

# DECISIVE POINT

The USAWC Press Podcast Companion Series

## Podcast Transcript

Carrie A. Lee

### “Introduction to the US Army War College Civil-Military Relations Center”

The United States is experiencing an era characterized by civil-military tension and conflict. From the increasing politicization of the military, to declining public trust in the military and the recruiting crisis, to the erosion of norms meant to protect civilian control to a perceived lack of accountability within the profession, healthy civil-military relations in America today are under assault. In response, the US Army War College established the Civil-Military Relations Center (CMRC) in summer 2022 to “sponsor and promote the development of a healthy, sustainable relationship between the American military, society, and political leaders through education, research, and outreach.

Read the article here: <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol54/iss2/13/>

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**Keywords: civil-military relations, General Charles Q. Brown Jr., General Randy A. George, Secretary of the Army Christine Wormuth, National Security Strategy**

#### Episode Transcript

##### Stephanie Crider (Host)

You’re listening to [Decisive Point](#). The views and opinions expressed in this podcast are those of the guests and are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army, the US Army War College, or any other agency of the US government.

I’m talking with Dr. Carrie A. Lee today. She’s the author of “Introduction to the US Army War College Civil-Military Relations Center,” which you can find in the Summer 2024 issue of *Parameters*. Lee’s the director of the US Army War College Civil-Military Relations Center and chair of the Department of National Security and Strategy. She’s a term member with the Council on Foreign Relations, contributing editor for *War on the Rocks*, and an adjacent fellow with the Center for a New American Security.

Welcome to Decisive Point, Carrie.

##### Carrie A. Lee

Thanks so much for having me.

##### Host

When did the Army War College stand up the Civil-Military Relations Center, or CMRC, and why?

##### Lee

So, we stood up the Civil-Military Relations Center in the summer of 2022, and this was largely in response to an environment that we felt demanded increased attention on civil-military relations. And, in particular, what I mean by that is the relationship between the military and political elites—so military leaders and political elites—as well as the relationship between the American military and American society. We have seen, and continue to see, a number of challenges in the civil-military relationship, ranging from a recruiting crisis that is now years long in the making, as well as civil-military discord at some of the highest levels, going all the way back to the Obama

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administration through the Trump administration and, now again, dealing with civil-military discord over the withdrawal from Afghanistan and the other issues. This hasn't escaped note.

Back in September of 2022, all but one living former chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and all but one living former Secretary of Defense published an open letter in War on the Rocks that essentially called for a return to best practices and principles of civilian control in civil-military relations. This was a pretty astounding thing for folks to do, particularly men of that high rank who oftentimes aren't often in the public eye and intentionally stay out of the public eye. And yet, for them to call for renewed principles suggests to those of us who think about civil-military relations on a regular basis that something is really amiss.

In response to senior leader calls, those from not just the open letter, but also currently serving leaders, the Secretary of the Army has prioritized strategically adapting the way that we recruit and retain in order to sustain the force. Our new Chief of Staff of the Army, Randy George, has made strengthening the profession one of his key issue areas. And so, we felt that the time was right as we were looking ahead to the strategic environment and the changing strategic environment that the Army War College has a really important role to play here. And we're the right place to do it—not only because the Army is the service that is traditionally closest to the American people and so, it makes sense for us to be leading the effort here but also because of our location and faculty expertise. We're far enough outside the Beltway that we can have hard conversations and get into the meat of issues while protecting academic freedom. And also, because we have so many faculty across the Army War College that approach civil-military relations from a variety of different perspectives.

And so, we felt like we had the talent, the location, and the mission to really make a contribution here.

### Host

The CMRC held its first conference recently. What do our listeners need to know about it?

### Lee

Our inaugural conference actually happened in May of 2023. So, this was our second iteration that we executed on May third and fourth of 2024.

We learned a lot. The theme for the previous year, for 2023, was the military and society. We were celebrating the all-volunteer force's 50th anniversary and the establishment of the abolition of the draft and establishment of the all-volunteer force.

This year, we chose a theme that focused on civil-military challenges in modern war. The reason why we chose this theme is because oftentimes, even at the strategic level, even here at the War College, when we're talking about the challenges of modern war, it oftentimes devolves into either a technological problem that needs to be solved or an operational issue that needs to be fixed through revisions in doctrine or TTP—tactics, techniques, and procedures—rather than thinking about it as a holistic challenge that will come with specific problems and specific challenges to the civil-military relationship.

So, even questions like who fights in modern war, the role of autonomous weapons versus what kind of human capital do you need in the fighting force for 2040 or 2050? How do you recruit those people? What is the right mix between civilian and military? These are all questions that have big implications for how well and how effectively we fight modern war, and yet oftentimes don't get discussed in the same conversation when we're discussing AI, for example.

And so, we wanted to change the conversation this year and inject some discussion about the civil-military relationship for our conference. I will say, I think we were reasonably successful in doing so. We had a lot of really, really interesting conversations, some fantastic speakers who raised some really important points that I think both our students, as well as policymakers around the Beltway, would benefit from listening to.

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The conference was divided into to a public day and a research day. The public day was full of discussions and invited plenary speakers to discuss specific challenges on modern war. So, our opening keynote address was with Ambassador Douglas Lute discussing the war in Ukraine and civil-military challenges in Europe right now.

We then had a panel looking at who fights modern war; another panel that looked at the relationship between industry, technology, and modern war; and then, a panel that investigated what modern war looks like at home because of our domestic environment—what we might anticipate as being a contested information environment going forward.

And, all of that was recorded and will be posted to the [US Army War College's YouTube channel](#) once it's through post-production.

### Host

Thank you. What's next for you and for the CMRC?

### Lee

Next is we're looking ahead to the fall. We'll take a brief break this summer to try and consolidate all of the work that we did over the last 10 months or so during the academic year. We've got a couple of exciting research projects and initiatives that I'm hoping will come out over the next several months, but we're really looking ahead to our fall workshop series. This will be the third year that we put this on, where we invite top scholars and practitioners from across the country to come in, and every Thursday afternoon, they give about a 90-minute presentation or essentially hold a 90-minute workshop with our faculty and students. Those sessions are, for the most part, also live-streamed and broadcast for a general audience. For those who are interested in these types of issues or think that there's a recent book that they want to hear described, we offer an opportunity to engage and go back and forth. We're really looking ahead to invitations for that right now and setting up our fall workshop series

### Host

Do you have any concluding thoughts you'd like to share?

### Lee

I think the biggest concluding thought is that we are still a center that is in growth mode. The way that I have described the center to various stakeholders is that the first year was very much a proof of concept and a labor of love. With a lot of hard work and blood, sweat, and tears—and everything that goes into essentially creating a startup—our second year was about showing that we can institutionalize the center and that we continue to have something to contribute, not just to the national debate, but also to the education of our students. And I think our goals for this coming year and our third year of execution is to find real sustainable programming and broaden our reach.

Podcasts like this one, and other outreach efforts, are a real priority for us because now that we have a lot of our programming in place, and we feel like we have something to offer the conversation, it's time to jump in. And, we're really excited about the future.

### Host

Is there a website or another place that we can send our listeners?

### Lee

Absolutely. For more information about the work that we are doing at the US Army War College's Civil-Military Relations Center, please visit our website at [cmrc.armywarcollege.edu](http://cmrc.armywarcollege.edu). You can also find us on the app formerly known as Twitter at USAWC\_CMRC.

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### Host

Thank you for your time. This was a real pleasure.

### Lee

No, the pleasure was all mine. Thank you so much.

### Host

Listeners, you can find the article at [press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters](https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters). Look for volume 54, issue 2. For more Army War College podcasts, check out [Conversations on Strategy](#), [SSI Live](#), [CLSC Dialogues](#), and [A Better Peace](#).

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