



VALUES, INTERESTS, AND LEADERSHIP BEYOND AFGHANISTAN

By Larry Goodson and Ron Granieri, August 31, 2021
<https://warroom.armywarcollege.edu/podcasts/beyond-afghanistan/>

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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. After 20 years, the American intervention in Afghanistan is at an end. As Hemingway once wrote, the collapse happened gradually, then suddenly. Operation Enduring Freedom has not endured forever. And the result for too many has been illusory freedom that may now vanish altogether. Scenes of chaos at Kabul airport have shocked international opinion and raised so many questions about how it came to this. Where did it all go wrong? Could it ever have turned out differently? Such questions will occupy planners and scholars for some time to come. Here at A Better Peace we want to encourage such re-considerations drawing on the expertise of our intellectual community at the U.S. Army War College.

For that reason, we are delighted to welcome Dr. Larry Goodson into our virtual studio. Professor Goodson is professor of middle east studies at The U.S. Army War College. He holds a PhD from the University of North Carolina and has taught at the Department of National Security and Strategy here at the War College since 2002, while also serving as a member of the expert advisory board to U.S. Central Command among others. He is the author of many articles and the book *Afghanistan's Endless War: State Failure, Regional Politics, and the Rise of the Taliban*. I can think of no one with whom I would rather discuss this complicated subject than Larry Goodson. So, welcome to A Better Peace, Larry.

Larry Goodson: Thank you, Ron. Good to see you.

RG: Larry, explain for the audience briefly your engagement with Afghanistan as a topic of study. When did it start? How has it developed over the time of American engagement in the country?

LG: Well, gosh, I'm one of the really, truly old hands-on Afghanistan. In the 1970s my undergraduate work, I started on Afghanistan doing some papers. And in the 1980s, I ultimately

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did my dissertation on Afghanistan. I received American Institute of Pakistan studies yearlong fellowship to go to the Peshawar Pakistan in 1996 and spent all my time in and out of the tribal area. Afghanistan, of course, as well, studying the war in Afghanistan, the Soviet war against the Afghan Mujahideen in those days. And the refugee crisis that had poured into Pakistan and made it the world's largest recipient of refugees during that period, in that region's history. And then after that, my research in the 1990s was very focused on the Taliban in and out of Afghanistan.

And then on 2001, September 11th, 2001, I was teaching in Boston before coming to the War College, getting ready to go to Washington that day for a meeting on Afghanistan. Ahmad Shah Massoud, the famous leader of the Panjshir rebels against the Soviets had been killed by Osama Bin Laden couple of days before. And I was invited down to an intelligence community meeting, and anyway, we were going to meet, I never made it to Washington on that particular day, obviously.

And then thereafter, since my book had just come out at that point, I became really involved going to all sorts of organizations and being on television and radio and all that sort of thing a lot. And then ultimately was asked to be part of the UN effort to manage the emergency Loya Jirga, which selected Hamid Karzai, and so forth in Afghanistan in 2002. And it was after that, I came to the War College. And then as you pointed out, I've subsequently worked for CENTCOM commanders and done various things for the government on Afghanistan since then until maybe the last few years when illness and so forth, sort of took me away from going out there all the time.

RG: Can I ask, what was it that grabbed you to do a dissertation on Afghanistan? This would have been in the 1980s. Was it as a result of having been aware of the Soviet war in there that made you think about the history of the place or was there anything in particular that made you think I want to study Afghanistan?

LG: Yeah, I used to get asked that question, Ron, all the time.

RG: I'll bet. Now, of course, nobody would ask as everybody would just assume there's reasons.

LG: Yeah, exactly. No, back before 9/11 or after 9/11, but right around that time, people would ask the question and I said, I wish I had a really sort of sexy, clever answer. But you're right, it was ultimately the Soviet invasion that sort of made me focus on it as an international relations topic worthy of attention. And I was pretty familiar with the history already. And then America's greatest specialist on Afghanistan, Louie Dupree, who taught at West Point. He moved down to Chapel Hill and Durham to teach at Duke and Chapel Hill together and became my professor. I was actually his last graduate student. And so I was benefited by having a guy who really

understood and could help me understand the country, and meet people, and do all those things. So I was very fortunate in that regard. So yeah, I guess that's the answer, as I said, it's not terribly clever, sexy, but anyway.

RG: If it works it has the advantage of being true. So, there is that. Well, and historians, and I'm a historian, you're a historian, right? We like to talk about the long-term reasons for events, but at the same time, I know historians can be very impatient when people just sort of shrug their shoulders and say, well, that area is a problem. It's always been a problem. Or people say things like Afghanistan Graveyard of Empires, and they non sagely as if that explains everything about what happened. But I am curious, how do you feel the current situation in Afghanistan? What's the balance between sort of long-term historic forces that are at play here and shorter-term specific policy decisions? Do you think one is more powerful than the other in explaining the outcome of Operation Enduring Freedom?

LG: Okay. So, a really good question that maybe has a slightly different twist at the end, since you'd focused on Enduring Freedom.

RG: I did. Yes, I did that.

LG: Or you might say since you mentioned Enduring Freedom at the beginning, in a very clever way, you might also have said our resolute support didn't turn out to be all that resolute.

RG: It was irresolute at the end.

LG: Yeah, in the end. But on the other hand, maybe it's impossible for us to really remain there indefinitely. I used to tell people throughout all these years of government service, I used to say, Afghanistan can be repaired, it can be made whole again, it could be whatever it was before, because of all the incredible destruction that happened prior to our coming there that had to be repaired and rebuilt, if we stay for three generations. So, that's what 75 years or so, I wasn't really thinking we were going to do that. I'm pretty sure no one else was. And clearly President Biden and before him, President Trump, we're not thinking of doing that either. So, in any event, failing that it's hard to really rebuild that country, but to the point that you asked, I mean, it's really a good point. Both factors are decisive in Afghanistan's case, not so much Seth Jones's notion of Graveyard of Empires, although he's not wrong about that. But more the 19th century, great game, maybe between the British and the Russians might be a better way of thinking about it. But that traditionally the way I see it is that Afghanistan was viewed by outside actors as an arena where you came to play games.

So, you showed up with your soccer team against the other guy's soccer team. You played it in this arena that was Afghanistan. And probably the Afghan sport of Buzkashi would be a better

example than a soccer team, because the game was kind of rough. And if you killed some Afghans along the way, well, you killed some Afghans along the way. That's what happened for centuries in Afghanistan, outside powers did things there. And they often used what we now call proxies to try to advance those things. They did it with small numbers of their own troops or political agents or whatever, and used more of the local troops. But to the point of the Graveyard of Empires, if they were ever dumb enough to put their troops in there, we can think of the British a couple of times. We could think of the Russians more just to the north of Afghanistan, a number of times, then bad things could happen to those troops because they're out in the middle of nowhere in relation to where these European powers or now the United States is far away from the country. So, those realities have always been significant there and significant in the context that I would add to that, I guess. And then to the other side of your question, I would add to that Afghanistan, because it was ultimately created as a nation state or as a state anyway, by virtue of these outside powers, drawing the boundaries in ways that would protect them.

Because of that, the reality of the ethnic groups or the identity groups, the linguistic groups, the sectarian division between Sunni and Shia that exists in the country. All of that didn't really fit any natural borders, every ethnic group in Afghanistan, with the exception of the Hazara in the middle of the country overlaps into neighboring countries. So, all of these countries have built-in proxies if they want to become involved they're the Pashtun who overlapped into Pakistan, along with the Baloch and the Brahui and the Nuristani. And then of course, the Chahar Aimak and all these Western Afghans that overlap into Iran and the Tajiks for Tajikistan, the Uzbeks, Uzbekistan, Turkmens for Turkmenistan, Kyrgyz for Kyrgyzstan all of those folks in the north, and even the Hazara in the center, because they're Shia, they overlap into, or their patrons, if you will, are in Iran. And so those realities, which are realities of today are very hard to overcome if neighboring countries want to manipulate things in Afghanistan.

And of course, as you know, I teach on Kautilya at the War College. And I often tell people that the Kautilyan in view of the world from the Indian author of the Arthashastra is that among other things that you want to get behind your neighbors. So, that if you've got a problem with say, I don't know, say you're India with Pakistan. You want people in Afghanistan on the backside of Pakistan, from your point of view, to create problems for Pakistan on both sides. India has done that. Pakistan, of course, wants their people in Afghanistan and that's how these kinds of proxyfied great games occur in a place like Afghanistan. So, what we saw all along the ages, the great games, or the losing of an empire in Afghanistan appears to still be going on maybe in a different way today, but still going on.

RG: Well, so that gets to the question, when people are looking around today, they talk about the American involvement Afghanistan, and they say, what went wrong? Or they say, when was the right time to end this, end American engagement? And so I put that question to you. Are there moments where the American intervention in Afghanistan could have reached a suitable

culmination and an end? Or once the United States decided to get involved with its own troops, was there some kind of border that had been crossed that would lead inevitably to what we have experienced here at the end of August?

LG: So, also really a good question. I mean, I can give my answer, but it probably is different from other people's.

RG: We're here to hear you out, Larry.

LG: Yeah, I get it. So, my view on that, we just taught as you know very well, and our students know, we just taught about the Gulf War this past week at the War College. And George Herbert Walker Bush had laid out in effect four objectives that he hoped to achieve in the Gulf War. And I've always kind of had a problem, and during that war, we talked a lot about Weinberger doctrine and the Powell doctrine and all these things, vital interests is when you go to war and all that sort of thing. All good. But the problem I've always had is when you have more than one real goal, then it becomes problematic because you might achieve one goal and the other one might take a lot longer. Or perhaps the one that you think is going to take longer is shorter and the other one takes longer that you thought was going to be easier to accomplish. So, in Afghanistan, we went in really for two reasons, we went in there because of 9/11. And so we went in there to, in effect, avenge ourselves against Osama Bin Laden.

I had a number of conversations with senior people in the government about separating the Taliban from Al-Qaida, that if we decided to fight the Taliban, that was going to be a different kind of fight than if we went after Al-Qaida early on. And so I remember that, as a real challenge, of course, the Taliban and Al-Qaida fled into Pakistan early in our involvement there, for the most part they did anyway. Of course later, some of that would bleed back into Afghanistan. But our initial focus was to go after Bin Laden and the Al-Qaida leadership. That is as it turns out, took a long time to resolve. He wasn't killed until 10 years later into the conflict. Everyone thought it would happen, any minute. We all remember George Bush, the younger George Bush with his deck of cards and all that sort of thing. It was supposed to happen very fast.

RG: Dead or alive.

LG: Right. Dead or alive. Now the other side of the issue was much harder, has always been harder. It's why I said we should be there for three generations, because the other side of the issue said, hey, we've got to make Afghanistan a place that can't be a cauldron of terror. It can't be a state that supports terrorism against the United States and the international community going forward. Well, how the hell are we supposed to do that? I mean, George Bush had run for president against nation building because that was something that there was concern that Bill

Clinton was in favor of prior and Bush was running against Al Gore, Clinton's vice-president. So, when he came in all of the nation building kind of national security, I forget what they were called in the Clinton years, but the national security directives of the national security council, that was set aside, which is what administrations do when they come into office. So, from the beginning, the administration was trying to figure out exactly what to do.

And no one really knew what to do, because if you asked the handful of Afghan specialists, we would all say well you're dealing with a bunch of warlords over there. I mean, the average human being over there is down on their knees. They've been beaten down by decade long war. And so you're going to have to build everything. You're going to have to build roads. You're going to have to build schools. You're going to have to build every bit of infrastructure. You're going to have to build a government. You're going to have to build an army. Everything had to be done. And so did we do that right? Well, who knows? Obviously not well enough if the army melts away when the fight comes. But beyond that, it all had to be done from scratch, with no real plan for how to do it. And a president, God bless him. I'm not really blaming him, but a president who didn't really want to do that. He didn't run for office. He didn't come into office wanting to do that.

And so all that was a real challenge. And it took a long time and there was a lot of effort and a lot of false starts, and we're going to do this. No, we're going to switch and do it this other way. I could walk you through loads of that. But I mean, the reality is to answer your question in a more succinct way, you couldn't leave Afghanistan until we got Bin Laden. And then once you got Bin Laden, since that took place a lot later than it was supposed to, by then, we were kind of well along in what I always have called nation building or state building process, even if we were doing it poorly, or even if it couldn't be done because of the realities of corruption and other things on the ground in Afghanistan.

RG: That's a fascinating paradox, Larry, if I understand what you're saying here is that the job that people thought was going to be the short-term job is catch the people who did 9/11. And if perhaps that job had been accomplished in short order, we wouldn't have gotten so deep into the nation building that we would feel the sunk cost. Right, is that fair?

LG: Correct. We would have been out I think for sure. If we'd gotten Bin Laden by the time of the emergency Loya Jirga in 2002, we would have said, okay, good job.

RG: Good job, go get them Afghanistan. Well then let me ask you this unfair question. I'm warning you in advance, but this is an unfair question, but I have to ask somebody who studies Afghanistan. Would this all have worked out better if we had never decided to invade Iraq in 2003? Did Iraq distract us from resolving the Afghanistan question? Or if Bin Laden had escaped

to Pakistan and the Pakistanis were going to protect him, he was already lost to us before we decided to go into Iraq.

LG: Okay. So, the Iraq question is a fair question. It's an important question. And we all now know from one of Bob Woodward's books, that we got to close the accounts with Iraq. Some of his people I'm thinking of Doug Feith and Paul Wolfowitz right now, we're telling President Bush the day after 9/11, we've got to go into Iraq and President Bush is scratching his head going, well, what are you talking about? We got this Afghanistan thing going on. So, anyway, I mean, that's ancient history now in a way. But it clearly made Afghanistan into the forgotten war and forgotten to the American public. I mean, obviously in the military people were going out there on these one-year assignments and sometimes those assignments meant that you were kind of in the front line. And a lot of times they meant you were in a fort or a base somewhere. And you weren't really in the frontline until later when the insider attacks began to happen.

But in any event, it made Afghanistan into a forgotten war. I remember one of our senior generals used to tell me, he kind of liked being the forgotten war because it meant he could do things without being constantly overseen by the Pentagon, which would look east towards Afghanistan, but would be interrupted by Iraq being in between. And okay. I mean, I get that. I think the bigger problem though, and I've thought about this a great deal. I remember way back at the beginning, telling someone sort of facetiously, if you want me to get Bin Laden and by which I really meant, if you want someone who knows the region and knows the sort of counter-terrorism, so really the CIA or someone like that, you need to send those people to Pakistan and let us put the money about and see if we can figure out where he is. Because we knew he was Pakistan. We just didn't know exactly where. And then you've got to figure out what you're going to do about it if you find out where he is.

And eventually of course, under the Obama Administration, all those issues were resolved and they took the action that actually involved us invading a sovereign state that wasn't part of the conflict in the strict sense of the word, to resolve that. So, I felt like the mistake early on, and not that I would have done this, obviously, I was just trying to say, you can't do it with military people. You're going to have to send people that know the region. They're not too many of us that know the region. But there were some, and those people need to be going out trying to resolve this. But if we could have done that quicker and then with everything going in Iraq, Iraq might've allowed us to close Afghanistan and get out before all of this happened. But that's all just sort of idle speculation about how history might have been otherwise.

RG: But you pointed out an important thing. And that is lots of people who are talking about the situation today. Talk about how the American decision-making and American behavior in the last few months or the last few years has undermined American credibility with our allies. That if we won't stand by Afghanistan, how do we know that we'll stand by, people say, will we stand

by Taiwan? Will we stand by Israel? I want to set that question aside for a second, because I think that can go a little too far. But I do want to flip it around and say, what does our experience in Afghanistan say about the difficulties that the United States has in understanding and I would say getting credible from our allies, especially our ally next door to Afghanistan? What's the future of the United States Pakistan relationship now?

Because I can see it. I mean, I'm not an area expert like you are, but I can definitely see opening up a newspaper in a couple of weeks and hearing that the Pakistani say they need more aid from the United States to protect against the spread of extremism in the region after they have essentially helped to undermine the American presence in Afghanistan. And what's the future of that relationship?

LG: Yeah. Good question. Thank you for that question. So, gosh. Some of my fondest memories of my life are of Pakistan. So, I hate to say anything that the Pakistanis will be unhappy with. But to be honest, I think our relationship with Pakistan might be waning very significantly. And here's why if I can give a little context behind it. Some years ago, when President Obama was in office, I went to India on a track two mission, as I've told you in the past. And I remember the home minister on the first night standing in front of our little team and presenting a lecture in front of a slide that said, or a banner that said "India/U.S. strategic partnership". And I knew then what was going to be presented to President Obama a month later when he came for his first state visit out there. And indeed that's what happened. And they signed the strategic partnership.

I came back and was back when all that happened. And we were at the end of the academic year at the War College and someone, I believe probably the grand leader of our department, Frank Jones, I think perhaps is the one. But someone pointed out and I didn't realize this until it was done, that while President Obama was in New Delhi, signing that agreement, the leader of China had gone to Rawalpindi and Islamabad, and had signed 32 or 33 agreements with the Pakistanis that would pave the way for the China Pakistan economic corridor, part of the Belt and Road Initiative, and deepen the relationship between China and Pakistan.

I think now all this time later, a decade later, I think now it's the case that the U.S./Pakistani relationship might be declining, and it used to be, and I've been out there sometimes in an official capacity, not official, but there on behalf of some senior leader or something, and you'll be brought into the foreign affairs ministry and they'll send someone to lecture you. "You have abandoned us four times" and yes we have. And you're sitting there thinking, or has it been five times? I'm not really sure. It's been a lot of times, you're right. That from your point of view, the United States came, promised, did something and then walked away. Because, and this goes to something President Biden said the other day, we don't really have any interest in Afghanistan. Well, we used to have interest in Pakistan. They were part of the Baghdad pact, the central treaty

organization during the cold war era. But really our interests aren't as significant there, they're a long ways away. And even if they are the fifth largest country in the world with nuclear weapons and an ongoing problem with India-

RG: Another nuclear of power.

LG: Another nuclear of power and the second largest country in the world. And one that we have a strategic partnership with, Pakistan and the United States really aren't that close. And I think the rise of China and the move of China in this area, China, of course, has issues with India too, has largely set the United States aside now. So, my expectation is that, of course, they'll try to make the argument perhaps that you suggested, that they need more money, the United States has to help and so forth, even as they have turned around and helped foster the Taliban that came in and took over Afghanistan so quickly. But I kind of feel like our relationship there has declined and that perhaps future Larry Goodson's will go out there and will not be lectured about all the times, because it really won't matter anymore. I don't know. That's my thought to that. The other thing I would say, you didn't ask this question. I thought you might. But you went in this other really interesting direction. But we have a problem.

All great powers have a problem, as our students will soon learn when they read their Peloponnesian war. All great powers have a problem with partners and allies. Because you naturally see partners like the Afghans or the Kurds in Syria or Northern Iraq as useful for you. So, you send these people out there to work with them, but those people can't work with a proxy supporter without telling that proxy supporter, I'm here for you. I'm part of you. And we're going to go into combat together, if they're soldiers, right. We're going to do these things together and you can't do all of that and say, oh yeah, but whenever they tell me to leave, I'm going to leave and you're going to be left here, holding the bag. So, good luck. I mean, it doesn't work that way.

RG: I mean, you can't tell him that, but that's always potentially true. I mean, if I'm a visitor I might leave.

LG: Yeah, absolutely. It is true. And as I wrote in War Room a couple years ago about the Kurds, when asked about this situation with the Kurds back in the 70s, Henry Kissinger said, "Covert action is not missionary work." Which is a shockingly realist thing. But of course, this is Henry Kissinger. Of course he said that. But I mean and it happened.

RG: I supposed he read Kautilya, Larry?

LG: Yeah, he probably wrote Kautilya. But he said that in Congress, so no one really paid any attention to it. It was just a congressional hearing. It came and went and then it was gone. But I mean, it's the reality of what you're saying. Of course, you're going to leave. This is a challenge.

It's not usually a challenge for a great power because everyone knows this is what the big powers do for the reason that you said and the reason that I said. But it does become a challenge when people begin to think that the great power is slipping. Because then they begin to say, you can't really trust those people. Well, of course you can't, you can't trust anybody in that capacity that you said. But if you start thinking the U.S. is slipping or China's slipping, or fill in the blank. Then people lose confidence in where that power might be leading.

RG: So, Larry I'm keeping you a little extra long, because I have two questions I want to ask you. I'm going to start-

LG: I'll try to be quick.

RG: That's all right. But this is one based on what you just said about when a great power is slipping its relationship with its partners can take on a different tone. A variation on that is when the great power in question. Like, let's say it rhymes with flunited flates. Let's say if a great power that always wants to say that it is different from other great powers, because it stands for values or ideals that are different. No one would be surprised when our students read Kautilya or heck when our students read Sun Tzu, when our students talk about realism, and they talk about interest and they talk about being hard-nosed. Everybody likes to imagine that you're a good hard-nosed power starts and stops, whatever it's going to do, whatever it's going to do it. But what if that great power claims to stand for something more and claims to say, we're not just in this for our material interests. We're in this to spread democracy, we're in this to spread enlightenment, we're in this to spread Western ideas. Does that then become a trap of that great powers own devising, because these are essentially impossible things to do? And eventually they're always going to fail. This is the question that I've been wrestling with. And I think that a lot of Americans are wrestling with. I mean, so this gets to the ideas, is the problem in Afghanistan that the United States got itself into a position where it was talking about doing things that it knew it could not accomplish in less than three generations. And they also knew they weren't going to stay for three generations, which essentially means we knew all along that we were not going to succeed in transforming Afghanistan. And that we were always going to end up with the point that when we left, it was going to be terrible. That's a statement and a question at the same time. What do we do with that, with that kind of tragic realization that this was a flawed operation from the start?

LG: Yeah. So, that's a great question. Of course, it's the Woodrow Wilson's Dilemma, right? It's the dilemma that's always been there for, ever since the United States even contemplated walking away from George Washington's farewell address and becoming one of the world's leading powers. Back when we were in the George Washington era and we were just, hey, we're here in the new world and it's all great and well, okay, tough for the Indians. But anyway, it's good for everyone else. And it'll all get sorted out here and we don't want to be involved in any of that

great power nonsense over there in Europe. But eventually of course, as we rose and as other countries, Europeans that were caught up in all those fights began to decline.

It was clear that we were going to become that. But we had said from the beginning that were a country that stood, and then eventually a power that stood for principles, and stood for democracy, and stood for all of those things that all of our leaders have preached to us about down through history. And so, I think the real challenge that we've always had ever since is how do we live up to those ideals as a great power and at the same time pursue our own national interests more narrowly defined the way most countries do because they aren't in that big power seat, or even if they are, they're not doing it from the point of view of principles and interests. Or if they are, you think of maybe the Soviet Union back in their era, they did so very firmly with the realism there, even if they're talking about the great communist international and how they were going to change the world and all that. But all of that was very clearly secondary to pursuing Russia's or Soviet Union's interest.

I've always maintained to my students. And this is where sometimes I part company with folks on the faculty and students at the War College, and the general public, that if you are going to be a great power from the American point of view, which is to say with those ideals at the center of your strategic center of gravity, that's it. People think of America as the land of opportunity, as a place for freedom reigns, where they can come and make something of their life. We're going to now have Afghans come into America, trying to do that. And they'll just be another, in a long line of people that came to America to do that. But if at some point you can't set aside your interest a little bit, narrowly defined and step up for your partners and your allies and lead from that point of view, then you're probably going to lose that great power status.

Now you can make the argument. It certainly applies for the Venetians in an earlier period of time. It applies for the British in an earlier period of time. Or you can look back to earlier great powers in history and say, it is possible to reset. To go back and say, oh, we've lost some of this, let's refocus on our internal interests, rebuild ourselves and get back out there and play that role in the world again. But that's a challenge to achieve that, because in the process of doing that, and we're seeing it right now in the United States, people don't really know what to believe about virtually anything now. And I'm not trying to pick on parties or talk about this or that. I'm just saying there's disagreement on all sorts of things. And so it's very hard then to lead when internally you can't even agree on the world.

But you've really raised a question that is going to be challenging for our students and for our alumni as they go forward in their career. How do we lead successfully when always in the background is the idea that America has a value based conception of itself? And therefore, always it is possible for our adversaries or even sometimes for our good friends to say "You hypocrites. You've got a double standard." Well, it's true. It happens when you're trying to lead

from a values-based perspective because no one can ever really live up to their values as well as they would like to.

RG: And I guess that's the challenge. Is that the problem is not always, it can sometimes be hypocrisy? But it is often, it's not hypocrisy it's imperfection. And would we rather have somebody who didn't even claim to have any values? And because if I don't claim to have any, then nobody can ever call me a hypocrite because I never told you I was anything different.

LG: Now we're talking about, oh, let's say someone whose name sounds like Vladimir Putin.

RG: For example.

LG: For example. Who says, look, this is what I'm going to do. And we would never do anything ... But of course, I mean, your point is exactly right. I want you to have values and I want them to be values that I can aspire to. If I'm out in Afghanistan, I want to look to the United States and say, I've heard of this Ron Granieri. And he believes in all the things I also believe in. I want to go there and be part. But imperfection, I agree. It's not hypocrisy. We're accused of that. And sometimes it is hypocrisy.

RG: For sure.

LG: But imperfection is certainly there. We heard a lot from President Obama near the end of his term in office or his second term in office that the United States was not perfect. We were still trying to get there. And now we've heard from a couple of presidents that I think are a little more focused in part, there's been a Pandemic and all that, but focused on kind of resetting things and trying to rebuild. But imperfection is definitely, probably the word that best fits here. It's a big challenge though, because ... One last little story that maybe illustrates this, I was giving a lecture at the Royal Jordanian National Defense College several years ago. I think in the early days of the Trump Administration. But clearly the students were very familiar with the Obama Administration and the eight years there. And now they had President Trump in there. And so now there was kind of a continuation of America first approach from when Obama was talking about leading from behind in the middle east. And now President Trump was talking about America first or make America great again.

And I remember a student from, not from Jordan, from another Arab country, standing up and asking me "If you won't lead, what are we to do?" Meaning what should my small Arab country do? What should the Jordanians ... What do we do if you America won't lead us? And I'm sitting there thinking, well, if you're in Syria, maybe the Russians are going to come in and lead you. Oh, that would never happen. Oh, it sort of has happened now in parts of Syria. Or maybe you'll see a return to the struggle within the region between Turkey and Egypt and Saudi Arabia or

whatever, to return to a leadership role, Iran in the region. But that won't be a very peaceful arrangement, because they have different views. Or maybe America will come back to its role in the region, since this was a regional question. But really it's a global question. The world has seen the United States as the leader for your and my lifetime. And for all the lifetime of the students that we have now, the somewhat younger students.

RG: They get younger every year.

LG: Yeah. They do. I don't know how that's happening, but anyway. So I mean, that's a real challenge. I don't know the answer to that. I've never forgotten that question. I tell my students every year about it when we talk about this topic. So, who leads? Is it China with the Belt and Road Initiative and the rising role that it's playing in the world, as we were discussing with Pakistan a little bit ago? Maybe it is and maybe the era of the United States leadership is beginning to come to an end. Or maybe we just have to reset ourselves, recommit to our values and find a way not to go into conflicts that we're going to walk away from at some point, demonstrating irresolute support and Operation Enduring Freedom that is no longer so enduring. To your earlier points.

RG: That's all right. We want to avoid future irresolution and future failures of endurance. Larry, this has been a fantastic conversation. Obviously, we've talked about a lot. There's a lot more that we could talk about. I know there are probably more questions that are on the minds of listeners. I hope that we can have you back again to talk about some more of these things, both the longer-term star perspective and the issues of a specific policy. But I think that we have reached the end of this conversation for today. So, thank you so much for joining us today on A Better Peace, Larry Goodson.

LG: No, thank you. And thanks very much for the reality that you have this podcast that you bring people for us to listen to, and I'm pleased to have had a small role in it.

RG: Outstanding. And thanks to all of you for listening in. Please send us your comments on this program and all of our programs, send us suggestions for future programs. Please subscribe to A Better Peace on your pod catcher of choice. And after you have subscribed, because why wouldn't you subscribe to A Better Peace? Please rate and review this podcast because that's how more people can hear about us so that we can continue to grow this community for conversations like this one. This conversation is over, but we look forward to welcoming you again. Until next time from The War Room. I'm Ron Granieri.