

2fold: Investing for impact

Ian Langford

CAROLINE GURNEY: I'd like to begin by acknowledging the Traditional Owners of the land on which we meet today, and recognise their continuing connection to lands, waters and communities. We pay our respects to Elders past and present.

IAN LANGFORD: War's nature is imposing will through violence, one country to another. War's character are the tactics, techniques, procedures, the operating environment that evolve constantly. And what we're seeing now, and we see evidence of this in Ukraine and in other conflict areas, is that the emerging technology sets that include robotics, artificial intelligence, space-based technologies, quantum sensing and encryption are really accelerating these technology dynamics to future warfare and they're becoming determinants.

CAROLINE GURNEY: That was Ian Langford, one of the Australian Defence Forces most respected and decorated leaders. Over three decades in the army, Ian served in Afghanistan, Iraq, Israel and Syria, among other places. He was awarded the Distinguished Service Cross on three separate occasions. Ian has said to have been in the mould of US Admiral William McRaven, the man who masterminded the mission that brought down Osama bin Laden.

When he retired last year, it was described as, and I quote, "a massive loss for the Defence Forces". Ian is also scarily smart. He has more degrees than a thermometer, and I had the pleasure of hearing him talk in Tasmania last year. He spoke about his time in Afghanistan, the current geopolitical situation and what it means for the West and the future of warfare. Very serious topics. It's fascinating and incredibly terrifying and we're going to delve into some of these topics today. Ian, welcome and thank you so much for joining me.

IAN LANGFORD: Thanks very much. It's a great privilege to be here and again as part of the Wilson family, it's always a pleasure to come in and say hello to everyone and be part of something special. I really appreciate it.

CAROLINE GURNEY: Oh, thank you. I'm going to ask a question that we start with every time we interview a guest, but first a bit of background. The podcast is called Twofold because at Future Generation, our purpose is Twofold. We want to get the best investment returns for our shareholders,

and we also want to get the best social outcomes for young Australians. We do that by investing in mental health and youth at risk not-for-profits. So Ian, what's your Twofold? What are your two driving purposes?

IAN LANGFORD: Well, I've spent 32 years in the military and I'm sort of two years into my Plan B. What really motivates me now is purpose and value. When you're in an institution like the army, you have a reason to get out of bed every morning. You have a routine, you've got people you're responsible for, and people you're responsible to. And in certain instances, you're managing risk, including risk to life. So you have that purpose and that intrinsic motivation. Beyond the uniform, beyond military service, it's not about recreating that necessarily, but it's about finding the same kind of feedback in terms of value and purpose that can motivate you to be the highest and best version of yourselves, but also enable others to aspire to and achieve the same kind of outcome. It's a little bit ethereal. It doesn't manifest in terms of a particular profession or pastime, but it's about finding the motivation to want to make a contribution. and as I said, be the better version of yourself.

CAROLINE GURNEY: Thank you very much for sharing that with us. I really want to turn to a topic that's dominating the news cycle at the moment, and that is the terrible situation in the Middle East. You've obviously recently been travelling, you've been to Riyadh, you've been to the UAE, you've been to Abu Dhabi, you've been to Lebanon. I'm really interested with your background, what is really going on there? And also, what are the broader implications for the West?

IAN LANGFORD: Well, the issue of the Middle East remains a vexed issue that has global consequences, whether it be the impact of the Cold War, where we saw countries ally themselves to either the United States or the Soviet Union, or in the post-Cold War environment, we're now seeing the broader regional tension between Iran and its sheer form of Islam and those Sunni states that are contesting, led by the Saudis and others. And that proxy will manifest itself in terms of interruptions to maritime traffic in the Red Sea for example, all the way through to the sponsorship of terror groups like Hezbollah in northern Lebanon that threatened Israelis and Israeli farms living across the Hula Valley in the northern part of that country.

So what we see now in its latest manifestation, which is the atrocities of the 7th of October and the response by the Israeli government, is yet another chapter of this tension that remains unresolved. And I think for the world moving forward, the risk of contagion in terms of conflict spreading beyond the Middle East is serious and it's real. And you can also see the reactions of the citizenry of many countries that normally wouldn't be interested in Middle Eastern politics on this particular issue. It's become a red-hot issue, and it tends to polarise like no other right now.

CAROLINE GURNEY: You have extensive experience in conflict zones. Many of them have long-term consequences for Australia and its legacy, places like Iraq and Afghanistan. What are some of the key lessons and insights that you would take from that?

IAN LANGFORD: Firstly I would say that, and this is a lesson that humanity has learnt since time immemorial, is that war and conflict ruin everything. There is often a righteous and a virtuous reason for countries to use the military to defend themselves, to defend their values, to protect the weak, to shelter the innocent. And they are righteous and honourable reasons to use military power in that context. But everything comes at a cost. Whether it be the conflict in Afghanistan, which from an Australian point of view was our longest war in terms of commitment, or whether we see the liberation of other countries in the Middle East that have been suffering at the hands of totalitarians, there is always a downside and there is always a human dimension to war which creates suffering. And so I think, given what we are seeing in the Middle East, given what we are seeing in the Ukraine right now, and the pressure that the international system is under, it is worth us perhaps talking to those that were in the last great global war, the Second World War and some of the survivors, both civilians and military from that conflict, to remind of what true horror looks like in the context of global conflict.

CAROLINE GURNEY: Let's carry on with Afghanistan, because there was obviously a huge public outcry in terms of the actions of the SAS. How does a country actually reconcile its military operations in both a positive and a responsible way?

IAN LANGFORD: Just to clarify, those allegations remain unproven, and again there's a process that is underway to ask all of us in terms of our accountability. So I wouldn't want to presuppose an outcome. What I would say is that in the history of our country, we have a tendency to justify going into conflict, oftentimes for the right reasons, but invariably, it's always the case, it's very difficult to extract and come out of it. And I think in the context of that particular experience for our generation, we have learned that lesson.

The virtue around going into Afghanistan as it relates to the US-led response to the 9-11 attacks, the very quick capitulation of the Taliban government, and the establishment of what I would describe as a democratic enough alternate, which was tragically not sustained and resulting in the catastrophe of 2021, which saw the return of the Talibs, is testament to, again, the high risk nature of some of these activities. And also the human cost that comes as a result, both in terms of non-combatants and victims of war, but also in terms of volunteers that wear our nation's uniform and undertake to do righteous and honourable things that come with risk. And again, I would say that our legacy of

Afghanistan is one that this country needs to spend more time reflecting upon. We need to think about the reasons why we choose to go to war. We need to understand that when we choose, we have a moral obligation to go to win. A half commitment or a policy that doesn't fully articulate strategy in terms of its ends, its ways and its means, I think is irresponsible on the part of those that make these decisions. And they have an obligation to our military forces and our citizenry more broadly to state war aims, to be able to resource and commit fully. If you're going to put people in harm's way, you've got a moral obligation to allow them to win, and then to stand next to the legacy of those decisions and assume responsibility in an enduring way.

CAROLINE GURNEY: So as a soldier, it's imperative that you believe you are on the good guy side, especially if you are, as you just said, put in a position to win. Do you sometimes worry that it's a fine line in terms of the good and the bad side? How do you think about that? How do people that have been under your command think about that?

IAN LANGFORD: Well, it's a reason why military ethics are a discipline all of their own. We want our soldiers to reflect our values. We want our soldiers to operate within a legal framework that makes it very clear what is lawful and what is unlawful. We want our soldiers to be the best version of ourselves. And when I say soldiers, I also mean aviators and sailors in that true Australian Defence Force context.

Our nation is deservedly proud of our Defence Force. We want them to be the best versions of us. Ethics and values matter, because that's what keeps you on the side of right when you're under pressure. So having a moral framework, which is the difference between right and wrong, and then having an ethical framework, which is about doing what is right in the context of sometimes doing challenging things, being on the side of right, is a really important dimension to how we train professional military forces. And I think the experience over the last 20 years has only underscored that. And as the operating environment becomes more challenging, as we have adversaries in the future that use computers, often don't wear a uniform, don't subscribe to the traditional way of identifying what an enemy combatant or an adversary is. The ethical handrail that we give our soldiers to be able to operate legally, morally and ethically becomes all the more important. Hence, my previous comment around when we think about sending our military forces into conflict, into harm's way, we need to design a strategy that allows them to win, to allow them to conclude that commitment and to come out of it in a way that is survivable and positive.

CAROLINE GURNEY: Let's go back to something that you just said there. And it was also something that I heard you speak about when we were in Tasmania last year. It was really about the future of warfare, whereby countries can deliberately disable satellites, you can disrupt communication, like you said, they're not wearing a uniform. How hard would that be? Can you elaborate on that? Is that really likely that we're actually not fighting people in the uniform? It seems to be many for themselves.

IAN LANGFORD: That speaks to war's character. There's a way of thinking about this. War's nature is that it is a human contest where you're imposing will through violence, essentially, and that nature is enduring. So that's what qualifies to some degree, as the definition of war itself. It's the reason why you can't go to war against a corporation, why you can't go to war against a non-state actor.

There's been rules since really 1648, the Treaty of Westphalia, around what that constitutes. War's nature is imposing will through violence, one country to another. War's character are the tactics, techniques, procedures, the operating environment that evolve constantly.

And what we're seeing now, and we see evidence of this in Ukraine and in other conflict areas, is that the emerging technology sets that include robotics, artificial intelligence, space-based technologies, quantum sensing and encryption are really accelerating these technology dynamics to future warfare and then becoming determinants. Whereas in a previous time it might be how many battalions of infantry you have, or how many battleships you have, or how many air force aircraft you have - and that's still important as it relates to war's nature, but increasingly war's character in the technology dividend I just talked about, is becoming significant in determining the outcome. And the Americans in the first Gulf War in 1991, when they fused global positioning systems and used satellite navigation with precision missiles, and with information warfare via their command-and-control systems, they demonstrated that.

You fuse those technologies, and you combine it with your hard power, and you can be decisive in effect. And I think we're seeing that now in modern conflict and it really is an insight into what will happen in future conflict.

CAROLINE GURNEY: We've had a few decades where large-scale conventional war went out of fashion, as we've just talked about. But Lawrence Summers recently said, "the holiday from history is now over". If you look at the Ukraine, the Middle East and obviously what's happening in China, what do you believe are the wider implications for this, for Western democracies, particularly Australia?

IAN LANGFORD: Well, we had a unipolar moment at the end of the Cold War where we thought that this thing called warfare in the international system was outdated and we didn't need it anymore. And the US went after what is loosely described as a peace dividend, where they demobilized much of their military power because they believed it was no longer necessary. And then we see a country like Russia invade Ukraine and rely on technologies that don't look dissimilar to what were used on the Western Front in World War I, which tells us that warfighting and warfare as a tool of the international system, as a tool of statecraft, never went away, and now it's back in a big way. And you can see as the global system adjusts to one or two hegemonic powers, and the contests that come as a result, that when you've got diplomacy, information, your economy and your military as tools of statecraft, that the temptation to use the military tool becomes significant, particularly at moments of crisis. And so warfare, which never left the international system, we kind of ignored it for about 30 years, it's back in our mind in terms of what the realms of possibility look like as the international system deals with conflict and with disruption.

CAROLINE GURNEY: We talk about democracy being under threat. We've got the world's most powerful democracy going to elections in November. You've just returned from the US. What do you think the outcome will be? And what will the flow on be? We hear about it from markets, but from your perspective, what do you think it will be?

IAN LANGFORD: I think we're at an interesting time. Half the world's democracies are going through elections this year and into next, including our own and the US and the UK. The Indians are going through one at the moment with Modi being returned, albeit in a reduced majority kind of way. I'm heartened by the resilience of our democratic systems. The US is a republic. It's actually not quite a democracy by definition in terms of one person, one vote. The Electoral College means that four or five states can swing the whole election. But it's interesting in terms of its ability to be resilient when under real pressure. And we saw that during the Civil Rights movements in the 60s. We're seeing it now as the West, particularly the Americans, grapple with the threat of misinformation and what it means in terms of harmony across civil society. So that's testament to that.

We in this country have mandatory voting, which in my view is quite a protective factor. It obligates people to make a decision. It's not about right or wrong. It's about either self-interest or what's the least worst outcome. But nonetheless, they have to decide. So collectively, we have a democratic system where people need to state what's the least best outcome for them. Some would take that view. But nonetheless, they're participating in the process. And there's that reciprocity between the state and the individual that makes you part of the political system.

And I think that's a really important protective factor. Other democracies are challenged. And where you see big states pick on little states, like we're seeing in Russia and Ukraine in that conflict right now, that threatens the vibrancy of global democracy. When you think about nation states that act collectively, when we think about the arsenal of democracy, when we think about the coalition of the willing, we think about the World Trade Organization, not in the context of it being a UN-administered authority, but about collective action, democracies matter. It's about protecting citizens' rights in a system where big things can pick on little things, unless there are safeguards put in place. And that's why it's important.

CAROLINE GURNEY: Let's continue with the theme of elections. Obviously, Rishi Sunak has recently called a snap election in the United Kingdom. One of his first priorities was to mandate military service. What do you think of this?

IAN LANGFORD: Well, it's an interesting idea. It's something that no one in our hemisphere has really thought about since the end of national service here in Australia, and the end of the conscription element of the US commitment of the Vietnam War. I think it speaks to a broader issue of how do you bring relevance to demographics around obligations to serve?

And whether it be the Peace Corps in the US context, or we had in 2009, I think under Kevin Rudd, the idea of an Australian civil corps, which didn't really fly. I think the British Prime Minister has touched on this issue of what individuals are obligated to do in return to living under the protection of their nation state. And that's actually the bigger issue. This is not about conscripting young men and women to wear the uniform for the sake of it. Albeit there is a national defence dynamic to that. And you can see it also in places like Singapore and in Israel, and even in places like Turkey, where national service currently exists. Thinking about how we mobilise and employ national power and human capital was really front of mind for countries that are struggling to recruit numbers into their public service, into their militaries. And this is one way of simulating that debate.

So whether it ends up as an outcome in law, I think having that debate right now - what is the obligation of individuals to the state, and how do we bring national power that relies on human capital, is a really important dimension of political discourse right now.

CAROLINE GURNEY: What would you say the benefits of military service are for young people?

IAN LANGFORD: I'm biased, clearly.

CAROLINE GURNEY: I would expect that.

IAN LANGFORD: I'm a product of a training system that I derived huge benefit from. And it's not some sort of throwback to 1950s conservative Australia. I'm not talking about rules and regulations to bring people into line or bring broader discipline to a youth demographic, not for a moment. But what I do think is positive is what I like to call the shared experience of bringing cohorts of people together, in this context around about the same age, and understanding and having a discussion around what do they value? What is it that unites? What is it that, when there's a bushfire emergency in southeastern Australia, compels people to join the RFS, or to join the New South Wales SES, or to be part of something higher than themselves.

This notion of service, and I mean that as a verb, not as a noun. Now how do you serve is something that bears thinking about. The Royal Surf Lifesaving Association is one of the biggest all-volunteer organisations in the world. The New South Wales Rural Fire Service - one of the biggest volunteer organisations in the world. What is it that compels people? Why do we want a part of that?

And the answer is it's something higher and beyond themselves. There's a higher purpose. And I think people are yearning for it. I think there are two things we need that make us strong as a society. One is transformational leadership, and the other is a high purpose. And it's virtuous in the sense of what's good for our community also happens to be good for our country. So I think that's a debate worth having.

CAROLINE GURNEY: Let's talk about you. How did you get involved in the army?

IAN LANGFORD: I joined the army out of an army family. When I joined, we were at the height of the 1990s recession. It was out of country Victoria. I mean, unemployment was north of 30, 40 percent, and youth unemployment was probably even higher. We had massive shutdowns of manufacturing and the typical sort of blue-collar jobs that many people would normally fall into post school. And so for me, joining the Army was a means of escape. And I don't want to be too harsh on country Victoria, because it's a wonderful place to live, but there really weren't a lot of options.

I mean, you could delay the inevitable by hiding out in university and incurring a huge HECS debt as a result. But the army for me was an opportunity to be able to lift and shift from my circumstances and then grow opportunities for others. I was inspired partly by family service, but frankly mostly by the need to get a job. Coming from a very comfortable, but modest background, privileged to be able to do so. But wanting more, wanting to be able to generate opportunities, you often need a hand. It's not self-evident and it doesn't occur naturally that people get given opportunities in life.

It has to happen. And part of it is you've got to either create the circumstance or somebody's got to

create it for you. And for me, it was the army. For others, it might be a charity or a scholarship or indeed, something in terms of philanthropy. And I think, again, it just underscores the life-changing benefits that come from those sorts of opportunities.

CAROLINE GURNEY: Defence force numbers are falling. I mean, that's obviously in the news - it's in the news today. Why do you think this is? You talk about the benefits of your training, how do you think this can be addressed?

IAN LANGFORD: There is a challenge, I think, in terms of attracting young men and women to defence as an employer of choice. We're seeing that manifest in a number of ways. I mean, frankly, I think the legacy of our wartime experience is something that we're grappling with as a country. I'm not making criticism of anyone in that regard, but we saw that in the post-Vietnam period as well, post national service, when the army went through huge restructurings, everything, including the CMF and the Army Reserve, went through a massive sort of downsizing.

CAROLINE GURNEY: CMF?

IAN LANGFORD: Civilian Military Forces, which is a form of part-time military service that more or less became the Army Reserve in the 80s. There is a war legacy there and I think that's significant. The other challenge is it's obviously a competitive employment environment. Now, I don't necessarily buy into that because the skills and opportunities on offer in the military are pretty compelling. There might be an opportunity to just make that more obvious to people and maybe want them to serve for that benefit.

The other piece is that healthy militaries reflect modern society. We're a multicultural country. So how do you ask people who have fled war zones, who are second generation Australians, and their parents came here to get away from war and conflict. How do you inspire them to want to be part of military service? And that's a serious issue because increasingly the demographic of, dare I say it, white Anglican families, is decreasing, which is where we typically recruit from. And the plurality of other countries, people from other parts of the world and what the attraction to serve is part of the differential. It's not the army and the Department of Defence's problem to solve. It's the nation's problem to solve. And it comes back to that point. What is it that makes you want to be part of something bigger than yourself? How do you find value and purpose in life? And what is it that inspires you?

And again, that's the opportunity. And it's not just the military. It's in the police. It's in a lot of first responders. They're really struggling to get numbers. And I think it all comes back to intrinsic motivation. We want to help each other. People want to intuitively be part of something bigger than themselves. It's how we help them realise that which is part of the challenge.

CAROLINE GURNEY: Do you think in Australia we should mandate military service, or some form of service before self?

IAN LANGFORD: I wouldn't mandate it. I think that's a tool that you use in the moment of an existential crisis. We're seeing in Ukraine at the moment where everyone under the age of 27, soon to be 25, has to effectively register for some form of military service. They are the two minutes to midnight moments that I think are a special case. Mandating it comes with all sorts of challenges. And to some degree, it comes back to what kind of Australia do you want to live in?

There are pluses and minuses either side of that argument. But we want to inspire people to serve the nation in the way that allows them to be part of a fulfilling, common experience that has a civic virtue to it that's enduring. So, you might do four years in the military as a volunteer, and then you might move on to your second or third career, and then you might be a community leader or best of breed. And you're using the values and the lessons you learned during your military service to then bring greater benefit to society in those other roles.

This is about using a common experience to inspire people to want to help the nation in all sorts of ways, both in uniform and in other parts of life.

CAROLINE GURNEY: Continuing that thread, you've begun a second career in business and academia. What value has your training brought to your next stage?

IAN LANGFORD: I'm two years in, or 18 months in. I'm finding that I'm initially just trying to keep myself busy. My measure of performance was being as busy as I could be. You then realise that, well, hang on, there's more to this. And so, you now start to look to find purpose and value.

And what I would say, I haven't really made a decision or settled on what my best fit is. But through explorations and through opportunities and through meeting people, and Geoff Wilson is a classic. It was not a natural occasion to meet, but it happened through some introductions. He's an inspiration, as your listeners would know. He gave me opportunities to try different things. And I find that it's not about me being a different version of myself. It's about finding how I can value-add to that particular problem, or that particular modality of life.

Whether it be the university appointment I have, whether it be helping companies do market entry or do venture capital raise, or being part of the Wilson family, I'm finding that I rely on the values and the lessons I had from my military service to effectively be able to value-add to those particular challenges and problems that they asked me to solve. And I really enjoy it. But it's about people. It's about trust. It's about purpose. And it's about value. And none of those relate to any sort of monetary or financial dividend. This is about those non-material human connections that we think about in a legacy context. And I think that's important.

CAROLINE GURNEY: I love that you talk about Geoff, because obviously he's the founder of Future Generation. And in a way, it's helping our shareholders get a return, get dividends, get income, et cetera. But it's also helping not-for-profits. It's helping young people in terms of mental health and children at risk and giving these not-for-profits funding so they don't have to continually fundraise. They know they've got three years of funding, which I think is truly amazing.

As we are one of the biggest mental health funders now, I would really like to talk to you about mental health, because you have seen so much. You've seen so much trauma. You've probably experienced it as well. How do you keep yourself mentally resilient if you don't mind sharing?

IAN LANGFORD: I grew up in that late 1970s, 1980s Australia where mental health was always something that someone else suffered from.

CAROLINE GURNEY: That was if you ever talked about it.

IAN LANGFORD: You never talked about it. And particularly in rural Victoria, where at the height of recession, the tragedy of being isolated and the harm that it causes is evidence of the fact that we just weren't dealing with it well at all. Having taken a bit of a wellness approach to mind, body and spirit, in the first instance, you start to sort of think about that as a 33, 33, 33, which means you've got to spend a 30-view time protecting your mental health in the context of your total health. And I think once you do that, you take a lot of the stigma away from that being a problem that other people suffer from, because I'm either too macho or what have you, to ever admit that it's a problem.

For me, it's about protective factors. I keep myself very busy. I find if I stop or slow down, then you have time to perhaps overthink certain aspects of your life that you wish were either different or you would do alternatively. For me, a healthy body is really important. I think routine is really important, but it comes back to going to purpose and value.

I've spent weeks out in central Australia walking around in circles, howling at the moon, which, if

anyone came with me, they would truly think that I was bonkers. But for me, it was really spiritually important because you never have that time in the modern world today to completely disconnect, find yourself at a point where you can think deeply about issues and also, decompartmentalize things that you've kept separate for all sorts of emotional and life reasons for so long. And then the other aspect is, as I said, purpose and value.

So this is about how can I make a contribution to the greater good? And it's not about being a hero or being selfless, but that's what will be measured in terms of legacy and outcome. And I like to think, maybe rightly or wrongly, in the last 10 or 15 minutes of everyone's life, they're not thinking about their bank balance or how many letters they have after their name. They're thinking about the difference and the change that they've brought to the people who are close to them, but also the community more broadly. And I think that's true.

CAROLINE GURNEY: When you say you keep yourself incredibly busy, is that because you don't have to think about your mental health or is that because if you keep yourself busy, that helps your mental health?

IAN LANGFORD: Probably both. And again, I'm no psychologist. And if there's one in the room they'd probably say, well, you're just delaying some issue that you haven't dealt with yet, maybe. And it drives my family mad at points because you generate a tempo that can be healthy, but sometimes it has a second order effect that you're just too busy.

But having said that, it moves in sort of a time wave. We're all looking for something. And it's the case that I think if you apply some safeguards around your mental health that allow you to have space to think, time to focus on your physical health, time to focus on understanding value and purpose. A lot of people journal. And I think that value and purpose is really important. And then, to understand what is your event horizon in the immediate, in the near and in the long term? And how do you want to contribute to that now? The whole point is you might not get there, but that's not the aim. The aim is to be on a path and to be able to exercise agency and options around decisions you make. And I'm very fortunate insofar as I didn't plan to end up where I am. But I now am very conscious about exercising agency, about making choices, having choices and making decisions. And I think that's really important.

CAROLINE GURNEY: My grandfather was in the army and obviously he was overseas a lot, and it had a very heavy toll on the family. What would you say are the tolls now on family life for soldiers, given your experience?

IAN LANGFORD: There is a cost. There's a cost to everything. And military service has impacts on families that aren't articulated or clear to you when you join the army. Now, you join often as a young person and family sort of comes on the ride. But I think, if not the biggest, but to be one of the biggest reasons people separate is that they find they have a choice. They can have a healthy family, or they can be in the army. I think everyone would agree that we need to change the dynamics so that they never have to be put in that dilemma. I mean, women have had that dilemma since the Industrial Revolution. You can have a family, you can have a career, but you can't have both.

Well, turns out now you can have both because again, the systems and the structures are put in place, noting there's still some way to go to make that as equal and as natural as we want it to be. But the impacts of military service on families, particularly in children, is well documented. There's some longitudinal studies on Vietnam veteran kids. And I think in terms of the current generation, there will be a similar sort of outcome when we do this 10 or 15 years from now.

Long absences, I deployed twice on less than 30 minutes notice to move in. When I went to Iraq in 2014, my other half was in Brisbane. My daughter was at school. I went to work in the morning and didn't come home for seven months. So just imagine to your listeners, you walk out the door, you don't say goodbye to your family, and then you've got to leave for seven months. And it's not just an occasion to go on a holiday or what have you, but you're going into a war zone where there is real risk of harm. But you're doing it for the right reasons in the context of your obligation to serve based on the uniform you wear. So that's the dilemma that we often ask our military people to deal with. And the consequence of that is their families have got to deal with it as well. And they didn't get to choose whether they sign up or not.

CAROLINE GURNEY: They didn't sign up for it.

IAN LANGFORD: No, they didn't join the army, but they kind of did. And that's what makes that particular dynamic of military service really important in terms of how we want to attract and retain people.

CAROLINE GURNEY: Let's look at the world and society today. What worries you most in terms of where we're trending?

IAN LANGFORD: I'm worried about the liberal international order effectively being overtaken by a rival system that reintroduces into the world the kind of war and conflict that we've seen for the last sort of three, four hundred years, war on a global level. The difference now is that we have the kind of technology that would be more or less planet ending. And that's not only in the upper sphere of

nuclear weapons, but I'm talking about other threat factors to include; pandemics, misinformation and the social discord that can bring. And all of it having the kind of impact on our generation and the next generation that means that my kids have a lower standard of living than I had, which is not how it's meant to be.

Again, it comes back to what is our high purpose? And every generation wants the next one to have a better experience, and I'm fearful that is at risk. Rival powers of rogue nations are now organizing around this alternate global system where rules don't matter anymore. Some countries feel like they can act with impunity, and the amount of human suffering that will generate will be unlike anything that we've potentially experienced before. I'm not saying it's going to happen, but that's what I worry about. And you can see it manifesting in different conflicts right now. And in the context of great power competition, it would only take a version of what's happened in the run up to the First World War or throughout the 1930s for this to be a global problem, which has consequences that are unimaginable. I worry about that in the near term.

CAROLINE GURNEY: You really have given a lifetime of service so far to Australia, the way I see it. As my final question, what matters most to you now?

IAN LANGFORD: I like the idea of service as a personal virtue. For me, wearing a uniform, having a rank or a position meant that you're obligated to lead. And I think leadership is again, coming back to the previous question, what can we do about it? Transformational leadership is part of this country's obligation to making the world less dangerous.

The kind of middle power leadership that all of our policy documents subscribe to is where we need to aspire. And I'm not just talking about the government or politicians. I'm talking about civil society. I'm talking about the financial services sector. I'm talking about science and technology. I'm talking about not-for-profits and global peace initiatives. We are a country that has responsibilities. We should be unashamed in our ambition to contribute to global peace and security. And we should have the kind of ambition where we can make a difference.

And so, how do you lead from behind? How do you create the momentum around leadership that sees civic service as a common virtue? They're the sorts of things that I would like to find purpose and value in moving forward. And the other thing, too, is that nation states are important because it's how the international system works. But there is a real need as human beings for a bit more empathy around the place, whether it be how do you ease human suffering over things you have no control about. I'm not asking you to donate your next pay check to a cause in a faraway land. But I'm just

asking people to have some empathy, because I think that translates into good personal, community, civic, and ultimately sort of transnational action in that regard.

We've done it. In the 80s with mass starvation in East Africa. This country has been very generous in terms of its refugee and migration programs. And I think a little bit more of that as an emphasis would be helpful.

CAROLINE GURNEY: Thank you, Ian. It's been fascinating. I've got so many more questions for you. But thank you very much for agreeing to do this podcast, because I think some of the issues we've touched on probably are quite painful for you. So, thank you very much for everything you've done. And thank you.

IAN LANGFORD: Oh, I appreciate it. And again, all the very best to your listeners. And again, thanks for being part of the Wilson family. Appreciate it.

CAROLINE GURNEY: Thank you.

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