

Demetri Kofinas: 00:00:00 Today's episode of Hidden Forces is made possible by listeners like you. For more information about this week's episode, or for easy access to related programming, visit our website at hiddenforces.io, and subscribe to our free email list. If you want access to overtime segments, episode transcripts, and show rundowns, full of links and detailed information related to each and every episode, check out our premium subscription available through the Hidden Forces website, or through our Patreon page, and remember, if you listen to the show on your Apple podcast app you can give us a review. Each review helps more people find the show, and join our amazing community, and with that, please enjoy this week's episode.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:00:50 What's up everybody? I'm Demetri Kofinas, and you're listening to Hidden Forces, where each week I speak with experts in the fields of technology, science, finance, and culture, to help you gain the tools to better navigate an increasingly complex world, so that you're less surprised by tomorrow, and better able to predict what happens next.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:01:13 My guest this week is former United States Defense Secretary Ash Carter. Dr. Carter served as head of the U.S. Defense Department during President Barrack Obama's second term in office, and before that served in the number two and number three positions at the Pentagon. As you can all imagine, it was a privilege to have a cabinet secretary on the podcast, particularly someone with Secretary Carter's breadth of experience, and scope of responsibilities. His newly published memoir, *Inside the Five-Sided Box: Lessons from a Lifetime of Leadership in the Pentagon*, offers an insider's look at what it was like to head the largest department in the government, with its millions of staff members, and nearly trillion dollar budget.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:02:00 I began this conversation by asking Secretary Carter about his experience serving under Barrack Obama. The unique challenges of dealing with Congress, and the exigencies of protecting the citizenry from threats, both at home and abroad, while also addressing some of the constitutional conflicts that arise from NSA surveillance, and targeted assassinations of enemy combatants, or terrorist suspects operating outside of traditional war zones, and military theaters.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:02:31 It was also my intention to try to identify and do away with many of the assumptions that are embedded in much of the language, and in many of the conversations around U.S. foreign policy, in order to see if we might be able to have a more honest and informed discussion about the nature of American power, what it means in practice, and how we might begin to

think about international relations in a gig economy, where people are increasingly working contractually on projects with team members located in just about every corner of the globe.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:03:06 Also, Dr. Carter has thought extensively about the future of warfare in the 21st century, including the role of autonomous weapons, artificial intelligence, and cyber warfare, topics that we discussed in this week's episode as well. And with that, let's get right into this week's conversation.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:03:21 Secretary Ash Carter, welcome to Hidden Forces.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:03:32 Good to be here Demetri. Thanks for having me.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:03:34 It's my pleasure having you on. So, I asked you briefly before you came in, how your -- I called it a press junket -- we were debating about what a junket is. How has your press tour gone so far?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:03:44 I think a junket is when you're not working, and pretending you're working, and that isn't exactly the way it feels right now. No, I'm out trying to talk about the book, and it's a different kind of book, so you need to explain what it is. Not a memoir. It's not about me. It's about the Pentagon, and I want people to understand that.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:04:01 I actually said that it feels a lot like a "Dummy's Guide to DoD."
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:04:05 It is, kind of. I wouldn't say necessarily dummy. It wouldn't stick with all, everything that's in there, but it is an outsider's guide. I think people are curious about -- it's a mysterious place to people on the outside, and even for people on the inside. Most of them have seen a part of it, but it just turns out I've been there long enough, and had all the different jobs, I saw all the parts of it.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:04:29 Since '81? When did you go in, '81?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:04:31 Yes. Caspar Weinberger was the Secretary of Defense. Ronald Reagan was the President, so I've seen a lot of time and a lot of corners of the defense department, and that, and then, of course, it's the largest organization in the world, and so leaders and managers get a little sense of what I learned in all that time, running the world's largest enterprise. And the last thing I'll say, Demetri, is about people who might read it. I hope some young people read it, and say boy, this public service thing -- it doesn't have to necessarily be military service, DoD service -- but this

public service thing really seems like a good thing to have, as all or part of my life.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:05:11 Do you think that people have been dissuaded from public service over the last 20 - 25 years, because of the political environment?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:05:19 I think that one of the big distractions in the political environment, it's been that the happening thing in society has seemed to be to go out and make money, and start a business, be part of the venture capital--
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:05:32 Entrepreneurship.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:05:34 Yeah, and so for young people, the romance of being part of the government that was very present when I was a younger person, went away for a little while, but it's come back now, because what I'm doing now is I teach at MIT and Harvard, and the students there, they're different from the previous generation. First of all, they look around the world, and they see that something's wrong, for example, in tech. I teach a lot of tech students, and I'm a scientist myself, and they see that there's a lot of good that comes out of tech, but they don't have the naïve view that everything turns out rosy. They see the dark side, and they want to do something about it, so it's a different generation. I actually find that really, really heartening.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:06:17 We have the naïve view. I have the naïve ... Well, I don't have the naïve view anymore, but I think that's an interesting thing, because in the '90s the culture of the web was libertarian, anarchic, and so much of that has changed now, with really centralization on the software side, with companies like Google and Facebook.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:06:33 Yeah, they have become--
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:06:33 The data chokes through these areas.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:06:34 Big institutions, and they can pretend at the top, that by wearing a t-shirt or something, that they're not just big corporations, and so, but they have teams of lawyers, and lobbyists, and everything else, and, obviously, we're now in the middle of a big transition, of trying to bring corporate responsibility and public purpose more infused into the tech world, and I think it's time for that. It's a good thing. Overdue.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:07:04 Your point about, the thing you said about people aren't as familiar with the type of, you didn't say it like this, but the sort of leadership structure of working as a cabinet secretary. That's something I thought about when I read the book. McNamara, of course. Wasn't McNamara CEO of Ford, before he came over to the DoD?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:07:20 Yes, before he became Secretary of Defense.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:07:20 Right, so I think one of the things I found most interesting about the book was trying to empathize with being the head of the defense department, or more generally, being the head of a department, a significant department, where you have to have considerations that aren't ... Sure, the budget's enormous. You have more employees than all the big tech companies combined.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:07:42 Yeah. I can do McDonald's, Target, Amazon, GE.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:07:47 How many, 26,000? What is the number? No, what am I talking about? Sorry, not 26,000.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:07:54 No, there are about 2.8 million, plus--

Demetri Kofinas: 00:07:54 Right, because of the Armed Forces also.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:07:56 Well, yeah. The Armed Forces, civilians, and then you should add in contractors too, which is another three million. That's six million, and then you have their children, and their families, and that's a big chunk of America.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:08:07 Yeah, so that's the obvious part, but what I thought was more interesting is to consider the political dimensions. Even the most extreme private sector case, which is now embroiled in public debates, still doesn't have to take as many political cues or calculations into the thought process, as let's say you would at DoD, right?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:08:27 Yes. Well--

Demetri Kofinas: 00:08:28 You have to deal with the President on a daily, weekly basis.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:08:31 Mark Zuckerberg doesn't even have to deal with his board, and his board is a couple handfuls of people, and no board would ever do what congress did. Congress gives me, as Secretary of Defense, every year 3,500 pages of detailed regulations. I've

been on boards, and I am on boards of corporations. We'd never dream of doing that to a CEO.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:08:51 Also, your board doesn't hold public hearings.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:08:54 Yes.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:08:55 I mean like a corporate board doesn't hold public hearings.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:08:57 Yeah, and in fairness, under the constitution, at the end of the day, it's their money.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:09:01 Sure, but that's my point. My point is the fact that you have to testify before Congress, that you have to take in all these things into account. Another thing that, again, this is part of the starting light. At some point, early on in the book, you describe the experience of sitting at McNamara's old desk. Well, it's actually the same desk, right, but in a new office?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:09:18 It's the--
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:09:18 The same has been redesigned.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:09:19 No. It's exactly the same place. That's the thing that's uncanny, and, of course, I've been in there since Weinberger's time. Same desk, same table behind. The phones have gotten a little more digital, but they're same thing. Lots of buttons.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:09:33 That's what I wanted to ask about.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:09:34 The President on one of the buttons, and pictures around the wall. The same furniture. The leather, the World War II stuff, from the Pentagon's leather with the brass tacks, your butt sticks to them.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:09:46 Huge desk. By the way, there's a picture of you in, what is that? A-24. Not A-24, what is it?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:09:51 E-4B. Big airplane.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:09:52 E-4B, where those seats are enormous.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:09:55 Yes. They're like Captain Kirk, because in those days they were battle stations. Now though, people just open their laptop, and do their secret, or even top secret emailing, and that kind of thing, but in those days it was all custom made, and they're big consoles.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:10:12 The funny thought I had when I was reading that part of the book was I think slightly neurotic, or this is where my neurotic tendencies maybe go, and I thought what if I accidentally called the President? It's not just a phone that you pick, you have to hit the button, or whatever. I just thought what if I ... The idea that you could just call the President, that's just something that most people could never imagine. Your role at the defense department, it's just very unique, so that takes me to my next question, which is what was that like? What was it like working for ... You worked for Barrack Obama for about two years, roughly, right? The last two years of the administration.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:10:46 Yes, although, I was at lower levels. I was the number two, and before that the number three when he was President also, so I wasn't in daily touch with him, like I was the secretary.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:10:54 What was that like, having that level of access to power, that proximity to decision making that impacts so many people, and also, issues of life and death, and security, and things that let's say keep a lot of people up, just imagining them, that fuel so much of the dark fantasies of fictional television shows, and shows like Black Mirror? You're actually living in that world.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:11:18 Yes, and I guess the first thing I'd say is it doesn't feel like fun. It feels like a very serious business. It's not a game. It's not some Washington game, or anything, and then it depends also a little bit on the personality of the President. I was lucky, in that I thought that the personalities of Ronald Reagan, both George Bush's, Bill Clinton, and Barrack Obama, while completely different, were congenial and understandable. They're all very serious about their responsibilities.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:11:50 Clinton was warm and fuzzy, and give you a big hug, and he knew everybody by name, in the administration. George Bush Senior was on first name terms with every leader everywhere around the world, of every kind of conceivable generation. Barrack Obama was a very demanding, deadly serious guy about his responsibilities, and I really respected that, so they were all in their different way.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:12:16 That's interesting.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:12:17 Bush too, same thing. People make fun of him, because they don't agree with the Iraq War, something like that, but he was a serious guy, and a very decent, moral guy.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:12:25 Bush 43?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:12:26 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:12:26 That's interesting, so Obama, the playful qualities that we see in Obama when he gave Michael Jordan the Medal of Freedom, that's not the Barrack Obama that you dealt with.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:12:38 Of the Sit Room, no.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:12:40 That's very interesting.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:12:42 It is. He changes modes depending upon venue. It wasn't that he was cranky, or tyrannical, or anything like that, but he was serious and he was demanding, so I didn't go into him with a proposal for a combat operation, or a strike, or a hostage rescue, or an escalation in either, any of our campaigns, or anything like that, without really doing my homework. He'd ask questions, and I wanted him to have confidence that I'd thought it through as well as he could think it through.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:13:15 What was your position under Bob Gates during the end of the Bush administration, and the beginning of the Obama administration?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:13:21 Well, I wasn't under the administration when he first came, Bob. Bob's been a friend of mine for 20, 25 years. Most of these people I've known for years, and years, and years, so Bob Gates and I used to go out to Aspen in the summer, and hike, and talk, and so forth, so I knew him in between the time he was CIA Director and Sec Def. When Bob came in, of course, and people asked him what were his priorities, he said Iraq, Iraq, and Iraq. He really focused very heavily on Iraq, and he didn't have the time then to branch out into all the things I talk about the book, about rest of the world, and acquisitions-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:13:59 When he did come in, when was he appointed Bush? When did-

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:14:02 I'm going to say '07.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:14:04 2006?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:14:04 I want to say '07, but then I became his top weapons buyer and technology officer when Obama became President, and Bob really had then Iraq under control, if you can use that expression, and he had a lot more time for managerial things, which was useful to me, because I was his top manager, and I could get his attention, and get his agreement when I needed to do something that was big. Like the tanker competition, Boeing

versus Airbus, or straighten out the huge problems in the Joint Strike Fighter.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:14:44 Yeah, you talked about it in the book. Interesting.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:14:45 Deal. Getting MRAPs rushed to Afghanistan. I could always count on him to back me up. Meant a lot.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:14:51 What was that transition like? You were there at the very beginning of Obama's administration, right?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:14:56 Yeah, mm-hmm (affirmative).
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:14:56 What was that like? In many ways, you could see the evolution, also, of his foreign policy, and I wonder, is it fair to say that Libya, the adventure, or misadventure in Libya, impacted his thinking about what to do in the second term? How would you describe ... The shorthand for Obama's strategy, I've heard, is don't do stupid stuff. What is the Obama doctrine? How did that evolve?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:15:21 Well, I think it did evolve, because people evolve in those jobs. They get more seasoned, they get more knowledgeable. They stop running against the guy who came before then, and start viewing the world-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:15:32 Right, because he's reacting to what-
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:15:35 He was reacting to George Bush, and there was a lot of that in the early years. He ran to end two wars, he ran on the ticket that Bush simplified things too much, so he wasn't going to be a simple guy. He wasn't going to follow the Washington playbook, and that kind of-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:15:48 Unconventional, you talk about in the book. That he was unconventional. That was sometimes frustrating for you. I found that very interesting too.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:15:53 Well, yeah. Conventional wisdom isn't always wrong. It's called wisdom for a reason.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:15:58 Do you think he was, by his nature, or he is by nature contrarian?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:16:02 No.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:16:04 He wasn't contrarian for the sake of being contrarian.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:16:06 You come off the campaign trail, and you have this certain juice behind you, and all your supporters are like that, and so by the time I started to deal with him regularly, as the number two or the number one, he was past that point in the presidency, when you're still running the campaign that got you elected. Much more mature and reflective. I think where--

Demetri Kofinas: 00:16:28 You're saying when you were Defense Secretary, where you--

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:16:30 Yeah, which ... Had been secretary for a while.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:16:33 I love that story you tell, about when you really pressed him on his proposal to have you as Defense Secretary, and he said to you, "That's like asking me if I still beat my wife."

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:16:47 Yeah, that was a great expression. He had some really wonderful expressions, and one thing that it was really nice to deal with him about, was he was very respectful of people, and so if he had something to tell me that was unpleasant he would wait until he caught me alone, and I really respect that. That's, of course, a rule I always have, which is you give praise in public, and you give criticism in private, and if he was annoyed with something I did he'd tell me privately, and I really respected that.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:17:20 Sometimes I was gnashing my teeth, because the evening would go on, we'd be sitting in the Sit Room, and he'd go methodically around the table, and give everybody a chance to say what they had to say, and at some point my stomach's growling, it's dinnertime. Come on, we've heard from everybody. All the people that in my judgment were the principle ones who needed to act on that particular decision. Do we really have to ask everybody?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:17:45 I think everyone can relate to that situation, the conference calls, or those long endless meetings.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:17:52 Yeah, not over, until everybody's spoken.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:17:53 You give an example in the book, of being reprimanded by the President in private, and what that experience was like. What was that like? That's quite an experience. We all have the experience of being reprimanded by our bosses, but here your boss is President of the United States.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:18:06 It didn't bother me, because he did it in such a straight way, and he did it privately, and I knew that I had exceeded my authority,

and I chanced it. Do you know the old expression, better to seek forgiveness than permission?

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:18:22 Yeah.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:18:23 I was in a hurry. I thought it was the right thing to do. I knew it wasn't a decision to make by myself, and I got caught speeding.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:18:31 This thing about the foreign policy, and the strategic view of the Obama administration, is interesting. The context of the larger evolution of American foreign policy since the end of World War II. It seems that with the Cold War the focus was obviously very traditional. There was a bipolar world, and then with the war on terror it shifted, right? To trying to ... In fact, I think Rumsfeld even came into office before 9/11, talking about reorganizing the Armed Forces, and making them more agile, right?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:19:04 Yes. His first quadrennial defense review, which was I think going to be published on September 10th, just one day before, wasn't about terrorism at all.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:19:13 He was also looking for like \$4 trillion that were missing, or \$3.6 trillion that were missing in the budget.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:19:18 I don't remember that. Remember, he was Secretary of Defense twice, and I think--
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:19:22 Right, under Nixon.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:19:23 Yeah, and if you go back that far, I think maybe he had some memories of how the department worked, that weren't exactly the way they still worked, and he was still updating himself.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:19:34 We had this transition, where Petraeus was very influential, I think, also, in that.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:19:39 Counterinsurgency.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:19:40 Right, counterinsurgency training, and everything else, and now we're moving back again towards a world where -- now it's a multipolar world, so it's different. It's also very high tech, but there are also nation state actors. It's not the Cold War, but it's also not that war on terror.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:19:54 Bingo, you're so right. You're so right. Well, and remember, there was a little interregnum of the '90s, when we didn't have anybody to worry about, and remember all the business about

peacekeeping, and so forth? That seemed like a luxury, and Russia was down, and China was down. You didn't have to worry about them. Then the era of counterinsurgency, and counter terrorism, and yes, this was important to me, was to turn, to make this strategic transition from the era of counterinsurgency and counter terrorism, to get back to full spectrum, and particular Russia, China, and that's still going on. It needs to go on. I hope it goes on.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:20:29 All right, so this is where I want to start to dig in. Help me understand, what is the working assumption of people in the Pentagon and the government about what the world ... There's the Hobbesian view of the state of nature, right? Which is war of all against all, or man against man, whatever it is. What is the underlying assumption of the foreign policy establishment, of what would happen if the United States pulled back, or what the state of rest would be of the world? What's the starting point from which ideas of foreign policy are created? Does that make sense as a question?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:20:59 It does, and it's been debated in the course of our history, whether being involved or withdrawing is the right thing to do. Now, that was a more arguable point years ago, when the oceans protected you, and you could withdraw, but even then the United States found itself drawn by its own interests. It's not that you're drawn in, because you're suckered in by foreigners, or that you're trying to do them good at your own expense. It's because your interests reside there, and there are two things that are important to me.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:21:31 One is to recognize that these guys are really intent upon, if not doing us harm, at competing with us, and trying to minimize our own influence, and economic opportunity sometimes, in the case of China. We've got to protect ourselves against that, and the other thing is that I'm old fashioned maybe, Demetri, but I actually believe in the values that we stand for, and China is a communist dictatorship. That's fine. I'm not out to change them, and make them not communist, like we were out with the Soviet Union, okay?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:22:11 That's not going to happen.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:22:12 I don't want to be Chinese either. I don't want to be a communist. I don't want to live in a dictatorship either, and I think their ideology really is about being Chinese, and ours is, at its best, about the rights of man, as the Enlightenment would have said, and so you need to stick up for your own values, and you need to stick up for those who share your values around

the world. Otherwise, you'll find yourself in a world where the things that you care about aren't present, so for both those reasons you can't walk away.

- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:22:45 Now, I am for hard bargaining when it comes to ... People used to say to me, for example, Demetri, what are you going to do about the Middle East? What's your strategy for cleaning up the Middle East? I would say that cleaning up the Middle East is not an objective of mine. That's not an American interest. My-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:23:00 What does that mean?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:23:01 Well, making-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:23:02 Does that mean nation building?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:23:03 Yeah, they mean all this turmoil in the Middle East, everybody not getting along with one another, old sectarian rivalries, and so forth, what are you going to do about all that? My standard answer to that is my approach to the Middle East is based upon our interest. In that sense, we're selfish, Demetri, but selfish and withdrawn are two different things.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:23:26 What do you think about the contribution of American foreign policy in the Middle East? Of course, that goes way back. It goes back, I guess, at least since the Suez Canal officially maybe, but what do you think in particular with the Bush administration, and the war in Iraq, and since that period?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:23:42 Well, the war in Iraq really didn't turn out that well. I can't tell you I was clairvoyant in that regard. I did not oppose the invasion of Iraq in 2003.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:23:52 You supported-
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:23:53 I believed the weapon of mass distraction argument, so I'm not going to say I was wiser than anybody else, but it's plain as day there weren't weapons of mass destruction, and the whole thing turned into a pretty messy situation, because we conquered the place, and then it didn't rule itself. It descended into chaos.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:24:11 At that time, what was the thinking, the deeper thinking about why Saddam Hussein could not stay in power long-term? What was the idea behind that?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:24:21 I never got that part of it. I know that my predecessor, Dick Cheney, felt very strongly about that. I think he had, since the end of the First Gulf War, and he believed that it would have been better if we had taken out Saddam Hussein at that time.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:24:37 Think it was going to be a problem at some point.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:24:37 Yes, I think that's right. That he was a ticking time bomb, and if he didn't have WMD now, I don't want to put words in Dick's mouth, but maybe, even if he didn't have them now, although Dick says he believed he did, he would at some point, and so we ought to finish this off. I think there was a lot of thinking on his part-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:24:56 Like North Korea, that it would evolve into a North Korea?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:25:00 Maybe that analogy. North Korea is so sui generis it's hard to say, but, anyway, it was always the twin of North Korea. You know we used to have this strategy of two major regional contingencies after the end of the Cold War, our official military strategy, which is really a way of bolstering fore-structure.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:25:18 The idea of fighting two wars simultaneously, is that what you're talking about?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:25:20 Yeah, and that was Colin Powell and Dick Cheney's response to the bottom of the budget falling down at the end of the Cold War. People say we don't have the Soviet Union anymore. Why do we need a defense budget? They needed an answer that was a pretty big answer, and that's how you take two enemies, and then you say at the same time, and that you can use that to argue for a substantial fore-structure, and they weren't trying to cheat anybody, but they were worried about the bottom dropping out of the defense budget, and us dismantling the U.S. Military.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:25:52 Well, that was the period where this concept of full spectrum dominance came into vogue, right?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:25:56 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:25:56 This idea that this was an opportunity to solidify, you could call it American hegemony over the world, right? This brings us back to another question, which is, is it possible to have a world without either a global hegemon, or is there always going to be competition, a national type competition? I also was thinking about this idea, this post Westphalian order that we've been

living in for the past 400 years, or less actually. Slightly less. Again, is that even a natural state? It feels like some of the assumptions that we've been living with for so long, we need to revisit them, but it's not clear what that means in practical terms.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:26:36 Yes and yes, or in the way you traditionally frame them, no and no. I'm going to disagree with you about the United States acted as a hegemon. There's a difference between a hegemon and a leader, and I'll come back to that, and that's more than just a self-primping American idea, and the other thing is there's a difference between the overweening suzerainty of one country, and international system based on principle, in which most of the people most of the time get to do pretty well, and I think we've stood more for leadership than hegemony, if I may ... I really believe that about the United States. Sure, at the end of World War II who could stand up to us? We were half the world's GDP. It was unbelievable, but we didn't use that only in an overweening way, the way some other countries and other cultures might have done at that moment of history.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:27:35 Certainly as Germany would have done, and Japan would have done had they won the war, rather than we won the war. I think there is something to an international system, which is not just states, which is the Westphalian thing, but states plus rules, and rules that are not just about state A doesn't attack state B, but state A respects to some extent the internal affairs of state B, and that we have some general rules about how trade occurs, how politics occurs, and what is okay security wise, in terms of violating one another's sea space, or airspace, and so forth. You need to have that, if you're going to have a world where everybody isn't on tenterhooks all the time, and war isn't breaking out all the time.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:28:23 This is interesting. I didn't actually think of this before we started the conversation, but it came to me now. Before the United States, it was really Great Britain was the first global power, could you say? They had certainly global naval power.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:28:32 Yes, by dint of their navy, yes, I would say.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:28:35 Right, but that was still a world where the number of corporations that we have in the world today didn't exist under the British Empire, right?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:28:40 Correct, that's right.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:28:41 With the United States global order that came out of the end of World War II, it was more enlightened, in so far as it was more evolved, and it was more consistent with the world that existed at that time, and the idea of interests, this idea of American interests also had to do with protecting seaways, and creating a world that was safer for commerce, right?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:29:00 Yes.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:29:00 For commercial interests, for corporations, so it seems now that there's a further evolution somehow happening. In a sense, we see it in the U.S., we touched on it before. This idea that a lot of people are more entrepreneurial today. There's this empowerment of the individual. The individual is more empowered today than at any previous point in our entire history. Our constitution was created in the late 18th century, for a world with no running water, no electricity, no indoor plumbing, no powered locomotion. People were largely agrarian societies. There was large amounts of infant mortality, everything else, and the primary concern about abusive power came from a central state, right? The government. The constitution was written to prevent the accumulation of power, and to protect the sovereignty of the individual.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:29:49 Now we live in a world where a sovereign individual has the capability, today, with very limited technical capability, to, as we've talked about in our episode with Bruce Schneier, but also with Josh Corman, both on cyber terrorism, and security, and warfare, to scramble blood records the day before a surgery, or the morning of a surgery. Very easily kill lots of people. That's a very simple, dumb attack, but there are more sophisticated attacks that can still be done by an individual, or a small collective of individuals.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:30:19 Fast forward however many years. We can get to a place where an individual could print a bubonic plague, and spread that, so we're talking about a world where an individual can commit massive atrocities against society as a whole. It used to be the government was a concern. Today, the individual is also a concern, and I feel that this dilemma has presented an increasing problem in the public mind, because, on the one hand, we want and expect to have privacy, and individual sovereignty, and our rights, the constitution, the Bill of Rights. At the same time, we can feel this instability in the world. We can feel-

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:30:58 Yeah, and the need for collective protection.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:31:00 How do we navigate that world? I don't know that there is a clear answer, and this is, again, part of the problem, and let me just say this, and set it out. I think that, by and large, most of us have made a deal with ourselves, which is we say we want this, but, at the same time, we want to look away while you do all of those things that you need to do, to keep us safe, right?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:31:20 Yeah.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:31:21 That hypocrisy, that line has become increasingly difficult to walk.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:31:25 Yeah. Everything you say makes perfect sense. To the last point, I used to say in troop talks I said sometimes you feel like your fellow countrymen don't understand what you do, and don't appreciate it, and I said that makes me angry too, and sometimes I feel the same thing, but here's how you console yourself. Remember, that if we do our job well, they won't even think about us. They'll take us for granted. That's the great paradox of providing security to people, but you can't allow them to take too much for granted.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:31:56 I think there is a change in the mood of people now, and you see this affecting tech. It's something we were talking about earlier, where they are aware that technology isn't all good. It puts evil things and darkness in the hands of small individuals. You see that in social media, you see it big time, potentially in the kind of super terrorism that you're talking about. Now, how-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:32:23 Also, again, corporations too. That's something we discussed with Shoshana Zuboff. Google, Facebook have tremendous amounts of power.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:32:30 Yeah, and people are getting tired of that as well, and saying that needs to be checked, in the interest of overall public good. To the terrorist thing, you're right. All those things are formidable, and more and more power passes into the hands of smaller and smaller groups of individuals. That's a scary thing. On the other hand, more and more power comes to us collectively, if we use it well to protect ourselves, to do counter terrorism, and so there is another side to it as well, but we need to believe in our institutions that do that, and not think that if they're trying to do some reasonable level of surveillance, that they're violating our freedom all the time, and that balance needs to be done in a more open way.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:33:14 As far as companies are concerned, every once in a while I have a businessperson, and I hear this particularly from a lot of VC type people, and they describe themselves as self-made, and I have a little riff I do with them Demetri, and I say how'd you get here tonight? We're having dinner together. How'd you get here? "Well, I took the road." Where'd the road come from? Your company's very successful, and I respect that. You have employees, right? "Yeah, I have employees." I said can they read and write? How'd that occur? I get it, you're self-made, but none of us is self-made. You're talking about an era when people realized that to get collective water they had to support the government, to have a water company, and so forth.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:33:57 I think people are taking for granted what government is, and it's not that I'm trying to stick up for government. I'm trying to say that government isn't a thing that stands apart from us. Government is how we do things that we have to do together, in order to have a decent life, and it can be just protecting ourselves, or it can be doing the roads, and so forth, and people need to stick up for those things, and companies need to feel some loyalty to where they live. This is one of the problems that I've had occasionally, with companies that have acted like they're not American.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:34:30 I also think though, not what you just about companies not being American, but the thing you were saying earlier, it's a lazy way to think about the world. In other words, there's so much more nuance in the world, and the idea there is just the government, and then there's just the private sector, is ridiculous. In fact, there is a huge amount of cooperation between the government and the private sector. Again, this brings us back to issues that are concerning. The Chinese, that line is not even necessarily there. It's certainly very different.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:34:58 I've struggled. We've done a number of episodes on China. We did one on Huawei as well, a few months ago. It's still difficult for me to understand China. I do my best. By the way, interesting anecdote you mentioned in the book. You said you never actually met with Xi Jinping, right? Because you were-

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:35:14 I did. No, I met with him-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:14 Oh, you did end up meeting with him.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:35:16 He came to the United States. I didn't travel to China, as he asked me to, for the reason that he had embarrassed Bob Gates, my predecessor, when Bob visited, and that ticked me off, and I thought you're not going to do that to me.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:29 Yeah. Also, I remember, it's not from your book, but I remember George Bush W. talking about going to Russia, and Putin showed him his dog, and he said bigger, faster, stronger, because he had the terrier. I forget, what was his name? Barney, terrier.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:35:44 Yeah. I remember he brought his dog, and he knew Angela Merkel was terrified of dogs, and he brought his dog, meeting with Angela Merkel. He used his dog a lot. Very Putinesque.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:35:50 Fascinating. Yeah, we're all at core hominids, but this brings us back to the fact that the world changes. We don't live in 1776, or 1787, or in 1801. We live in a very different world, and we have to grapple with these changes, and the relationship between the government and the corporate sector is also fuzzy, right?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:36:13 Mm-hmm (affirmative).

Demetri Kofinas: 00:36:13 For example, one of the things we talked about, like I mentioned, Shoshana Zuboff's episode on surveillance capitalism. One of the themes that she explores there is this concept of what she calls instrumentarian. She has this notion of surveillance capitalism. You're familiar with this.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:36:29 Yeah, concept.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:36:30 Right, so it is the modern day version of totalitarianism. It is what happens-

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:36:34 It's corporate totalitarianism. It's an odd thing.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:36:37 I think it's a combination of government, it's the corporate sector just working ever more closely with the government, and using the tools of the private sector, that are currently being driven by an ad model, to begin to shape political ends, and it's a very disturbing view of the future, and it's informed by the realities of the power of behavior algorithms, and just how pervasive our technology is. Does that concern you?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:37:04 It does, but I am more concerned about abuse on the part of companies, than I am abuse on the part of the government, and I'll tell you why, and this may surprise many people to say, but I think the tech companies have a history, demonstrated history, Facebook has a demonstrated history of using your information in a way that people have concluded is detrimental to their best interest. It was good for the advertisers, it was good for

Facebook. It wasn't so good for them, including Cambridge Analytica.

- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:37:38 I know this is unpopular to say, and everyone wants to stick up for NSA, and so forth, but I have had a top secret communications intelligence clearance since 1980. In all those years Demetri, and this is just an honest statement, never was I aware of, and I read about in newspapers or history books, an instance where the United States government used its signals intelligence collecting capabilities against an American citizen, either to disgrace them, extort from them, imprison them. I just don't know of any cases.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:38:21 It was pretty deeply ingrained in us that, and I know it wasn't NSA employees, that it was foreign surveillance only. Now, that wasn't that things weren't collected, that didn't have Americans on them. We always had the problem of two people calling each other.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:38:38 Mass surveillance, you're talking about.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:38:39 Yeah. We always had problems of people making international calls, and one of them would end up being American.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:38:45 Right, but I mean with metadata, it's much more-
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:38:47 Yeah, it's much more complicated. Yeah, so there's all this stuff collected. That doesn't-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:38:51 It's more invasive to the individuals.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:38:54 Yeah, but that's not more invasive than companies.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:38:57 You're saying that the NSA surveillance is less invasive than corporate-
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:39:00 Well, I don't know less, but it's on the equal to Google or Facebook, in terms of-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:39:04 Its motivations are different.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:39:05 Yes, its motivations are foreign-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:39:05 It's the logic of its algorithm is different.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:39:08 Foreign intelligence. They're not trying to make money off of you, and I'm just reporting a fact, which is I'm unaware of any

examples. I know people are very uncomfortable with the government doing that, and they should be, but I don't think they can adduce facts of what they fear. That's a remarkable thing, and if there were counter examples I'd freely give them. I think it's a remarkable fact, of all the decades I've been associated with, I've never seen it misused. I think that's a pretty good track record.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:39:40 Do you worry about its future misuse? I think that's the problem that everyone has, right? The idea is if tools exist, really, again, it brings us back to the point of the logic of the system. What is the logic driving the algorithm, or what is the logic driving the application of the tools, or the systems? That's the concern. What happens as our government evolves, as we get new leaders?
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:40:03 One of the things that many of us, some of us already were aware of this. You were obviously more aware of it than others, but we've known for a long time that the executive, ever since the end of World War II, the executive has been increasingly cloaked with greater and greater amounts of power, right? After Nixon, that took a hit, but after 9/11, that was you mentioned, one of Dick Cheney's big gripes. Was that the-
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:40:24 Restore the power to the presidency.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:40:25 Restore to the presidency, the executive. That has made a lot of people feel uncomfortable in the current circumstance.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:40:30 I understand.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:40:31 Is that not a point of concern?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:40:33 Yeah, of course it will be. People don't like, if they don't like the current President, they're not going to like the idea of strengthening the presidency, in this-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:40:41 What about beyond not liking the President, and what about being concerned about the motivations of the President, or the sort of disposition?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:40:50 Well, that's what I mean by not like. I'm being nice. Not thinking he's a good President, not trusting him, feeling that he will misuse the power. Whatever the source of it is, I don't think it's right to hobble the government, to make us safe from the worst possible, we can imagine, because when you do that you do trade away something, which is the ability of the government to

act collectively to protect our people, to advance our commerce, and so forth. There has to be modicum of trust. If that trust goes away, then we'll be back to where we were with King George of Great Britain. I hope we don't get back there.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:41:30 This makes me think about something else, which is the importance of having an informed citizenry. Actually, it's not an informed citizenry. There's a collective, it feels like a bit of a psychosis that's happened in the body politic, and it has, I think, a lot to do with the not just lack of trust, that maybe stems from the natural cycles of let's say missteps, or abuses of power, but also, I think it's the technology. It's the logic that animates the technology. It's the fact that people are being increasingly siloed. News organizations, media outlets are increasingly radicalizing, I feel like, the population.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:42:12 The algorithms are driving increasing levels of radicalization in the public, and so we have a democracy, and yet, we need to have a public that can be brought along. Public opinion actually has to mean something, other than just being herded, and public opinion was mobilized by the Washington Post. Not mobilized in that centralized sense, but mobilized-
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:42:33 Yes, Walter Cronkite.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:42:34 Exactly. Walter Cronkite had the respect of both the left and the right, right? That was-
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:42:38 Yeah, we had a public version of a common truth.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:42:41 We don't have that.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:42:41 Then we could disagree after that. No, and I'm a scientist, so when I started out in science, scientists were in my father's generation-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:42:52 You have a PhD in physics, right?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:42:53 Yes, and we didn't quite dress like this in my day, but in my father's generation they had the skinny black ties, and the white shirts, and everybody thought that they spoke the pure truth. Now, we know since then science can have certain aspects of opinion, and so forth, but at some point you've got to trust. Now, when I don't know something I start reading, and that doesn't mean I'm totally credulous. That I believe everything I read, but I read people whom I have reason to believe know

more about that subject than I do, and I trust what they say, because I think they're telling their knowledge straight.

- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:43:30 We used to have a collective understanding of where you went to get that kind of understanding, what was going on today, and what the truth was. When you lose that you become really unmoored as a society, and that's what worries me about the attack on truth, attack on the press. Well, fair enough, but at some point, even attack on science in certain places. Vaccinations, that kind of thing.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:43:56 Again, the vaccination issues, and some of these flat earth ideas. I don't know if you're familiar with this. Are you? It'd be funny if you weren't.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:44:03 I've heard of them, but-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:44:05 Yeah, it's hard to believe. That is hard to believe.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:44:06 People believe things that are outlandish.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:44:09 There are people that are making a lot of money, and very successful, that believe that. Professional basketball players and musicians that believe that. It's hard to believe, and I think it only becomes possible to process when you begin to view this from a lens of some kind of ... Again, I don't know if psychosis is the right word, but it brings us back to this point that, objectively speaking, philosophically, we can have a conversation, that we can debate the objectivity of truth, right?
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:44:34 From a philosophical standpoint. There may not be any objective truth. It may all be subjective, but there was what you described a collective, subjectively agreed upon hallucination of the truth. We had a generally agreed upon view of what the world was. That is increasingly being broken apart, and I do find it to be scary, in the context of what we're talking about here.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:44:54 It's based upon, if you doubt that, since Copernicus people have been lying to themselves, that's a pretty wild hypothesis. How could so many people have been so wrong? It's one thing if you hear of a new theory, and you say I don't buy it. I'm going to wait a few years, and see whether it's proved-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:45:11 You're talking about geocentric views.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:45:12 You're talking about flat earth. That's-

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:45:20 There has to go with that, is another belief, which is that in the intervening years since that was demonstrated not to be the case, that millions, and millions, and millions of people have been deluded. I find that ...

Demetri Kofinas: 00:45:35 It's horrifying, to be honest with you.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:45:37 How do you think so many people are so stupid for so long?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:45:40 It also just says something about, I think it assaults our notions of the dependability of a general mind. The general sort of mind, because I can't imagine that all those people have, are crazy. There's got to be something else going on. There's something in the water, as they say.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:45:55 Well, they think a lot of other people are crazy. That's the thing that's interesting to me, and have been crazy for centuries. A lot of craziness to believe in.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:46:04 One of the other things that we've talked about on prior episodes has to do with cyber warfare, and I mentioned to you before about the Schlieffen Plan, was an example I brought up to Bruce Schneier, because when we were talking about cyber warfare, and then he made a great point, which I hadn't thought of. I was basically saying in World War I, the Germans, for example, or the continental powers, they were incentivized to mobilize first. They were on hair trigger alert, because mobilization during the first World War I could be the difference between success and failure. During the Cold War, as you've pointed out in the book, we developed a nuclear triad, and it doesn't even matter if there's a nuclear first strike against the United States. The United States, because of mutual assured destruction, can still retaliate.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:46:48 That was a reaction to the dynamic of World War I, essentially.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:46:51 Right. Exactly, and so now we're in a world where not only are we incentivized to act first, we're incentivized to act first, because an exploit can be patched. A vulnerability, it can be patched, and also, the vulnerability, the other thing that's concerning is that if the NSA, for example, the U.S. intelligence community has identified an exploit in some software that a foreign entity is running, that software is also software that we're using, and so the lines get fuzzy between who the enemy is, who the ... I don't know what the opposite of the enemy is, but where the lines are.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:47:27 Again, this brings us back to the fact that the world is not what it was 50 years ago. The individual has been more empowered. There's all this globalization. People are working across the world in commerce, and everything else. I guess, for me, when I think about this, it feels chaotic. The world feels chaotic, in a way that it didn't feel before.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:47:46 Let's take the two things you've got going on there. One was the gray zone between war and peace, and the fuzziness, and the other is pace, how fast things unfold. Let's start with the pace thing. That, to me, is the most fundamental, and where most people I think fail in thinking about cyber war. It is in the category of what we used to call in the defense department, I think they probably still do, hybrid warfare. That is that zone between war and peace, conventional war and conventional peace, that is increasingly populated by new things, like cyber, but also by little green men, and lying to the press, and so forth.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:48:27 Where you're basically carrying out an aggression, like the Russians and Ukraine, and you're trying to put up enough smoke, and enough fuzziness, that people aren't quite sure whether they're at war, or not, and I'm not fooled by that. People, as you say, if there's a cyber attack, is that an attack? Yes. I don't care. Cyber-Shneiber; If it's an attack, it's an attack, and I'll know if it's an attack, so we have to take that gray area, and you need to dominate that intellectually. Certainly as a military leader, and be sure that you can say what side of the line you're on.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:05 The problem of attribution, also.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:49:06 Well, yeah, and to that, attribution in cyber, it's not as hard as ... We knew, basically, the Sony hack was done by the North Koreans. We knew, basically, the Russians were-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:49:19 You may not be able to prove it, without revealing sensitive sources-

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:49:25 I think there's a bigger thing going. I think the country has a greater hesitancy to act, because they don't want to seem precipitous, or to prejudge the issue. I don't think that's safe. I think that we ought to, in the case of cyber, you're going to at some point have to say if you have established yourself, a reputation for yourself, as the kind of country that does this kind of thing, and we get attacked, and it looks like you, you're going to get what looks like a response from us. You have to scare people away from getting in the gray zone, because you're

going to treat them as in the black zone. You simply have to do some of that.

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:50:04 This highlights two issues. One, I brought up. I tried to express it when I talked about the fuzziness. It feels, to me, speaking personally, it feels like the world is becoming where the individual is increasingly walking through a hazy environment, where there are bullets whizzing by. It feels like there's a lot of crossfire, even the way we talk about cyber war. What does it mean to get attacked? Then also, we have professional Armed Forces. We don't have a draft, we don't have people that are participating in the collective defense of the nation. Do you feel like the world we're heading into is becoming increasingly less compatible with the traditional notions of a citizen democracy, and a republic, and a citizen Armed Forces defense that this country was built out of?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:50:50 No. I don't go that far, but I see where you're coming from, and both-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:50:55 I'm having a hard time articulating it.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:50:56 No. You've got two things going in there. One is, to me, when you endanger or damage American life and property, that's an attack on our country, and as Secretary of Defense, it's my job to protect you against that, and so I know how to call it the way I see it, and even in these gray areas, we're going to have to call it and say in advance. Look, if I see such and such a thing, given your track record, you can change your track record, you say to another country, so that I will perceive you as not doing this kind of thing, but as long as you've established a record yourself of doing this kind of thing, I'm going to have to hold you responsible for it. You need to do a little bit of imposition of clarity, where the enemy is trying to sow a lack of clarity.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:51:51 Another place where this is becoming increasingly fuzzy are autonomous weapons, or drones. The way that we conduct strikes or war is changing, right?
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:52:00 Absolutely.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:52:00 The military.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:52:02 It'll change a lot more in coming decades.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:52:03 The defense department, so, as I understand it, I believe this was reported in the Guardian. Maybe it wasn't the Guardian,

but I read somewhere that the Trump administration already, in two years, has killed more people in drone strikes in Yemen than the Obama administration did in all of the eight years. You don't need to comment on that. I don't know if it's accurate, but the-

- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:52:23 Sounds implausible to me.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:52:24 Okay, interesting. It might be civilians killed in action then, enemies killed in action.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:52:30 I would hesitate to levy that criticism against the new administration. I just know the system very well. I know our military very well. We don't conduct airstrikes that way. We do follow the rule of law, our own law, international law. Our rules of engagement usually are not what drives the effectiveness of our strikes. It's lack of intelligence, lack of progress on the battlefield. This idea that we've shackled ourselves. That if we just loosened up the rules things would get a lot easier, is not really empirically correct, so, for that reason, and because I have a little more trust in our institutions, I doubt that statistic. I'd be surprised.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:53:16 Okay, so then let's actually scale it back to the Obama administration, and this brings us back to the point about Obama coming into office with two wars, with Afghanistan and Iraq, and the public wanting to scale back those wars, to end those wars. One of the things that Barrack Obama relied on more than his predecessor was drone strikes.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:53:34 Yes.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:53:35 I assume that was because he was trying to address the exigencies, or the existential threats against the country, or against its foreign interests, without having to deploy a large ground force, a turn of strategic thinking.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:53:52 I think it was a turn of strategic affairs. The drone had come of age. Anybody who was President in this time, if you were going to put up an aircraft to conduct a strike, and you could have a person in it, or not have a person in it, and if you have a person in it, like we had in Kosovo, remember? The now Chief of Staff of the Air Force was shot down in Kosovo, and it was a very uncomfortable big deal for us, because you had one of our pilots potentially falling into enemy hands. It would be a propaganda bonanza. They might parade them around. They might do what they did to that Jordanian pilot, when ISIS ...

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:54:27 Believe me, I talk to air cruise all the time, and what was uppermost on their mind is the idea that they would get downed, and we wouldn't get them before they got out, so if you're going to do one of these strikes and you don't need a person, why would you ever use a person?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:54:39 That makes sense. Actually, let me restate it. It isn't the actual use of drones, or unmanned aerial vehicles. It is the deployment of these systems in areas where we're not officially at war, and they're used to kill people that we identify as terrorists, so, in other words, many people, myself included, assume that people like yourself and other people in government are operating with good intentions. For example, when-

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:55:04 I hope people assume that.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:55:04 Well, I do, and I think a lot of people do. There is, of course, lazy thinking, and passions ignite, and where you're younger, perhaps you see things more in black and white, but as you get older, and you experience, and you meet people, you understand that most people are actually trying to do the right thing. I think that's actually, in some sense, exemplified in James Clapper's testimony to Congress, where they asked him about mass surveillance. I think James Clapper's answer to that question stemmed from good nature. I think that people that work in the intelligence community are by and large good people, attempting to do good work, but-

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:55:32 Certainly my experience.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:55:32 It brings us back to the dilemma, this dilemma, which is we have a Bill of Rights, we have the constitution, we have the individual, and then we have the exigencies, the existential threats. Does this concern you? You've talked a little bit about AI. I don't know how familiar you are with thinking about value loading, and utility functions.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:55:50 Yeah, sure.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:55:51 Well, this is concerning, because we have a world where we have these types of weapons, we have systems that are being increasingly deployed outside of the traditional battlefield, and there is a tremendous amount of power being vested at the top of these pyramid, power pyramids, and now we're beginning to introduce increasingly intelligent machines, and we're going to be loading them with our values, and these are the values. Does that concern you?

Demetri Kofinas: 00:56:16 Right, now, I'll say one more thing, because for you, I'll just say this. You were defense secretary, and even if you're not defense secretary, you talked about this before. You were head of DoD. You were friends with Bob Gates. You know all these people. There's a different sense for you, of your proximity to solution. That's not the case for us, right?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:56:33 Yeah, fair enough. Sure.

Demetri Kofinas: 00:56:34 This, I think, brings this problem to the forefront for you as well, because you're not also a machine, so does this future concern you?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:56:41 Well, it does, but only if we fail to do something, which is what I think the principle danger of technology ends up being, which is technology, in my judgment, doesn't change. Very few technologies change the fundamental human dilemmas. What happens, Demetri, is people have trouble finding their old values, and their old dilemmas in the new technology, so right now, when it comes to AI, we're trying to find human accountability and responsibility.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:57:16 When it comes to social media, we're trying to find freedom of speech and truth at the same time, and it's not that the freedom of speech and truth are outdated. It's that the technology has changed, and if we work hard enough I believe we'll find ... Those values have been around since Plato, or something, and I happen to believe in them, and as a technologist, I find it easier-

Demetri Kofinas: 00:57:40 Which values do you mean?

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:57:41 Well, the truth is worth following, worth identifying and following. That freedom is a good thing, and people will say to me, well, now that the drone exists, does that mean that the rules of warfare are off? I say no. You don't think about the rules of warfare, but you think about what they're based on, which is some common sense, and some values. You can find that in the new technology. It just takes a little bit of work.

Sec. Ash Carter: 00:58:08 Now, it's easier for me, because I'm a technologist, and so it's easier for me to find the old values, and getting a little more squared away, and situated when a new circumstance comes along. I grant that, than somebody who isn't as technically grounded as I am, but that ought to be the objective. I think some people are ready to throw away all of the political baby

with the new political wardrobe of technology bathwater. Are you following what I'm-

- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:58:41 I think so. I don't know that I'm following-
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:58:47 Sorry, that wasn't the metaphor-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:58:48 I'm not sure that I'm following, my own thoughts-
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:58:48 Metaphor wasn't wonderful, but-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 00:58:48 I think I have some sense of what you're saying.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:58:49 These are old dilemmas in a new form, and the new form created by the new technology, but they are the old dilemmas, so let's go back to what we thought we knew. Before there was the internet there was the telephone. What did we think we knew about surveillance? We knew that occasionally the government would be listening in on conversation between an American and let us say a non-American, and we wrote rules that said this'll happen, but when it happens here's how you're to behave, in such a way that you don't endanger the freedom of individual Americans, and those rules actually worked for quite a long time.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 00:59:25 I saw them work, during all the era of telephone communications, when I was cleared for that kind of material. Now, why can't you do that? The internet is a larger volume of stuff, and so forth, but the same rule applies. The government is not to use information collected for the citizen's benefit, against the citizen as an individual. That's the rule. Why can't we do that with electronic data? There's no reason why we can't do that with electronic data, if we could do that with a telephone conversation, or rifling through somebody's apartment without a warrant. These things are it's the same principle. It's just in a new technological guise.
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:00:06 Yeah, we did an episode on this, and I'm getting the cane, so I'm going to have to let you go Secretary Carter, as much as I'd like to keep you here.
- Sec. Ash Carter:** 01:00:12 This is a lot of fun Demetri. You're-
- Demetri Kofinas:** 01:00:13 I'd actually like to lock the door. I'd be happy to have you stay. It's up to you. You're the boss.

Sec. Ash Carter: 01:00:16 I get a real kick out of it. You've obviously done a lot, a lot of thinking about this.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:00:20 It's not easy. I'm trying to navigate this conversation as best as I can, so I will. Again, I'm getting the cane here, but we did an episode on this for listeners on I think it was Jeffrey Rosen, the President of the National Constitution Center. We covered the history of constitutional law, in line with changing technologies. I think the nature of metadata, and big data, and the type of information you can extract at a very high level with these datasets today changes this.

Sec. Ash Carter: 01:00:53 I do think we need ... If I can just say a closing note on that, that bridges that subject, me being Secretary of Defense. When I left the Pentagon I wanted to write this book, that I've now finished, about my time at the Pentagon, but that era is now behind me. I got to the top. I don't have anywhere else to go in defense, and so now you say, "Well, Ash, what are you going to do now?" I could just do nothing.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:01:15 Are you going to tell us you're going to run for President?

Sec. Ash Carter: 01:01:16 No.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:01:16 That'd be great. I'm looking for a news-making event.

Sec. Ash Carter: 01:01:18 Join the dozens of people who are doing that. No. What I was going to say was that I said to myself what is the next, other than defending ourselves, the next big challenge? To me, it is tech and public purpose, and finding what is good for the public within the new technological world, whether it be the digital world, or the biotech revolution that is coming, or the whole question of jobs, and unemployment, and training, and getting phased out, and not having a future for yourself.

Sec. Ash Carter: 01:01:54 These are very big dilemmas that are posed by technology, and I think they're next to national defense, which always comes first, because you can't do anything, if you don't have security, but next to that is the biggest challenge to our society, and that's what I'm devoting myself to now, so very much the subject of this conversation, but trying to find real practical solutions. What do we do about AI? What do we do about social media? What do we do about genome editing? We've got to do something about these things. We can't sit and dither, and get worried about them. We need to find a reasonable solution to them. I'm confident that there are reasonable solutions.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:02:31 For relatively new listeners, or people that are new to the podcast, we did an episode on the innovation economy. In fact, it wasn't just that. We did a number of episodes talking about Vannevar Bush, Claude Shannon, the role of Bell Labs. The misconceptions. This brings us back to this thing about being self-made. There are a lot of misconceptions about how the private sector monetized many of the technologies and protocols developed out of government research. There's a lot of positive that came out of that relationship. Again, this is why nuance is important in these conversations.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:03:06 I also want to say, before we end, Secretary Carter, we normally record overtime segments with our guests, but given the limited amount of time we had for this recording, the overtime instead will be a prerelease of my hour long conversation with professor of international relations, Stephen Walt, which I'm recording tomorrow, on American foreign policy and the future of U.S. primacy, which listeners can access, along with the transcript of this week's episode, and a copy of my entire 12 page rundown. Full of notes and links, to source material from today's conversation, by supporting the podcast through our Patreon page, at patreon.com/hiddenforces. Thank you so much for coming on the program, Secretary Carter.

Sec. Ash Carter: 01:03:51 Thanks for having me Demetri.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:03:53 That was my episode with U.S. Secretary of Defense, Ash Carter. I want to thank Dr. Carter for being on my program. Today's episode of Hidden Forces was recorded at Creative Media Design Studio in New York City. For more information about this week's episode, or if you want easy access to related programming, visit our website at hiddenforces.io, and subscribe to our free email list.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:04:19 If you want access to overtime segments, episode transcripts, and show rundowns, full of links and detailed information related to each and every episode, check out our premium subscription available through the Hidden Forces website, or through our Patreon page, at patreon.com/hiddenforces.

Demetri Kofinas: 01:04:40 Today's episode was produced by me, and edited by Stylianos Nicolaou. For more episodes you can check out our website at hiddenforces.io. Join the conversation at Facebook, Twitter, and Instagram, @HiddenForcesPod, or send me an email. As always, thanks for listening. We'll see you next week.