engaged Saddam's air defense and other assets from time to time. We have seen ordinates down at them. They have seen ordinates up at us, the war never ended. It just went into a state of ceasefire Limbo, but it never ended. So all we're doing in 2003 is resuming that war and putting a coda to it. That was the rationale that I heard the most. There were specific instances where people like Tommy Franks on the phone to my boss who was very

reluctant to do this because though he had been Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. He had been cautioned fairly stridently by the Vice President, that he was no longer Chairman of the Joint Chiefs. He was the secretary of state therefore he should keep his nose out of military business but it's it's hard to do when you know other people are screwing up. so bad that you'd like to slap them silly. So he's on the phone with general Franks and general Franks is telling him things like, you know, don't tell me I need 200 or 300,000 troops Cohen, god damn it. I mean, you know, I'm lucky I didn't have to use the 54,000 Rumsfeld wanted me to do it with initially. So I'm really happy that I got 116 hundred 60 465,000 troops. And you've got people like Jay Garner who are really SPI in January of 2004. Yeah, it was no, it was January 2003. Yeah, January 2003. Right before the war started in March. We're over at the National Defense University. And we're sort of with all the people who are supposed to have been doing the intricate planning for what you know, we call phase four. That is post hostilities interact. And Jay realizes that all he's doing there and I realized that And everyone else to, I think, is meeting each other, that there's been no planning at all, then indeed there is no plan. J is just sort of a pickup team going over to Iraq to sort things out in the aftermath and come home by August. So let's put it this way. The generals were not reluctant to take the commander in chief to orders and go over and end the war that Norman started and they knew it was going to be fast and furious and quick, and they'd be gone. Some totem pole would be installed like alma jollibee. And he would be sympathetic, at least for a week or two to the United States, and even more importantly, the Israel, and therefore we have done our job and everything would be over. And there were some people in the Pentagon and there were some generals amongst them, who thought Syria was next and maybe they even move on to Iran. But the basic feeling, I think, amongst the general officer corps, and those with whom I ran into who I talk more frequently, the colonel and Lieutenant Colonel level was that they were just continuing something we started in 1991 or saddam started and we're finally putting it into it. That was sort of the rationale that people use at that time.

Chris 'Henri' Henrikson

That's It's incredible to hear about I I spent I spent five months with my MP company stationed at the Pentagon in the beginning of 2003. And so I not not really involved with any you know, specific offices or anything we were just checking people's IDs. But you immediately felt the the attitude shift among these people who got to go to office jobs and weren't on the on the list for deployment soon, which of course, lots of MPs were along with one with myself, but it's incredible to hear about.

Larry Wilkerson

You know, I you know, I got a letter from Rumsfeld. Well, as Chief of Staff of the State Department, my letter said I was greetings. You know, almost it said I was going to be called back to active duty. And I went into the Secretary and I said, Hey, boss, look, Don sent me this letter here. I'm going back to be a colonel in the Pentagon, I knew I wouldn't go to Iraq. I would have gone to Iraq in a heartbeat. But I knew I wouldn't go in there. Because I was too old. They were going to send some younger Colonel there. And I would take his place in the Pentagon. That was the plan. And of course, he said, No, no, no, no, you're not going anywhere. You're, you're in a critical position, blah, blah, blah. And we had an argument over that because I said, I prefer to go to Iraq or go to the Pentagon or do whatever I had to do. And Rumsfeld had sent me the letter and sort of got me out of it. And by that time, I was already at the point where I was feeling a little bit, a little bit out of place a little bit not not well located because

things were, I was looking at all kinds of things. I was looking at the neoconservatives at his direction. I put together a dossier on Richard Perle. And you may know, sort of The Dark Knight who led the neoconservatives intellectually. Along with Bill Kristol and several others, I was doing things like trying to cover Powell's flanks and his rear with the press and not succeeding very well. And so it's a very disappointing job. Because when you've got the entire administration against you on most key issues, and you're alone, and on top of that, you're the diplomatic instrument of national power, which since Nixon, and arguably even before post World War Two has been in retreat, and since Nixon has been in blind retreat, we don't do diplomacy anymore except for the military. Then you're socking. You're sitting in the place where everybody thinks, as Nixon did that, you know, as he put it, in his colorful language pinko Fang communists blew up Listen to the tape. That's what Lincoln or that's what Nixon thought of the State Department. And the State Department has been taking it in the rear and ever since, and majorly took it with George W. Bush. The only thing that saved it was the personality and character and stature of Colin Powell. And you're seeing what's happening to it now under Trump. I mean, he's being eviscerated along with a diplomatic instrument, it might not even might not even should exist anymore because the military is the tool we use for everything. We are a national security state, we are a warfare state result, tetra is war. I have students now who have never lived in a country not at war. And occasionally they will remind me of that as we study national security decision making. So it was it was an extraordinary time. For me it was a learning time it was a painful time. It was a time to break from an individual whom I had come to love and to admire. To enjoy working for. And by the time we get to January 2005, as I said, we're, we're in opposite ends of the pole, so to speak.

Keagan Miller

Hi, Larry. I'm Keagan. I was in the Navy. I worked in the NSA, Georgia. I'm working on, you know, Fifth Fleet AR stuff. So like Yemen, Syria, Libya, mission. All the stuff from like in Obama's first term from 2009 to 2013.

Larry Wilkerson

Then I have a question for you. Sure. Why the hell did we ever do Libya?

Keagan Miller

Oh, my God. Oh, it was this. I mean, this is my take on it. I honestly feel like Obama wanted to show and the people that supported his mission of like, doing war but in this slow like, secretive way. I mean, I think that's Libya was like his opportunity and the the whole NSC, like their opportunity to show that we can do war without having boots on the ground. And, you know, and then we did the mission and it was over and then we're like, Okay, what now? And there was no direction there was no like, Oh, hey, like, we're gonna do X, Y, and Z now, and I felt like it was, Oh, it was so frustrating. And even me from my like, I did, I did Elance mostly, so I was doing radar stuff. And like, even from my perspective, I'm just like, what, what are we doing? Like, no, but um, I also like Danny mentioned, why we fight was the first thing I saw you in and that was actually my two 2005 was my freshman year of college. And that really like got me started to I was against the war when it first happened. But then when I found out about all the whys and everything that just made it even worse. And I just remember watching that documentary and like seeing you and being like, Oh my gosh, here's a guy who's been like at the top and sees this suffer what it is. And I just, I really appreciate you having the courage to stand up and say

what you needed to say. And that was really influential in me. I didn't join the Navy until four years later, but like, that was it. And so, for me, um, being in the community, I think that it's really upsetting to see how much should hold on you. Okay, so for me, I'm pointing out all the systemic policy failures that you've already pointed out. Um, for me, I look at over classification, because I, every single day I would look at something and I would say, why is this classified? And when I started to like when I would reach out to people, you know, obviously nobody would give me a straight answer. When I listen to

Larry Wilkerson

this most often, like it's most often classified to protect the politicians as

Keagan Miller

Yes, yes. And I know in that documentary that you were in actually was the guy who was the classifications are for a number of years. And I he also is another guy that I really respect because he points out the specific things that are wrong. And he says he hadn't he wrote a whole book about this, and he's talking about, you know, the fact that it is it's the cover people's ass, it's because it's embarrassing to a certain group, so they don't want to say anything. And also the fact that people tend to over classify because Sometimes they won't even read it unless it's classified in a certain level. And it also gives them something on their finger after like, it makes a lot of officers or people who are the or con to, it can like help promote them with their career as well. So it's like, there's all these incentives to over classify things right now. And so I wanted to know, what you felt like why it was happening. And if there's anything that we can do, especially those of us who have been a part of the community and are not anymore, like, what can we do in your mind to fix it?

Larry Wilkerson

I have many students who asked me similar questions, particularly those who like this last semester, and the semester before it, go to the NGA, or go to the DA or go to Booz Allen, or in one case, go to the CIA. And it's fascinating to try and answer their questions. much the way you've couch some questions Right here now, and others, and then talk to them a year later or two years later, as I do with some of them who went se from GW back in 2006, or from William and Mary in 2007, or whatever. They've been there quite a while now, one young lady at the NSA, for example, who's been there since 2006. And she's risen rapidly as well. She should, she was brilliant, brilliant young lady spoke fluent Arabic, fluent Farsi, Chinese, Russian, just a brilliant girl. And you, you watch them go through the process that I just tried to roughly describe with regard to pal, the process that puts them with good leaders in most cases. She had one bad leader that almost got got her to quit and leave. But we managed to get her around and get her around that leader in a sense, and we get to another one that was much better for and you watch them do the same thing. I was just describing I did you watch them become a part of the mechanism of part of the bureaucracy or part of the intelligence complex, etc, etc. And you wonder if they're going to make it to the point where they are questioning things like you and I are right now, including classification levels and so forth. But even more importantly, questioning things like Benny and Drake and others revealed and got raked over the coals for Trailblazer versus thinthread. And the multibillion dollar contractor program that was a total boondoggle, and the program roughly \$3 million program developed in house in the NSA and actually worked, but then you have to say, work to do what? And then you understand that one of the problems that others that blew the whistle had with that

program, even and Snowden Of course, blew the whistle. Big time on this was it they were going to use that program to surveil Americans To gather data on Americans and not just metadata. So it's a it's an extremely difficult community to send my youngsters off to to work. And yet, when they ask me, should I do this? I always say, yes. And do what you can to change it. You you've been in this seminar, you know, some of the things that are wrong, you've listened to people, I bring Intel people in to talk to them to whose character I know and whose integrity I'll say is probably the best word I know. And they'll come in and they'll talk to him about the NGA, the CIA, Booz Allen, whatever it might be.

Larry Wilkerson

But it's extremely difficult for me to sit there and say, You aren't going to have too much problem because you're so bright, you're so energetic, you're so dynamic and so forth. You are going to have problems. And one of the one of the things I'm waiting for some of these kids to be whistleblowers. I just know one or two of them are Gonna be because of the very thing you're asking the question about and other things, too. That devolve into the intelligence community. You know, we were talking about Libya. I got to tell you this. And November, the last the last year of Obama's second administration, in the fall, I want to say it was November the 10th. It might have been September, October. Anyway, we're in the Roosevelt Room in the White House. And I'm there with general Paul Eaton, then we're there ostensibly to be thanked for our work on the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, the nuclear agreement with Iran, and did now of course, and Obama is supposed to spend about 15 Minutes with Us and he winds up spending 45 Minutes with Us. And Kerry is Secretary of State is sitting right there with him. And I'll never forget the first words out of his mouth. And I went out there and I I had to look at this a little more deeply. I'd do some research. And I realized after doing the research, he was talking about Libya. I mean, Libya had seared his soul. He said, and this is a direct quote, there's a bias in this town toward war. Those are his exact words that he led off with addressing, generally not. And then he went into a disquisition on how, essentially he didn't know what to do about it. I mean, we saw he dispatched. Samantha Power to the United Nations got rid of her. I'm sure that was partly because she'd been a real influence on his decision to go do Libya as it were. I think he put Susan Rice a little bit more at arm's length. I'm damn sure he but john kerry a little more at arm's length. I think he was lecturing john kerry that day in that room with us, because Carrie at that time was, you might recall was advocating for US troops on the ground and Syria. So Obama was telling his secretary of state with no uncertainty whatsoever it his voice ain't gonna do that dude. So quit advocating for it. I mean, he was using that moment to do all of that. But the pain that he was expressing with regard to what he couldn't control, which was the warfare state, was very illustrative, very illuminating. I never thought I'd hear a president a sitting president united states actually admit that I'm part of this whole warp and woof, of course, is what you asked your question about specifically is the over classification of intelligence is the warping of intelligence underneath that classification where nobody can see it, and know that you're warping it to fit your policy needs. It's all this and more, that's distorting good decision making and thus distorting the way we go about our business in the world. And I think, as I've said, increasingly now, we're looking at an empire in decline. And not only in decline, but at any moment might go precipitously into that dark night.

Keagan Miller

Yeah, I, I am really freaked out about what's going to happen here in the next couple months, especially if Trump continues to press the like trying to deploy troops and stuff and like, I mean, yeah, it's we don't know, we don't know what's gonna happen in the next few months because stuff is so fully and everything.

Larry Wilkerson

Yeah, there. There are two huge crises. I don't I don't want to make light of the coronavirus. And I don't want to make light of the crisis in the streets right now. They are significant crises and they're indicative of the fact that we have not fixed we have not fixed real significant problems in this country. And we just keep putting them off and putting them up. But let me let me just see if I can't frighten you a little more. If you've missed Read Michel Claire's book all hell breaking loose the Pentagon's perspective on climate change. And you've looked at what President Obama did and what Trump has done since him with regard to backing out of arms control agreements, especially nuclear weapons, and developing new nuclear weapons and so forth. You know, we have two existential crises staring us in the face. The first most immediate one is the potential for a nuclear conflict. And the second one is the climate crisis. The second one being the earth saying, finally, in its inimitable style, you're gone dudes, like the dinosaurs, you're gone. We don't need you anymore. You're gone. We're not going to tolerate you anymore. You're gone. We're looking at by the time my students rise to their, you know, Middle Ages 5550 668 we're looking at a potential crisis of huge proportions. That might even be existential for the human race on this planet. And I see almost nothing. As Michael Claire points out the Pentagon is the only entity in the federal bureaucracy really energized to meet this crisis. I see no one else doing anything. In fact, I see people in Trump's White House, walking us backwards in this regard, not even recognizing it, denying it, like Senator Inhofe from Oklahoma bringing a snowball into the Senate and holding the snowball up and saying, oh, climate crisis, I don't see any climate crisis. And he's totally in arms of the fossil fuel industry. He's totally enamored of that industry because they pay for his reelection and reelection and reelection. So we're in a crisis situation now that is so much more than the coronavirus and the protests in the street right now, though they are serious and they could lead to more and they detract from my Being able to meet these bigger crises which are going to take international cooperation to meet because it doesn't matter if China stops its pollution or we stop our pollution or Brazil, Brazil stops its pollution or whatever. We've all got to cut back. And we've all looked at the skies in the last few weeks. And look at how clean and clear they look. This should be enough of a statement. anyone say that man, what we've been doing is polluting this planet. And we need to stop, we need to go to different sources of energy, we need to do different things with our infrastructure, we need to make it resilient. We need to make it repetitive and repeating. We need to make it so it's not the kind of infrastructure that contributes to our problem but helps us solve our problem or the minimum is neutral. There are so many things we need to do and I see no leadership to do it. And one of the ways the leadership getting back to your question, one of the ways the leadership hides a lot of this from the American people Through secrets, he he would be utterly amazed to know how many laws the Congress has passed in the last 20 years that they passed in total secrecy, and that they pass so that their execution and enforcement is secret.

Keagan Miller

Yeah, well, that's what bothered me so much when I'm doing the training, and then learning about the five x and then learning about just the entire apparatus that was basically being built at that time too. So stuff was changing all the time. But it's like that was what bothered me so much when I was in I'm like, Wait, how can we have this legal system that is entirely separate from the regular legal system. And then we just cover it all up and say, everybody has to be like read in to be able to even know about

Larry Wilkerson

it. And you know about you know about that at least a little bit. There are many You don't know anything about

it, like

Keagan Miller

I just that was one of my main reasons for like being against a lot of this beyond just the fact that nobody was ever asking the question of, is this effective? And are we doing anything with all these operations? You know, it was just effective. Like, we're gonna just cover everything up. And then when I sit there, and I try to talk to my friends, you know, who are in the community. And you know, this was during Manning, this was during Snowden. And I'm so grateful I had friends that I could sit there and talk to this stuff and like a real critical way. And I probably would have gone crazy if I didn't have that. So, um, but it's great. Like I was able that I was able to talk about those things and be like, what would we do if we were in that position? And we thought, like, the only thing we can do is just listen.

Larry Wilkerson

But I think I think that's increasingly the case. I'm just a book I'll recommend to you as Tom Mueller's 2019 book crisis of conscious the age of Whistle, whistle blowing in the age of fraud. And you read that book and I guarantee you as you complete each After you will throw it against the wall. It's just, it's so exasperating. It's everything from what Bechdel is doing and complicity with Department of Justice and Department of Energy and Department of Homeland Security at Hanford nuclear complex out on the Columbia River. That could be a sure noble at any moment, any moment could be 100 times worse than Chernobyl at any moment. And Bechdel. And do they have a revolving door do E and justice and homeland security just like we do at the Pentagon? for scientists who go out to the National Labs who go out to Hanford who go other places in the nuclear complex? We have not gotten rid of our nuclear waste. We've just filled up the last place to put nuclear waste and yet we're generating more and we're going to make more it's insanity what we're doing. And that's only one chapter of his book.

Keagan Miller

Well, I wanted to, I wanted to talk about the PR of the God and just what your thoughts are about why Like we've talked him on the pod before about, just the fact that we're not dependent on isn't reporting civilian deaths unless they are confirmed by another source. And they're only being they're only confirming them if they are asked, which I think is really messed up like this is happening a lot in Africa right now, particularly, but I just wanted to talk to you about, like, what the PR is like, when it comes to military operations and why? Why it seems like nobody cares right now.

Larry Wilkerson

They care but what they care for and about is protecting God.

Keagan Miller

Right, right. Well, and how do we how do how does anybody like punch, puncture that?

Larry Wilkerson

It's difficult, you have to do something like the cost of war project at Brown. You really have to get somebody in there who, in the in the case of the cost of war project, they have several women in We're just beavers at research. And you have to just do foil after foil, or a Freedom of Information, Information Act requests. You have to go to the investigative teams on the mainstream media and sometimes non mainstream media. You just have to go all over the place to try and put together the pieces and construct a better picture of whatever it is that you're trying to find the truth about, one of the places that I've seen some really brave people doing things is Syria, trying to find out about OPC W, for example, trying to find out if they really were manipulated by the United States to make it look like a shot of Assad used chemical weapons I'm quite confident that they were now I'm quite confident that they're whistleblowers are right when they come out and say, No, there was no definitive proof that he used any kind of chemical weapon. He may have used some low grade chlorine or whatever. These are

Keagan Miller

all looking with the weapons on And like you look at how they are, I, I probably shouldn't say a lot about this because I did this, but it's just like, there's all these red flags that when you look at the information, you can see Oh, wait a minute, like this story that they're telling us about this is not lining up with the facts.

Larry Wilkerson

But you're you're a professional and you know that you smell a rat instantly. Most Americans are not only not professionals, they're fat, dumb and stupid. And, I mean, you know, pulling something, I think the Gru and the NKVD and Putin and his FSB, I think they must chortle every night. Because we're such an easy target. You don't need very sophisticated bots to get us to do something. I mean, we are some of the dumbest people on the face of the earth. I'm convinced of that. And that's, that's just a statement of fact, it's not a statement of invective or hatred or, you know, it's a statement of fact, one third of us are so fat we can't get in the military and another third of us are so stupid. We can't pass The ASP net?

Danny Sjursen

Well, Larry, I have to tell you that I was speaking to my handler, Vladimir, earlier this morning. And he doesn't agree. You know, he's actually involved in all of this. And he's actually behind all these protests as well. You know, I should I shouldn't even joke about that, right? Because this is recorded, and I'm sure it'll be used at my trial, but it's really interesting what you what you had to say about the way that they must laugh, right, you know, the, the Gru, etc. Because, you know, as I just kind of briefly transition to some questions about what is happening now and what it really reflects. It's really become interesting

how in every phase of whatever monolithic enemy war lie, frankly, that we're, we're sort of facing whether it was the Cold War, which you know, had had real aspects and then overblown aspects or the war on terror and now this kind of war in the streets. It does seem that there's always some sort of broad brush pejorative, that can be, you know, thrown at the Centers. And it's it's been fascinating to watch you know Tulsi Gabbard become a Russian asset on a much lower level me consistently being called the same, as well as many others. And I can imagine some of the ad hominem that you face. But this is this does strike me as a very dangerous thing to brush off, you know, dissidents of any sort as an American are somehow foreign agents now.

Larry Wilkerson

It is it's extremely dangerous. It reminds me of McCarthy and his anti communism house on American Activities Committee and all that good stuff that got even a guy's hard headed is Harry Truman to make people take loyalty oath before they could serve in the United States government. But it's the politics of democracy to a certain extent if you want to get elected and the majority of your people have no real civil feeling. Only you want to make food and drink water and you know, have a job and that sort of thing and don't have any civic responsibility or sense of civic responsibility, then you know, your politician you want to get elected, you kind of kind of got to let Joe say what he says, and you got to do something that makes it look like you're taking actions, to remedy the situation that Joe is pointed out, even though if you grab Joe's hand, and you pulled it out of his inner code pocket where he just put the list of 200 communists who live and work at the State Department every day, you find a blank piece of paper. Now, why do we fall for that crap? Why do we go for that kind of stuff? We do. And it's not like it's the first time it's ever happened with Donald Trump. It's happened throughout our history.

Danny Sjursen

Absolutely. And, you know, a kind of a last point as as I was on mute, you know, I got a message. One of the organizations I belong to is about face veterans against the war. used to be called iraq veterans against the war. You know, and I don't speak for I don't speak for them in this instance. But, you know, I mean, they just, you know, they've put out a, you know, an encouragement to stand down, you know, to active duty troops in the National Guard called on to commit violence against the the peaceful protesters and, you know, a one of the members, one of the leaders share, you know, an email from another veteran that said, that mate that were terrorists because of it, and they sent our link, you know, to the Department of Justice, and of course, nothing will probably come a bit but it's it speaks to exactly what you're talking about that you know, it will not save you right that you're an organization of hundreds of combat veterans, that won't save you if you go against the narrative. very frightening.

Larry Wilkerson

Same with the people in Washington DC last night, who opened their doors and let the protesters who were being shot with rubber bullets and beaten by the police into their homes. I mean, they're aiding and abetting terrorists now.

Danny Sjursen

Very dangerous words. Terrorists just like the communists was so, alright, so let me kind of transition into that, you know, like I said, we weren't gonna make this all about what's happening now. But you

know, we would be remiss if we didn't get someone of your caliber, his take on what the goings on. And we've touched on it a little, but again, for everyone, we're recording this on the afternoon of to June 2020. So we're about a week into the ongoing protests. And, you know, like I mentioned already, frankly, I'm going to give you mostly just the space to comment on what you find most relevant. But my one prompt is, you know, it involves the tweets of the commander in chief because apparently that's, you know, sort of how we do leadership now and well, you know, the tweets, you know, calling for a counter maga rally, which struck me as a degree, it's almost like vigilante, deputize ation. tweets about the unlimited power of the military. I thought that was a very dangerous word unlimited. Talking about how the governor or the mayor in Minneapolis in Minnesota was, you know, not living up to MacArthur and patent Of course without any knowledge For the bonus March and then of course, when the looting sharts starts, the shooting starts, which was a, you know, rip from the, from the mouth of you know, segregationist mayors. So from my own soda straw, admittedly, aperture, it seems to me that he's mischaracterizing many, if not most, really, most of the protesters, at least in my experience, which I try to limit it to, but I find his daily comments, you know, whatever one thinks of looting fires, violence and so on whatever you think of that, you know, it seems that his comments are inflammatory and frightening. You know, I'd be lying if I said that. I'm not selfishly a little scared out there in those streets where, you know, incidentally, I'll likely be later today again, and, you know, the leadership by tweet may only increase some of that dangerous. So that's a big prompt, and I put my colors out there. But for starters, maybe you could, you know, just give us your take on the President's role or any president's role and what you think of the potential and actual presence of troops in the streets and This month

Larry Wilkerson

I've been getting emails all day long and most of yesterday to from people in Los Angeles, New York, Atlanta, Washington, DC and elsewhere who have been asking me questions like, and these are sane and sober people. They're academics, they're scholars, they're military veterans. They're people I've met in various places, like dinners in the state department where we would have a CEO of American Express come in or president of the University of Texas or maybe some other corporate leader or whatever. And they're asking me the same question, basically, what's going on Larry, tell me, this is not what it looks like. Tell me that we're not about to see the hundred first airborne or the 82nd airborne or the fourth mech or, or the 10th mountain in the streets of America. Tell me that one of them said today, what I just read is is not really the reality. I said, What did you just read? And he said, I'll send it to you. And he sent me a transcript of Trump's conversation with how he got it. I don't know, with the governor's, and it was like you were just saying only it was very, very specific. And it was you got to crack down. If you can't crack down, I'll crack down for you. You want the active military just call me I'll soon the 82nd airborne, they will descend on your city, etc, etc. It was it was as if he were trying to first cow the governors second intimidate them. And third, okay, if you want anything ever again from Washington, you better just respond and you better respond positively. Either you call out your national guard in mass and you take care of your problems, or I'll send in the military. I mean, that's the way the conversation went. So I echo everything you just said and say, mine and all the people who've been emailing me from across the country and incidentally from overseas to ask me things like when Canadian did this morning? What the hell is wrong with America? I have the same concern you do have strong concern about the election in November. I think we're setting the scene right now. To abrogate that election to either declare a national emergency and say you can't have the election because of the

emergency based on a resurgence of the virus or even worse rights than we're having right now that are more or less egged on and exacerbated by actions in the White House.

Larry Wilkerson

I see a man who I think clearly understands Finally, that his base is probably not going to be enough that he's probably going to lose in November. That's the first thing. Secondly, I see a man who wants to cling to power. come hell or high water. And then thirdly, I see a man and I worse worse around him, I see arrayed people who would help him do this, who will cling to power through any means he can find to do it. And I also see, and this is sort of counter to that, but it goes right along with it in terms of creating concern. I also see people like Esper and pompeyo, who believe that they are losing the opportunity to do the things they want to do Esper to mount a genuine cold war with China and pompeyo to in the regime, the theocratic regime in Tehran. Now they both want that. And the both, both of them won't what the other one wants, but those are the priorities for those two men. And I see them seeing Trump losing in November and therefore, taking frantic actions to try and either bring about their policy objectives with regard to Iran and China before he leaves or doing something even more on turd untoward and ensuring that those policy objectives can't be reversed by an incoming administration. Like for example, returning to the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action with Iran on pay was doing an emissary Brian hook are doing everything they can right now, to ensure that the new president, whomever my baby's hands are tied, and that they can't do anything to lock them into the same regime change maximum pressure campaign that they're in right now. So those two sets of forces Trump wanting to cling to power, they're wanting to get things done, that are not necessarily in our national interest before he loses power. They could collide in and of themselves, but together they are torturous and dangerous developments in our now very, very comparable democracy in my view, and this man has brought to fruition and brought to a an apple j if you will The things that I saw really start with a vengeance post 911. But they had been going on for some time. I mean, arguably, they've been going on in a recognizable way since about 1972. And as far as the disparity of wealth in this country is concerned, it was given a major kick by Bill Clinton, bob rubin, Larry Summers and all those gangsters that Clinton and I have to say to Obama continued in office, brought to the White House and brought to the administration of the American economy and the American financial situation. We're in dire straits right now, because of those people.

Danny Sjursen

You know, I'm not, I shouldn't have to say this, but whereas I don't feel comfortable passing judgment on every single thing. That's done. Because I think it's very complicated. You know, personally, I'm sort of anti looting that says, You mentioned larry summers and the other gangsters. And it is fascinating, you know, what sort of looting is acceptable when it's of the public Treasury and and pension funds? And, and I thought what you mentioned about the election is interesting because, you know, we held an election, you know, correct me if I'm wrong in the midst of a civil war that killed more Americans than essentially, you know, almost all our other wars combined. And, and part of the reason Lincoln wins, and in the middle of the Great Depression, it was horrible. Absolutely, yep. And so it would be interesting if this was the moment right, that that Trump decided, you know, this is too much, you know, when you really look when you when you take a breath and and look at it empirically, you know, and at scale so far, I mean, this pales in comparison, so, you know, even a single Riot Newark in 1967, right in

terms of deaths so far, which was a similar span of about four days, and so it's really disturbing. I will say that, you know, one of the reasons like and gets a lot of scholars, you know, say is, you know, the vote of the soldiers in the field, you know, in the army, the baton,

the other armies, and,

Danny Sjursen

you know, I can't speak for all the soldiers, but I'm seeing anecdotally a lot of rumblings of dissent even in the act of force, because, of course, my students are all out there. And, you know, a lot of peers, but, you know, Henry found and reviewed something that you'd written on police militarization. And so whereas, so far, you and I, and my question, spoke to, you know, active duty troops in the streets to some extent, federalized National Guard. I'm going to turn it over to Henry for I think, you know, a key discussion on the Empire coming home in a very real way to local community policing. Okay.

Chris 'Henri' Henrikson

So we're all watching and observing the fallout from The senseless murder George Floyd, although his death is only the most recent in years of systemic police violence towards black Americans, police violence kills around 1100 people a year with a hugely disproportionate number of them being African Americans. So Larry, I'm wondering what what are your thoughts in this current moment about the excruciating Lee heavy handed militarized police response to the protests of George Floyd's death It seems that the the garrison state of America is definitely on full full display to include a military police presence I saw in in photos and other places this morning that there are a couple different places where you can see uniformed troops I assume their national guard and Bs and on their their riot shield says military police, as if irony and over militarization were a literal line. Military Police soldiers are standing on it right now. And for advocates of peace and militarism, where do you think the focus should be when it comes to the militarizing our police forces and creating that concrete separation between war fighters and crime fighters? As the constitution project that you worked on characterized it?

Larry Wilkerson

Yeah, I'm I come at this from two perspectives. My son in law is a 20 year veteran of the McHenry County police force. So I have a real insight into that aspect of policing. My son in law is also a person who believes in and practices what he believes community policing, that is to say he's the kind of person who goes up to a 16 year old who's selling Oxycontin out of the trunk of his car at a high school in Damascus, Maryland, and instead of arresting that 16 year old gives him a riot act reading, if you will. And then takes him home to his mom and dad and gives them a little bit of a ride act reading and says, This is what I caught your boy doing. He could be a felon right now. I am not going to arrest him, I'm gonna give you a chance to put him on the street and they're going to give you a chance young man to resurrect your life. That's a kind of policeman my son in law. He laments the fact that we have turned the police forces in America into what we have, in many instances. And the constitution project demonstrated to me what that is. We did things like 35 of the leading police chiefs in America, Los Angeles, Chicago, Houston, Dallas and so forth. come in and talk to us with the constitution project. In

addition to having sitting judges and having ACLU members and so forth. We had a really eclectic team come in and brief us on What was happening to law enforcement as the military sold almost \$5 billion worth of equipment to them?

Larry Wilkerson

Oh, wow, you sold that to them? why in the hell did you sell that to them? At the same time, I had an experience with my own university where they sent us 400 m sixteenths and our president at the time, they really essentially said send these back to the Pentagon. What the hell do we need with him? 16th and we're married and what the hell does women marry police force need with them. This was all going on. We were listening to it. We were listening to the police chiefs tell us they didn't want this, it was militarizing their law enforcement elements. That in most cases, they had this community policing concept and idea to and this weaponry and all that it represented was corruptive of this kind of philosophy. We were told about the number of SWAT teams in cities like Chicago and Los Angeles that had gone into the wrong place that had killed people. In that wrong place that had done it based strictly on a snitches information that the snitch was probably getting even with the person or people who lived in that house, that sometimes there was absolutely no connection with even what the snitch said about the people that had broken in and in some cases, as I said, injured or killed some off, that there were millions of dollars being paid out underneath the table by mayors and governors to accommodate lawsuits that otherwise would have been fully condemned natori of their police forces. So in order to keep those losses from coming to fruition, and publicity to be gained from them, they paid off under the table, the people whom they had wrongfully arrested or in some cases, as I indicated, killed, in some cases, it was babies that they feel we're listening to all these horror stories about law enforcement all across America and we're asking questions like, what can we do to help you? And one of the first responses was stop. We don't need em wraps. We do not need armored vehicles in general, we do not need machine guns. We do not need all this stuff that makes us look like the warriors from Star Wars. We do not need this kind of crap. And then, of course, our response was always Why do you take it? Well, you know, we're gonna have it and then you get all kinds of answers from them. But it is a problem. It is a problem we created in a problem that we can fix. Not quickly because we spent so much of that equipment out there and we also sent training. And another thing that's happening and this is going to my son in law's an example of this. I won't say any names or anything. But we're sending military veterans out of Iraq and Afghanistan to police forces and in some cases, That's good. In many cases, I'll say I want to say it's good. But in other cases, it's not so good. Because military training and law enforcement training or to entire should be two entirely different modes of training. I saw this in Iraq, when we tried to use the Spanish heavy police gardeia Seville, and we tried to use the Italian heavy police to kind of in the enemy to help us interact train Iraqi police forces. And what we got was we got just another military force instead of a police force. If that's what you want, that's fine, go ahead and do it. But you shouldn't be doing that in a country like America. You just are going to pay for that if you create a heavy police force that is really more military than it is law enforcement. And you give it to philosophy that heavy police forces are you and usually given shoot first and ask questions later, much the way the military operates. So yes, long story short is What a problem this is. And I still see that it's been made even worse by reversing the Trump administration reverse the movement backwards if president obama convinced that some of this just been telling you is the case, committed to that he began to draw back on the military equipment go going to civil law enforcement. Trump came in and re

upped the ante on it. And so now we have the same problem times two or three being exacerbated all across the country. And let me add one other thing too. And I don't think my son in law would be too angry with me for saying

Larry Wilkerson

the caliber of people that go into the police force into law enforcement in general is fairly hot. But there are some people who go into law enforcement because they are the kind of people who are looking for an opportunity like that officer demonstrated recently with fully They're looking for the opportunity to use their power, in some cases to use their power to hurt or the people. If you don't weed those people, it's just like, you know this, if you don't weed those people out whether they're in a squatter platoon or a military law enforcement compliment or a civilian law enforcement compliment, then you're guilty too. If you don't take action against these people, if you you know, pay the millions of dollars of fees that you have to pay to avoid going to court and so forth, and just cover it up. Just hide it and keep that person on the force. You're going to have these kinds of incidents. And the more you build that up, the more people like that you keep on the force, the more potential you have for catastrophic failure in the future. And that's what we've done. There needs to be a cleaning of the house, if you will, and a lot of police departments and a lot of law enforcement entities, and the cleaning needs to be towards the community policing philosophy and concept and not Towards the military concept.

Danny Sjurson

Yeah, I think that that's so important, because whereas to the extent that this ever exists, you know, I would say something close to a consensus of scholarship, you know, has demonstrated the value of community over militarized policing. And yet it seems the policy never whether it's, you know, foreign policy or law enforcement policy never really seems to catch up, or be in line with the prevailing scholarship, you know, and we don't have a president who reads Of course, and, and we don't have underlings who read the right thing. So even if they were valedictorian at West Point, you know, in the case of Pompeo. You know, as we sort of wrap up, looking at the time it's interesting, you mentioned your son in law and, you know, I think that it's important that you do because that just like we're called anti American or you know, unpatriotic when we are go against these wars. You know, I've found myself and thousands of others, of course, who, you know, we're told we hate all cops, you know, just for being at a peaceful protest or criticizing nice things. And, you know, and I come from a family of cops and firefighters, you know, I mean, and a neighborhood full of them. And my, you know, I have four uncles that I, you know, lived with largely on the, you know, especially on the weekends, my whole life and, you know, two of them were cops and then firemen and two of them, you know, I guess we're some version of low level criminal right ended up dying of drug overdoses and run ins with the law. And, and there are good and they're bad cops, and everyone knows the platitude, but we're really fighting the system. And I saw that system as we transition to the Kagan asked in the last question in Kansas City in a anecdotal way when, you know, khaki clad police officers in full riot gear banging on their shields eventually, in rhythm to scare us. You know, in broad daylight had drones overhead and sniper For armed Overwatch, whatever you want to call them teams on the rooftops behind them. And you know, I mentioned in my column today that, you know, I didn't always have that kind of, you know, Overwatch for patrols against the very real violent Taliban in practice 365 365 days in Kandahar province. So, to me that that's that speaks, though not just to the militarization of the police, but in our

final transition to some of the aspects in terms of technology, mercenaries, machines, and militias, proxy militias that have characterized sort of a new you know, what Russell widely called the same as book American way of war. And it does seem that there's there's something afoot, and it's been there for a while and I can't help but wonder what the pandemic is going to do it. And so, I'm gonna let Keagan close out with the last question, kind of on that issue.

Keagan Miller

Thank you for bringing up the cop thing. I, before I started working with veterans, I actually thought about being pleased officer. So I went to one of those orientation movie videos, presentation, and there was a lot of other veterans there. And I thought it was really interesting, but there was definitely some kids who were like, Oh, can I use my own gun? And like, Can I can't wait to do X, Y, and Z. And it was just, it was really disappointing. And like, Oh, these are the people who actually become bullies. But I wanted to talk about I know that you commented on Danny's article on the social distancing way of war, and we're talking a lot about we you and I talked earlier about the fact that we've been moving from this heavy mobilization, you know, Cold War type thinking into our new way of war. Which is drones and Special Forces. And so we were just kind of wondering what your thoughts are on the move in that direction. And then also what we can do, as you know, people who are out of the community and civilian citizens, what we can do to help keep the Pentagon accountable when the rest of our wars are just going to go unseen by most Americans.

Larry Wilkerson

That's an excellent question. You know, My son is a lieutenant colonel in the Air Force, and he's a Reaper guy. And I watched my son's personality, which is quite vicious. And he he's a guy who just has got a joke for everything. I've watched him deteriorate. If that's the right word. It probably isn't. I've watched him change evolve, as he goes through iteration after iteration Have use of the Reaper. And he's he's a squadron head now, so he gets to see it full scale. And I've watched also how when they switch the squadrons mission for a time from signature strikes or similar similar activities when they switched it to close air support in Afghanistan as I recall, he can't talk about it much. Of course. It was a whole different person I was looking at the morale was completely different because he was actually using the lingering time of the Reaper, and the kinetic capabilities of the Reaper to support Marines and special forces on the ground in Afghanistan. And so as a different thing it was it was more or less the kind of war that we're more accustomed to the kind of war that we see. All wars dishonorable in my view, but the kind of war that we see is honorable You know, the guy's got a gun, I've got a gun when I was gonna die, not this kind of stuff, I'm gonna kill you from 10,000 miles away. This is a case of lingering over a foxhole or over a village or whatever in Afghanistan. And when a special forces team or marine squad got in trouble, they helped them with close air support. And of course, the troops on the ground loved it because the drone could linger. It was much more accurate. It didn't roar in and roar off like an F 16 or whatever. And so I I noticed a change in my son's morale when the mission shifted to that. Your question though, is, I think one of the questions of the future. I don't see that we're here's another thing my son said if it weren't for the bomber mafia and the fighter mafia in the Air Force, everything would be our PVS. Everything would be remotely piloted vehicles. It doesn't make any sense to risk the pilots life when the rpv can do the job as well or in many cases. is better than a human. We've taken an F 18 equivalent, fully loaded with ordnance off a carrier, flown it to a target struck the

target got 99% hit and brought the plane back and landed on the carrier again with no pilot in the loop. So my son's probably right. If it weren't for the Mafia's in the service, we would be doing that all together now. But then your question is even more profound. What are we doing? Are we consigning killing people for the state to artificial intelligence? Because that's ultimately what we'll do. What are the ethics of this? What are the ramifications of this for the warrior? What are the ramifications of it for the civil society the warrior is fighting for? Are their warriors anymore? Is it all artificial intelligence? Is it all done over computers? Is it all cyber warfare? These are huge questions. I'm not going to to answer them, I'm not even going to even be around to see the answers, probably. But the generations I'm teaching right now, and you are probably, and I, you know, for one, maybe it's just a generational gap, but I don't envy you, your TAs.

Keagan Miller

Thank you. I just I look at like, I like to look at things through the lens of neoliberalism, and just how, you know, we've seen the effects of that on our economy. We're seeing it right now. And we're seeing the backlash. But I've been thinking about it from the military industrial complex perspective about the fact that we've been continuing operations. And we look at this pattern of growth. And then Henry and I have talked about this so many times about the how our measures of effectiveness are not lining up with our measures of performance. Like we keep looking at performance measures, and we say, look at all the stuff that we did, isn't as good but there's no real substance. behind it, there's no real policy and objective with it, other than continuing. And I think about that a lot in the economic standpoint of the way that neoliberalism works, where it's give all the money to the rich people, and we'll see that it'll come down eventually, but it never does. And that's unlike so I feel like that mentality has it has really pervaded the entire structure of the military industrial complex, and so that we think about it in that same manner of, well, if we just keep doing this, it's going to work eventually. And the fact that we're pulling it now into autonomous vehicles, and increasing our Special Forces Command numbers on I just I don't see any way for regular people to like, that's been my big thing since I got out. I'm trying to, you know, let people know what's going on. Because a lot of the stuff that I was a part of wasn't really talked about at the time, like now everybody knows about Syria. Yemen and Somalia, but they didn't know shit about that 10 years ago. Yeah. And so I feel like, I feel like there's there's there has to be a way for us to just constantly push and push on this and just keep trying to make people aware that look at what's being done in your name. And here's how there are things that we can do to make it stop.

Larry Wilkerson

I agree with you. I sometimes when I teach covert operations as a part of the national security decision making I sometimes let my students look at some of the stuff that comes from the National Security archives at the George Washington University, which is the real government stuff, is the memoranda of record. It's the memoranda of conversation and so forth. It's where Nixon actually said to the director of the CIA, make the Chilean economy scream, and goes about doing it. And then I look at them in pause for a second and I say, and what is your government doing today? They because of classification, you will know anything about for 25 years? Do you think they've stopped? Do you think they've ceased efforts and then I tell them about the 2002 attempt to overthrow Hugo Chavez in Caracas in Venezuela that occurred during my administration? What else is going on? I asked them, because your question is to the point it is going on, and it is going on in the name of the American people and it is going on with

your taxpayer dollars, and in most cases, it is going on contrary to the real interest of your country. I don't know what we do about it. I I don't that scares me to death. covert operations, in a sense are the worst thing we've developed since World War Two. They're out of control. And they're run by people who, unlike the original CIA guys, even Allen Dulles and some of those other Northeastern pedal heads, who gave from Princeton, Harvard and elsewhere, they don't even have their ethics such as they were, they don't even have their skills and competence, which is why we haven't pulled off a successful covert operation. That is to say, one that actually got rid of somebody we don't like, in a long, long time, but we have in the process, killed, harmed, maimed and hurt a lot of people and a lot of economies.

Danny Sjursen

Absolutely. And you're so right to connect the nexus of economics, militarism and intelligence. And you know, you said you said you don't you know, you don't you don't wish the challenge that we have upon our generation and and that's that's a tough that's a tough thing. And there there are a lot of reasons for concern and and I have to fight my dark moments and I'm just old enough now that you know, I have students West Point, graduate. are out in the force. And, and I used to say that I wanted to vomit in the trash bin whenever I thought about them going to the same wars that I fought and of course they did. And so one take and there have been phases in my life where I say all you know, everything's, everything's over, you know, nothing good is gonna come in this world and and there's real reason for that I mean, I'm not for you know, naive optimism, but I will say that we do just keep passing this torch of challenge and what I call patriotic descent I'm sure I didn't coin it. And Larry, you know, you're 75 years old. I think he said and, and you've done your part and one of the things you've done the best I think, and even though I think you'd agree with me that just having been military doesn't, it's not healthy for that to be the thing that lends us our credibility. But you know, I mean, they still attack you, I'm sure as they attack all of us, but when you give If my math is correct, 45 years of your life in government service, you know, it does make it just a little harder to say this person is anti American. And, you know, we're thankful. And I know millions of people are thankful for your voice. And I just hope that we're carrying on some of that mantle. And I know that it's gonna be time soon enough. And it already is where we're passing that same torch to to a younger group. And if if the police brutality and militarization issues was getting folks in the streets, because clearly, as we both agree without a draft, we have been having a lot of trouble with that over anti war stuff, then, then so be it and let's try to connect those issues and I just want to thank you one more time for coming on and and being that connective tissue always between domestic and international and social and political because it's rare. It's profound, and and I'm glad that some Mainstream media is again reaching out to you because your voice is so great. So thank you for coming on and if and if you have anything cooking or any place you'd like to kind of direct listeners, just please do let us know before you go.

Larry Wilkerson

Well, thank you. I was only campus at women marry right before the coronavirus drove us away and saw a bumper sticker and I love the bumper sticker. It said simply, the scent is the highest form of patriotism. I think that's the theme of Tom Mueller's book crisis of conscience too. And the theme that motivates and energizes a lot of the whistleblowers that he talks about from everything, as I indicated in the nuclear community to the warfare community to the military industrial complex. whistleblowers, for

example, at Lockheed Martin, on the F 35 program and so forth. These are real patriots. I'm not tooting my own horn. These are real patriots and I look at you and your gang and others like you as the same kind. I hosted Edward Snowden video teleconference at the College of William and Mary and I did it for essentially one reason because I thought to turn it off and to not listen to this young man and hear what he had to say was un-American.

Danny Sjursen

Totally agree and it's it's awesome that you were willing to open up to that voice and, and so many others because free thinking is is really a dying art. And Larry, just want to thank you one more time for being on and I agree that in moments of crisis, especially dissent is the highest form of patriotism and and you're not going to toot your own horn, but I will you've you've done more than your part and more often than probably a lot of folks and so we're just really honored came on and hope we can do it again soon.

Larry Wilkerson

Thank you and keep up the good work and stay healthy so much. All of you.

Danny Sjursen

Thanks later you too, and we'll talk soon. Take care.