



The Forge: Lives in Leadership Podcast - Australian Defence College

SHOW NOTES

Episode Summary, Highlights and Full Transcript

SEASON 1: EPISODE 4

Guest: Dr Florence Gaub

Host: Dr Lucas Marie



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Lives in Leadership explores leadership in demanding environments, featuring insights from experienced practitioners drawn across Defence, government, industry, and academia. Through sharing compelling stories and perspectives, the podcast explores military leadership, ethics, culture, and service in the Profession of Arms. The podcast focuses on insights in joint and integrated appointments at the operational and strategic level. It complements existing single-service professional military development platforms.



S01E04 – Dr Florence Gaub – Episode Summary

Duration: 35 minutes

Key themes: Strategic foresight and futurism, scenario analysis, cognitive bias in strategic thinking, affective forecasting bias, systems thinking, geopolitical analysis, military recruitment, climate change security

Overview: In this episode of Lives in Leadership, Dr Lucas Marie speaks with Dr Florence Gaub, Director of the Research Division at the NATO Defence College in Rome. The conversation explores artificial intelligence in warfare, strategic foresight methodology, comparative analysis of Russia and China as military powers, and challenges in military recruitment across Western democracies.

Key Discussion Points

AI and Military Technology. Dr Gaub challenges the notion that AI is a revolutionary "game changer" in warfare, arguing it represents evolution rather than revolution. She compares AI to electricity—its full impact won't be understood until thoroughly tested. Currently, AI shows the most promise in unglamorous areas like logistics and maintenance rather than strategic decision-making, where trust remains a critical barrier.

Strategic Foresight and Futurism. The conversation explores Dr Gaub's work as a futurist, including weak signal detection—identifying early signs of emerging trends before they become widely recognised. She shares fascinating examples, including how Android's affordability contributed to the Arab Spring by making internet access widespread via mobile phones. Her team produces annual "What If?" scenarios based on weak signals projected five years into the future.



Russia vs. China as Military Powers. Dr Gaub provides a nuanced analysis of these two strategic competitors. Russia is characterised as a territorial land power with extensive operational experience, making it a more predictable adversary. China, by contrast, is building impressive military capabilities but lacks combat experience, making its actual wartime performance theoretical and uncertain. She notes that both powers are developing similar approaches to freedom of navigation and military expansion.

Cognitive Biases in Strategic Thinking. This is a particularly insightful segment that addresses how biases shape strategic analysis. Dr Gaub explains that humans prefer certainty over ambiguity—even negative certainty—which leads to catastrophic thinking about adversaries. She emphasises the importance of cognitive hygiene: recognising biases rather than eliminating them and deliberately seeking contradictory evidence to challenge assumptions.

Military Recruitment Crisis. Dr Gaub directly challenges prevailing narratives about younger generations being unwilling to serve. Drawing on NATO research, she argues that defeatist rhetoric about "entitled" youth actually creates the recruitment problem it claims to describe. She points to Finland's success with total defence and Germany's 30% increase in recruitment after adapting messaging to emphasise self-actualisation and individual values. The research shows people under 24 in Germany are actually most likely to say they'd defend their country.

Australian Strategic Identity. During her first visit to Australia, Dr Gaub shares observations about Australian strategic culture. She was surprised that Gallipoli holds more significance than the Darwin bombing in shaping national identity, and that Australia's island geography hasn't produced the naval-dominant identity she expected based on the UK model.



Conclusion

This episode offers a refreshing counter-narrative to technological determinism and generational pessimism in defence circles. Dr Gaub's emphasis on human factors, cognitive awareness, and adaptive institutional thinking provides a valuable perspective for military leaders navigating an uncertain future. Her work demonstrates that effective strategic planning requires understanding not only adversaries' capabilities but also how our own biases and narratives shape institutional effectiveness.

Memorable Quotes:

On Military Adaptation and Recruitment Success: *"A successful military institution adapts to the society it represents rather than expecting it to change... Think of who is this generation that you want to fight with you and then adapt to them."*

On Cognitive Biases and Uncertainty: *"Humans hate uncertainty. Like they hate uncertainty more than a negative reality. It's absurd... it feels cognitively more reassuring to imagine the worst than to leave space for not knowing."*

On Military Recruitment and Generational Narratives: *"I think it's very dangerous actually, from a strategic point of view to cater to that narrative that, you know, we wouldn't defend ourselves... I can tell you who likes this narrative, it's Russia in our case and probably China in yours."*



About the Guest:

Dr Florence Gaub is a Franco-German researcher, security expert, and futurist currently serving as Director of the Research Division at the NATO Defence College in Rome. She also serves on the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on Complex Risks and previously worked as Deputy Director of the EU Institute for Security Studies and as a Foresight Advisor for the EU Council. Her work focuses on strategic foresight, scenario analysis, and understanding how different societies conceptualise future conflicts.

Resources & References:

[NATO 2099](#) (graphic novel)

["Notwithstanding: An Upbeat Perspective on Western Societies' Will to Fight"](#) - NATO Defence College study

[Daniel Kahneman - *Thinking, Fast and Slow*](#) (on cognitive biases and decision-making)

[Lawrence Freedman - *The Future of War: A History*](#) (on technological determinism in military thinking)

[Carl von Clausewitz – *On War*](#) (war as a human phenomenon)



S01E04 – Dr Florence Gaub – Time Stamped Highlights

1:34 - Is AI Really a Game Changer? Dr Gaub challenges the AI hype, arguing it's "evolution, not revolution." She compares AI to electricity—we won't know its full impact until tested. The "bubble has burst" on generative AI's capabilities, and trust remains the critical barrier for military decision-making.

3:00 - AI's Real Potential: Logistics, Not Strategy. The greatest near-term potential for AI isn't in flashy strategic applications but in unglamorous areas like maintenance and logistics, where it can anticipate equipment needs better than humans.

4:45 - Technophilia: The Promised Land Fallacy. Dr Gaub explains how technological determinism creates a "promised land" mentality—the seductive belief in shortcuts to complex problems. Science fiction consistently overemphasises technology while underestimating enduring human behaviours.

9:45 - What Is a Futurist? Strategic foresight means thinking about the future in a structured, scientific way—not just imagining fears, but researching trends, analysing causalities, and understanding how different societies conceptualise the future.

11:52 - Android and the Arab Spring: Weak Signal Detection. A masterclass in weak signal analysis: Android's 2008 launch made internet access affordable via phones. Two years later, the Arab Spring erupted, fuelled by Facebook access—not from desktops, but from phones people couldn't have afforded before Android.

15:38 - Freedom of Navigation in the High North. Dr Gaub identifies a critical weak signal: climate change opening the Nordic Sea route, combined with UK-Russia tensions, commercial interests, and reduced visibility from fog. Small incidents could escalate into full-scale war.

17:33 - Australian Strategic Identity: Gallipoli Over Darwin Dr Gaub's surprising discovery: Gallipoli shapes Australian strategic identity far more than the Darwin bombing. She also expected a stronger naval identity given Australia's island geography, but found the Army equally prominent.



20:57 - Russia vs China: Experience vs Theory. The critical difference: Russia has extensive operational experience (Ukraine, Syria, Chechnya, Afghanistan), making it a known quantity. China is building impressive capabilities but has never been tested in combat, making its capabilities entirely theoretical.

23:51 - Cognitive Biases: You Can't Eliminate Them Dr Gaub's key insight: biases aren't a disease you can cure—they're your mental software. The solution is awareness and cognitive hygiene: recognising strong reactions, deliberately seeking contradictory evidence, and holding opposing convictions simultaneously.

26:03 - Humans Hate Uncertainty More Than Pain A striking psychological insight: people would rather receive an electric shock immediately rather than wait with uncertainty. This drives catastrophic thinking about adversaries—imagining the worst feels more cognitively reassuring than admitting "we don't know."

28:31 - Military Recruitment: The Defeatist Narrative Problem Dr Gaub dismantles generational stereotypes about recruitment. Opinion polls asking, "Would you fight?" are useless. People can't predict future feelings. The real problem: defeatist narratives about "entitled youth" create the exact recruitment crisis they claim to describe. Germany's 30% recruitment increase came from adapting messaging to emphasise self-actualisation rather than criticising the generation.

31:47 - Finland's Success: Adaptation Over Expectation Finland's total defence model succeeds because military institutions adapt to society rather than expecting society to change. With 1 million reservists from 5.5 million people, they're also the world's happiest—because they believe they can influence the future.

33:21 - Who Benefits from Defeatist Narratives? Dr Gaub's warning: "I can tell you who likes this narrative [that Western societies won't defend themselves]—it's Russia in our case and probably China in yours." Defeatist rhetoric serves adversary interests.



S01E04 – Dr Florence Gaub – Full Transcript

[00:00:00] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Welcome to Lives in Leadership. This podcast is dedicated to promoting thoughtful and strategic conversations about military leadership, ethics, culture, and service in the profession of arms within the Australian Defence Force.

My name is Dr. Lucas Marie, and in today's episode, I'm joined by Dr Florence Gaub, a Franco-German researcher, security expert, and futurist who is currently working as the Director of the Research Division at the NATO Defence College in Rome. Dr Gaub also serves on the World Economic Forum's Global Future Council on complex risks, and she's previously worked as Deputy Director of the EU Institute for Security Studies, and as a Foresight Advisor for the EU Council.

Florence, welcome to the Lives in Leadership Podcast. Thanks for joining us.

[00:00:59] **Dr Florence Gaub:** Thank you for having me.

[00:01:01] **Dr Lucas Marie:** There seems to be a lot of hype and discussions at the college in Australia, in the world, perhaps about artificial intelligence, about AI and the future, and the future of technological advancements in war fighting and in the military. And particularly, there's a lot of discussions about how AI is a game changer. You know, how it's going to change war fighting, and military operations. Is AI the game changer that people are saying it is? And you know what, do you have any thoughts on this? Or does NATO have any thoughts on AI and, and the future?

[00:01:34] **Dr Florence Gaub:** I mean, we're part of the debate as much as everybody else. I will say that, first of all, we need to perhaps rephrase what a game changer is. I think that there's a lot of hype. Uh, you know, drones were described as a game changer, the Internet's described as a game changer, but the question is: is it a true revolution, as in, does it change fundamentally, in our case, the character and nature of war or is it an add-on to something that already exists? I would say it's probably more the latter.



I don't think the reason why people go to war, how they go to war, how they conduct war is fundamentally going to change. That's just because when you look at studies done since the end of World War Two, you'll see a surprising continuity in even, for instance, land warfare operations.

So there's a lot of hype and, uh, you know, regularly, every decade there's a revolution announced in the field that we work on and we find it's an evolution, not a revolution. So when it comes to AI, I always compare it to electricity in that we won't know the full extent until we've tried and tested it.

So it's very much something we have to apply to see what it can do. I think as we speak today, we are all a bit in a bit of not a delusion, but there's a bubble has burst a little bit on what especially generative AI can do. Um, we find that it's making many mistakes that you can't really trust it, and if you want to have AI assist you in military decision making, obviously the number one condition is trust. And I don't think we have that right now.

So I think, ask me again in a year and five years. At the moment, I will say the greatest potential is in the areas that are not super sexy, flashy, strategic, like, okay, AI can help us maintain logistics because it's going to be better than us at anticipating when certain equipment needs repair or maintenance and all that.

So at the moment, I think it's going to be more in those areas and it's going to be super useful for that, but I just don't think. You know, we published a comic, uh, sorry, a graphic novel last year, NATO 2099. You can also see it in our website in which AI plays a key role, so I don't want to spoil a story for the listeners, but there is an AI called the "War Predictor" and the war predictor in the story at some point says war probability 100%. So I'll leave the cliffhanger there, but I don't think that that scenario is imminent. I don't think we'll have an AI let us decide fundamentally human affairs, and war fundamentally is a human affair first and foremost.



[00:04:08] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Yeah, that's really interesting. And I think the same sorts of discussion and debates, um, happen in the field of sustainability and climate change. It's like there's a lot of technological advancements and people are kind of looking at that as a sort of silver bullet solution. It's going to, it's going to be a game changer. You know, we're going to solve all these sort of, global poverty and climate change and I don't know if the evidence, you know, there's the, the technology. The science is one thing and, and the, the technology to solve those things, I think, I think is another. And I, I hear the same sorts of discussions with AI, that it's...

[00:04:45] **Dr Florence Gaub:** I mean, Technophilia is a real thing, right? Um, people get really excited about technological innovation because it's a little bit like the "promised land", you know, like finally we don't have to go through all these painful changes because we'll have the silver bullet in the shape of technology and you see that in many areas. Now what's super interesting is that, be it old science fiction, when you look at, you know, watch Bladerunner, for instance, from the eighties or, or even before, there is always overemphasis on technology.

The same goes if you read Lawrence Freedman, the "Future of War: A History" when it comes to how we used to think about the future of war there is always overemphasis on technology and underestimating the human aspect of it, right? So you watch all science fiction, you see that people don't cook anymore, people don't go into nature, people don't do all those things that we actually still enjoy doing today. Because we prefer, because it's easier to think about tech than it is to think about all these classical human things. Right? So I think that's normal. It's also, seductive because it means, you know, it looks like there's a shortcut to all these problems. And I'm not saying it's wrong, but I think it's probably overstating the impact of technology.

[00:06:00] **Dr Lucas Marie:** No, I agree. And do you think the militaries or the militaries that you've had the pleasure of kind of working with, have a, perhaps a bias towards thinking about the technology in the future, kind of emphasising the technological future capabilities, rather than the human aspect of their futures.



[00:06:21] **Dr Florence Gaub:** I'd say yes, but there is, I'll say there are two schools of thought on that. You'll have those that fundamentally think about how war is being fought. So there's a tech, very dominated by Technophilia. But then you also have those, and I'm part of that group, but I'm not the only one. You know, HR McMaster, for instance, is also part of that we think more Clausewitzian in the sense that, what does Clausewitz say is that fundamentally war is a fundamentally human phenomenon.

It's about why is we should ask much more about why do people actually start fighting with each other. And for what reason rather than how, and I think I find this question more interesting, but as I said, it's, it's less, you have nothing to show for. I don't have a cool slide with a new weapon that will change everything if I ask a question that's thousands of years old, right?

So I think. I won't say all of military officers have a tendency to think tech. I think it's very much also service dependent. Um, if you are like the Air Force or of course in a cyber domain, you have to be tech oriented. But I find that, you know, the Navy or, or the Army tend to be a bit less about the fundamental question. I'm overgeneralizing, but that's my experience.

[00:07:34] **Dr Lucas Marie:** And I guess a counter kind of thought to that is in the ethics space in which people talk about AI, maybe removing the human elements of warfare, you know, not that there isn't a human element, but that, you know, I think of, my mind goes to the trolley problem, you know, the, aspect of, for those that aren't aware of that example, it's, it, so sometimes it's articulated as a choice between, you know, pushing a button and pushing someone over a bridge and that, you know, the study show that the human kind aspect of having to, having to do the act like up close in person was a lot harder because of the ethical implications that one has to go through to do that, whereas pushing the button from far away seems less removed and the AI may be...

[00:08:14] **Dr Florence Gaub:** there's even the other question, uh, the other scenario, which is, um, for instance about self-driving cars, where they ask people, okay, so the car detect the situation where it's either about running over a child or killing the driver. The vast majority of people will say, well, of course it should kill the adult driver. Except when you ask them, okay, you are the driver, then they're like, well see.



So there are no universal, um, conclusions from certain situation, which is why I think even though our fear that AI will decide over life and death is I think it's a valid fear to have.

But I also think that until we've cracked it - philosophical conundrum or moral conundrum - I don't think it's going happen. I also don't think China or Russia would, uh, would be super cavalier about maybe more cavalier than, than western nations. But I also think, remember, uh, it's about trust. It's can you trust the system?

It's also about consequences. Can an AI think through consequences? Can it actually have completely novel ideas? You know, perhaps in the future, but, uh, like the distant future. But I think in the next 10 years, I just don't think that.

[00:09:29] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Yeah. Interesting. Um, I might just pivot a bit because I, when I was reading the bio of yourself Florence it, it says you're, you're a futurist. And I, I guess I don't exactly know what that means. Can you maybe explain to our listeners what a futurist is and does?

[00:09:45] **Dr Florence Gaub:** So some people prefer the term Strategic Foresighter, the term futurist. Also, there are many futurists that don't want to be called a futurist. But I think if you think of it as somebody who thinks about the future and the structured and conscious, and I'm going to say scientific way, then you're a futurist, meaning, so scientific way means, oh, I'm not just going to write down all my fears and what my imagination can bring about like aliens and whatever. But doing the research, seeing what do the trends say, what different causalities are possible, how do others think about the future?

That, for instance, I think is a very interesting aspect. Like, um, how do, how does Russia think about the future of its, you know, the world or, or war or whatever could be on any kind of topic. I love watching science fiction from other countries, for instance, because it tells you a lot about how these societies think about the future.



So, um. It is at the end of the day, what I do for NATO is a lot of scenario analysis, writing scenarios, but also, you know, weak signal searching. What, what's weak signal searching is that my radar is constantly looking for new developments that might be under, uh, ongoing or coming up. Um, you know, there's this term like the signal and the noise, uh, not every beep that you hear is actually the beginning of a new trend. But it can be. And that's also part of my job. So looking at, I'm reading the New Scientist, I don't know if you know scientist, the British Science Magazine. I'm, that's why I said I'm watching science fiction. I'm reading lots of different things just to see is there anything that's about to change that could be interesting for us? That's what a futurist does.

[00:11:20] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Wonderful. And so weak signals means certain types of evidence or data that you feel is...?

[00:11:25] **Dr Florence Gaub:** exactly a weak signal is a, a sign that a trend is being trend on, right? It's the early stages of a trend. What is a trend? A trend is a pattern of change, right? So a trend is not, you know, let's say the sun rises and sets every day. That's not a trend because it doesn't change. So it's fundamentally about detecting the beginnings of a change that could be interesting for you. So I'll give you one example. Um, new software, it's a good thing to have a look at new software that are coming out because they can change things.

Android, for instance, if somebody had understood the impact of Android on geopolitics, that would've been very good in terms of, uh, weak signal detection. Why? Because Android meant that suddenly the internet was available for a lot of people on their phones. Before that, it was only the iPhone. The iPhone was very expensive, but Android arrived on the market, made, it a lot cheaper to have the internet on your phone, which then, you know, that happened 2008 and in 2010, the Arab Springs started. It had a role in that because most people in the Middle East didn't access Facebook from their desktops, but from their phones. But two years before that, they couldn't have afforded an iPhone. So detecting a new software, detecting anything very early before the others do, or not the others before it, before it's public conscious, before the public is aware of that. That's weak signal detection. And it's weak signal because it's very early. Right. So you don't have mega evidence yet.



[00:12:47] **Dr Lucas Marie:** And what does your research division or the NATO defence college in general try to make sense of with those weakness, weak signals? I know you've talked about 'what if' scenarios or you talked about scenario. Can you maybe explain to us what, what that is and how it works?

[00:13:00] **Dr Florence Gaub:** So we have, for instance, one, so once a year we bring out a collection of what if scenarios. Um, and so the researchers are free in choosing their topic. Uh, the only thing they have to do is bring me scenario that's based on a weak signal set five years in the future.

So weak signal means they have to have some evidence. It's not just, oh yeah. I think aliens are coming. Um, and. Then they have to think through the consequences of that. Of course, we work for NATO, so we look at it for, you know, consequences for NATO. And then we also look at the present. What can we do now and in the coming years to mitigate the effect or maybe avoid this scenario altogether?

One week signal that a colleague of mine, uh, identified was panic over, you know, rumours over a bio weapon. And you know, we don't have strong evidence of a bio weapon, but we have evidence of people freaking out over it. And so he thought through not the effect of a bio weapon, but the fear of such a weapon. What could that do actually, can it be manipulated? Can you actually use that as a weapon? The fear itself. So that is, for instance, one example. I think it's a very good one.

[00:14:08] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Yeah, that's really interesting, especially in a post sort of COVID era. In which people talking about it as a weapon. Yeah. Or it being developed in a lab or you know, these sorts of

[00:14:16] **Dr Florence Gaub:** Yeah, like for instance, I'll tell you one scenario that's been going around for a while is what happens when the permafrost opens up because of climate change. You know, in the north, in the high north, uh, we don't know if there are viruses trapped in there that survive, they can survive extreme cold. And then will we have another pandemic because of that?



So a lot of people are thinking about that. There is no evidence. It's just that we also don't have evidence to the contrary. We can't exclude that, and so then we wrote one scenario where we are imagining that an unidentified contagious disease emerges, and we don't know yet is it from the permafrost. Maybe it's actually not that bad, but just the hysteria in the beginning could create a lot of negative effects, and then we're thinking through that and also how do you also, based on the COVID experience, how do you react very fast to rumours like that?

[00:15:07] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Are there some weak signals that you think people aren't taking it seriously or ones that really captivate you personally?

[00:15:13] **Dr Florence Gaub:** So, uh, all the researchers are told that they should pick something that they think is overlooked, right? So, I mean, it's kind of a weak signal is often overlooked because it's very early. Um, I think one thing that I will consider a weak signal, but you know, it's a weak signal for you and I maybe, but for others, it's already mega prominent is freedom of navigation issues in the high North. For instance, between the UK and Russia, they have, um, you know, a. In, in the high north most of the year right now there is a lot of ice, so ships can't circulate freely.

But you had the on and off issues of Russia and the UK, um, getting in a bit of a fight. Nothing violent, but I'm thinking Okay. Extend that to the future with the Nordic sea route opening up and more and more ships, including British ships, trying to travel to China for commercial reasons.

Can we imagine a situation where this escalates into war, actually? So that is something, for instance, that I've been thinking about, coupled with, um, another dimension to climate change, which is visibility issues. Visibility will drop because, you know, warmer weather means you have more humidity in the air, you have more fog, and then you add perhaps a satellite that doesn't function normally, the radars don't work. So these are small incidents that could escalate into full on war, and so we think those through when we have a combination of climate change, commercial interests, and then already not very good diplomatic relations that could escalate.



That's a weak signal that I'm very interested in. Freedom of navigation, especially in the high North. I understand it's also an issue in the, in the Pacific, so that could be an interesting thing to look at together with partners like Australia.

[00:16:55] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Definitely. And it's been two weeks since you've been in Australia, is that correct? And I know you've been meeting with a lot of, I guess different military personnel and organisations and, and non-military people across the government. Are there things that you've learned about Australia since you've been here that you can perhaps share with us?

[00:17:11] **Dr Florence Gaub:** I've learned a great deal. So, it's my first time in Australia. Of course, I've had Australian friends before and so forth, but it's a completely different thing when you come here. And also, of course have a lot of, uh, exchanges. A lot of people are working on the areas that I'm working on. So I came here with a blank slate and with my European perception.

And I was wondering what is, what is the Australian strategic identity made of? You know, because every strategic identity has key elements, often taken from history, culture, and so forth. And as a European, I looked at the attack on Darwin by the Japanese Air Force, and I thought, surely that is a key ingredient of Australian thinking of itself.

I realised, not at all, not at all. Gallipoli is a lot more important. It popped up in a lot of conversations that I had, which coming from Europe, I thought, oh, that is so peculiar because I would never have expected that. So understanding, Australian strategic identity, how it, uh, is very influenced of course by, by its operations, especially World War I, as I just said.

But also, the other thing that surprised me was as an island. I would've expected the Australian identity would be much more naval, you know? But that was probably me taking my experience with the UK and thinking, well, the UK is an island, Australia is a massive island, but still and I realised that's not the case either.



The Army in Australia is actually, well, they're all equal, I'm going to say, but the Army is stronger than I thought. I thought truly, you know Australia depends on shipping lanes and all that and has had its conflict also, you know, from maritime point of view and I thought, oh, surely, it's a mega naval identity. It's not.

So I've, I've overturned a lot of my, not going to say expectations, but stereotypes perhaps that I had constructed in my head before I came here. And I realised we have a lot in common. I mean, China, is a strategic priority for Australia. For Europeans, it's Russia. But beyond that, these two are acting in a very similar way.

You know, speaking of, um, freedom of navigation, the South China Sea, the Nordic Sea route, it looks very similar. And also the way they're building their military, rebuilding their military, in Russia's case, also very similar. So I think at the minimum we have a lot to share on how, um, well, how actors that worry us, uh, how they're behaving and what we can do about it.

[00:19:41] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Right. And I, I'd like to just ask if you could maybe unpack some of the, maybe the differences, that you've experienced and there are probably some similarities in that sort of context...

[00:19:50] **Dr Florence Gaub:** between Russia and China or, um, I mean, yeah, of course. So Russia is a territorial power. So it sees itself, well, it is seen by Europeans as an army power, so it's territorial land. Warfare is basically all the wars that we've had with Russia, you know, world War I, world War, well actually not World War I that much, but two, it was an territorial invasion at the time. So we don't see Russia as a naval power, whereas China is, I think first and foremost, a naval power because its vulnerabilities, the way it sees itself is, is in that regard.

But there's something changing when it comes to Russia. As I said, the opening of the Nordic sea route, Russia just finalised a new naval strategy for 2035. It's increasing its naval capabilities. Of course, a lot of its new nuclear weapons are supposedly based on submarines in the north.



So, um, I think Europeans are wrong to think that Russia is not under strong naval power. Um, so I think there is a difference in how these two handle this, but one is historical, the other is climate change related and commercially related and all that. So I think there is something common and something, uh, different.

Uh, the other difference is of course Russia has a lot of military operational experience and China doesn't. So while we have seen Russia in action. Repeatedly, uh, against, uh, Ukraine of course, but even before that, you know, in Syria we've seen it, of course, during World War II. We've seen it in Chechnya and so forth and in Afghanistan in the seventies.

So we have, from a research point of view, a lot of material to go on. What does Russia look like in action? And with China, all we know is that it's building, but we've never seen it in action. And I think that's an interesting conversation to have because before military force has been tried and tested, all of that is theoretical. We just, they themselves, don't know. We, we ourselves don't what we're like when we are actually in action.

I'll give you a parallel story from the Middle East. Until 2012 I think many observers would have dismissed Saudi military investments as, I can't remember, somebody said to me, oh, it's just, it's just for show, it's just for alliance building, you know, buying American weapons to have a relationship with the US et cetera. But I saw over more than 20 years, I saw a military build-up in Saudi Arabia that I thought that's more than just signalling, they're getting ready for something. In my conversations with Saudis, the threat perception is very much related to Iran.

So also you could see that the way they were rebuilding their military or building their military, there was a very strong component that was Navy and Air Force and less Army. Well, yeah, if you look at the map, uh, if you want to have, if you're Saudi Arabia and you're afraid of Iran, these are the two services that you will need the most.



And then of course the operation in Yemen happened, and I'm not saying it was, it was the reason why it happened, but I think it was the factor for Saudi Arabia and also for the UAE, a way to test the way they do at war. It, you know, it's an air war. Um, so it has, it would have experiences, it would have lessons learned from that experience that could be useful in the future war.

Um, so every military organisation learns as they're doing, so equipment buying and training that's useful, but that is not how you're going to be in an actual war. And I think that's the main difference between China and Russia. One, I see, is becoming a theoretical military power. The other has all this military experience, and so it's easier for us to learn from. It also makes them, I think, a scarier opponent because we know what they're capable of.

[00:23:34] **Dr Lucas Marie:** That's really interesting and it makes me think of the kinds of ways in which our biases can kind of shape how we are thinking about the future in that regard because we don't have that information and so yeah, How do we make sense of it? Or what are the stories we tell ourselves about China based on a sort of fog of war or incomplete information.

[00:23:51] **Dr Florence Gaub:** 100%. I mean, biases are, they have a bit of a bad rap because they, of course, they distort our perception of reality, but I always say it's not like a disease, it's not like you can get rid of your biases. The most important thing is that you're aware of them and that's the first step is that you I, I always, you know, when people ask, how do I get rid of a bias? Well, first of all, you can't get rid of it because it's your software. You've been coded that way, but you can identify it and the way to identify it is, is very simple. The moment you realise that you have a very strong reaction to something. Like that will never happen, for instance, or I'm sure this will happen then, you know, there's a bias that played as a shortcut.

If you're interested in reading further, Daniel Kahneman, "Thinking fast and slow". He explains that. So, system one is thinking fast. System two is thinking slow. You want to move more into system two. So develop methods to keep your biases in check. Ask yourself, can I contradict myself? Can I look at a conviction that I have and say, okay, I'm going to find evidence that it's not true, just in your mind, you know, hold the two, convictions and so forth.



So 100% biases. There's an avalanche of literature on that in military history. Biases play a huge role in underestimating your opponent, overestimating, misreading your opponent, also misreading yourself. So it's very important that you develop a, I'm going to say a hygiene or a cognitive hygiene, be aware of what information your mind has stored and how it classifies it. That's, I think, the trick.

[00:25:29] **Dr Lucas Marie:** And in anthropology in my field, it often takes shape through stories, not just like a, a cognitive bias in the way that you're talking about, but the, the language that we use around, say China's capability might be a story based on real information and evidence, but we fill in the gaps to kind of give it narrative and make sense of it.

And those stories get reproduced and reproduced and, and they become a sort of truth and that can sort of lead to the same things you were talking about, quick thinking of this is how we frame this problem. This is how we frame...

[00:25:59] **Dr Florence Gaub:** ...and you know why? Because, uh, humans in, in our particular field humans hate uncertainty. Like they hate uncertainty more than a negative reality. It's absurd. But, so if you ask people you know, do you want an electric shock, uh, now and be done with it or wait 30 minutes and you have a two third chance of getting it, or one third chance of getting it, people will say, a lot of people will say, "just give me the shock, I want to be done with it". And the same is at play here in that it feels cognitively more reassuring to imagine the worst, then to leave space for not knowing. And I think that's what you see a lot, which makes sense 'cause a lot is at stake. You know, we are talking war, we are in an area of existential things, right? It's about life and death. So a lot of people will fall into catastrophic thinking because it's cognitively more reassuring than saying, "you know what, we don't know what China will actually look like when it's at war".

[00:26:58] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Particularly as we're trying to prepare for certain eventual futures in that regard. Exactly. It's really hard to look at that whole ambiguous, uncertain, geopolitical environment and say, where do we put effort and training.



We are nearly at 30 minutes, but there's one more topic I'd really love, um, your thoughts on. It's about the ADF recruitment and retention sort of ongoing issue. There were two articles published this month, actually; One in The Guardian that I read just today; and another one on The Conversation. The Guardian one was actually quite interesting because it was mentioning that the ADF had, introduced some new recruitment initiatives, um, that were posting ads on TikTok and in video games targeting younger people and I guess, you know, talking about better pay and better conditions, and both these articles had talked about also a German initiatives that did similar things that had resulted in better recruitment.

But generally the ADF has experienced low recruitment and retention over the past 15 years and has sort of been an issue. And a lot of these articles that have come out about why, and often said stuff like I think in The Conversation one it actually mentioned, a former Australian army chief Peter Leay, who blamed poor recruitment and retention on falling national pride.

And there's a lot of negative assumptions about younger generations today, and younger people, you know, they don't want to fight or go to war, or they're entitled as a generation and they don't know what it takes to, you know, join the military. And I know NATO's done some work in this and you have some thoughts and I'd just love to hear it.

[00:28:31] **Dr Florence Gaub:** yeah. I'm laughing because we've, we have exactly the same narratives in Europe and I will say probably also in the US. So we published an article, uh, sorry, a study. We did a huge study on the will to fight. Actually the title, full title, you can also get it on our website. So if you Google NATO Defence College, the title is "notwithstanding an upbeat perspective on Western societies will to fight". And what we found, so we found exactly what you just described. Uh, you know, the Germans, the Brits, the French, no, actually not the French. The French is a different story, but in a lot of European societies you have exactly that. Now, what's very interesting is that, um, first of all you can, you had very similar stories about the, you know, wild, the roaring twenties generation, you know, they're entitled and they're addicted to partying and alcohol and da da and then boom, Pearl Harbor happened and the recruitment officers were overrun in the US.



So, um. I think there is no, what we know from research is that there is a thing called effective forecasting bias. So we, we are saying that the polls, if you rely on opinion polls, you know, ask people, would you fight for your country? We find that they're actually useless, because people don't know how they would feel if it came to war. Um, and that's not just in that situation. It's in many other situations. We are very good as humans to imagine a future situation. We are not good at, creating the feeling that we will have in the future. We're not, we rarely know how we will feel about something in the future when it actually does happen.

So we're saying the opinion polls, you can forget them. We are also saying that the people that say no to this question very often don't say no because they're not, what did you say, patriotic or proud of their country or whatever. Very often, especially women or men over 45, they say no because they don't know how useful they would be in a situation like that. So we are saying all of these opinion polls, you can kind of forget them and they're asking the wrong question.

What we do find, however, and that's important, I think is the way journalists and recruiters and whoever's part of this conversation frame this problem, um, says a lot more about them. And we find that, um, there are three types of people when it comes to the future. Either you think the future can be predicted based on the past or you think the future, uh, which you know, we, we, we cannot influence it, we can kind of, you know, adapt to it a little bit where we, but it's just, you know, it's like a train that's leaving a station and we can perhaps get on board or not, but there's not much we can do. And you have the third group, the influencers, the people that actually think you can influence the future.

So you have, um, the planner, the strategist, and the influence that we call them in our study. And if you are, uh, a strategist or a planner, you will have exactly that narrative that you just heard, you will say, oh, we need these, you know, young, strong men, you know, willing to die for the country and all of that.



The problem is when you have a narrative like that, that criticises this generation, well, they're not going to come and want to work for you. You actually create exactly the situation that you are afraid of. You actually push recruitment rates down because you are creating a defeatist narrative that nobody wants to sign up to.

I'll give you the counter example of Finland. Finland is a very interesting case study because it's a small country, but it has a million reservists. It has five and a half million people, a million reservists. Total defence concept where all of society is involved. They know should Russia come, we know exactly what to do. And you know what's interesting? They're also the happiest people on earth because they believe they can influence things and their military institution doesn't believe in a 19th century image of, you know, masculinity or whatever.

Just what you just described, like the Bundeswehr, think of who is this generation that you want to fight, with you, and then adapt to them because a successful military institution adapts to the society it represents rather than expecting it to change, right, and I think the Bundeswehr did that very well. The German military in their latest, recruitment efforts. They're putting front and centre, the strong individualistic values of that younger generation. Right? So it's about self-actualisation, realising your potential in all of that. So they're emphasising that, and recruitment rates have increased by 30%.

It's not just because of the recruitment campaign, of course, but I think it, it helps. And we also see, you know, contrary to this public perception that the younger generation in Germany, people under 24 are the most likely to say yes to the question, would you defend your country? Because they're very politicised, very activist, and they believe they, they want to feel that what they do have has meaning.

So I think it's very dangerous actually, from a strategic point of view to cater to that narrative that, you know, we wouldn't defend ourselves, et cetera. Because I can tell you who likes this narrative, it's Russia. In our case and probably China and yours. So, I invite you to check out the study because I think it's a very, um, upbeat perspective and it really invites you to take down that stereotype that western societies are post heroic and too woke to fight and whatever. I think none of that is true. Our studies show the opposite.



[00:33:48] **Dr Lucas Marie:** Oh, that's very interesting. And we'll link that study hopefully to the show notes of this, of this episode. Florence, thank you so much. You've given us so many good food for thought for how to maybe think about the future, but also, um, yeah, just speak so, so clearly about so many of these issues that kind of affect not just, um, the EU but Australia. So thank you for so much for taking the time to join us.

[00:34:09] **Dr Florence Gaub:** Thank you for having me.

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