A Deeper-Look: How military and development actors share the battlespace
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[Music]

Patrick Fine: As we enter the 2020s, we see a world of growing great power competition where the effects of climate change are becoming more and more apparent and where non-state actors threaten sovereign states and national governments. We've seen more migration than ever before in history over the last few years, something we've explored in depth in previous podcasts, and we're seeing how these same factors fuel conflict and threaten longstanding international arrangements.

Voiceover: *A Deeper Look. Exploring what works and what doesn't in development, and the changes we can make together to turn ideas into action.*

Patrick Fine: Welcome, listeners. I'm Patrick Fine, CEO of FHI 360 and host of *A Deeper Look*. This season, we're taking a deeper look at the trends, ideas and forces that will shape the future of development. Today, I'm joined by Lieutenant General David Barno to explore how evolving security challenges will shape the way we think about and address human development needs.

General, welcome to the podcast.

Gen. David Barno: It's great to be here, Patrick.

Patrick Fine: General, even as the world has grown more prosperous, we're seeing complex human development challenges, particularly in places affected by conflict. In our last episode, we had Masood Ahmed from the Center for Global Development, and he observed that a rising tide has lifted many boats, but there are places where the tide does not reach and those are characterized by fragility, instability, and conflict.

We start this decade amidst an escalation in conflicts in the Middle East, the Sahel and what once were stable prosperous countries in Latin America. These challenges on a grand scale intertwine security and military operations, humanitarian response and long-term development interventions that are sure to shape development practice in the decades ahead, which is why I'm so excited to have you on the podcast today.

Listeners, General Barno is one of the people who brings great insight into these matters. He is a highly decorated military officer, an Army Ranger with over 30 years of service prior to his

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retirement. He is also a soldier scholar who has taught at the U.S. Army War College, at American University, and currently is professor at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. He is the co-author of a terrific blog called *Strategic Outpost* with Nora Bensahel. And, if you aren't already signed up for that blog and you're interested in the intersection of security and development, then I highly recommend it.

I had the good fortune of getting to know General Barno and to work directly with him when he led U.S. and coalition forces in Afghanistan from 2003 to 2005 and I was the USAID mission director at the time. I recall, General, on my third day in country, you convened a meeting of all the development actors, donors, NGOs, local organizations, to address the tensions of how military and development organizations share a battlespace, where our missions were simultaneously very different and yet overlapped in many respects.

That was 15 years ago. We've seen a lot happen since then. And, we now live in a world where we've become accustomed to asymmetric warfare in spaces crowded with humanitarian responders, with development actors, with national armed forces and informal armed groups. What have we learned about how we work together?

Gen. David Barno: Well, Patrick, I think the U.S. military did a tremendous amount of learning during the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, both of which, of course, are still ongoing in a different phase, if you will. But, those were the first encounters for many people in the military, and of course, I was – had been in the military for several decades at that point, it was really the first time I think many of us encountered international development actors out there in the space that we were fighting in.

And these wars were characterized, as we all are keenly aware of by now, by fighting against non-state actors who often would blend in with the population by having a battle space that wasn't defined by, you know, mountains and deserts with tank armies battling each other, but really of a fight amongst the population, as I used to term it when I was in Afghanistan.

And the population and being in a space with all of the other actors made it extraordinarily complicated for military forces to be able to conduct their operations and do so in a way that was consistent with the rule of law. We had to find a way to conduct our

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operations but also support, at least indirectly, many of these other civilian and development operations and humanitarian aid operations that were going on at the same time we were doing – during conflict reconstruction development, not post-conflict reconstruction development.

And, that was a new dimension. How do you continue to conduct military operations and continue to fight in an environment where in one area you've got humanitarian relief going on, in another area you've got international aid organizations providing support, but a half mile away or a mile away. You might be fighting against Taliban insurgents or Iraqi insurgents. It was very, very complicated for the military to put their arms around that, and I think we're still learning.

Patrick Fine: Yeah, this is still complicated. As I look at the state of the world today, I see that those kinds of situations have proliferated. So, we look at the Sahel, for example. A similar situation where you have a mix of informal actors that are drawn from the community, that play different roles at different times, but that threaten the overall security. What do you think are the steps for a military operation to engage with the civilian operations in the same battle space?

Gen. David Barno: I think the whole concept of counterinsurgency brought this to the fore in the U.S. military, and again, during my time in Afghanistan or our time there in '03 and '05, the U.S. military didn't really have a current doctrine of how to fight counterinsurgencies 'cause they hadn't updated that since Vietnam.

So, when I came in and decided to implement a counterinsurgency strategy, I had to actually rely on textbooks that I read at West Point and historical studies from counterinsurgencies in the past and pick out various principles to apply to our role in Afghanistan. But, central in that was the fact that the population of Afghanistan was the center of gravity.

They were the most important part of the counterinsurgency campaign in ensuring that they were protected as best we could protect them and had the options to choose their own government and were, you know, shielded from attacks from the Taliban, again, to the extent we could do that, while allowing all these other development activities to happen at the same time.

Patrick Fine: So, that's a very important observation about the population being the center of gravity or the key to stabilization and then eventually

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reconstruction or to ending the conflict because that is also, from a humanitarian point of view and a development point of view, it's the population that is the center of gravity. So, that's a key convergence in views from both military actors and development actors.

Gen. David Barno: Absolutely. And, I think we recognize that, you know, certainly when I came in, one of the things I observed is there was a tremendous amount of tension, even friction, between the U.S. military in Afghanistan and the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan and the NGO community in Afghanistan, those that were trying to bring development aid, everything from Doctors Without Borders to demining organizations, that there was this great friction between these groups. And, I made a deliberate effort to try and break that down as much as possible, that I thought we shared enough common objectives that we wanted to support what they were doing. We wanted to know where we were doing things that were problematic to them.

We discovered things like there were certain military units, particularly before I was there, that would wear civilian clothes, even though they were military units, while delivering aid and relief to the Afghan nation, so the NGOs were concerned that they would begin to be conflated with the military, that they would be seen as military actors, and so we stopped doing that. You know, we were trying to protect, to the extent we could, the neutrality of the NGOs that we were doing their operations, 'cause what they were doing was helpful to the overall cause, in my view, in Afghanistan, and we didn't want the military and the NGO community to be seen as the same by the Taliban.

Patrick Fine: Right. I think the recognition of the importance of listening to the people that you're working with distinguished you as an outstanding leader, to hear the senior U.S. military commander inviting people to share their concerns, to share their criticisms and then actively listening to them. So, in terms of lessons, one is the need for the different actors to have an open dialogue and for that open dialogue to really be characterized by active listening. And, you really modeled that very effectively.

Second point that you've highlighted is the importance of separation and to be clear about the military is the military, it has a certain role and identity, and not to confuse that identity with the civilian actors, because that does get at this issue of the neutrality of civilian actors. And I – I think that that neutrality principle is

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very important to humanitarian organizations, that they're there to serve human needs and not to take sides in a conflict is one of the most difficult issues to reconcile in today's conflicts where the theaters, where action is taking place, have so many actors, and the humanitarian actors are frequently not recognized as neutral, even if they seek to be.

Gen. David Barno: Right. Absolutely. Now, I'm concerned about that. I mean, I've found, even in Afghanistan, after watching this and watching attacks on various humanitarian actors at different times during my time there that I didn't feel that there was a defined humanitarian space.

Those actors, you know, whether they were MSF, Médecins Sans Frontières, or they were, you know, NGOs doing demining operations or they were just providing humanitarian medical support, humanitarian relief, I did not ever feel the Taliban really respected them as being neutral. I – you know, I think the western militaries respect that idea, but we are also skeptical that that's widely shared by many of the non-state actors out there. But, ultimately, the non-state actors have got to make a calculus about whether they're going to respect that space or not and it's very uneven, to say the least.

There are places where the U.S. military or United Nations peacekeepers or regional peacekeeping forces really have to establish some degree of security in order to have the humanitarian operations take place.

And, I think that's one of the big benefits in some ways of the military presence in some of these areas. In Afghanistan, our goal was to try and extend the security envelope, and within that, you know, certainly NGOs had free rein and a lot of relative protection to do all types of humanitarian relief operations to help, you know, the Afghan population, to, you know, build schools, to be able to improve their agricultural products, to treat them in medical facilities. When there's no security, that becomes much more challenging.

Patrick Fine: Well, you just can't do it. And, if part of their strategy and tactics is to disrupt normal life as a way of gaining power, so to disrupt health services, to burn down schools, to not allow them to have a livelihood so that they become dependent on that group.

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You mentioned counterinsurgency, which is often referred to as COIN. My understanding of counterinsurgency is that it was an attempt to systematically think through how do militaries operate in these crowded spaces where you have different local factions or different local actors, civil society organizations, militias, that maybe malign or they may not be, and humanitarian actors. Can you say a little bit more about the development of that doctrine and where you see it right now?

Gen. David Barno: It's been an interesting journey, I think. The U.S. Army and Marine Corps didn't officially publish an updated counterinsurgency manual until the end of 2006. So, you know, five years on in Afghanistan and, you know, three plus years on in Iraq and during my entire time in Afghanistan, we were operating off of our own designs, our own concepts and our own structures of counterinsurgency built on a lot of the historic principles and things of that nature, but not codified in military doctrine at the time.

But, the basic premise though is that your goal is not simply to kill as many of the enemy as you can, but your goal is to enable the host nation government, the Afghan government or the Iraqi government, which we hope is a democratic government elected by the population and it's representative of the population's will, that you want to enable them to be successful, to provide security for their population, and you want to provide the space for a wide range of international organizations to help the populations recover from the first stages of the conflict.

So, counterinsurgency is much more, as I noted, population-centric than enemy-centric. Your focus is how do you protect the population. How do you enable the government to be able to extend its reach further into the population and provide more goods and services out there. How do you get the economy reestablished. That's not certainly a direct military requirement to do that, but all those things are important 'cause what you want at the end of the day is a functioning country.

I used to talk about that our goal was not to defeat the Taliban; our goal was to make the Taliban irrelevant. Our goal is to have Afghans ask themselves, "Why on earth would we want to join the Taliban when the economy's going well, we have all of our children are now in school, girls as well as boys. You know, we have, you know, roads that are allowing us to get our goods to market. We have an improving security situation. You know, our

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	government's not corrupt. Why would we want to join the Taliban?"

That's a very aspirational goal. We achieved some of those things. We certainly have not seen others, you know, come to fruition there.

Patrick Fine:	But the objective there is really around stabilization and then ultimately about creating the conditions for the well-being of civilian population and of the nation.

Gen. David Barno:	Right. yes, and their government's a very critical note in that and you know, that has been in some ways one of the deep-seated flaws in counterinsurgency doctrine. If the host nation is not up to being able to provide government without massive corruption, if their security forces are either corrupt or incapable or both, those are major challenges to how the U.S. thinks about counterinsurgency 'cause it's about the term of art in special forces community is, "by, with, and through" your partner in partner nation. You're not trying to do it all yourself, you're trying to partner and build capacity in the host nation.

Patrick Fine:	It's interesting that that term of art, "by, with, and through" your national partner, the partner you're working with is, you know, essentially what development workers, how they look at the world. They're not there to do the work.

Gen. David Barno:	Right. Right.

Patrick Fine:	They're there to support the work of their national counterparts. We don't make progress if we substitute ourselves for the legitimate actors, the legitimate governments and leaders in a country.

Gen. David Barno:	Yeah, I think that's a key problem the American military has often is that if we do it ourselves, we leave nothing enduring behind when we leave.

Patrick Fine:	Exactly.

Gen. David Barno:	And, I've watched us go through several cycles in Afghanistan where we attempted to put the Afghans in the lead, then we took the lead, then we put them back in the lead, then we took the lead again, and it was problematic. So at the end of the day, who's responsible for the outcome and can they stand on their own? You

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know, your goal is eventually you don't want to be there doing these things. You want to have the host nation fully capable of taking on its own security, taking on its own governance, taking on its own rebuilding of the nation and without having hundreds of thousands of Americans or tens of thousands of Americans there. And because of our enthusiasm sometimes to get the job done ourselves, we've actually worked across purposes to our long-term strategic interests, I think.

Patrick Fine: Yes. The term of art in the development field was "country ownership," and that's what we recognize is essential to effective efforts. It's another example in the 21st century battlespace where the objectives of the military and the civilian actors, the civilian organizations coincide.

Now, you've talked about counterinsurgency doctrine. It seems to me that in the last five years or so, that there's been a shift away from counterinsurgency towards a counterterrorism doctrine, and I think of the counterterrorism doctrine as really being focused on kinetic or combat operations. So it's, "Let's kill as many of the enemy as we can, and the civilian population and the needs of the community and the areas where we're working are not really our concern as a military. We're just out there to round up and neutralize the enemy."

Do you see a shift from counterinsurgency towards counterterrorism and did I describe it accurately?

Gen. David Barno: I think there's some trends that would suggest that some of that is happening out there, and I think the U.S. military still, you know, believes in counterinsurgency, understands that as the preferred way to conduct operations. That's what is going to give you an enduring result if it's successful, and that counterterrorism, you know, attacking the enemy, particularly the enemy's leadership by capturing and killing key leaders, that has a transient effect. Those leaders are replaced. The organization continues to function. You're doing the same thing again six months from now in the same place against the new leader and then there's another leader that replaces him next year.

Counterterrorism, these so-called CT Strike operations are, in a way, a Band-Aid to allow the U.S. military to cover more areas when they can't cover those same areas with a large counterinsurgency force. There's two ways to do counterinsurgency, in my view. One is that there's a U.S.-centered

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counterinsurgency effort as we did in Iraq when we had 150,000 Americans there in 2007, -8 and -9 and then the dominant counterinsurgency effort was driven by American troops on the ground.

The same thing occurred to a lesser extent in Afghanistan in 2009, 2010 when General McChrystal was there. He had over 100,000 Americans. He had another 50,000 NATO troops, and that was, you know, first person, hands on, U.S. troops and our direct allies doing the counterinsurgency, providing security for the population.

The other way to do it, which is now what we're trying to do in both countries is we provide advisors to the Afghan security forces or the Iraqi security forces and then let them do the local security of the population, ensure that, you know, that there's security available for the governments to function, but not have American troops in the hundreds of thousands providing that service. So, you can do it one of two ways. We have found, I think, in retrospect now that we can't afford from a financial standpoint, from a troop demand standpoint, from a number of conflict in the world perspective, to put 100,000 American troops in two, three, four, five, seven countries that might need that.

Patrick Fine: What about – what about from an effectiveness standpoint?

Gen. David Barno: I think there's an argument that the U.S. forces, when they were at their peak in both of these areas, without question provided effective security for the local population and enabled, during those one or two or three or four years, the host nation government forces and capabilities to grow. But the question is, is that enduring?

Patrick Fine: How is it sustainable?

Gen. David Barno: Exactly. And, when the U.S. pulled out of Iraq in 2011, the insurgency in Iraq was easily containable, relatively, by the Iraqi security forces. Four years later, we had ISIS back and they had seized half the country of Iraq, an entirely new, you know, insurgent group or non-state actor. And, the Iraqi security forces were incapable of stopping them, it seemed.

So, the problem is, if you build this, if you create this space, if you, you know, do it yourself, as it were, and don't get those host nation forces in the lead early on, then I think the ability to sustain that over time is limited. We're seeing that in Afghanistan today. The

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Afghan security forces are holding the line, but just barely, against the Taliban.

The realization has set in that we have to do counterinsurgency basically second party. We have to support other nations doing the counterinsurgency. And, that also takes us to where counterterrorism now fits. We have realized, and I think Africa's one place where I've noted this in the last two years, we don't even have the forces available to do the advisory missions because there are so many demands in so many places that now all we can do is go in and strike key terrorist leaders in the various organizations. Al-Shabaab comes to mind in Somalia.

We don't even have enough forces to be able to do anything but kind of keep these organizations from exploding in their capabilities, mostly by going in and targeting their leaders. We're still doing, you know, host nation support and some advisory work, but we just don't have the amount of force capabilities to do these large operations. We found that the big operations might be effective while we're there, but they often don't remain effective after we leave.

Patrick Fine: Yeah, so it gets to the issue of sustainability, which is another key concern on the development side. But, looking into the future in the next five years, what do you think we're going to see in terms of not just the U.S., but in terms of UN peacekeepers and the other military forces, do you think we're going to see a trend towards greater counterterrorism kinds of actions or more towards the counterinsurgency approach?

Gen. David Barno: I think one of the other big trends that's impacting U.S. military very directly here in the last two years especially is great power competition. The U.S. military is in effect shifting its aim point from the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, counterinsurgency operations, towards potential large-scale future conflict with perhaps China or Russia or even a large regional actor such as Iran or North Korea.

So, the pendulum has shifted dramatically in just the last two or three years from the ongoing wars to changing the military's direction towards having a lot more of it, training, preparing, equipping itself to battle these large, major state actors in a potential future conflict. That inevitably has taken a lot of these forces out of the potential availability to do, you know,

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counterinsurgency operations and advisory missions in Africa or you know, have a large number of troops in Afghanistan.

The U.S. military's priorities now are major conflict, no longer limited conflicts in Iraq, Afghanistan, Trans-Sahel, et cetera. What they are using, and the military term for this is called economy of force, when you have the least possible force to be able to achieve the maximum possible objective in an area.

So, now if you look at Africa as an example, the economy of force rule for the U.S. military there is how do I use very small forces to get the maximum effect, and oftentimes that's counterterrorism operations.

Patrick Fine: Yeah.

Gen. David Barno: It's not advisory operations that have a long half-life and it's never clear how effective they're going to be for many, many years. And most counterterrorism operations, they're not necessarily U.S. only, but they are – they're very focused with very specialized national forces. So, counterterrorism becomes the economy of force way to use a small U.S. force to have as much effect holding back these non-state actors who are terrorizing the country and in many cases, threatening, you know, U.S. interests as well. So, it's a challenge.

So, I think the tide of counterinsurgency is receding and the tide of counterterrorism is essentially staying the same because that's become our go-to way of achieving effects with very small forces and essentially holding the line in a lot of these countries where we can't any longer put a lot of American troops.

Patrick Fine: Especially we've seen a proliferation of conflicts as well.

Gen. David Barno: Right.

Patrick Fine: Or, we've seen conflicts that may have been long-simmering grow in scale. Applying the principle of economy of force is a good way of understanding why the tide is shifting away from counterinsurgency or for actions that are more aimed at supporting the civilian population to actions that are more aimed at combat operations.

Gen. David Barno: Disrupting the enemy so he can't actually disrupt the nation you're trying to support. That's a way to do it. It's the least troop intensive

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choice, but it's also putting a lot of strain on American special operations forces at the same time.

Patrick Fine: Right. It feels to me like the number and the, in a way, the intensity of conflicts is growing, not decreasing. I think of places where I traveled freely and those places are inaccessible now. And, it's not just in central Asia; it's in Africa, now in parts of Latin America.

Gen. David Barno: I think your observation is exactly right and it's frightening in some respects to see more conflicts. We're out seeing bloodier conflicts. We're seeing more enduring conflicts that don't seem to be able to be defeated by certainly the host nation forces in many, many of these countries, and I think that's going to continue.

If you look at the various global trends that are affecting that, you know, mass migration is one of those, climate change, the impact of water resource is one of those. The recurrent failures of governments to be able to secure, protect and effectively govern their people across the world, these are all things that I think accelerate conflicts and I don't see any of those trends moving in what I would consider a positive direction in most parts of the world.

Economically, we're seeing a lot of boats being lifted by the tide around the world, but one of the great flaws that will perhaps neutralize that to some extent, or at least limit its positive effect is failure in governance. Governance itself is under a lot of stress, and I think that will, particularly in areas in the developing world, will continue to be a cause and a catalyst for conflict. And, these non-state actors thrive in that space.

Patrick Fine: So, that suggests that the ability of humanitarian and development actors and militaries to work together, at least to coexist and to share spaces is going to continue and perhaps even become more important in the coming years.

Gen. David Barno: It will, and I think the value of a lot of these development organizations very much fits into this arena of improving the situation in the country to permit better governance. So, there's a great deal that can be done in a positive way by the wide range of NGOs and other organizations in the development world to help build better governance in some cases, to certainly set conditions for governments around the world, particularly in the developing world, to have a better scenario to work with. The U.S. military, I think, recognizes that, but I also think they're going to be doing it

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with a lot fewer boots on the ground than they did in the last
decade.

Patrick Fine: You know, that's a really important observation because what I
                       hear you saying is that when military action is required, for it to be
                       able to achieve its long-term objectives, which is the return of
                       stability and of peace and then the conditions for the society to put
                       itself back together, for people to have normal lives, to have
                       livelihoods and so forth, that the key factor on the civilian side is
                       governance and that the military is not the force that is best suited
                       to build that governance.

Gen. David Barno: No, absolutely not. Absolutely not, and we, the military, the U.S.
                       military, has had to dabble in that in a number of different places,
                       but I think that scenario where the United States specifically could
                       invest a lot more resources to build more capacity to help foreign,
                       developing world nations especially, to improve their governance.
                       We have a tiny, tiny amount of resources devoted to that, and I
                       think that area could produce some very outsized results if we put
                       some investment against it.

Patrick Fine: I think that the development community would agree with you on
                       that. In fact, because it's difficult to measure short-term benefits in
                       governance programs, it's difficult to justify funding for
                       governance programs. You know, that's the crux of the matter. If
                       you're going to really get to long-term stability in these chronically
                       conflict-affected spaces, and yet it's one of the areas that is under-
                       invested in because of the difficulty in making rapid progress.

                       Where do you see the UN fitting into this and peacekeepers fitting
                       into it?

Gen. David Barno: I think the UN's got an important role to play and you know, I was
                       a big fan of the United Nations Assistance Mission in Afghanistan,
                       I made a point of spending a lot of time with the mission director
                       there, ensuring that our folks out in the field supported what the
                       UN was trying to do.

                       Those kinds of missions, I think, have great value because they
                       also integrate and help provide space, I think, for NGOs to operate
                       and put some degree of security out there. And the peacekeeping
                       part of that is an interesting dynamic. We didn't have any United
                       Nations peacekeepers in Afghanistan. Right?

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They're most effective, in my view, when they have a peace to keep, when there's some kind of a treaty or an agreement that they're going to actually be there to separate the two warring factions, whatever the case may be, but they're probably least effective, in my judgment, when there is no peace, when they're facing an active terrorist group or a non-state actor who is particularly unlimited in their brutality.

We see this again, Boko Haram being a good example, we see this with al-Shabaab to some degree certainly as well in Somalia. What I do find somewhat troubling with the UN groups is they're not reliable in terms of their willingness to fight should they need to to do their job.

Patrick Fine: Yeah.

Gen. David Barno: And whereas American forces, that's job one. You're always prepared to fight and that's how you establish your deterrent value against adversaries, because they know you will fight if called upon or if attacked or if people you're protecting are attacked, you are going to fight. Well, that's not always the case with UN peacekeepers.

Patrick Fine: It's also how a force establishes its legitimacy with the civilian population. I was in the eastern Congo in November and while I was there, there was a terrorist group that attacked a village and they murdered seven civilians. That attack took place a couple of hundred yards from a UN peacekeeping camp and there was a firefight that went on overnight. The peacekeepers never came out of their camp.

And the reaction by the civilian population was to demand that the peacekeepers leave. People in that region were outraged. It created very destabilizing demonstrations that turned into riots, protests against the UN's presence 'cause they said, "If you're not going to protect us in a situation like that, then why be here at all?"

Gen. David Barno: Yeah, unfortunately that's not an uncommon phenomenon over the last two decades, especially. Now, this blame does not all accrue simply to the peacekeepers themselves. There's a mandate they get from UN in New York and sometimes those mandates are dominated by risk aversion, if you will, the unwillingness to put any forces at risk, an unwillingness to take casualties, certainly an unwillingness to actually fight to do your job.

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And, I think that really negates the effect and certainly negates the deterrent value of peacekeepers. If the adversaries out there, the terrorist groups know that that's how the United Nations peacekeepers are going to behave, they're empowered, the terrorists, to do whatever they want. They know they have a free hand. That's the reverse effect of what you're trying to achieve.

Patrick Fine: Right. It's actually counterproductive.

Gen. David Barno: Exactly. Exactly.

Patrick Fine: Yeah. Do you see any trend where that would change and the terms of engagement for UN peacekeepers would become more assertive and they would be expected to actually carry out combat operations in order to quell a conflict?

Gen. David Barno: I think that's unlikely. I think that undercuts their cultural norms of how they see themselves or what the purpose of UN peacekeeping is. In a clean state versus state conflict that has a peace treaty at the end of a conflict, they're a great force to put in there to maintain stability, to enforce that peace that's already been agreed upon in a world that's increasingly threatened by non-state actors who don't respect treaties or in the middle of conflicts, I think the traditional UN peacekeepers is increasingly obsolete unless they're given more authority.

Patrick Fine: Have you looked at all at the establishment of the African Union's new peacekeeping function? They've put in place an operation that can mobilize contributions from militaries from African countries to play a peacekeeping-like function.

Gen. David Barno: Yeah, I think it's a valuable contribution to peace that having more forces and having collective action with a number of countries represented who actually are stakeholders. I mean, they, I think, will probably be more assertive than a United Nations peacekeeping force might be and willing to defend themselves, defend the civilian population, take more assertive military action, should they need to do that. So far, that looks promising. We're seeing that in Somalia in an environment that's pretty tough and they seem to be holding the line there and doing pretty well. So, I think that's, you know, positive growth of this sector in a way that doesn't require the UN to be involved.

Patrick Fine: It's interesting. It seems to be that a takeaway from this conversation is that as we look to the future, we're likely to see a

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continuation and perhaps even a proliferation of conflicts of different sizes that affect the civilian populations in the areas where the conflict is taking place and that are going to require militaries and humanitarian and development actors to occupy the same space and to work out some means of coexisting in that space.

Gen. David Barno: Right. Right. Absolutely. The U.S. military from the last 20 years of conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan especially understands who these actors are, understands they're going to be in the same battlespace that the military operates in virtually anywhere in the world and I think has a fair bit of respect for the courage of these people out there in these very contested zones doing their jobs. And, I think the military actually has civil affairs organizations that are devoted to, in effect, working with these actors and understanding the civilian population and needs of the civilian population in every operation we go into now. So, I think this has, in some ways, been an eye opening set of events for the U.S. military to understand who all these other players are and to recognize that they're going to have to interact with them when they go to war or in conflicts short of war, some of these limited conflicts in the future.

Patrick Fine: I hope that those lessons don't get lost as time passes. My observation in Afghanistan and then also in Iraq was that you had members of the military and the civ-mil units and even in some of the combat units who were very adept at connecting with communities and viewing the communities as the center of gravity and then at working with civil society organizations, with other international organizations, in a way that promoted stability, that promoted the well-being of the population. But, it's not clear to me whether that experience and the lessons learned from that are being fully integrated into the doctrines and the thinking of the military today and that going forward, we'll be able to draw on those lessons.

Gen. David Barno: I think it's a risk, and I think the experienced senior sergeants and the captains and lieutenants are now reaching the point where they're about to retire from the military and the younger generation who's only been in for the last five years or ten years haven't – didn't have the same experience as those that served in Iraq or Afghanistan in '05 or '08 or '09. I think the lessons have been reasonably well institutionalized in doctrine, but the experience ages out as people leave the force.

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And, as you now turn to major power conflicts, your sensible priority, these issues of working with the local population, you know, kind of fade into the background in importance. And that I think is worrisome. So, there is a risk that all these hard-won lessons are going to have to be hard won again the next time we do this in a similar situation five, ten, twenty-five years from now. And I do have concerns that, you know, 15 years from now, we'll be in a not-dissimilar situation that I was in 2003 in Afghanistan when the last counterinsurgency manual was published in 1967 and it was all about Southeast Asia. It wasn't about Afghanistan.

Patrick Fine: Right.

Gen. David Barno: So, I worry about that, and I think there is a number of folks in the force that worry about that.

Patrick Fine: So, that is an area where advocacy would play an important role.

Gen. David Barno: Absolutely.

Patrick Fine: To make sure that policymakers are aware that there is experience and lessons that will apply to future conditions and that we need to guard them and we need to maintain that capacity.

Gen. David Barno: Yep, absolutely.

Patrick Fine: General Barno, in our discussion today, and looking at some of the trends that are going to shape the future, one of the concepts that comes out is the need for all actors to be able to adapt to new conditions. Where can listeners find out more about that?

Gen. David Barno: Well, we've taken some of the ideas from our Strategic Outpost column at *War on the Rocks* and built that into first a class that we're teaching and now a book that'll be coming out in July from Oxford University Press and it's called *Adaptation under Fire*. And, the book basically looks at the challenge of militaries going into conflicts with one set of ideas and then realizing when the battles start that they have predicted a very different war than the one they're in and how quickly they adapt often means whether nations succeed or fail in these wars.

So, we're looking at a number of historical case studies. We're looking at the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan from an adaptability standpoint, was the U.S. military adaptable enough in those wars or not? And, then we're looking at the future and making some

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assessments on where the trend lines are going in the world and what that means for the importance of military adaptability in the future and judging whether the U.S. military needs to make some change to become more adaptable.

So, that'll be out around the first of July from Oxford University Press and we're excited to get out and talk to a lot of people about that here in the coming year.

Patrick Fine: So, I have a final question for you, General Barno. We've talked about tough issues around conflict, around non-state actors, about malign forces that are having an impact on our world and that are likely to continue to shape the future. Looking at that, do you look at the future as an optimist or as a pessimist?

Gen. David Barno: Well, I'm usually pretty optimistic, but I think my optimism is being challenged here in the last few years, particularly the last three or four years. And, it totally goes back to this issue of governance. I worry about that. You know, modern democracies are having some significant challenge with governance, as are developing states who, you know, are trying to find what kind of governance they want to have in their states. I'm seeing, you know, there's a rise of authoritarianism around the world. There's isolationism is taking hold, and nativism and nationalism in a lot of countries.

So, that's disturbing. I didn't think I would see that in my lifetime. Having lived through the Cold War and then the, you know, the unipolar moment of the United States through the 1990s and then, you know, spent a lot of time in Afghanistan in the decade or so after 9/11, it's surprising to me that we're at this point in time. But writ large, I think there's great reason for optimism. I mean, the energy of human beings around the world, the technological advances that we're seeing, the incredible change and uptick in economic wherewithal around the world, the number of people that have been pulled out of poverty in the last 20 years really gets buried under the bad news often.

And so, I think there's a lot of promise out there, if we don't screw it up ourselves. So, I'm hopeful that we can collectively figure out the governance problem and find ways to learn some lessons from the painful experiences we've had in conflicts over the last couple decades and apply that to building a better future.

I'm cautiously hopeful we can figure this out as we go forward.

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Patrick Fine: Right. So, I hear cautious optimism, but also a realism about the kinds of challenges that we face. And, I want to end with the point that you've emphasized several times in this conversation, which is the importance of governance in conflict-affected areas, and that without progress in governance that actually governs with the interests of the population at heart, that there's not a military solution nor is there a civilian solution.

Gen. David Barno: No, I think that's right. I mean, if you have a failing or failed government in place, they can undo all manner of good things in any of these other sectors. And so, I think it's taken a while for me to kind of come to that conclusion, but I'm increasingly convinced that that's the area where we need to put more emphasis, we need to find ways to empower better governance at all levels around the world, and that many things can flow from that, but very few things can happen without that.

[Music]

Patrick Fine: Listeners, thank you for tuning in. I'd love to hear your views about some of the concepts that we've talked today about some of the intersection between how militaries operate and view a conflict-affected space and how development actors do and then some of the differences. I'd love to hear both where you agree with some of the points you've heard today and where you disagree with those points.

So, share your comments and share this episode with your colleagues and with the community. Tune in next month for another discussion. Subscribe now so you don't miss it.

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