

Malcolm Gladwell: The only way you can develop your ideas is if you have a crowd. And it's that kind of conversation that is at the heart of every, every intellectual revolution.

[INTRO MUSIC]

Stephen Scherr: Hi everyone. And welcome to Talks at GS. I'm Stephen Scherr, Chief Financial Officer of Goldman Sachs. I'm thrilled to be joined today by writer and podcaster Malcolm Gladwell. Malcolm is, of course, the author of several best-selling books, including *The Tipping Point*, *Outliers*, and *David and Goliath*. He is the host of the podcast Revisionist History, a contributor to *The New Yorker* since 1996, and his latest book, *The Bomber Mafia*, is now on sale.

Malcolm, thank you for joining us and welcome back.

Malcolm Gladwell: I am delighted to be on GS Talks.

Stephen Scherr: Well, why don't we begin just with your new book, *The Bomber Mafia*, which is, you know, for me it was a kind of fascinating history of war, technology, and how innovation can lead to unexpected ends in many respects. And you start at the beginning sort of reflecting on your look for a topic that you would be quite excited about to write. And I'm curious how you came upon this story and what drew you to write about this sort of moment in history.

Malcolm Gladwell: Well, you know, I've always been a little bit of a military buff. And I've always been particularly fascinated with the bombing campaigns of the Second World War because my father is English, was English. And he grew up in the war. He grew up in Kent in what's called Bomb Alley, which is the heart of Kent that the German bombers flew over during the blitz. And as a kid, he was told by his grandparents to sleep under his bed. As if that would protect him against falling bombs.

And a German bomb once landed, unexploded, thankfully, in my grandparents' backyard. And I grew up on these stories. You know? And my dad was, as many English people of that generation were, the war was the defining event on his childhood. And so, I've always been sort of fascinated by it.

And I was in Japan about two years ago. And I ran across this little museum, a private museum on a side street in east Tokyo, devoted to the fire bombing of Tokyo by the US Air Force in

March of 1945. And it's just this little out of the way museum. And I was so moved and kind of fascinated and horrified by this, what was the deadliest night of the Second World War. And I wondered, how did we come to that? How did the US Air Force come to the point where they were firebombing the Japanese capital? And they killed 40,000 people in one night. Civilians. In one night. I wanted to know how we got to that point. And that's where this story begins. It begins at the end. Right? I wanted to tell the story of what led up to that moment.

Stephen Scherr: But the interesting aspect of it as you read the book is, in fact, what leads to that event, as you say. Meaning, what was the thinking? How did people change their sort of position and the like? Talk a little bit more about that. Meaning, all that came before, you know, the event itself.

Malcolm Gladwell: So, the story begins with a little group called the bomber mafia who were a group of very young pilots in Montgomery, Alabama in the 1930s. And they were in Montgomery because they wanted to turn the way that we fight wars upside down. And they realized they couldn't innovate if they were in Virginia like the rest of the Army brass. They'd need to get as far away as possible if they wanted to do something new.

And so, as far away as possible in 1935 was Montgomery, Alabama. It might still be as far away as possible.

Stephen Scherr: Might well be, yes.

Malcolm Gladwell: And they were a group of pilots who were obsessed with bombers, and particularly, bombing. And they felt that if there could be a way to figure out how to drop bombs with accuracy, because bombing was incredibly inaccurate in those years, if they could solve that physics problem, they felt they could make the rest of the war machine obsolete.

That if you had bombers that could put bombs wherever they wanted, you wouldn't need armies. You wouldn't need infantry. You wouldn't need tanks, jeeps, ships, the Marine Corps. You would need nothing except for bombers. And not only that, you could fight a war without leaving hundreds of thousands of civilians dead. You could just fly over your enemy's cities and take out all the critical components that made the city work: the bridges, the power plants, the aqueducts. And leave everything else untouched. And the enemy would be crippled, right? That was their dream. They bring that dream into the Second World War.

Stephen Scherr: The interesting thing is, and I'll come back to sort of the protagonist on all of this and the story itself, but the effort to strive for precision, yet sort of pulling back to kind of look at or attack a broader array, I mean, this plays out in a lot of sort of aspects of our life. I mean, even in medicine, if you look at the way in which we fight cancer, the attempt has always been to drive medicine toward a particular cell or set of cells. It is that way now. And as I was reading, I couldn't help reflect on the fact that we try for that. Yet fail. And still rely on various other aspects of treatment that just bombard the body. This happens in a lot of sort of pursuits. And I'm curious if there was something about that, or is there something about that, that interests you?

Malcolm Gladwell: To use the medical analogy, you know, if you think of what does science look like in the 19th century and early 20th century? It's the search for a series of generalizable principles about biology.

What happens at the end of the 20th century leading into our century is that it goes from that to an examination of human variability. So, we go from trying to understand what is it that makes us human to the question of what is it that makes you different from me? So, it's about specificity. Right?

And you're absolutely right. You can see a version of that in huge numbers. I mean, I'm talking to a Goldman Sachs banker. If you look at the financial markets, it's the same thing. Right? The data revolution in financial markets is about that. It's about being able to zero in on what makes one domain different from another, one company different from another, one product different from another, one opportunity?

So, they're doing a kind of early version of that same thing. And on some level what they're trying to do is to solve a data problem. Which is, there are a finite number of variables that go into dropping a bomb that affect the flight path of a bomb dropped from an aircraft. That was an overwhelming problem for someone to solve in 1935.

The bomber mafia thought, actually, no, we think we can solve it. We think we can figure out how each of those variables-- you know, can you imagine what they are? Wind speed. Humidity. Speed of the airplane. All of those things. We think we can, essentially, make sense of all those variables and come up with an algorithm that will tell us when to drop the bomb. And when

we can come up with an algorithm that works, we have revolutionized warfare, that's the dream.

Stephen Scherr: But it's interesting, is the bomber mafia different than a group of scientists who are experts in oncology, any different than, you know, bankers in the financial services? Where, as you say, we're always looking for sort of precision, but then often default back, you know, to something other than precision in the way in which we pursue? So, we look for companies that are differentiated, but fall back to look at an industry? Or we look to engage in precision medicine, but to fall back with rather blunt force in terms of attacking?

And in this case, was Curtis Lemay, and we'll come onto him, is he different than that? You know? In the context of looking at an attempt at precision, and then falling back because of the changing sets of variables?

Malcolm Gladwell: Yeah. Super interesting question. I think you're right that until the kind of technical problem of specificity and precision is resolved, there is always going to be this tension between these kinds of very, very broad strokes and this attempt to really kind of zero in on-- here's another good example of this phenomenon which is-- you look like you might have teenage children. I'm not referring to your age at all. I'm imagining that someone of your--

Stephen Scherr: I may have just come upon them. Yes. Indeed.

Malcolm Gladwell: College admissions are a great example of this. Right? The goal of the college admissions process, or at least the stated intention of colleges is they think they can actually identify the worthiest with a great degree of precision. That is a departure from 50 years ago or 60 years ago. You know? Big state colleges in the United States or colleges around, you didn't even bother to do that. They had some version of open admission. You had to meet a certain level. Now we're in love with this idea that they really think that they can gather enough data and they can specify who the perfect admittee is.

Now, by the way, it's complete nonsense. It's like hocus pocus. The idea that we have all bought this notion-- the idea that you can take a 17 year old and predict with certainty the kind of student they're going to be at 23 or 24 is so absurd on its face. I mean, that we have allowed a group of charlatans who run admissions offices, to play-- and by the way, they play the same

game in selective high school admissions. The same game in selective preschool admissions. All of these people aspire to this kind of false certainty. This is one of the ways professions discriminate themselves is by pretending to have a level of insight into these questions that they don't have.

Stephen Scherr: But the interesting thing is, so, just coming back to the bomber mafia and you look at Curtis Lemay, his pursuit was a noble one in that, I mean, as I read it, which was he was trying to accomplish what needed to be accomplished in the context of warfare. Do it through precision bombing in ways that would avoid, you know, kind of collateral damage as it were. Perhaps his pursuit, no less noble in a given context than some of the examples we've been talking about. But he had to change. And what does that say?

Is it an admission of failure in the initial pursuit itself? Is it, instead, sort of a more high minded adjustment to circumstances that are present as they were in Japan? I'm just curious to get your thought as it reflects more broadly on the way humans think, engage, and pursue what they do.

Malcolm Gladwell: I think this is a really interesting point. So, this question of what is the appropriate trajectory for someone who is trying to resolve this question of precision? So, the bomber mafia have a dream. They say, "We think for a number of reasons, both strategic and moral, war makes a lot more sense if we can use bombs with precision. If we can avoid having to destroy an entire city in order to defeat the city, we're ahead as human beings." So, they try this.

And I think that decision to try, to go for precision bombing, is one of the noblest efforts of the Second World War. These people honestly wanted to avoid the kind of carnage that characterized the First World War, where a million people could die on a battlefield. Why? Because you had to do this kind of broad stroke attack. You had no other alternative. They were trying to find a way around that. I applaud them.

The story of the book is the story is the story of how that attempt to bring precision to bombing failed. They tried and tried and tried and tried and finally the Army brass back in Washington said, "No more. It doesn't work. We have no choice but to go back to the old way." To go back to broad stroke chemotherapy, if you like.

And I think on balance, that was probably the right decision.

They had to give up for the time being, because we weren't going to win the war otherwise. So, I'm interested in describing just how difficult that collision between an idealistic vision of with better way to pursue an objective and the kind of practical realities of the real world, that is really interesting to me because, to your point, I think every field wrestles with that. When do we give up this idealistic quest or this surgical, precise, clean way of approaching a problem and the old messy way of doing a problem?

And the guys, you know, to wrestle with that problem in the middle of a war when the outcome of the war is at stake, and when, you know, the decisions you make, hundreds of thousands of lives hang in the balance, to me that's the drama of this story. That these pilots and Air Force generals I'm writing about, they went to bed at night knowing that if they decided to change their mind, civilians would die by the truckload under the most horrible of circumstances. I mean, imagine having that kind of burden.

Stephen Scherr: But in your research, did you get a sense for the weight of that decision, that weight on these men? And by the way, does conflict in war kind of accentuate in that it compresses, to some extent, just the elements of this decision making more broadly?

Malcolm Gladwell: So, to your first part of the question, did this question weigh heavily on the minds of these men? Absolutely. In fact, you know, the drama of the story-- I mean, my story is all about these two characters: Haywood Hansell and Curtis Lemay who represented the two sides of this argument. And Haywood Hansell was the dreamer who never wanted to give up his dream. Lemay is the one who adjusts. And they're the two paradigms. Right? The stubborn, persistent one. And the realist. And I think both of them suffered, in some way, the rest of their lives over this, particularly Haywood Hansell, because the very thing he was trying to avoid in the Second World War, which was the wholesale slaughter of civilians, is how the Second World War ended, particularly in Japan.

Haywood Hansell was sent to Japan to kind of try and enact his precision bombing over Japan. He failed. And as a result, over the summer of 1945, we napalmed 66 of the largest Japanese cities in the space of four months, with the result that we killed somewhere around a million Japanese civilians. I mean, it's a carnage. I mean, we burn them to death. Right?

So, it's like Haywood Hansell spent the rest of his life thinking about the consequences of his failure.

Stephen Scherr: But of course, he suffered for the consequences of his failure. Lemay may have suffered for the consequences of his action.

Malcolm Gladwell: Of his success.

Stephen Scherr: The two are clearly different, though the weight of that may have been equal on them both.

Malcolm Gladwell: Yeah. Lemay gets promoted. Lemay becomes, first of all, the head of strategic air command, the most powerful military figure in the world during the Cold War. And then he runs the Air Force. In the 1960s he's Kennedy's choice to run the Air Force. So, he climbs the ladder. He becomes, maybe, the dominant aviator of the 20th century. So, yes, his kind of anguish, I think, is much more private.

You know, there's a moment in the book where I talk about how the guy, when Lemay was long since retired and living in southern California, a young military officer comes to his house to deliver some kind of package. And Lemay opens the door. And the officer sees on the walls of Lemay's foyer two photographs. And they're what's called strike photographs. The photographs you take after you do a bombing run. And they're of two of the most disastrous bombing runs of the Second World War that Lemay had been a part of. And you realize that the man, we're 40 years removed from the Second World War, and he had in the most prominent place in his house, photos that remind him of a raid where not only dozens of his own men died, but where he killed all manner of civilians. I mean, yes, these people lived with these memories for as long as they were around.

Stephen Scherr: But as you wrote this, you know, as a historian, sort of the retrospective look on this is different than the view of it that would have been in the moment. In other words, you know, we can look at it now in the context of what was saved, what was avoided. But in the moment, it would not have been quite so clear. Certainly, in the immediate aftermath of the action. I'm just curious your thinking on that. You know? The sort of moment at which you step back to look at decisions made; pivots made in strategy. They look very different from different moments in time.

Malcolm Gladwell: Yeah. To use another analogy from your

world. There was a time some years ago when I read as many financial crisis memoirs as I could. I thought they were really interesting. And they're interesting for a number of reasons. But, like, there's always a moment in every memoir by everyone who was central in the financial crisis of '08 where everyone's been out for four days and they honestly don't know whether the markets will open.

There's one phrase I'll always remember. I forgot who said it, but where they honestly didn't know whether there'd be any money in the ATMs the next day. Right? All of these. They're all the same, these memoirs, on some level. And they're all-- there's meetings that last all night and go onto the next day. And no one slept. And you realize that not only is everyone at the absolute edge of their-- you know, they're this close to kind of physical and emotional and mental breakdown. They're as tired as they've ever been. And also, no one has the big picture.

Stephen Scherr: That's true. That's true.

Malcolm Gladwell: They're solving the problem in front of them. Right? Whether it's their firm's problem. Their specific position. They're managing their relationship with some other bank. And what war is, is that stretched out over four years. And so, you come away with this and you just think, oh my God, these guys-- and by 1944, they're beyond exhausted.

And, you know, the other added element, of course, that's different between what I've just described in '08 and the war is that add into that some incredible percentage of the people that you served with are now dead. Right?

You know, there's a moment in the book where I describe these commanders would come back from bombing campaigns over Europe and they would lose 5 percent of their force. So, they would lose, whatever ten planes. And each plane has ten people on it, so that's 100 men. And they have to write a letter home to the families of each man they lost. So, you come home. You're exhausted. You've lost 100 people. And now you have to write 100 letters to 100 families explaining why their son is dead. Right?

Now, Jesus, I mean, I'm sorry. It's just the stress they were under was just unimaginable.

Stephen Scherr: But you know, it's often hard as we sit here now with the immediacy of new broadcasts, levels of communication and the like, to kind of imagine the deliberation

and the sort of length of that experience. In other words, it would be known to the world what happened in the Japanese are theatre almost immediately, perhaps before even those that are in the theatre know what happens. And it's very different today than it was then.

And that weighs on, you know, the emotional toll put upon these men, the decisions being made, and the like. Meaning, the world didn't know about it. And now the world would.

I'm just curious, compare moments in time. Because it's relevant, right, to think about the externalities around these events and these decisions.

Malcolm Gladwell: The book ends with the story of the air war against Japan, which is launched from-- we start the air war against Japan in 1944 when we finally conquer Guam and Saipan. But this little cluster of islands that are close enough to Japan that we can reach them with a B29 bomber. And from the end of 1944 through to the end of the war in the fall of 1945, we launch these bombing attacks on Japan from Guam.

The thing about Guam is, you know, to get to Guam, Guam is in the middle of nowhere. And this is 1945. If you're anywhere else in the world, getting to Guam takes days. Days. So, the guys in Guam are really off by themselves. And Curtis Lemay who takes over as commander of the 21st bombing command in January 1945, first of all, he attacks Tokyo and burns 16 sq miles of Tokyo to the ground in March. And then he keeps going.

And over the course of that summer, as I said, he basically uses napalm to burn down 66 of the largest Japanese cities, sparing only Nagasaki and Hiroshima, which we have other plans for. And the thing that you have to understand is that people kind of know what he's doing back in Washington, but they don't really know because it's not today. It's to your point. He's in the middle of nowhere and he kind of goes rogue that summer. He's just sort of doing what he wants. He's got tons and tons and tons of napalm and he's got a couple of hundred B29s. And he's just, everyday, he sends another group of planes to go and take out, to burn down another Japanese city.

And today, that would not happen, right? Today, you know, everybody would know that was going on. Nobody knows it's going on. Even senior military guys. It's not until the war ends and they start touring around Japan in, like, jeeps and they're like, "Oh my goodness, there's nothing left."

Stephen Scherr: No, but there are aspects of historical warfare that are just unknown to any of us who sit here today. In other words, the fact that, you know, Guam and the neighboring islands were within proximity to Japan. Or that Kent, for that matter, was proximate to the European theatre, was the element of success or failure in terms of where we are. And now, you know, we live in a world in which there's airborne refueling and these logistics matter less in the context of it. And so, you don't quite have context, you know, for the burden of history, as it were.

Malcolm Gladwell: Yeah. Oh yeah, no, although these kinds of things would some, they're absurd considerations today. Today, I remember talking to this Air Force general when I was doing this book, and he was talking about the air war against Kosovo, you know, the stealth bombers would launch from, I believe, Kansas. And these guys, they live in Kansas. They'd drive to the Air Force base from home. Get in a stealth bomber. Take off. Bomb Kosovo. Come back. And go back to sleep in Kansas.

Stephen Scherr: Yeah, Kansas, correct.

Malcolm Gladwell: Like, you know, there's nothing, nothing in common with what was going on.

Stephen Scherr: So, let's just stay with Lemay for one minute just as an individual and as a general. You write about the Air Force being kind of different then than where it is now, as kind of an equal branch of the Armed Services. It was started off as an extension of the Army, almost a logistics facilitator. But given what you've learned and what you've written about, put Lemay in context of other sort of generals, whether it's Eisenhower, Patton, or the like. Put him in some context in terms of how you view him, decisions he made, impact he had, and so forth.

Malcolm Gladwell: He's almost in a class by himself in the Second World War in the sense that Lemay is a really remarkable figure. And like I said, if you served in the Air Force in the Second World War in any capacity, you would speak of Lemay the way a basketball player who played in the NBA in the '90s would speak of Michael Jordan. He was the greatest pilot of that generation. The greatest navigator of that generation. The greatest tactician of that generation. Virtually every tactic we used in the air war against Europe in '43 and '44 was devised by Curtis Lemay. He was this brilliant, inventive, one of the

greatest battlefield combat commanders of the Second World War.

And then on top of that, he was embroiled in the biggest strategic debates of the war. And on top of that, he's the one who ends up kind of closing out the war against Japan in 1945.

So, it's like he has a hand in every aspect of the American air war against Germany and Japan between '41 and '45. I mean, he is this-- a better analogy would be to find someone outside the military world who had that kind of outsized impact on their world.

After the war, he builds the Cold War infrastructure in the United States. It's built by Curtis Lemay. Yeah. He's fascinating. And I, really as a writer, he's a figure that you fall in love with because he's just such a-- I mean, he's famous for-- he looks like a bulldog. Got a big, square head. He says almost nothing. He's famous for, like, he'll sit in a three hour briefing and get up at the end and say three words. He never takes his cigar out of his mouth. He's just brutal, unsentimental. He's the kind of guy you're very glad is on your side if you're in the middle of war.

But he's also the kind of guy you just hope there's not a lot of them. Right? I'm happy with one Curtis Lemay. I don't want an Army with nothing but Curtis Lemays.

Stephen Scherr: Let me pivot a little bit. At the beginning of the second chapter in the book, you write with reference to the tactical school, that conversation seeds revolution. And I'm curious what you mean by that.

Malcolm Gladwell: Oh, such an interesting-- so funny. This is so relevant to today.

Stephen Scherr: It is. It is.

Malcolm Gladwell: So, this is something I've thought about a lot for a long time. And I wish I could have done more of this in the book. But basically, there's a really wonderful study, and I've forgotten the man's name, a historian, who basically looked at every intellectual revolution in history and asked the question, "Do you ever have an intellectual revolution that comes from one person?" And he managed to find in 3,000 years of recorded history two instances. One is, like, China in the 6th century. And one is another obscure philosophical. Every other revolution is a group.

Now, we sometimes talk, well, psychoanalysis came from Freud. Actually, no. Freud had a group of guys who met in his office for tea every Tuesday and duh, duh. You know? Einstein was-- no, no, no.

Stephen Scherr: It was a school.

Malcolm Gladwell: It's always a school. Right? And so, I was talking about this revolution in bombing. And it's a group of people. And there's no way it could be one of them because their ideas were so crazy and so heretical that no one can sustain a heretical conversation by yourself. The world thinks you're crazy. The only way you can convince yourself that you're not crazy, and the only way the world will finally accept you is if you have a crowd. And the only way you can develop your ideas is if you have a crowd. And it's that kind of conversation that is at the heart of every, every intellectual revolution.

Now, why do I think this is so crucial now? You know where I'm going with this. Because we have this crazy notion coming out of COVID that we can all work remotely. Are we nuts? Have we learned nothing from thousands of years of recorded history?

You know, if you could convince me that we could have casual conversations, spontaneous conversations on Zoom, again, I would say, "All right." You can't even say that. No. If you want to do something bold, you have to have a group of people who are in social, spontaneous social connections and interactions. Right? That's where it comes from.

And so, when we say, "I need you back in the office," the reason is because we want to do something possibly creative and interesting and bold.

Stephen Scherr: So, coincidentally, you know, just in the half hour before you and I began our conversation, Goldman Sachs put out a note to its employees around the world that in places such as the US and the UK we would like to invite people back in June, recognizing that we have many, many employees who continue to suffer in places like India and Brazil and parts of Japan. But where we can, we'd like to come back.

It does come to this issue of just the serendipity of human engagement. And there's something magic that happens from it. And it can't be plodded and scheduled on a Zoom call at the noon hour, you know, with the same expectation of what the result may

be.

Malcolm Gladwell: So, the bomber mafia, the people for whom the book is named, are this loose group of, you know, a dozen or so men at this school at Maxwell Air Force Base in the '30s. And they develop this whole completely novel military doctrine together. And what's interesting about the group is how heterogeneous the group is. There are people who were World War I veterans. There are people who were bombers, bomber pilots from the beginning. There are people who started out as being obsessed with fighter planes and then transferred to the bomber side.

And the reason you get this powerful thing coming out of there is that there is a pooling of different interests. And also, a cross generational kind of education that goes on. The older types teach the younger ones, who in turn, infused the older ones with all of their new ideas. And that's another part of this. It's like when I was 25 years old and I went to work for *The Washington Post*, I was 15 feet from Bob Woodward, the greatest reporter of my generation. And I spent my first six months sitting in my chair watching him. I barely did any work.

Stephen Scherr: But is there something physical? Is there something proximate? Is it the fact that you were there and present in as much as those around the table in the bomber mafia were physically present that mattered? In other words, could the bomber mafia have accomplished at the tactical school what they did on Zoom?

Malcolm Gladwell: No. Absolutely not. And nor could I have learned from-- part of it is that a lot of what happens in a revolution is unscripted. So, you don't know when. A new idea emerges out of a series of conversations. But you don't know which conversation is going to be crucial. It's not that you have a conversation with the intent of uncovering some brilliant thing. No, you have 100 conversations. And by chance one of them happens to be something that triggers something. And you cannot predict that. So, it's this unpredictability and the spontaneity of these in-person interactions that makes them so valuable.

So, when I was looking at Bob Woodward, I didn't know what I was looking for. And a lot of the time, it was just boring. I was eavesdropping on his conversations. But some of this stuff is simply, like, his work habits. He's the hardest working reporter of his generation. When I was 25, I was not a hard worker. I am now. Why am I now? Because I understood from looking at Bob

Woodward who at that point was already famous. He didn't have to work a day in his life. He was rich and famous. And I saw that that man, just looking at how many calls he made in a day. When he got in and when he left. How did he talk to people on the phone? How did he ask questions? I just sat there, and I just soaked it up. Right?

The idea that a 25 year old or a 28 year old or a 22 year old today would not want to go in the office and soak that up, to me, it's nuts. These people should be clamoring to get back in the office. Right? Your future is reliant on what you learn at that age.

Stephen Scherr: Let me ask you just sticking with warfare and then we'll pivot a little bit, which is, Hansell and Lemay were dealing with the kind of relatively risk imbalance. Meaning, if you took the road toward precision as opposed to not, what was the risk/reward in the context of human life and the like?

And I'm curious, with the introduction of drones, you know, how does that change that balance? In other words, does it suddenly become somewhat inconsequential except for cost to send an unmanned drone in, you know, to sort of engage in battle, relative to whether or not I was going to send a squadron in, you know, to then accomplish what needed to happen?

Malcolm Gladwell: Yeah, the end of the book, I spent an evening with the Chief of Staff of the Air Force and a bunch of senior Air Force officers. And this is what we talked about. That we're now at the stage where you can accomplish with a drone, you know, in terms of precision bombing, we now have-- if someone called in the coordinates to the Air Force right now, they could take me out where I'm sitting and leave the rest of the house perfectly intact. They could just send something to the roof. I mean, that's how good we are now. Does that make it easier to go to war? To take out someone? Absolutely. I mean, that's what we're wrestling with right now, right? There are zero political consequences to using a drone to take out some Afghani, some Taliban chieftain or some Al Qaeda. And is it too easy? In other words, have we lowered the bar towards engaging in this kind of conflict to the point where we're just too willing to do it? Maybe. But I've got to say, I'm still a lot happier with the result than I would be if war meant that we would be killing a million civilians after six months.

Stephen Scherr: So, turning to your book, less about its

content and more that you wrote it, first, to be an audiobook. And I'm curious what your thinking was in that.

Malcolm Gladwell: Well, I started this, an audio company, with my best friend, called Pushkin Industries. And our notion was that audiobooks were a radically undervalued commodity. That typically what you would do, you'd write a book. There's a print version. Then you go and they sit you in a studio for two days and you read the book into a microphone. That's what an audiobook was. And we said that's nut. That audiobooks should be as richly produced and immersive as documentaries. They're audio documentaries.

And so, when I set out to write this book, I decided when I talk about these characters: Curtis Lemay and Haywood Hansell, you're going to hear a tape of these guys. When I talk to historians, you're going to hear the historians. When I talk about wars, you're going to hear the wars. You know, we have archival footage on all this stuff. Let's produce something that is a memorable, immersive audio experience.

So, as opposed to an audiobook, typically you'd have a budget of \$10,000 and you'd do it in three days. *The Bomber Mafia* was produced first as an audiobook. And we spent six months and probably \$200,000 making it. And the result is something. And we're selling it, both through Audible, but also, you know, there's bombermafia.com. You can download it directly from us. It's a whole new business model and a whole new form, literary form. And we think this is where storytelling is going.

Stephen Scherr: Do you think it takes lift in school? In other words, not necessarily this topic, though this topic may be an example, but in educating younger children on any number of different topics, which absent that dimension, fall kind of flat? They don't spur the kind of interest and curiosity that you'd like?

Malcolm Gladwell: Yeah, I do think this is a way to engage people, particularly a young-- if you just look, I mean, we started an audio company because I was walking around Manhattan and I was seeing how many people under the age of 25 had buds in their ears at all times. It was like, this is crazy. This is how the younger generation is consuming everything. Why aren't we making them a product that appeals to them? Right? Why are we neglecting them?

So, but I think you're absolutely right. There's no reason why

we can't expand into the educational realm. I don't want to say "we." I mean the world. Can't use sound and audio as a powerful education tool, because it has all these inherent advantages.

Stephen Scherr: Malcolm, thank you for spending an hour with us. The book is really a fascinating one. I would encourage people to read it. It has much broader implications than even the sort of selected passage of history it addresses. And we look forward to having you back again. Thank you.

Malcolm Gladwell: Thank you. Bye, bye.

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