

## LAURA FLANDERS & FRIENDS

### ANOTHER JANUARY 6 INSURRECTION? 'WAR GAME' FILM ASKS IF WE'RE READY

**LAURA FLANDERS** - What if January 6th happened again, worse? Are we prepared for another post-election insurrection? That question is not just top of mind because the results of another election will soon need to be certified, but also because there are threats coming from the same man who egged on the violence last time, that he will call out the National Guard, even the military, to handle, quote, unquote, "his enemies" in the context of this election. There's also a Department of Homeland Security threat assessment that warns that domestic violent extremists pose a significant physical threat, especially if their preferred candidate loses. And finally, there's Trump's former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, retired Army General Mark Milley, who now calls him a total fascist, "the most dangerous person to this country", quote, unquote. Suffice to say, if we were poorly prepared last time, there's every reason to believe we should be extra prepared now. So, are we? A 2024 film takes up this question to chilling effect. It features an all-star cast of senior officials war gaming a scenario in which there's another insurrection. Here's a clip.

- **JANESSA GOLDBECK** - All of us are here today because we are increasingly concerned by the rise of domestic extremism and radicalization in this country, specifically within the active duty military forces. I don't need to tell you that the alarms are flashing red. Most of you have at one point, sworn under oath to protect and defend the Constitution. Today, we'll examine a frightening scenario. What happens when those in uniform break that oath?
- **HEIDI HEITKAMP** - I think what brought us all together is a need to be better prepared, and the exercise is introduction to coup prevention 101.
- **LT. GENERAL (RET.) JEFFREY BUCHANAN** - I'm a retired Lieutenant General. I spent 37 years in the Army. I'm pretty adamantly non-partisan. In fact, that was one of my conditions for participation, that it was not a partisan exercise, because this should not be about politics. This is about security.

**LAURA FLANDERS** - That was a clip from the film "[War Game](#)". It featured former North Dakota Senator Heidi Heitkamp, playing senior advisor to a newly elected president, retired US Army Lieutenant General Jeffrey Buchanan, playing a military commander and one of today's guests, [Janessa Goldbeck](#). Janessa is a Marine Corps veteran and the CEO of [Vet Voice Foundation](#). She also produced the "War Game" that is at the center of the movie. Also with us, the movie's directors, [Tony Gerber](#) and [Jesse Moss](#), both of whom are award-winning filmmakers. Welcome, everybody. These are such hard times to be asking this question, but I'll

ask anyway. How are you feeling about this election? What is top of your mind? Tony, let's start with you.

**TONY GERBER** - Oh, I'm feeling so much anxiety, to be perfectly honest. Every waking minute, it's like a weight that's on my shoulders. Having gone deep into this subject with this film has gotten us out on the road. It's gotten us into red states and purple states. I'm a little bit siloed in Brooklyn, New York. And going to Milwaukee, Wisconsin last week, with the film, I saw these MAGA attack ads for the first time. These attack ads also were just spewing paranoia and lies. But it's unchecked and it doesn't matter. And that's the really terrifying thing.

**LAURA FLANDERS** - And what about you, Jesse?

**JESSE MOSS** - I'm scared. Our film has been called a horror film and the [scariest movie of the year](#). And it is scary. It looks at a scary prospect. Another insurrection, only worse. But there's some very hopeful things about it. Meeting Janessa and her organization and the role players in this exercise actually filled me with some optimism, and I think we all need that.

**LAURA FLANDERS** - Janessa, coming to you, you are a Marine Corps veteran. You've been in scary places. How scared are you right here, right now?

**JANESSA GOLDBECK** - Well, I think all of the warning signs should scare every American who cares about democracy and the continuance of our experiment and representative democracy in this country. We have the leader of a major political party in this country, and one of the two candidates for president of the United States who has signaled that they will not accept the election results if they are not in his favor, has put out a policy document in Project 2025 that outlines use of the active duty military to police the cities and states that are governed by political rivals to use the active duty military to deport people who may be here illegally. Huge, massive breaks in what we as American citizens expect from our democratically elected leaders and the military and our military civil relations. So, I'm very concerned about these trends towards this authoritarian style of governance in this country, and that people aren't necessarily taking it seriously or seriously as they should, which is one of the major reasons why we did this project in the first place.

**LAURA FLANDERS** - Well, let's talk about that and sticking with you, Janessa, that Voice Foundation was behind this "War Game" scenario. Can you talk about what brought it about and what you were hoping to achieve?

**JANESSA GOLDBECK** - One of our chief concerns over the last few years has been the rise of domestic extremism here in the United States. And in particular, the fact that domestic extremist groups, particularly on the far Right, have been targeting veterans and military family members

for recruitment. Because veterans are one of the last groups in American society that have cross-partisan respect and appeal, our voices carry a lot of weight in our society. And so, we've seen veterans and active duty military disproportionately represented in places like the January 6th insurrection in 2021, where one in five of the people who were charged in the insurrection were actually military veterans. That is far vastly disproportionate to our share of American society. So, we as an organization and as a community wanted to take a harder look at this problem. There was a op-ed written in [The Washington Post](#) by three retired generals that called out the issue of extremism in the active duty forces and called on the administration to do such a war game, a tabletop exercise to examine what would happen if we had another contested election in this country. But this time, the losing candidate called on people in uniform to help them take power. And that is exactly what we decided to do as an organization.

**LAURA FLANDERS** - And then, you, Tony and Jesse, you turned that tabletop "War Game" into what's being hailed as the best political thriller of the year. What did you bring to that table, Tony?

**TONY GERBER** - Well, we are observational documentarians, so we didn't invent anything. The folks around the table, the scenarios, the emotions were all real. What we brought to it was some shaping. We also took six hours. The exercise itself was six hours long. Our film is 94 minutes. So, there there was some real filmmaking that had to happen, but the goods were brought by these folks. These are non-actors. We didn't cast them. And it was chilling. It was chilling to say the least.

**LAURA FLANDERS** - And, Jesse, you really created one heck of a set. I mean, to look at, you would assume you were, this action, was happening in the situation room. Did that affect the performance, do you think?

**JESSE MOSS** - I think so. I think when those role players who Janessa's organization recruited, stepped into that room, they felt the gravity of what they were engaged in, in a new way. They really brought everything to the table, literally and figuratively. And for us, the audience and the filmmakers, it was like being invited into the White House situation room, not normally a space I'm invited into. And to really see someone like Governor Steve Bullock playing the president wrestle with this enormously consequential decision. I think Americans, audiences who watch the film become part of this conversation. And it's not a prescriptive film. I think it presents them with an enormously challenging scenario. And I think it leaves them with a lot to talk about.

- **LT GENERAL ROGER SIMMS** - We have undertaken an extensive investigation of the 2024 election, and it is Hotham who is attempting a coup to consolidate his illegitimate power and eliminate our God-given freedoms.

- (Narrator) So, the red cell is motivated not just by a failed candidate who's trying to steal the presidency, but also by a religious figure, someone with military experience who comes with a lot of credibility, like former General Michael Flynn, a convicted felon who spent his career fighting against insurgencies. It is not unrealistic that figures like him could play roles in attack.

- **MICHAEL FLYNN**: Those of you who are feeling weak tonight, those of you that don't have the moral fire in your body, get some tonight, because tomorrow, we, the people, are gonna be here. And we want you to know that we'll not stand for a lie. We will not stand for a lie.

**LAURA FLANDERS** - Janessa, when you and the foundation started this tabletop "War Game", as you described it, Project 2025 hadn't been released. You didn't have Donald Trump as the nominee, you certainly didn't have him talking about calling out troops on the insider, the enemy within. And yet you focused on the [Insurrection Act](#). Can you, A, remind our audience what that is, and, B, why did you focus there?

**JANESSA GOLDBECK** - Certainly. While the Insurrection Act is an authority that lays with the President of the United States to deploy the National Guard or the active duty military domestically. And in the past, it's been used principally to respond to things like natural disasters or hurricanes, but also to quell political violence, whether that is in Waco, Texas or during the Rodney King demonstrations in Los Angeles. And so, we've seen over the years this power and authority evolve. Certain checks and balances have been stripped out of it. So, the decision whether or not to deploy it really rests with the executive and the executive alone. And we wanted to invite Americans into the conversation about what it is, how it could be used, how it's been used in the past, and what to be on the alert for.

**LAURA FLANDERS** - And we should say that in the film and in the "War Game", the distinction is that some of the military are possibly siding with the insurrectionists, something that didn't happen last time.

**JANESSA GOLDBECK** - I think it's really important to mention that I'm a Marine veteran. I served as a Combat Engineer Officer in the United States Marine Corps. We believe fundamentally that the vast majority of the military and veterans will do the right thing, that they have sworn an oath to protect and defend the Constitution. But we are very concerned when the Department of Homeland Security puts out a report and puts out a report after report that says we have a domestic extremism problem within the United States military. And so, we thought, who better than to raise this issue up the flag to ensure people were demanding accountability from their elected officials and their leaders on what they're doing to address this problem. And that's

why we felt so strongly that organizing this "War Game" and this tabletop was the right thing to do.

**LAURA FLANDERS** - Coming back to you, Tony, in terms of the impact of the film, you've said it doesn't make a particular case, but it does have a message.

**TONY GERBER** - Yeah, I would say that our film is a rallying cry for reasoned leadership. What you see in this 94 minutes is process. You see democracy at work. The notion that democracy is this sort of idyllic perfect thing that was once great and will be great again is a complete fabrication. Democracy has always been flawed, it's always been in process. And I think that that's what we need to double down. We need to circle the wagons and there's gotta be certain issues that we can all agree on, like the peaceful transfer of power for Pete's sake. And the reason that some folks find it scary, because you see Steve Bullock as this very reasoned measured president. He listens, he listens to all of his advisors. He doesn't jump to conclusions. He's not led by ego. He's not worried about how he's going to appear around the table.

- (David Priess) Mr. President, are you invoking the Insurrection Act or Federalizing National Guard?
- (Speaker) Neither has happened yet.
- (Speaker) I'm not asking you, I'm asking the president. Are you doing either?

**TONY GERBER** - Even though Trump is not the subject of our film, he's the offscreen presence, he's the boogeyman of nightmares that's not mentioned in the film, but the audience brings him into the room. And so, the thing that I think makes the film scary is imagining that guy in that seat, and that is terrifying.

**LAURA FLANDERS** - The other thing that's terrifying, Jesse, coming to you, is that you make the film, there's sort of two fronts to the conflict. There's the on the ground, what's happening in the states that's happening in Washington, DC, insurrection, but there's also this kind of online virtual reality that you're having to deal with, of insurrectionists sending out fake messages and deepfake videos. And one can only assume that the ability to do that has gotten a lot worse or better depending on how you look at it even since the film was made.

**JESSE MOSS** - You do see that these opponents, the White House and the insurrectionist force in the film are really playing with the different skillset. And certainly when it comes to using the online information space, we see misinformation, we see propaganda, we don't even see what we all see now, which is AI-generated content and state actors using these tools to destabilize our democracy. Like Janessa and her organization have a very complex scenario, but they had to

draw some boundaries around how much they could bring into this event over six hours. And I think we all know what we're dealing with as a country and we see that we, all of us, have our work cut out for us if we are to wrestle these tools and ensure that our process, certainly the peaceful transfer of power and the potential for an insurrection are not accelerated or fully destabilized by more misinformation, more propaganda on social media.

**JANESSA GOLDBECK** - We really were cautious when we designed this scenario, knowing that it was going to be depicted on screen down the line, not to put anything into the ecosystem that might inspire bad actors. Every inject that you see, meaning every twist and turn in the scenario, they're all based on things that have already happened in our history, just all kind of smashed together for one terrible day and with the dial turned up just a notch.

**LAURA FLANDERS** - Addiction's just one of the challenges that returning vets, actual real life returning vets like your colleagues have struggled with, also suicidal tendencies, suicidal depression, of feeling that they were at a loss, that they aren't appreciated. When we were doing reporting into survivalists groups that played a role in January 6th in North Carolina for an episode that we did, I spent a lot of time on the dark web listening to them and discovering, and even in the very alive web, the very above ground web that one of the approaches survivalists and insurrection groups make is by simply listening to the grief and sadness and trauma really of those veterans. So, has anything changed in light of what we've seen when it comes to caring for returning vets' physical, mental health and just their loneliness?

**JANESSA GOLDBECK** - Well, first of all, thank you for your reporting on that. It is a tough place to be, to listen and observe firsthand some of those conversations. I really think that our country for many years did not prioritize veterans and particularly combat veterans returning from overseas. We have seen some strides in the last four years with a passage of the [PACT Act](#), which now expands veterans' healthcare to millions of previously ineligible vets, so that they can enroll and get the mental and physical healthcare that they so desperately need. And that is thanks to the Biden administration really prioritizing that issue and working with Congress to get that over the finish line. But a lot remains to be done. And I think one of the things that is very important to highlight is that every problem that exists in the military and the veterans community also exists in our broader society. It is a reflection of our broader society. Loneliness and isolation have been called an epidemic in the United States by the United States Surgeon General for the first time in history. You see that even though we have these devices and access to the web and social media, we are more disconnected and more siloed off from our neighbors and from people who have different backgrounds than ever before. And I think that when these groups know that there are veterans who are returning from service or stepping out of uniform who may feel very disconnected and alienated from civilian life, they become a very soft target for recruitment efforts. One of the things that happens to me the most when we are screening the film across the country is people come up to me afterwards, and they say, "I have someone in my

family who believes in things that I can't even imagine that they believe are real and I don't know how to talk to them," or "It's impaired my relationship where we don't see each other anymore." And that is really dangerous for our society and it's really sad for us as a country. And so, I hope that this film can help inspire more of those tough conversations between people who do love each other deep down, but might just find themselves living in completely different realities.

**LAURA FLANDERS** - All right, so we need recent leaders. We need more care in our community, especially to vulnerable folks. Jesse, what else do you come away from this experience believing that we need? I'm thinking institutionally. What do you need or wish was in place today? And then, we'll ask the big question, is it?

**JESSE MOSS** - Well, I think we see it in the "War Game". We see a healthy politics model, people who probably disagree on a lot of things politically, but actually agree on one important thing, which is safeguarding our democracy and they're working together through this problem. And we get to see those disagreements and arguments within the "War Game" itself. But they share a common purpose. And I think the war game itself is not naive and it's not sentimental, but I think modeling healthy politics is really valuable today. It's hard to look around and see that, see how people are working together across partisan divides to get work done on Capitol Hill or in state houses. So, I think that's a value to model, to show beyond what Tony also talked about good government and decision making.

**JANESSA GOLDBECK** - There is a bipartisan effort that is led by a number of legal scholars to reform the Insurrection Act, to actually bake back in some of the congressional checks and balances that would still preserve the president's authority to deploy the active duty military or National Guard, but allows for at least some conversation amongst democratically elected leaders and some accountability there. That's one. Second is allowing the Pentagon to pursue some of the very basic actions that it does in screening for new recruits that most Fortune 500 companies do. Like scrubbing someone's social media, ensuring that they don't have a presence in the dark web or haven't posted neo-Nazi propaganda on their Facebook page. We don't even have those simple steps set in place yet. And the third thing is really investing in caring for American people. Now, I know that's going to sound a little squishy, but hear me out. We talk all the time about the mental health crisis in this country. We've talked about the isolation epidemic. The reality is when people are struggling, when they're hurting, when they can't make ends meet, they seek community and they seek help in the places they can find it. And when we deny Americans a basic right to healthcare, when we deny Americans the basic rights to be able to be housed, to afford housing, all of these things contribute to the sort of appeal of extremist groups and of these extremist ideologies. And they really weaponize the grievance people feel that their government has let them down. So, I think that institutionally, it isn't just about dealing with the aftermath of when people are radicalized or have already subscribed to this, but it's about building a society that actually takes care of its citizens and provides people with opportunity.

**LAURA FLANDERS** - You said you were in the business of making documentaries of the future. What do you think will be the story that the future tells of this moment?

**TONY GERBER** - Look, we haven't even mentioned what's happening to the planet. We haven't even mentioned the climate crisis, and I do think that that is one of the greatest social justice issues of our day. And it all comes back to reasoned leadership, doesn't it? So, I think everything and the climate crisis I think is right up there for me. But reasoned leadership is so critical and I hope, I hope we find a way to dodge the bullet, to right the ship, to turn the Titanic before we crash into the iceberg.

**LAURA FLANDERS** - Janessa, Tony, Jesse, thank you so much. And I will just remind people of yet another episode from our archives, one from earlier this year where we interviewed experts on the question of political violence who pointed out that feelings aside, the actual data in this country is very small numbers of people either support or engage in any such thing. And our experts on that show also talked about what's been successful in other countries and turning that around. I don't know how this story will end, neither did any of us. But thank you for provoking this conversation, all of you. I appreciate your work.

**JANESSA GOLDBECK** - Thank you so much for having us.

**LAURA FLANDERS** - The British parliamentarian Tony Benn used to say that hope is the fuel of progress and fear is the prism we put ourselves in. And I'm choosing to live in hope this important time. And not just hope, but in remembrance of all the surprising, improbable, seemingly impossible change I've seen happen in my lifetime, and the surprises I've been witness to. I was witness to Donald Trump filling Madison Square Garden in the middle of New York City. He really did do that. Lots of people were turned away. Also in Madison Square Garden though, I've seen equally improbable things. Tina Turner in her 60s leaping across the stage in six-inch stiletto heels when there was an equipment snafu. She really did do that. I was there. Bruce Springsteen sang all of his album, Nebraska, from beginning to end, and most of the audience stayed. He did that too. And in 1999, Eve Ensler, as she was known V, gathered her forces for a grand anti-Trump rally. It didn't get the coverage, but it happened. I was there. 18,000 women and their allies pledging themselves to stop gender-based violence, stop violence against women in our lifetime. They turned the whole place into a rape-free zone. Improbable, seemingly impossible? Yes, but it happened. And surprisingly, good things can happen when we come together and believe. So, that's how I'm choosing to spend this time. If you want to hear how all of our guests talked about the future, you can through a subscription to our free podcast. All the information's at our website. Podcast subscribers get the full uncut version of every week's conversation. Till the next time, stay kind, stay curious. For "Laura Flanders & Friends", I'm Laura. Thanks for joining us.



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