



CARLISLE SCHOLAR, INTERNATIONAL FELLOW—THE VIEW FROM BAHRAIN

By Khaled Al Khalifa and Ron Granieri August 25, 2020
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Ron Granieri: Welcome to A Better Peace the War Room podcast. I'm **Ron Granieri** Professor of History at the Department of National Security and Strategy at the U.S. Army War College and Podcast Editor of the War Room. It's a pleasure to have you with us. Despite the conclusion that many may draw from its name, students at the United States Army War College come from many places other than the Army, and also, many places other than the United States. Each year several dozen International Fellows travel to Carlisle from allied nations to live and work as full-time students in residential program. A select few of those students also participate in the Carlisle Scholars Program which integrates the seminar experience of traditional professional military education with the autonomy of a self-directed fellowship. Carlisle Scholars who include both United States and International Fellows form a single seminar to complete approximately ten weeks of intense coursework and then shift focus to research, writing and advising senior leaders through a combination of individual, team and faculty-coordinated work. The essence of the Carlisle Scholars Program is competitive analysis of strategic challenges, contribution to broad strategic dialogue among national security leaders and stakeholders about problems and opportunities of national security. Our guest today can talk about both of those experiences as an International Fellow and as a Carlisle Scholar. **Lieutenant Colonel Khaled Al Khalifa** of the Bahrain Defence Force is with us today. He is a graduate of the Royal Military Academy of Sandhurst in the UK. His last assignment was Battalion Commander in the Bahraini Defence Forces' Royal Guard and Lieutenant Colonel Al Khalifa is an International Fellow in the class of 2020 at the Army War College. We are pleased to welcome you to A Better Peace, Lieutenant Colonel Khaled Al Khalifa.

Khalid Al Khalifa: Ron, thank you for having me.

RG: So, your year as a student at the War College is coming to an end. What are your initial feelings or impressions about how it has gone?

KAK: I think this has been an incredibly rewarding year. It's been academically demanding but very fruitful especially that we are here at the end. I had the opportunity to meet and learn from incredible people from all over the world, share experiences with them. I was able to make great friendships along the way. I can say that the atmosphere is very welcoming, was and still is, very hospitable as well. I cannot say enough good things about the International Fellows Office and

their staff. The tremendous effort that they made to make our transition from home country to Carlisle very seamless. They exposed us to several programs including a field studies program which is very interesting and insightful as well. And on the academic side, I was very fortunate to enroll in this unique and very talented seminar which became the core of my time here and the prominent source of what I learned throughout the year. I am sure as the year fades away into the past, I'll have more reflections about the time I spent here but now and since I'm doing this podcast at the end of the academic year, I can say that my experience from beginning to end is that I am much more prepared and confident in the knowledge that I acquired to navigate through the challenges in my professional career in the future.

RG: Outstanding. So, when you were selected to come to Carlisle, come to the War College, were you able to speak to other Bahraini officers who had come before you to give you a sense of what to expect?

KAK: I have but it was a very brief transition unfortunately. If I had to do it again, I would probably have dug in a little bit more about the opportunities that are available at the Army War College because I do think there are lots of options that can suit international students' objectives and goals for this particular year to further their career when they get back home.

RG: And one of those of course is the Carlisle Scholars. How did you end up part of the Carlisle Scholars Program?

KAK: When we first arrived, there was a month of orientation I would call it. Our orientation phase that gave us the opportunity to acclimatize to the United States and gave us the opportunity to start our exposure to the curriculum itself in addition to some of the field studies that the IF, International Fellows Office had gotten us to go through. We had a briefing by Colonel Perez and he provided us an overview, a brief about what the Carlisle Scholars is about and what it entails and he offered the, or opened the door for international students to apply if they thought that it was the right course for them or the right structure they would have liked to go for.

RG: Right.

KAK: And that intrigued me in the beginning, but I was not completely sold on the idea. And I think that if I'd had more information about this particular program before coming to the Army War College, I would have made my decision to go for it before I even came here, knowing what I know now. And I received an email, an invitation from Dr. Hill when he was at the Army War College at the time and he invited me to have a look at the course and consider it and I did, and I had an interview with Colonel Perez, and we took it from there and I applied. And once I was selected, I was enrolled, and I got into the seminar and things started happening from there and I'm very happy that I made that decision.

RG: Well good, and for those in the audience who are familiar with the War College but not Carlisle Scholars, or are familiar with neither, I guess the short way to put it is in the typical seminar, the students go through the core curriculum, we have twenty-four seminars, the students go through the core curriculum at the same pace but the Carlisle Scholars, they go through the core curriculum much more rapidly and in a much more concentrated way which means a lot

more work up front. And then they move on, as I said in the introduction, to other research projects team and individual. So, what part of the core curriculum did you enjoy the most as a Carlisle Scholar.

KAK: I'm going to answer your question, I just want to talk real quick about how I thought it was a little bit different.

RG: Sure.

KAK: I want to first start by confirming how grateful I am to have made the decision and was welcomed to enroll in this particular program because it took me out of my comfort zone. It put me in an environment that was pretty competitive, and this was due to the talented individuals within the seminar, students and faculty. I think these variables, they created an atmosphere that kept me on my toes for the better part of the first year and this was me trying to keep pace and, in some cases, catch up with my colleagues. I think I only started to acclimatize to that particular program, say it took me about two months, two or three months, going through the condensed curriculum which you just explained.

RG: Right.

KAK: The interactions between the students was extremely high, on a high level. It demanded interjections or positions to be nothing less, so you had to be thoughtful in every single position that you were going to posit or make. But as far as workload, I think it was manageable. Even though it was condensed, it was manageable. It can become overwhelming if not managed carefully. For the standard Army War College curriculum, assignments like the SRP, the student research project or the examinations like the oral comprehensive exams are big milestones that the students prepare for and have time to arrange their work in a structured format to meet those particular requirements. For the Carlisle Scholars Program, you would have those two milestones in addition to two more integrated research projects which are about SRP size and those could be done individually or by group and all of this was also in addition to student-driven committee work which included both written and oral requirements for each topic. That said, the program did allow students more time for research and I think that's kind of the big difference which really, it gives the student control to tailor the education experience to what the student really wants. And it takes place of elective requirements as well, meaning the requirement for scholars is only one elective although you can opt for more if you feel that you have time. One elective is the requirement, but you do have a lot more time to research and develop projects that you have.

RG: What were the subjects of your IRPs? I don't want to interrupt but I'm curious.

KAK: Right. I've done three IRPs during the program. The first one was a large project that I've done with four other colleagues and that was about artificial intelligence and machine learning in multi-domain operations where we looked at visions and pitfalls and we discussed the desirable machine-enhanced future army and what would it look like and highlight possible pitfalls that apply to artificial intelligence and machine learning in military operations. A second IRP which I did with one other colleague—we argued for the need for a vision which incorporates innovation and experimentation as well as a doctrine. We called it “A Living Doctrine” which is essentially,

it's about a vision for a doctrine that can adapt to the context of technologically dominated environments that we are currently experiencing and will experience more complexity of in the future. The final IRP was one I've done individually. It was an assessment of Iran in light of the United Nations Embargo ending in October and the U.S. elections coming up in November. So, these are the three IRPs that I have done in addition to the SRP which was also another big, big project.

RG: Right. So, you came to Carlisle ready to work? Clearly. And would you say that level of workload, the three IRPs in addition to your SRP, was that typical of the members of your Carlisle Scholars seminar?

KAK: I think it was. Because what varies was the size of the project. Some of the projects that some of my colleagues have undertaken are bigger, some of them are probably the same size as far as work load, and I think that was the determining factor of whether you went for two or three. But the faculty always advocated for hey, if you want to go for something and if you feel that there is a particular topic that you are interested in finding out more about or possibly even influencing as far as stakeholders go, go for it. And they helped us out with finding the right resources to do that.

RG: That's fantastic. Well, I don't want to put you on the spot but since you mentioned that one of your projects was about Iran and American politics, do you feel that your experience as an officer in the Bahraini Defence Force gave you a different perspective on Iran than you were getting from your American colleagues or did you feel that those perspectives meshed?

KAK: Not necessarily. I think there is a common understanding as far as how Iran is behaving in the region. The facts are facts. Recently Iran has been very belligerent and malign in the region and this particular pattern has a long history. It's just a matter of unpacking that pattern and trying to put it in the context of the approaches that are required to find a solution towards stability in the region. This might be a place of debate but most of it is, or I would say all of it really, as far as the experience I had in my seminar, was very healthy and insightful and I think just to answer your question, there is a lot of common ground between understanding between myself and other colleagues.

RG: It is an interesting challenge to come to the War College as an officer in an allied military. You've had experiences with American officers before. You've had experiences in the United States before and you studied at Sandhurst so you've had a variety of these kinds of experiences. How does—and Bahrain occupies both literally and figuratively a very interesting place in American security policy being there in the Gulf and being between two very large factors, the Saudis on one side and the Iranians on the other—how was the interaction and the discussion among International Fellows about—I think of this as the triangular relationship, between International Fellows and the United States and International Fellows and each other. How would you characterize those kinds of interactions and conversations?

KAK: In the context of us within the Army War College?

RG: Yeah. In the College and just how it goes from there. Because the advantage of everybody coming in with common military experience means you have sort of a grammar for understanding lots of common problems, but I am curious about how you International Fellows come from all over the place and how you work together.

KAK: So, I did have a lot of opportunities to discuss some of these issues with my international colleagues as well. One thing I'd like to mention about possible candidates for the Carlisle Scholars program is that our time as Carlisle Scholars staggered with colleagues and friends from other seminars. The requirements and the do-outs had different schedules which kind of made it difficult to commit to social activities that they were doing. And that said, there were opportunities there but not as much as a person that would go through the regular course as far as their schedules. To answer your question: the International Fellows have a variety of perspectives. Especially when we are talking about the Middle East. It's very complex. The wave of the Arab Spring, the series of interventions from the United States, the economy kind of makes it, I would say, a melting pot of variables that are very, very hard to understand. And that kind of comes out in the conversation, that complexity where I don't think there is—you wouldn't come out of a conversation completely satisfied but you'd come out with an understanding of various positions. And there is a lot of onus on, as far as perception, there is a lot of onus on the U.S. in terms of how it asserts itself—I wouldn't use that word—but how it influences the environment or shapes the environment. So, I think the United States is a stakeholder in the region. The perception from a lot of the different international stakeholders that are represented here is that there is an onus on the U.S. to help instability, which it is doing. Now, the differences are very nuanced as far as, well, it should have done this, or it should have done that. That is where the debate kind of goes. The big themes are, when we are talking about say, stability in the region, everybody is in agreement about that. Everybody wants to be part of a coalition or a partnership that tries to achieve that, but I always go back to the idea of before achieving that we need to get to understanding, and if I do not understand that certain actors or certain variables within that environment are not what they seem, then understanding is lacking and we need to go back to studying the issue once more, once again.

RG: Right. To think about this a little more broadly too. You've had multiple experiences with professional military education starting from Sandhurst and am I correct, you were at Command General Staff College?

KAK: Yes.

RG: You were, and then here at Carlisle at the War College. How do you feel your experiences with military education have shaped your development as an officer?

KAK: I think I've gained a lot of ideas and concepts, methods that I learned here, and they certainly influenced my interactions back home. And I can say the same thing about my experience here in the Army War College that it's going to do the same thing. One of the questions that we were asked in the seminar in the probably first or second day we were there: what are your goals? What do you want to achieve out of this? What do you want to get out of your experience as Carlisle Scholars? And my answer to that was I want to prepare for the next five to six years. And I have had that. I've got that. When I experienced CGSC, when I experienced the Maneuver Captains Career Course, or even AOBC back when I was in Kentucky, Fort Knox. I feel like the Army War College—the point I'm at right now—has done that for me. That particular goal that I had for myself has been achieved and will definitely influence the way I approach challenges when I get back home.

RG: Right. Even though I know that in the times that we are in right now, we spoke off mic before we started about the transition that it takes to go home in the age of coronavirus. When you are back in Bahrain, when you are ready to report back to duty, what will you be doing in Bahrain?

KAK: The first thing that I will do as soon as I get back, of course I will have to go through the fourteen-day quarantine period, but right after that, I will be conducting a series of meetings and those meetings are going to determine my career path for the future. The system that we are part of is not necessarily similar to say our colleagues from the U.S. side and I think this is shared between me and quite a few other international officers as well. We go back to a board and that particular board will cut a career path for the next five or six years and that will be the discussion when I get back home. I have a few things that are possible, but I wouldn't want to talk about them right now because it's not 100 percent, but we do get signals. So that's another thing. And I've noticed that some U.S. officers actually go through a similar process, not all, but I've noticed that a few of them have as well.

RG: Have you by chance been contacted by any Bahraini officers who are planning to or are potentially coming to Carlisle or is that something that would happen later in the summer if that were to happen based on your experience?

KAK: I have not. Not yet. I anticipate that I will be contacted. I am not sure if the next intake is going to have a Bahraini officer yet. I've heard that there was an intention to have Bahraini officer come over, but I believe because of the travel restrictions and all of that going on with the pandemic, that there might have been a decision to do one the next year. But in any case, I will be a resource for the next person coming in or the next officer coming in.

RG: Sure. Whenever that may be.

KAK: Right.

RG: Well, to bring this conversation to a conclusion, is there a particular insight that you've taken away either from the practical level of your experience at Carlisle or the specific intellectual work you've done on your IRP projects or in your seminar discussions? If there was one particular thing that you would say that you've taken away from these ten months at the War College, what would that be?

KAK: That's a very good question.

RG: I'm sorry to put you on the spot.

KAK: No, that's fine. I think as I said, there is a lot to unpack when I get back home. There is the tremendous amount of knowledge that I acquired that it's hard to point at a single concept or insight and say that is my one thing that I'm going to take away, but I'd like to take this particular opportunity to note an article or publication that was written by one of our faculty members, Tom Bruscano. He wrote "Developing Strategists: Eisenhower and the Inter War Army War College." Now we read that paper when we first got here. I think we were issued that reading in the first week. I remember Tom telling us that you didn't have to read it, but take a look and if you want to understand what the Army War College was like back in those days and get an appreciation for what you are going to be doing here, it might give you some hints to what you are going to go through. And I read it when I first got here, that first week and read it again, just maybe three weeks ago, and it read differently because I understood it a lot better after going through the Carlisle Scholars program having done Eisenhower's Army War College. This was, I think the intent of having us read it at the time is to understand that when we go through committees and we go through student-centered instructions through committees and instruction that is led by students themselves, we are practicing strategy, we are practicing the practical side of what we are being taught. And I think that particular idea hit home for me especially at the end of the year and going back and reading it again made me appreciate what we have done here. And I think that would be probably the thing that I would take back towards your question that you asked me at the end.

RG: Sure, and of course we are delighted to hear you say that here on A Better Peace considering that Dr. Bruscano is our Dusty Shelves Editor and that we published that article in A Better Peace so that people can read up on it. But precisely that issue is that coming to study and coming to learn is a way to develop strategic thought and that you are doing strategy when you are engaged in these kinds of conversations which is the basic point of Carlisle Scholars, is the basic point of being here at the Army War College. Well, Khaled Al Khalifa, we are delighted that you were able to join us here for this conversation on A Better Peace. We are glad that the year turned out so well notwithstanding the, let's say the unconventional aspects of the last

couple months of this particular academic year, but thanks very much for your service and thanks for being part of our community as an International Fellow, as a Carlisle Scholar at the Army War College. Thanks very much.

KAK: Thank you, Ron. Thank you for having me.

RG: You bet. And thanks all of you for listening in on this conversation. Please send us your comments on this program and all of our programs, your suggestions for future programs and, after you have subscribed to A Better Peace on the pod catcher of your choice, we hope that you will rate and review this podcast because that's how other people can find out about it so that they can listen in on these conversations as well. We look forward to welcoming you to future conversations but until next time, from the War Room, I'm Ron Granieri.