

## Where from Here: Blueprint or Scramble?

**Ross** Welcome to Renegade, Inc. In a wide ranging interview, we talk with Colin Powell's former chief of staff Colonel Lawrence Wilkerson about the reordering of the geopolitical world, the death of the American empire and what can be done to reimagine the West.

**Ross** Colonel Wilkerson, good to have you on Renegade Inc.

**Lawrence Wilkerson** Good to be back with you.

**Ross** When we first met you, we interviewed you for Four Horsemen, you talked about thinking in the same way as Royal Dutch Shell think. You talked about Blueprint or Scramble. Let's just play that clip.

**Video clip (Lawrence Wilkerson)** When I look at the world, I look at much the way Royal Dutch Shell looks at it. They have one of the best strategic entities in the world - private or public. And Royal Dutch Shell is posited two scenarios. One is called Blueprint and is obviously a planned corporate structure where world leaders get together and they think about things like energy transformation, planetary warming and dwindling fossil fuels and so forth. The other is called Scramble. And Scramble is pretty much what it sounds like to. It's a mess. Interestingly enough, in 2075, the ending year for these scenarios, as I recall, we get to about the same place. It's just that Blueprint leaves a lot less blood on the floor. Scramble leaves a lot of blood on the floor as people fight for these resources and so forth.

**Ross** So, hey, we are prescient words eight, nine years ago. Where do you think we are on that trajectory now?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** I think we're beginning the beginning, if you will, as Churchill said of the scramble. And I think global leadership, in particular, the leadership in the West, is extremely deficient. And I see no signs of it modifying that state. In fact, I see every sign of it becoming even more inefficient, more deficient, more apt to be insular and to try to retreat from globalisation and all that globalisation entail, which includes Western liberalism in and of itself. So I think I may be in for an even worst - I'm not going to live through it, I'll be dead - but we may be in for an even worse situation perhaps than Royal Dutch Shell and their people predicted under Scramble.

**Ross** What we talked about in Four Horsemen was the end of empire. And you alluded to the fact that all the signs were there that the American empire was coming to an end. I mean, does this go very quickly? Does it happen like bankruptcy slowly and then all at once?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** One wonders about that. In fact, I've posited with two different groups right now, both of whom are pondering it, something I call On the Brink. And it would be a talk of about 50 minutes duration every week for the next six months or so, right up to the November elections in the United States. And On the Brink, as you

might suspect, is on the brink of empires collapse. And I talk about everything from the Hanford nuclear complex out on our Columbia River out west, which portends a Chernobyl times one hundred at any moment because it is so inefficient, so ineffective and so deficient. We have at least a dozen different scenarios, nuclear scenarios, that can happen out there at any moment to the kinds of things we're seeing all across the globe right now, whether it's in the Middle East or it's in Venezuela or wherever. I think we have the possibility of going rapidly and the possibility of, as I call it, muddling through over the next decade or so and going slowly and painfully. In some respects. I'd rather see the rapid demise than I would the slow, lingering death. But it's coming.

**Video clip (Lawrence Wilkerson)** I testified before the Senate Finance Committee under Max Baucus about a year and a half ago, and the subject was Cuba. But all of a sudden, some other issues came up, as they want to do. And Mr. Bunning over here, you know, the senator who is now railing against and held up some things because of the deficit spending and everything. I made a remark that China had one point two one point three trillion U.S. dollars in its current accounts, plus. And I said I was concerned about that. And this is what this senator who is now so concerned about deficit spending said back to me. He said, 'that's all right, Colonel, there's plenty more where those came from. Two faced b\*\*\*\*\*d. But worse, worse. It's not just duplicity or to face-edness. He's stupid. And frankly, I'm not sure that in our Senate and in our House of Representatives, there are more than a handful of not stupid people. That scares me more than there being all criminals.

**Lawrence Wilkerson** We really haven't had all three branches of government - the Supreme Court, the judicial system, the Congress, the legislative system and the executive branch - polluted, corrupted - at the same time since about 1850. And everyone knows what happened a decade later. This is a tragic situation for this country that we really have no governance. We have no courage. We have no leadership. We have no governance. And that's what leads me to believe that this might come a little more rapidly than perhaps our size and our economic strength and our military strength and everything suggests it would cost.

**Ross** And when it comes down to it and you have a president in the White House who is obsessed with ad hoc-ery, ad hoc decisions to short term pressures, who incidentally, is an ex reality star and a property developer. In a sense, that must not be a surprise to you that that series of events have landed that person in that role who then gives us all this ad hoc-ery?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** No. H.L. Mencken rather accurately predicted that someday the American people will get the leader they deserve. I think that's what we've got. But at the same time, it's rather interesting that Donald Trump, the bankruptcy expert, is there at a time when America is going bankrupt. And as you as you know, anyone who studied his career knows, his way of dealing with bankruptcy is anything but ethical or above board. So this is a perfect leader, if you will, for these times.

**Ross** So is he going to default on the national debt and say to the Chinese, I'm really sorry, we can't pay any of this back?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** I think we already have. The interesting thing in the world right now is people are still buying our debt and they're buying our debt by and large because they have no other place to go. We're the court of last resort, if you will. And so it's still being bought. But that can't go on forever.

**Ross** And as we know often currency wars lead to trade wars, often lead to hot wars. How worried are you about a possible conflict on the other side of the pandemic?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** I'm still very concerned about where the pandemic, incidentally, is having ravaging effect right now, Iran, partly because of our sanctions and this incredibly myopic view of Mike Pompeo. Mark Esper, I assume Donald Trump and others in the government with their maximum tension, maximum pressure campaign on Iran. The president doesn't want a war with Iran. I'm quite confident he does not want a war there. But these guys do. And that's very dangerous in my view, because if you want a place to start something that would be very difficult to end and wind up probably being ten times worse than Iraq, Iran is certainly it. And it's still sitting there looking as if they are exasperated by Barr, by Pompeo with regard to the failure of their policy and that means they'll go all the way. And there'll be even more desperate as it looks more and more like Donald Trump might lose in November to close this issue before they're gone.

**Ross** It keeps us on the subject of ad hoc-ery insofar as the assassination of Qasem Soleimani. As a colonel, when you look at that, and when you look at the order that came from on high to do that, what do you conclude?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** I think it was really a very ad hoc decision and a stupid decision, and it was pressured by those people that I just mentioned. I had a moment when the president was vulnerable. Fortunately for us, well, the United States in particular, I think the president saw the impact to the extent that he said no more of that. Here's what I think this scenario might develop into in Iran. The RGC, the Revolutionary Guard Corps, has become increasingly powerful. And even with the assassination of Soleimani, I don't see that power having abated much. They're plan a year or so ago was to make sure they selected the next ayatollah and that he was their man. I think now they might speed that up a bit and affect a military dictatorship. Just giving up on some of their economic endeavours could stabilise the Iranian economy on the short term basis and it could bring some stability to the majority and Iranian people might accept. So what would we do if suddenly there were a regime change and it were a military dictatorship?

**Ross** What does that look like to you?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** Looks to me like we would be just as adamant about opposing them as we have the theocracy, and they would probably take that theocracy and run for a nuclear weapon. So we're talking about opening the old box again with a nuclear weapon and this time with a military dictatorship. And that's not going to please any of those authoritarian states on the other side of the Gulf of course. It's

probably going to make them even angrier and more fearful. And we're backing off from them. That's one of the positive things that President Trump has done. Our backing off from Mohammed bin Salman right now might just get him overthrown. So these are dicey situations in a very volatile region of the world.

**Ross** Do these people not ever learn?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** No, I think that's the one thing I have learnt in my 40 years plus in government service. We never learn from my mistakes, from our successes, from anything. We don't do history in America.

**Ross** Is it true that Soleimani, the Iranian general, was instrumental in fighting terrorist groups?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** I think it's true if you are looking at something like ISIS or any other group that the Iranians clearly thought was antagonistic to their existence as well as ours - ISIS in particular, but al-Qaida, too. The Iranians have never been in favour of terrorists they didn't own. By that I simply mean elements of Hamas and Hezbollah.

**Ross** Right. So Soleimani has been taken out. He was actually doing a decent job over there?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** He was doing a decent job with regard to some of the enemies that we claimed we feared too.

**Ross** Right.

**Lawrence Wilkerson** By the way enemies that are very, very, slowly coming back on the scene again.

**Ross** Who are they?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** ISIS in particular. I've just read an intelligence report. They have made themselves known in certain provinces in Iraq and still in Syria. And they look fairly formidable in terms of the 15 to 20 thousand fighters whom they can still see field.

**Ross** Surely that is the order that you take that on and vanquish them?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** I think the question about ISIS would be better settled if the United States ignored it entirely, other than perhaps some support from afar to both Iraq and ultimately Bashar al Assad. That's something we have to get over the hurdle of. Bashar al Assad is the ruler. He's going to be the ruler. Whether you attribute it to Russia, Iran or Bashar al-Assad himself, it doesn't matter. He is the legitimate ruler of Syria. Let's get busy and helping restore his border, bring his people back and do the kinds of things he needs to do to stabilise the country. If we don't do that, then we're going to have to fight ISIS. I think the better plan is let them

fight ISIS on their territory. Do a good job of it. Get rid of them, rid of them forever. And we can clap from the distance.

**Ross** Famously, you said in 2011 that you will regret to your grave working on the speech that Colin Powell gave to the U.N., which ultimately was instrumental in the 2003 invasion of Iraq. Weapons of mass destruction. Have we got a situation now when we talk about Syria and Assad, where the OPCW has found itself in a massive quagmire, if you like, when it comes to reporting honestly and transparently about whether he used chemical weapons on his people?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** I think that's absolutely the case. Frankly, I'm not sure I'd believe any of these organisations anymore, nor would I believe our intelligence reporting on them with regard to these sorts of weapons. Disinformation is the name of the game today, cyber warfare, the name of the game. It's going to be very difficult for anyone with any credibility in the national security realm in the future to make an argument and make it believable and credible given the disinformation that's out there, and the ability growing every day, to make it even more realistic, to make it even more believable and to appeal to those little segments that are already preconceived in that vein and so make them even more ramified in their beliefs.

**Ross** Welcome back to Renegade Inc. Before we go back to the US to talk with Colonel Larry Wilkerson about the reordering of the geopolitical world, let's have a look at what you've been tweeting about in this week's Renegade Inc. index. First up from Yashar Ali: 'Why Biden's choice of running mate has momentous implications. Biden has hinted he might serve only one term if he wins. That would set up a woman as front runner for 2024 and perhaps define the Dem agenda for the next decade'. Next from Sarah Abdallah: 'Obama's presidency. One hundred thousand bombs dropped on eight countries. Drone strikes increased tenfold. 90 percent civilian death rate. Libya, Syria and Yemen destroyed. Al-Qaida and ISIS armed with billions in U.S. taxpayer money. The tan suit isn't a scandal. But these sure are. #Obama Gate. Finally, we have a tweet from Brian MacDonald: 'America's special envoy to Syria publicly admits that the continued illegal US military occupation of parts of the country isn't about fighting ISIS or other terrorists as Washington claims. Instead, the US aims to make it a quagmire for the Russians'.

**Ross** In that first half we touched Blueprint and Scramble, the Middle East and what the sort of levers, if you like, that are being pulled at the moment, which will ultimately change the geopolitical landscape. Post virus, what does the geopolitical landscape begin to look like from your point of view?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** Well, that's a very interesting question. I've read The Economist, Bloomberg News and a number of other economic forecasts that are really disturbing. A complete retreat from globalisation, if you will, a retreat from socialisation, a retreat from community, retreat from all the kinds of things, activities, for example, restaurants and aeroplane flights and tourism and so forth that breed it. If this is the case, if it really is going to be a major move into a new form of isolationism, maybe even autarky, economically speaking, I think that's a disaster for

the world. I think we'll regret it very quickly. All of us will regret it and we'll have to scramble to get back together again.

**Ross** What this also presents is a massive opportunity. We know that the last 40 years of neo liberalism has been largely a disaster. Inequality, and at the end of every empire inequality grows massively. That's the case in the US, certainly the case in the developed West, if you like. What are the opportunities that this brings post Corona?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** I think the opportunities are incredibly promising. If we can beat out the forces that are going to try as hard as we to take over this new period, and by that I mean transnational crime, all the things that are happening right now - trafficking in women, illicit drugs, you name it - Misha Glenny estimates it's somewhere between five to ten trillion dollars every year. If are going to defeat these forces, all backed up by the big banks who were complicit with this transnational crime, all backed up by corporate complicity, if you will, and a number of different areas, and meet the challenge that most threatens us and that is the climate crisis, and have that meeting of that challenge bring us all back together in a way we've never been together before and maybe forge more resilient, more equitable economic systems as we do it, then we could come out three quarters of the way through this century, maybe even 2050 looking pretty good. We could come out having met the crisis and dealt with it both in an ameliorative way and an adaptive way. And we could have brought ourselves together in a way that leads the globe to a new economic system, a new way of living, a more equitable distribution of wealth and so forth. I know that sounds Panglossian. It sounds like, you know, oh my God, he's talking about world government or something like that. Well, maybe I am. And maybe we need to get to that. We'll see. I'm not gonna be alive. I keep telling my students, you're going to shoulder this burden and you're gonna shoulder it with an enormous weight on your back from debt to all the bad things my generation has done to you. But you're gonna have to show them. I do find a growing distrust, a growing mistrust, a growing anger even amongst twenty-somethings with regard to my generation and all that I represent in terms of the generations around me. A little anger is a good thing sometimes if it sparks energy and dynamism and innovation and creativity in this generation coming up, but it's also contaminated. So they've got to be very careful that they don't let their disgust for us lead them astray in their own efforts to fix what will be their lives and their futures.

**Ross** And really, that blame game is a total waste of time. But it seems to me that your current president also loves the blame game, whether he calls it Kung Flu, whether he calls it Wu Flu, he is very clear that it's Chinese-made and ultimately the blame game. As opposed to taking responsibility and administering some leadership, the blame game must continue. Is that an election strategy to get him back because he wants the American people to fear something else?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** It is a political strategy and he's been using it ever since he was inaugurated, arguably even before. The first president, as one critic said the other day, to use disunity rather than an attempt at least at unity as the president to run the country. I'm inclined to believe increasingly of late that he actually feels this

way. Watching him in interview after interview, particularly on the Corona virus, leads me to believe that he is, and of, his base. He is a member of his base, the most visceral, venal, evil element of that base, if he will. He actually hates people. And he particularly hates people who aren't white, male and who aren't bankruptcy experts like he is. And that's dangerous. That's truly dangerous because you get a guy like George W. Bush, for example, and he does all manner of crimes in the world, but the guy goes away and paints pictures and looks a little bit apologetic afterwards. Donald Trump will not do that. He will not go kindly into that dark night. Donald Trump believes what he preaches.

**Ross** You mentioned transnational crime just a bit earlier in this piece. One person who seems to have got away pretty much scot free is President Obama. When we look at Libya and what is happening now in open-air slave markets, through massive amounts of crime and dire economic circumstances, why did Barack Obama get away with the Libya disaster?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** Partly because of the contrast with Donald Trump and to a certain degree, with George W. Bush. I mean why did he get the Nobel Peace Prize? He didn't bring about a zero content of nuclear weapons anywhere. In fact, he passed the biggest, his administration passed the biggest, increase in nuclear weapons spending since World War. A trillion dollars plus we're going to spend over the next 10 years to so-called, quote, modernise, unquote, our nuclear weapons stockpile. Obama gets a good rap because Obama was black. Obama was well-spoken. Obama was such a contrast to what preceded him, George W. Bush in a miasma of Iraq. But Obama in many respects, as you just suggested, was worse than George W.. Bush ever thought to be, particularly with regard to national security, where he made even more draconian and more civil liberties usurping some of the things that George Bush in the Patriot Act and other pieces of legislation only began. Obama made them much more intense. And Eric Holder his attorney general corrupted the Justice Department, I think, beyond rehabilitation. That's what Donald Trump and Barr are dealing with right now - a corrupted, utterly corrupted, Justice Department, including the Federal Bureau of Investigation.

**Ross** Will Joe Biden select Michelle Obama as a running mate?

**Ross** I certainly hope not. One, because I see what inexperience does. And she is grossly inexperienced. And two, because I just don't think that's what's necessary right now. I think President Biden, if it is to be President Biden, is going to have extraordinary difficulty just staying alive, let alone ruling in a way that rectifies or begins to rectify some of the incredible problems created by George W. Bush, Barack Obama, Bill Clinton. Bill Clinton and Bob Rubin and that group really put us on the 'we're owned by Wall Street track' that we're on right now. And so you really need someone in there. And I can't even suggest a name right now. But if someone needs to be in there who when Joe leaves - and he could leave at any moment - we have a good president.

**Ross** It really is end of empire stuff this isn't it? We can't get away from that. Because the other problem, it seems to me that you face, and we do here in the UK,

is that talent really doesn't want to go into politics anymore because it's become such a jamboree.

**Lawrence Wilkerson** That's true. And it's also because other places are so lucrative. I think a good case could be made for having lost 10 to 15, maybe even 20 percent of our young men and women of extraordinary talent from the Ivy League schools and so forth to Wall Street over the past 20 or 30 years, because there are no holds barred millions to be made there. I lost one of my best students to Goldman Sachs. He's now a millionaire seven years after I lost him. He lives in a big palace in New York. Incredibly capable young man, but lured away, as so many are, by prospects of a million dollars in five years and everything that means.

**Ross** You made the point that you agree with what John F. Kennedy said when he said that there won't be peace in this world until there are as many conscientious objectors as there are warriors. Now, you were a warrior for, what, 31 years. Do you still agree with that statement?

**Lawrence Wilkerson** I do agree with it. And I would take it even further. I would say until the youth of this land understands that paying taxes to a warfare state, serving for that warfare state and doing other things that aid and abet that warfare state, at the same time that a predatory capitalist state looms over the entire thing, is just a recipe for more of the same recipe for the demise of the empire that we're talking about. How you come to the point, though, where enough of this energy, dynamism, creativity and so forth and youth coalesces around a particular leadership and brings about change, whether it's revolutionary change, and that's got a history that's bloody and bad, or it's some sort of seismic change that comes about within the system, is an important question. But it needs to come about. I said the other day, the next Occupy Wall Street will have leadership. It will have meaning and purpose. It won't be this listless group of youths spread across the country objecting to obscene wealth. It will be people who will drag the wealthy out of their mansions and shoot them in the streets. So we better do something to avoid that. And we'd better do something to allow the youth of this country to affect change quicker, faster, more innovatively without that. But I fear that that might be the way we do it.

**Ross** Colonel Wilkerson, always good to have you. Thank you very much for your time.

**Lawrence Wilkerson** Thanks for having me.

**Ross** That's it from Renegade Inc. this week. You can drop the team a mail, [studio@renegadeinc.com](mailto:studio@renegadeinc.com) or you can tweet us at Renegade Inc. Join us next week for more insight from those people who are thinking differently. But until then, stay curious.