



STRATEGY FROM THE INSIDE OUT (EISENHOWER SERIES)

By Rena Henderson-Alailima, Jeff Munn, Nicholas Ploetz and Ron Granieri
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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. For 50 years, the U.S. Army War College's Eisenhower Series College Program or ESCP has been designed to encourage dialogue on national security and other policy issues between War College students and the broader public. In pursuit of that dialogue, War College students have traveled across the country speaking to college classes, voluntary organizations, think tanks and other public forums. In our age of Corona and social distancing, the ESCP has unfortunately had to scale back the travels of our students. Here at A Better Peace, however, we aim to pick up the slack by giving Eisenhower program participants a chance to share their expertise and insights. Today's topic is the internal dimension of strategy. The recently deceased scholar Colin Gray identified multiple dimensions within which strategy is developed to give students and practitioners a sense of the complex web of circumstances that place limits on abstract notions of strategy. These can include cultural, social and political factors, and all of those outside the usual military conceptions of strategy. Our guests today to deal with this internal dimension of strategy include three members of the U.S. Army War College Class of 2021. **Lieutenant Colonel Rena Henderson-Alailima** is an engineer with the Missouri National Guard, which she joined in 2013 following 11 years of service in the U.S. Army. She has deployed to Afghanistan and Korea, graduated from West Point with a degree in civil engineering and holds a master's degree in engineering management. Before attending the Army War College, Lieutenant Colonel Henderson-Alailima commanded the 7th weapons of mass destruction civil support team. **Colonel Jeff Munn** is an army officer with 21 years of active service. He was commissioned from the Reserve Officer Training Corps at Florida Southern College in 1999 and served in various command and staff positions in the United States and Germany. He served in the Pentagon twice on the Joint and Army staffs managing equipment programs and defense budgeting processes. Colonel Munn has multiple deployments to Iraq and Afghanistan and served in Bosnia as well. He holds a master's in policy management from Georgetown University and a Master of Arts in Security Studies from Kansas State University. Our 3rd guest **Lieutenant Colonel Nicholas Ploetz** is a U.S. Army Blackhawk helicopter pilot who has served

in a variety of positions in the United States and overseas, including as a plans and policy officer for NATO Rapid Deployment Corps Spain. His most recent position was as an assault helicopter battalion commander in the 101st Airborne Division Air Assault. Lieutenant Colonel Ploetz also has extensive deployment experience to both Afghanistan and Iraq. He holds a Bachelor of Science in International Relations from the United States Military Academy and a Master of Arts in National Security Affairs from the Naval Postgraduate School. Welcome to A Better Peace colleagues.

Nick Ploetz: Thanks for having us here, Ron.

RG: You bet. In the normal course of things, when Eisenhower students go to a public forum, each gives a speech on a particular topic. We're going to give brief versions of those speeches today, so I'm going to go with you in order of how I introduced you. So I would like to ask Rena to go first.

Rena Henderson-Alailima: Okay. Good afternoon and thank you for inviting me for the opportunity to discuss climate change and national security. I find it pretty fascinating and interesting to be able to discuss these two topics simultaneously because not long ago, climate change as a national security threat was rarely discussed in the same sentence. But more recently and especially with the new administration, more emphasis is being placed on climate change as a top threat to our national security. Climate change has the potential to tremendously affect global stability, military readiness, our need to respond to military crises and it also brings a potential of great power conflict. Just to quickly define climate change—climate change is a long-term change in average weather patterns. The general impacts of climate change include rising sea levels, rising temperature, shrinking glaciers, thawing permafrost, and it can also mean more intense and frequent weather events such as droughts, floods, hurricanes and heat waves. So now let's talk about that climate-national security connection. How does climate change create a national security threat? First, climate change heightens and intensifies social and political instability in vulnerable and contested regions that are adversaries and the U.S. can exploit to further their interest. The impact of that increase in stability is our increased need to engage militarily in order to protect our interests overseas. This is particularly concerning and regions such as the Arctic, the warming Arctic brings increased competition and military presence from our state adversaries, particularly the People's Republic of China and the Russian Federation as they seek to control strategically important territories and resources. Furthermore, instability poses a national security threat because extremists and terrorist organizations turn these unstable regions into breeding grounds for their terrorist movements. And these terrorist movements have the potential to target democracies and western ideals. Another impact of climate change to national security is climate change poses a direct threat to military installations. As a power generating and a power projection platform, the impact of non-resilient military installations is a decreased ability for the military to maintain combat readiness, and it's

also a decreased ability to project power globally. Lastly, climate change increases the intensity of a frequency of natural disasters, which impacts our need to conduct more defense support of civil authority and humanitarian missions which places strains on the military and limits our ability and our capability to respond globally and domestically. The takeaway is the deteriorating climate is causing the U.S. a significant security concern from lowering stability to the potential of great power conflict to a decline in force readiness, and it's just generally impacting our ability to protect American national interests. But there's good news. Although the connection between climate change and national security did not always receive much attention and prioritization, there's growing acknowledgement within the military of the need to prepare for and respond to climate change in order to protect our national interest. Thank you.

RG: Thank you, Rena. We'll come back to you for questions in a bit, but first I want to go to Jeff Munn.

Jeff Munn: Thank you, Ron, for allowing me to participate in his podcast. Following up on Rena's comments about climate change and how it impacts national security, it's a relevant point for where I'm going with my discussion on how senior leaders discuss and make difficult decisions on our resourcing. Strategy requires a means or resources to achieve its ends. At the War College, we discussed the difficult decisions senior leaders make to balance resources necessary to maintain readiness, which is our ability to fight tonight, invest in modernization efforts or the tools and equipment to deter or fight tomorrow's wars and adjustments to force structure requirements for the size and organization of our military, all within the budget constraints. And after two decades of war focused on counterinsurgency operations, our military is in the early stages of transitioning to compete and fight in an era of great power competition. Over the last two years, the department has applied resources towards improving readiness in the short-term and paid for it with reductions in force structure and deferring modernization investments. The result was a marked improvement in readiness over the last few years, with resources applied to unit training, equipment maintenance and soldier wellness. Now we're shifting focus to modernizing the force. There are several initiatives in the Army underway to achieve this effort. For example, in 2018, the Army established a four-star headquarters, the Army Futures Command based out of Austin, TX. It has the mission of establishing future warfighting concepts, identifying capabilities needed to win tomorrow's wars and working with industry and academia to realize those capabilities into tools and equipment for our objective force. There are several equipment programs in various stages of development in the science technology realm, and our senior leaders have the responsibility of deciding where to invest and where to accept risk. The third lever in our defense management processes is force structure. This describes how the military organizes personnel, weapon systems and equipment to execute operations to achieve defense strategy objectives. Changes to force structure within a service may derive from changes to defense strategies following war or conflicts, such as what we saw in the downsizing after World War II and the Gulf War. Where structure changes may also come

about are changes to our operating concepts such as the new multi-domain operational concept for 2028. Going forward, our leaders face difficult decisions on the size of the force needed to achieve defense strategy objectives, the amount of resources to apply to legacy equipment and whether to sustain, increase or decrease modernization investments that will soon be ready to incorporate into our objective force. The challenges of competing domestic priorities, such as COVID-19 expenditures, demands on infrastructure, education, health and welfare, constricting federal budgets, climate change as discussed by Rena, influences from a variety of stakeholders in the military industrial complex and those external threats identified in our various strategic and policy documents all contribute to the challenges of balancing requirements within this budget. Thank you, and I look forward to further discussion.

RG: Thanks Jeff, I appreciate that. Very nice job. Nick.

NP: I echo the sentiments of both Jeff and Rena in having me on today, so I appreciate it. When we first start here at the War College, the CJCS conducted a presentation and challenged us to really think deeply about the future of warfare. Being an aviation officer who's seen the development and benefit of technology as well as a self-declared early adopter of tech—although I think my teenage son would disagree—I wanted to really kind of look at the future of autonomous weapons. And I thought that the recent technological advancements to include artificial intelligence have once again kind of brought the future of autonomous weapons to the forefront of debate. And I think this debate is oftentimes dominated by comparisons of pop culture icons. So when I just said autonomous weapons, what came to your mind? Were you thinking R2D2 or BB8 from the Star Wars series? These are helpful droids that we tend to think of in positive light. Or did you immediately think about images of evil, human hunting sentinels from the matrix or the terminator? I think these simple names we start to assign moral agency to inanimate objects and then you start to form narratives that certainly have emotional context to them. Instead, I wanted to propose and have conversations across the country here and reframe people's reference and look at the near future of autonomous weapons instead as a teaming between man and machine and thinking a little bit more along the lines of something like Iron Man to use another pop reference, where a human maintains that moral agency through a machine that exercises autonomy at a variety of levels to enhance overall capabilities. I thought this framing more closely resembled the near-term Department of Defense procurement efforts, which I actually believe will enhance our ability to meet international humanitarian law into the future. And although I certainly agree with the debate that future limitations on the development of autonomous weapons may be prudent, some of the current efforts for an outright ban on the weapons, I believe right now are premature. And I think because too much of the debate is actually focused on narrow definitions and environments. The real debate and discussion are on the level of freedom we're willing to give to an autonomous system and trying to define where's the line between a human being on and out of the loop—the loop referring to a decision cycle for a machine to make autonomously. So how do you define it? Is it time? Is it space? Is it level of

control? And then how does the environment also affect the autonomy that you're willing to grant to an inanimate object? You know the sea, the air, information, all these different domains are certainly not the same, and they shouldn't be regulated as such. So I think as we look at the future and the possibilities of leveraging technology to better inform human decision making, we need to expand this conversation outside the default to an outright ban and really kind of expand it outside of our pop culture references. I think we should desire and be interacting across a wide-ranging group of interest groups if you will and have a conversation on what components of combat are truly human and cannot be delegated.

RG: Alright. Thank you, Nick. As a comment on your early adoption of technology, I have to say because I'm able to see a video which our viewers or listeners are not, you have a very cool microphone there for your recording. Clearly you put some effort into your tech. I value that. A bunch of questions come to mind based on what you all said, and I want to start actually with you Nick because of something in particular that you pointed out and that is the decision about whether or not to use a tool, much like decisions about strategy, are not shaped purely by practical considerations. Does it do what we want it to do? Any decision is fraught with or hedged around with pre-existing moral or cultural or social assumptions. So people are nervous about AI because, I'm not ashamed to admit that whenever we talk about AI, I always think of Arnold Schwarzenegger and the Terminator. At least that's the first place I go, but that's just me. I like the fact that you brought up R2D2 and BB8. As an army officer, how do you see the military as making a case for the strategic use of particular technology? Or make a case for it in a way that can be sensitive to the existence of these pre-existing factors that are external, while also being true to the strategic argument, say this is necessary, this is useful for these reasons, but respecting those concerns that people might bring to it.

NP: I think that's a very valid question and I'd think through it probably in three different ways. The first one is, I think the case starts off as being purely pragmatic, and it's pragmatic because right now we're seeing the use or I should say the development and implementation of autonomous weapons across the globe by a variety of different actors, mainly states although certainly as this technology advances, it can proliferate beyond just states and go to non-state actors. But if we look at those states that we are most likely in competition with right now, they are rapidly developing the capabilities to leverage autonomous weapons on the battlefield, and I think we would be at a disadvantage if we don't also think through how we're going to counter that weapon system. And although there may be ways that are not purely autonomous to counter, I tend to think you don't necessarily want to restrict yourself in developing something, i.e., an autonomous weapon to counter somebody else's autonomous weapons. So one is pragmatic. I think there is a need that's going to get driven that way. The second one is really talking about what kind of limitations and commitment the U.S. government is willing to place on the development of autonomous weapons, and I think we've seen the Vice Chief of the Joint Chiefs of Staff had stated in an earlier conversation how he did not want to see at least some level of

human judgment over the leverage of autonomous weapons in the future. Whether or not that's on or in the loop, that's a difficult discussion to have because it's somewhere in there, but at least some sort of control is something that we've even seen our most senior military leaders talk about. I believe even General Murray recently talked about it. He's the U.S. Army's Commander of Futures Command. So you're seeing the senior leaders talk about this requirement to have limitations and place constraints, and I think how we talk about and structure that may also allow people allow it to go forward. And the third one is really probably just bringing up technology that we're seeing in our daily lives and allowing to see how well it works or fails to work. Think Through, what are you comfortable with, Ron? You're thinking the Terminator, or I also think, is it toaster autonomous in some regards? At one point I probably would have thought of it as not, it's a very simple machine, but at the end of the day you push the button and the toaster makes all the decisions on what your toast looks like when it comes up, and it's not really that dangerous.

RG: True.

NP: And that goes all the way up to things like self-driving cars which are becoming more and more prevalent on the roads today. As you think through what is autonomy and what you are comfortable with, I think as long as we leverage things like pragmatism, putting in set commitments and also leveraging what we're comfortable with as a society, I think you can actually push the case a little bit farther.

RG: Excellent response, Nick. I have to say that in so many of these discussions about technology, people are nervous about technology either because they're afraid of the people who are going to be programming the technology or they're afraid that the technology is going to realize how imperfect the human beings are. I recommend an old classic in this field, the film *The Forbin Project* about Colossus, which was a computer designed to take over the nuclear systems. Before Skynet there was Colossus. But we'll come back to that in a second. I want to go to Rena because of a variation on the question that I asked Nick—when you talk about climate change as a national security problem—once again, this is a topic that one can approach at a purely pragmatic level, but it is very politically fraught within the United States, I would venture to say within the members of the services, within Congress—how can or should good military leaders, strategic leaders, how can or should they take climate change into account as a strategic national security challenge while managing the political pushback that they will get for doing so?

RHA: Skepticism and climate change go hand in hand almost to the fact that in 2016, we had members of Congress saying that the military and intelligence community, they need to focus on ISIS and not climate change. So what we had was an environment that just really did not pay much attention to climate change. So what the military does to combat that in a sense, is we focus on the threat of climate change, aside from the political issue of climate change. What we have to do is we have to look at all the threats that face America and our military and we say,

hey, whether or not you want to believe in climate change or what's causing it, the fact of the matter is we have this threat. We have national disasters that are affecting our installations. We have events overseas that are causing instability in these regions, and those are the things that we address, and we try to stay far away from the political debate.

RG: And so hopefully, you're suggesting that you can make strategy on the basis of concrete problems. So to say, I can't tell you why there's a drought that's forcing people to flee or forcing a civil war in this area, but we need to respond to that. Is that fair?

RHA: Yes, that's correct. That's very correct. We evaluate all our potential threats and the impact to mission readiness and those threats being associated with climate change or whatever it could be, they're still there.

RG: Gotcha.

RHA: And that's what we're responding to.

RG: Well, this is good and once again then to move to you Jeff on the issue of politics. If there ever was a pure realm of strategy, certainly you move out of that very quickly when you've got to get down to the fact that there are only so many dollars to spend on things. Should the military when you're dealing with readiness and modernization or how should the military, I should ask, how should the military adapt strategy to resources? Do you find out how much you have to spend and decide then that's all you can do? Or do you decide what you absolutely want to do and then reallocate resources based on that?

JM: I think it's a mixture of both. We obviously receive our strategy guidance from the various documents, National Security Strategy, National Defense Strategy, previous years' budgets, what we expect the next year's budget to be, and then it starts with prioritization. We look at what we're being told to do at the service level or the joint service level, at the DoD level, we're being told this is what you must do and then we have our priorities within the service to help achieve those objectives. The senior leaders have the difficult challenge of prioritizing and then weighing the risk of what they can and can't fund or what they have to perhaps defer funding on based on the limitations of the budget they were given. It's a matter of both. It's a balancing act of here's what I know I'm being told to do and what we are being asked to do and what would be nice to do. And then here's the prioritization of those efforts. And now here are the programs associated with that priority list. And here's the risk of not doing whatever x, y and z our senior leaders have asked us to look at funding. So there's a balancing act with the finite resources, whether you put a b, an m or a t at the end of those numbers, it's still finite, and balancing what we're being told to do. So our job as senior leaders or advisers to senior leaders is to go back to congressional leaders, executive level leaders and say, here's what you told me to do, but here's what I can't do,

or here's what the risk is if I do this and not do that, and so that's the balance, the game we play in the Army staff at the Joint staff in that defense management process as the budget is being built and sent up to the President and then onto Congress as they make their revisions.

RG: Great. Thank you, Jeff. Now I have a question for the three of you. One of the fun things about organizing the Eisenhower program—Colonel Perkowski, who is the master brain behind the whole Eisenhower program—is figuring out how to group you together for these kinds of presentations, and what I find interesting about the three of you together is this idea that you're talking about problems of strategy, problems of national security that require military people to think outside of purely military categories. You have to think about technology. You have to think about the climate. You have to think about the budget. I'm curious, I am going to ask each of you in turn to answer this. I'll start with you, Nick. When you have talked about your topic or things related to your topic with your colleagues at the War College, how do they respond to the idea of having to consider ideas that are from different dimensions of strategy? Are they resistant to it? Do they push back against it? Do they say that's too theoretical and that doesn't tell me how to take this hill? What do you think? I'll start with you, Nick.

NP: I don't think there's been a lot of hesitancy or pushback. I think it tends to be a lot more discussion based on our backgrounds on what we see as a priority. So the differences aren't necessarily this idea that we don't think outside the box, it just tends to be based on our experiences and what we believe is the greatest priority and also thinking about maybe timelines. I think some of us think longer timelines, mid-term and in short-term, this kind of is where I think the debate tends to be here at the War College. I think everybody here realizes everything that Jeff just said. There are limited resources that have to be prioritized across a wealth of different challenges. It's just which one is the number one priority, and then we all agree it's a grouping of a bunch of different priorities, but then we disagree about how much of a resource each one should be receiving. I tend to think that's what I've had the most debate about. I tend to be a little bit more on the modernization side. I think that's where the future is going to go. I think Rena is pushing a little bit more on climate change. But I think they also come together, and that technology could inform decisions on the challenges with climate change. And that's where you're probably going to get some value added from the debates with our colleagues.

RG: Nick, do you find that pilots are especially interested/concerned about the future of autonomous weapons?

NP: I think it's twofold. I think you probably have two different things. I think pilots love technology and are always interested in the newest gadget, typically as a group stereotype. I would also tell you that I think pilots tend to grasp a little bit onto some of the past. We want to be reaching towards the sky. We want to be in a cockpit so you'll also see some pilots saying how a machine will never be able to replace them although you may be seeing that as a

possibility in the near future, so it's a weird dichotomy between both a welcoming of technology which makes your life so much easier and better and faster and safer, and then also this concern that it may drastically change what the future holds for you as a pilot, and whether that's even a possibility or a need in the future.

RG: Thanks, Nick. Rena, I want to turn to you. When you have talked about climate change with fellow officers, what is the typical response? Is it this is a problem that's outside of our control? Do people resist it? Do they say I want to talk about other things? And how do you deal with the responses that you get within the military community?

RHA: So it's funny you should ask that question because not long ago, I was actually having a little sit-down lunch with some colleagues and we were talking about the climate change-national security nexus and they were having a hard time unwrapping how national security could be related to climate change. And it's just based on how national security threats have traditionally been defined and how that definition is expanding. So traditionally, they were thinking, national security, the Constitution says protect the Fed. We're always talking about fighting against an adversary, and it's been traditionally very narrowly defined with national security means. So when I'm talking to them about that nexus, there was a little bit of resistance. But as I went in and discussed the various impacts and how it all interrelates and connects and how things are expanding and changing and we have to look at climate change and national security and those non-military dimensions of protecting our interests, people start to come along a lot more easily and better. And it's just that understanding of what can constitute protecting our national interest is very broad.

RG: That is very true, Rena. Thanks for that. Now, Jeff, I want to turn to you because I think as you know, anytime anybody talks about the budget, people get a little nervous or they take the position that if we say we need this money, we're going to get it, but we really can't be too specific about our concerns, about how much money we need because there's always a fear that if you don't ask for enough, you're not going to get more. So how do you talk about the budget as a strategic consideration in seminar, for example. In the defense management course, people talk about how the process works, but how in the seminar with your colleagues when you talk about budgeting as a strategic consideration, how do you work these into the conversation in a way that that shows how important they are and gets people thinking about things they'd rather not think about?

JM: Yeah, it's a very interesting conversation to have at the War College because as Nick said, it's a lot of different backgrounds. So if you haven't spent time working on a budget cycle, the POM, or the Program Objective Memorandum, or maybe G3 working on force management issues, a lot of this stuff is new when you go to the course at the War College. I was fortunate to have a glimpse of it for two years, so going into that course, it was a great conversation to have

because a lot of my peers and temporary colleagues, as I did, focused much like we talked about, on the readiness of our formations and being able to fight and take the hill or achieve that objective, and for the last 20 years, if a commander at the company, battery or battalion level needed something, they were resourced whether it was from the base budget or the overseas contingency budget, there was no question about it. If the soldiers need it, they're going to get it because that was what the political and the domestic temperature for lack of a better word, was at the time and now we're kind of moving out of that. So resource constraints are real thing, and it's something that the Pentagon is dealing with now as we go into the next few years with the rising deficit and the rising costs of some of these modernization efforts are coming true. They're coming to bear as we move out of research and development and into procurement or decisions on procurement. And so those are real issues that we have to deal with. It's funny that after two years, how I contextualize it, I'll use my partners' topics—Rena's and Nick's—when we look at autonomous vehicles that conversation was rampant for the last two years I was at the Pentagon and we did talk about semi-autonomous, autonomous vehicles and how we integrate them into the force. When do we transition them from the legacy systems? And what is that cost of getting rid of legacy systems? And what is that cost of introducing the training and the other DOTMLPF solutions to integrate that into the force? And for me all I think about is the dollars and the programmatic and what am I going to sacrifice for my programs to help autonomous programs find their way because it is such a zero sum. And then we look at climate change. The first thing I think of, I loved Rena's perspectives, but the first thing I thought of was, as we continue to look at changes to fuel consumption and how we how we find other green type energy sources, all I can think of was all the legacy systems that need to go from their diesel engines to electric engines and the billions and trillions of dollars that would cost not only in the equipment but also the infrastructure at each installation. And so that's what I think about when we talk about programs and topics of this nature, and it's been a fun discussion to have in the last year or so.

RG: I can only imagine. Anyway, we are just about out of time, but in the last couple of minutes I wanted to ask each of you what you're going to be doing after you successfully complete this very unusual year at the U.S. Army War College? Where are you off to after this, Jeff?

JM: In about four weeks, the day after graduation, I fly to Korea and I will be taking command of the 3rd Battlefield Coordination Detachment at Osan Air Base where I will be responsible for integrating the land component, commander's scheme maneuver with the air components' resourcing and planning.

RG: Okay. So you will have plenty to do, and that's even before the installation of all those charging stations for all of those electric vehicles. Rena, how about you? Are you going back to Missouri?

RHA: That's right. The Show-Me state. I am going back to Missouri as a member of the Missouri National Guard. I will be stationed at Fort Leonard Wood and will be the executive officer of the 140th Regional Training Institute.

RG: And Nick, do you plan to get back up in the sky or what is your next assignment?

NP: I think they're going to let me fly a keyboard for a little bit longer. I'm headed to Human Resources Command as the HRC OPMD for aviation.

RG: Well, wherever you go, we were delighted that you were able to spend your time here with us today to discuss your work on A Better Peace. Thank you, Colonel Jeff Munn, Lieutenant Colonel Rena Henderson-Alailima and Lieutenant Colonel Nick Ploetz for joining us today.

RHA: Thank you.

NP: Thank you, Ron.

JM: Thanks for having us.

RG: And thanks to all of you for listening in. Please send us your comments on this program and all the programs and subscribe to A Better Peace if you have not subscribed to A Better Peace already on the podcatcher of your choice, and after you have subscribed, please rate and review this podcast because that is how other people can find out more about us. We are always interested in hearing from you. We are always interested in building this community for these types of conversations. So even though this conversation is over, we look forward to welcoming you to the next one. Until next time, from the War Room. I'm Ron Granieri.