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DEFENSE CHALLENGES AND FUTURE OPPORTUNITIES

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FEDERAL FELLOW RESEARCH SYMPOSIUM

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**Lunchtime Keynote:**

MAJOR GENERAL LORI ROBINSON  
Director, Legislative Liaison  
Office of the Secretary of the Air Force

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## PROCEEDINGS

SPEAKER: It's my great pleasure to introduce Major General Lori Robinson as our lunchtime speaker. She is currently the director of Legislative Liaison in the Office of the Secretary of the Air Force. She brings with her a breadth of experience at the operational level of war as well as working strategic issues. She has served as an air battle manager, including instructing in and commanding the Command and Control Operations Division of the U.S. Air Force Weapons School.

Additionally, she commanded an operations group, a training wing, and an air control wing. She deployed as vice wing commander for the 405th Air Expeditionary Wing, where she led over 2,000 airmen conducting B1, KC135, and E3 missions and operations Iraqi Freedom and Enduring Freedom.

She has held staff assignments as command briefer at headquarters, specific Air Forces, deputy chief of staff and executive assistant to the director of the Defense and Information Systems Agency, and executive officer to the commander of Air Combat Command. She has also served as a director for the Executive Action Group for the Secretary and chief of staff for the U.S. Air Force.

Before taking her current position, she served on the Joint Staff as the deputy director for Force Application and Support. But most importantly, in 2001 and 2002, she was a federal executive fellow here at Brookings Institution.

Please help me welcome Major General Robinson. (Applause)

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: Thank you. I have to tell you, I was saying to Pete that walking in, I haven't been back since I left, so walking back in here brought an amazing rush of memories, and all of them awesome. I have to tell you the time when I got here I had just finished being General Jumper's executive officer when he was the commander of Air Combat Command. So, for those of you being an executive officer to a four-star, you don't have your own life, do you? I mean, it's their life. And so after a year and a half of that, everybody wanting to know where Lieutenant Colonel Robinson is, wanting to know how to -- how can I talk to the general, coming here and being an obscure

person was just Heaven on Earth. I loved every single second of it.

The other part that brings back huge memories is I lived on 21st and O, so for me walking to Brookings every day was just awesome, and living in a brownstone. In fact, we were early, so I made the folks that came with me, I said, oh, let's go find my house. So we went and looked, and I lived on 21st and O.

But I think the thing that I appreciated the most of my time at Brookings professionally was the ability and the way to start thinking differently. All of us that are in the military, you know, we're very A to B to C thinkers. We demand structure and order. We like orders and we like giving orders and we like following orders. Okay, I don't like following orders, but I like giving orders. We crave regulations and instructions and we like those things that bound our life because most of us are those kind of folks.

But when I got here and I had my first opportunity to take one of the classes that Brookings offers, Inside Washington, and I had the opportunity to go around and start hearing the way people think inside the Beltway that are not military, it was fascinating to me. And then when I was able to do the class Inside Congress, to, again, listen to the way those people think -- not good or bad, right or wrong, but just different -- it was really the first time I started thinking about how people think and think about problems differently and how you communicate with people outside of defense.

I do have to say, though, if you looked at my bio, this place also struck me very personally. I was here during 9-11. My husband and I had walked to the gym; we'd done a gym sortie. We'd walked back home and I'd gotten out of the shower to watch the first two airplanes hit in New York. I dutifully took my shower because, what, you go to work, right? I mean, that's what you do, you go to work.

And I remember walking from my house to here, to Brookings, and about halfway through the walk my sister calls on the phone. And she said, Lori, Lori where are you? What are you doing?

And I said, well, I'm walking to school, you know. And she's like, no, seriously, Lori, what are you doing? And I said I am.

She said there's an airplane that's going for the Pentagon, you know. Go home, go home, go home.

Well, you know, I mean, I'm a dutiful officer and so I went to work. I don't think I got to work for more than five minutes and my husband called. He happened to be home that day and he said, I won't use all the expletives that he used, but the basic message was get home and get home now.

So, I got home and shortly before that is when the airplane struck the Pentagon. It was the most amazing for those of you that lived here during that time and lived in the District to watch the city empty out. It was the most amazing thing that night, living in my house, how absolutely quiet it was, where we could hear the fighters swap out and I could hear AWACs swap out. It was amazing to see a car with a gun, you know, out of the car in our city, in Washington, D.C. You see that overseas, but in our city.

So that whole experience compounded with the experience of starting to think differently really struck me on how I am as a citizen of the United States, but, more importantly, to try and make me a better officer in the United States Air Force. So when I was thinking about what do I talk about today and I looked at what the forum was all about, and I contemplate my new job as I deal with the Hill almost every day -- in fact, this morning I had the vice chief up talking to a couple of professional staffers; right after this I'm taking our Undersecretary up to talk to a senator; and tomorrow our Secretary and Chief are testifying to the Senate, so I think about things like this a little bit differently. And I looked at what the theme of the symposium was, you know, Defense Challenges and Our Future Opportunities, and I thought about how does this look through Congress' eyes? How does Congress think about this?

And I looked at all the different panels you had and the groupings that you had: Regional Insecurity and Emerging Governance, DOD Efforts to Harness Cyberspace, and The Changing Maritime Environment, and U.S. and Regional Powers. And I thought I wonder what Congress says about this? I wonder how they think about these areas. And what are the messages that Congress is thinking?

So, I would love to say I did a lot of research, but I do have to give the credit to my exec, Major Kenny. She did a lot of research for me, but I asked her to go back and look at two 2009, 2010, and 2011 National Defense Authorization Acts. You know, there's a lot of places you can look, but I deal with the NDAA, so I thought that would be the place to look. And what has Congress said on these issues and what things has Congress asked us to do?

But as we were looking and as Major Kenny and I were looking through some of the data she had collected, what we noticed is there were a lot of reports. And for those of you that deal with Congress a lot, they ask a lot of reports. And I thought why do they do that? Why do we have reports? So we asked a couple of staffers. And what the staffers told us is reports and hearings are used to exercise their right of oversight, specifically reports force agencies to plan and document those efforts. And also, the PSM seek legislation for reports if, one, there's not enough details provided at the hearings; or, two, a program is moving quickly; or, three, there's not wide Hill support for whatever the topic might be or if it's a partisan topic; and last but not least, it's new and it's different.

So, you'll see some of that in here and it relates -- I've tried to keep it just in these general groupings. So, what I'd like to do is kind of read you some legislation through these. Now, I won't bore you with deep, deep, but just to hear what Congress thinks about some of the topics that you're talking about.

So, we'll start with Regional Insecurity and Emerging Governance. If you look at the 2009 NDAA, a report discussion, they want a report on the Status of Forces Agreement between the United States and Iraq, specifically -- okay, now I can show you I'm getting old - - "specifically matters that are to be included are a description of any conditions placed on the United States combat operations by the government of Iraq; a description of any constraints placed on the United States military personnel, civilian personnel, or contractor personnel; a description of conditions which the United States military personnel, civilian personnel, or contractor personnel of contracts awarded by any department or agency of the United States Government could be tried by an Iraqi court for alleged crimes occurring both during the performance of official duties and during such other times and the protections

that such personnel would be extended in an Iraqi court."

There's another report requested in the 2009 NDAA on the strategy of the United States-led Provincial Reconstruction Teams in Iraq, "specifically the President shall establish and implement a strategy of United States-led PRTs, which embedded PRTs and provincial support teams in Iraq. And the strategies should include, as a minimum, a mission statement and clearly defined objectives for the United States-led PRTS; a mission statement and clearly defined objectives for each United States-led PRT; and measures of effectiveness and performance indicators for meeting the objectives of the United States."

In the 2010 NDAA, further instruction for Iraq. "Modification of authorities relating to program to build the capacity of foreign military forces, specifically temporary limitation on amount of -- for building capacity to participate or support military and stability operations. Of the funds used to carry out the program not more than \$75 million may be used during Fiscal Year 2010."

In the 2011 Ike Skelton Act there was a modification of a report on responsible redeployment of the United States Armed Forces, "specifically an element is an assessment of progress to transfer responsibility of programs, projects, and activities carried out in Iraq by the Department of Defense or other United States governments. An assessment of progress toward the goal of building the minimum of essential capabilities of the Ministry of Defense and the Ministry of Interior of Iraq, such as capabilities both extant and remaining to be developed; major equipment necessary to achieve capabilities; the type and level of support provided by the United States to address the shortfalls; and the level of commitment, both financial and political, made by the government of Iraq to develop such capabilities, including a discussion of resources used by the government of Iraq to develop capabilities that the Secretary determines are not minimum essential capabilities for the purposes of this paragraph."

At the same time, in the 2011 NDAA, authority to build the capacity of Yemen Ministry of Interior Counterterrorism Force. "The Secretary of Defense may, with the concurrence of the Secretary of State, provide assistance during Fiscal Year 2011 to

enhance the ability of the Yemen Ministry of Interior Counterterrorism Forces to conduct counterterrorism operations against al Qaeda in the Arabian Peninsula and its affiliates."

Pretty interesting when you look at that in your context of what you were looking at for your panel.

Cyberspace is also an emerging area of capability and of concern. In fact, during the Fiscal Year '09 NDAA, there is no language at all about cyber. But remember, this is just as we're beginning to start thinking about cyber. It's when we're starting about establishing CYBERCOM and all of that.

But when you go to the 2010 NDAA, the Department of Defense, organization and management, "authority to allow private sector civilians to receive instruction at Defense cyber investigations training, Academy of the Defense Cyber Crime Center. The Secretary of Defense may permit eligible private sector employees to receive instruction at the Defense Cyber Investigation Training Academy operating under the discretion of the Defense Cyber Crime Center. No more than the equivalent of 200 full-time student positions may be filled at any one time by the private sector employees enrolled under this section on a yearly basis. Upon successful completion of the course of instruction in which enrolled, any such private sector employee may be awarded an appropriate certification or diploma."

2011, it was amazing to me as we looked through this the amount of proliferation of congressional language in the NDAA on cyber. I'll just read a couple of them.

"The Secretary of Defense and the secretaries of the military departments shall jointly carry out demonstration projects to assess the feasibility and advisability of using various business models and processes to rapidly and effectively identify innovative commercial technologies and apply such technologies to the Department of Defense and other cybersecurity requirements.

"Pilot programs on cybersecurity required. The Secretary of Defense shall support or conduct pilot programs on cybersecurity with respect to the following areas: threat sensing and warning; manage security services of cybersecurity within the defense-industrial base; use of private processes of infrastructure to address threats, problems, and

vulnerabilities; process for securing the global supply chain; and processes for threat sensing and security of cloud computing infrastructure."

There's more language on continuous monitoring of DOD information systems, strategy on computer software assurance, report on the cyber warfare policy of the Department of Defense, report on the Department of Defense progress in defending the department and the defense-industrial base from cyber events. And finally, there's a strategy for acquisition and oversight, Department of Defense Cyber Warfare Capabilities. There's a strategy that's required. "The Secretary of Defense, in consultation with the secretaries of the military departments, shall develop a strategy to provide for the rapid acquisition of tools, applications, and other capabilities for cyber warfare. The United States Cyber Command and the cyber operations components. It should have basic elements and it should be safeguarded to prevent the circumvention of operational requirements and acquisition processes through informal relationships among the United States Cyber Command, the Armed Forces, the National Security Agency, and the Defense Information Systems Agency, and the abuse of quick-reaction processes otherwise available for the rapid fielding of capabilities."

And finally, "the establishment and maintenance of test and evaluation facilities and resources for the cyber infrastructure."

If you look at the rapid proliferation of the language, and you think about if we go back to why do people write language in there? Why do PSMs write language? Why do members want language? Think about it. That's something that's brand new. And think about I'm sure you all talked about on your panel about how we're struggling with this, you know, with cyberspace and cybersecurity, how we think about that. Well, look at what Congress has asked us to do to keep their role of oversight in here and look at the depth of things that Congress has asked us to look into. So it's interesting when you combine those two thought processes.

And finally, the United States and regional partner, I'm sorry I couldn't find much maritime stuff. Sorry.



"The increase in amount of available for cost of education and training of foreign military forces under Regional Defense Combating Terrorism Fellowship Program. The amendment will take place October 1st, and shall apply with respect to fiscal years; year-by-year extension of reimbursement of coalition nations for OEF and OIF," so modification of authority for reimbursement. "Using funds described in the above section, the Secretary of Defense may also assist in any key cooperating nations supporting the United States military operations and Operation Iraqi Freedom or Enduring Freedom in Afghanistan through the following: the provision of specialized training to personnel of that nation in connection with such operations, including training of such personnel before deployment and connection; the procurement and provision of supplies that the nation in connection with such operation and the procurement of specialized equipment and the loaning of such specialized equipment to that nation on a non-reimbursable basis in connection with such ones."

And finally, in '11, the extension of authority for reimbursement of certain coalition nations, they extend it and they extend it from '08 through '12, so that they're following all of this all the way along.

So you sit back and you go, all right, that was an interesting congressional lesson, right? So what? What's the big deal?

I remember when I was running the House office and my boss and I then, Major General Dan Darnell, and we had gone into a member's office and we had sat back and we had approached a member about an Air Force problem. And when we walked out of there, you know, the Air Force position was not -- did not win the day. And, you know, in Colonel Lori Robinson's brain the Air Force was clearly right, right? Absolutely clearly right. And I looked at General Darnell and I said, General Darnell, you know, I don't understand. How come we were right and yet we're no further than we were a minute ago.

And General Darnell said this. He said, Lori, not one person is going to take a football, run down the football field, and score a touchdown. We're all going to take a football together and we're all going to score our touchdown together.

So what does that mean? I read you all that stuff because it's interesting, but,

more importantly, I read you that stuff so you hear where Congress is on these things. One of the things that I've learned in the job that I'm in now is that while the way I talk is interesting, it's not compelling to them, right? What's important for me as the person that's in charge of legislative liaison and to invite and talk to my Chief and Secretary about, it's important for me to listen to them. It's important to me to understand where the member is. Is this a constituent issue? Is this a national-level issue? Is this a personal issue? Is this a professional staff issue?

It's important for me to sit back and listen to what they have to say, digest why are they saying it. Are they saying this because it's a Republican or Democrat or Tea Party issue? Are they saying this because it's something that somebody has fed them? Why are they saying what they say?

And once I listen and once I analyze, then I can be a better speaker (inaudible). I can answer their question in ways that answer their concerns, answer their thoughts, answer what it is they want to know about.

So, I read you this stuff because if I wrote a paper on any of these things I would not go to the NDAA, the first. I wouldn't consider going to think what Congress thinks about this. I wouldn't consider what it was that Congress wanted to know about, what reports were being asked for. Why were the reports being asked for? Was it because they weren't getting enough information? Was it because that they needed to know where we were? Was it because it's something new? Was it because they were concerned?

And the more that I understand why they wrote the report and who requested the language, then the better I can be writing the report. The more that I understand and listen to Congress, the more effective that I can be. So why would you want to worry about what Congress thinks about some of the stuff that you're talking about in your panels? Why would you care?

Well, I would tell you, I'm sure a lot of the stuff that you wrote, a lot of the papers that you put together, all of the discussion items that you have, at some point in time will have to be addressed with Congress, whether it's money, whether it's authorities, or whether

it's a written law. And the more that you understand the history of where something has been, the more that you understand what has happened, the better off you can be to score the touchdown together.

I will tell you, quite frankly, every office call that I have, any time the Secretary and the Chief talk, every time we go to address an issue, what we talk about with a member or with the PSMs -- professional staff member -- or even the military (inaudible) come early, come talk to us early, so that we can be a part of the solution; so that we understand what you're thinking; so that we can voice our concerns early; so that we can do this together. Don't come with a decision. Come and let us help and be a part of the oversight.

And you have to think about this. There have been several occasions that people can cite that we have brought a decision, the department has. We have brought a solution. And it has gotten better with the help of Congress.

Now, is Congress always right and we're wrong? Absolutely not. Are we always right and they're wrong? No, that's not true either. It truly can -- it should be and is a partnership as you go forward.

So I would only present to you, as you think about the future of your projects, you think about the future of the things that you do and the folks in the military, I would encourage you to sit back every now and then and think about how we present information. We present information in PowerPoint slides. We present information with a lot of -- now, what are those things called when it's a whole bunch of letters written together?

SPEAKER: Acronyms?

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: Acronyms, thank you. I'm getting old; I should put my glasses back on. With a whole bunch of acronyms, right? And sometimes acronyms inside of acronyms, right? And we present information that is not easily absorbable often and -- I'll speak for the Air Force -- often technical and often degrees of technicality. It's more important, I would tell you, to sit back and listen to what they have to say as you try to bring your issues forward, your efforts forward, and you think about the things that we just talked about.

I'll ask, did anybody do -- when you did your paper, go look at what Congress has spoken about any of these things? You did? Were you surprised at the amount of language? Yeah.

Were you surprised at the amount of language? I was surprised at the amount of language and the specificity of the language. And more importantly, and now in my hat as LL, who's writing those reports? And I hope they're on time. (Laughter)

Anyway, so I'm going to stop there because I think that's kind of where I wanted to end. And I will be glad to take questions for a few minutes because I know that's actually more fun than people sitting there listening.

So, can I drink this water? Okay, thank you.

So I'll take the first question. Anybody have any questions? It's great if you don't because I know you guys are a hard crowd. Yes, ma'am?

SPEAKER: I had a question about when they hold hearings. And what I've noticed when I look up the organization I'm looking at for my research here, you know, they'll have a hearing (inaudible) list. But what I also notice is that depending on who's holding the hearing, some of the witnesses skew one extreme or another. And so, you know, who puts together that witness list? Is it really the PSMs or is it really a member driving that depending on their agenda, or can it be any of that? Because sometimes it's not -- they don't get the full spectrum of ideas on the topic. It's really one way or another.

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: I would tell you it's all of the above. The chairman has the last vote on who the witnesses are going to be and then the PSMs have a huge influence on that. In fact, I got a note from a PSM about a week ago and it said, hey, Lori, we're thinking about, you know, this hearing on this topic. We were wanting this kind of a person. Have you got any names you can think of that would be helpful in that? But the final vote goes to the chairman on who he or she wants up there.

And I would tell you, in full honesty, while maybe one hearing perceived skewed in one manner, you can watch another hearing and (inaudible) on the same topic and it's skewed in a totally different manner, so in order to get the whole story.

You know, I'll kind of diverge for a minute. One of the things I talk to, in the Air Force we have what we call a wing commander's engagement, where in the summer we have our wing commanders come and bring their command chief and airmen that have been over in the AOR. And there I go again, AOR. And so -- but we have them meet members from their states and their district and we have them meet members from their home.

And one of the things I try to tell everybody is that this is a dialogue. This isn't an interrogation, although sometimes it feels like it. This is a dialogue. This is an exchange of ideas. This is a way to inform and listen. This is not, you know, this. Sometimes it obviously gets heated depending upon what the specific topic is and whether it's in a hearing or in an office call, but I try to have our folks think about it as a dialogue. And again, a dialogue because this language here, they didn't think of this language all by themselves. You know, they have input and they have things from military members, from other people. So the more you make it a dialogue and the more they go -- as an example, this morning the Chief and the Secretary met with the Senate Armed Services Committee majority and minority staffers.

One of the problems in the Air Force is we are over end-strength in our officer corps. One of the things that contributes to over end-strength in the officer corps is the amount of cadets we have out at the cadet wing in the Air Force Academy. We are 500 cadets over. So one of the staffers said really? That contributes to your officer end-strength. And the Chief said yes.

And he goes, well, talk with the other services, see if it does the same thing. And if it doesn't, or if it does, maybe we can write some language that it doesn't count for that.

So if you make it more of a conversation, they're also there to help you. What language do we use to help you with this problem? And so that's the other reason to make it a conversation so that the language that you want, the language of the things that you're thinking about with your projects, the language of the things that your bosses are trying to do, you know how to talk to them.

Now, will it always work? Absolutely not. But is it worth trying to understand that?

Yes, ma'am. So I would say on both sides.

What else? Yes. Uh-oh.

SPEAKER: Thank you again for joining us.

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: Yes.

SPEAKER: And welcome back to Brookings. I've been on you could say two sides of this foreseen function; this perceived foreseen function that Congress has when it requests reports. And think tankers and researchers usually feed into those reports where staffers will say, you know, what questions should we ask, with the idea that if we ask hard questions it will force a response, not just an answer to those questions, but a policy shift on those issues by the agencies that's required to do them.

And the flipside is when I was in OSD we looked at those reports as either a pain in the butt or something often to be ignored.

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: Right.

SPEAKER: So, I wonder, you know, as you spoke about the dialogue, how effective is the forcing function in actually changing policy? And what are the ways that perhaps it might be improved?

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: So, I would also add a third category for the reports and that's don't tell them very much in the reports, right? First, how effective is the dialogue? I have discovered -- because I ran the House office for a year, I walked back into the Rayburn Building and I was getting hugs from folks. Oh, it's great to have you back. It's so nice to have you back. I can pick up the phone and call almost any PSM on the House side and we can have this dialogue. And we can have the dialogue about, you know, hey, come in and talk about it. I'm still working on the Senate. So I believe in the dialogue.

And I believe that the dialogue isn't just at posture hearing or not just at markup, but you should have the dialogue all the time. You know, my schedule's been crazy, but, you know, it would be great to be able to sit down once a week with PSMs or, you know, and have those kind of discussions with the staff directors. Because I really do believe it shapes the language. Now, again, there's lots of other input to language and so -- but the shaping.

The policy part I think is actually harder. And I think if I -- I think part of the problem is the flipside of that is there's so many reports, right? And so -- in fact, there's a report that's required this year about ISR. And the only reason I'm even halfway sensitive because it took me about a day to read it about four or five times to understand exactly what was requested. But what was requested was each service needed to talk about their ISR, then you needed to talk about where it was. Was it in garrison or overseas? Then you needed to go, okay, and what are we thinking about building? And how does all that look architecturally? And then all of that gets rolled up to the Secretary of Defense and it gets sent over. Okay?

That's pretty complicated, I think, you know. And what behavior -- really the real question is what behavior is that trying to change, right? What is the behavior you're trying to get at with that? I think the more that we understand it as the way it was described to me, the reasons why that we have these reports, the more we can ask what behavior are you trying to change, the better you can answer the question and then get a better policy shift, I think. But I don't think we look at it like that yet. And this is just Lori thinking. I think we look at it more as answer the questions, don't get us in trouble, you know, get it off your desk and move on. And I think very rarely does it end up with a policy change unless it's a significant, you know, very loud, a very public discussion.

So that -- and I'm with you. I track reports every week. I mean, I watch reports every week and we do what we call "murder boredom." You know, pay attention, everybody gets together and make sure we can answer the questions that needed to be. But yes, we don't get to that very often, I don't think. I haven't seen it.

SPEAKER: If I can ask a follow-up.

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: Absolutely.

SPEAKER: So if you were to take your hat off and move into the role, say, of advising PSMs, what would you advise them in the crafting of report requirements that would make them more likely to be answered in the way that they're looking for? Because you sort of see it going in both directions.

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: Yeah, yeah. So the way I would do that is I would acknowledge the work that has been done, you know. Acknowledge that there is a position, the department has taken a position in something, and don't ask for work that we've already answered three or four or five times. It's just worded differently. Let's -- if we want to pick up the football and move down the field a little bit, acknowledge the work that's been done. And now how do we look forward, right, to where we want to go versus rehash some of the stuff that's been done?

I mean, here's a classic. On the Joint Staff the last two years I had the privilege of being part of the bomber study, right? The long-range strike bomber study. And so from the first study to almost the end; I moved right beforehand. Well, in the 2011 National Defense Authorization Act, you know, there's a question that we've already answered a couple times. Well, what have you been doing, Air Force? What did you do that for, you know? What have you been doing the last two years? Why? You know, that kind of thing where we had that dialogue already.

So if you've got a new one, let's just move out on the new one. That would probably be the one thing that I would say.

The other part, though, that I have to continually remember is, especially for the professional staff, they've been there forever. Right? They've watched the ebb and flow of almost every single issue of significance. They can tell you the history of everything. And so as of just today, when we -- the Vice Chief was over, was talking about the bomber. And it was like, well, let me tell you what you said back on the other. Now let me tell you what you're saying today. Nothing's changed. So what's different?

So I think that's part our message, right? We need to work on our message better. But the other part is it's done, let's move on. The Secretary of Defense made a decision.

Yes?

SPEAKER: The big issue of the day seems to be the federal budget. What Air Force-specific issues dealing with that are you sort of having to get your arms around and explain to Congress or actually seeking, you know, help during this dialogue?



MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: Right. So I would tell you, every office call that the Secretary, the Chief, the Undersecretary, the Vice Chief, any of the members of the United States Air Force, independent of the committee that they're serving on, the first thing that they talk about is the Continuing Resolution and what it's doing. And knowing that, you know, the only people that can do anything about it is the appropriators, but knowing that it's definitely a whole of Congress problem.

The things that the Chief and the Secretary talk about often are a lot of programs that we can't put contracts to, right: F18 (inaudible) radar, some of the MILCOM that we can't put money to, some of the issues in our long-term what-are-we-going-to-build, those kind of contracts from an investment standpoint. From an O&M standpoint, right now we already know that we won't be able to pay our members in the month of September. So those are the kind of things that we talk about when they go talk to the members of Congress.

What else? Yes, sir.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL BURTOLE: Ma'am, Lieutenant Colonel Jason Burtole, ma'am. One of your fellows this year.

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: Oh, so, okay. You know, one of my fellows. Be careful what you ask. (Laughter)

LIEUTENANT COLONEL BURTOLE: Yes, ma'am. So this should be a softball.

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: No, no, no.

LIEUTENANT COLONEL BURTOLE: Okay. My question is about earmarks. So there's a moratorium on earmarks. And my question, ma'am -- I've been meaning to ask you, but I thought this would be good -- do you see any potential opportunities and threats to some of the things that we've been talking about today with the moratorium on earmarks?

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: So, now, I haven't seen anything in writing and I don't know anything official, but I am hearing that it'll be called something different.

(Laughter) And I forget what the word is, but I do believe that we will have an earmark by a different name, you know, because it's one of the things that the members feel very strongly

about, especially because it's some way that they can take care of their constituents or their state. But I heard that rumor; I don't know that for a fact.

Now, let's say -- let's put that aside and say it is pure rumor because I really don't know that for a fact. Let's say that we don't have earmarks. For the military specifically I can tell you as a wing commander, one of the things that I enjoyed doing the most was being able to know that I had things in my major command budget that was below, you know, the actual funding line and to be able to talk to members of Congress about the things that my installation needed and their ability to help with that outside of our budget.

I will tell you, also, that there will still be pressure from the Congress to support. It'll just be different pressure now. And so we'll see how some of that will play out.

But it was one of the things that I know that the members of Congress, both on the House and the Senate, enjoy doing -- and I'll just speak from a military perspective -- to help a military installation and that would make them something that they could go, hey, look at what I did and what I was able to do to help them.

So, what else? Yes? Another fellow.

SPEAKER: I'm not one of (inaudible).

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: I know.

SPEAKER: Thank you. Good to see you, General. Thanks for speaking with us.

I am doing a defense fellowship at the State Department. And I was wondering if you could comment on Congress' seemingly increasing role in foreign policy, whether it's the amount of CODELs that travel overseas, whether it's calling for certain leaders to step down, you know, suggesting military tactics such as no-fly zones, et cetera. It seems to me that that is increasing, at least historically, and I wonder if you could just comment on that as you deal with that.

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: You bet. So let's talk about CODELs for a second. I had the privilege to travel on a couple of CODELs with Speaker Pelosi right when Congress flipped. And, you know, after a while, at the end of the day, when you're sitting down and you're chatting with the members' staff, and I'm like -- and, in fact, I went and had

the privilege to go on a trip that went to Damascus, Syria. And so -- to meet with the President. And if you all recall, that was a big hullabaloo, you know. I mean, remember, you know, the President and what's the hullabaloo? And, I mean, it was just huge. And it was right up until the very end that we knew for a fact that we were going to go to Syria.

So, at the end of the day, you know, sitting in the delegation room, chatting with a couple of the staff, I was why are we here? You know, why do you -- why are we here, you know? I'm trying to understand. And it goes back to their oversight role and responsibility. And so that's why you see CODELs go to the places that they go.

The other thing, though, I would tell you this year that's a little different of something that I've seen was the House Armed Services Committee decided, because it -- remember, now we flipped back to Republican with a lot of new members on the HASC, and so Chairman McKeon made a conscious decision to do a couple of educational sessions and a couple of educational CODELs. And he took them, a whole bunch of new members, over to Iraq and Afghanistan, so that they could see -- eyes -- of what's happening up close and personal as they are trying to make decisions about this upcoming year and this upcoming -- the questions and hearings and all that stuff. So I thought that was a little different, you know, still the oversight part, but also the question.

I would tell you, quite frankly, the other part, like no-fly zones and all that, in Lori Robinson's opinion that's politics. You know, that's politics and that's not just trying to say, hey, we want to run the department. That has, to me, a much more political overtone than a CODEL with its oversight responsibilities. So I would kind of delineate it that way. That's just me, though.

SPEAKER: One more quick question.

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: Okay.

SPEAKER: Question.

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: Oh. I was like, ah, I thought you were seeing a hand I didn't see.

SPEAKER: So did I. But thank you. That was (inaudible).

COLONEL LIVINGSTON: Thanks. Good morning, ma'am. Colonel Doc Livingston and I'm a fellow as well and I'm with Congressional Research Service for the last year.

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: Awesome.

COLONEL LIVINGSTON: So I've had a lot of exposure with the Legislative Affairs folks. In the -- the associates that I've been dealing with over the past year, the sense that they have as far as why they mandate a lot of reports is that the services -- I won't put it to the Air Force specifically -- are not to that level of detail of describing their ways and means, whereas they describe objectives. We will provide capability to the combat and commander without saying we'll provide X-number of Y to do Z. Could you address how we as a servicer are dealing with that or if that's intentional to give us latitude left and right?

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: I would tell you a couple things. It's interesting to me to watch our leadership kind of think through some things not in a report context, but more in a hearing context because that's kind of the same thing in a much constrained environment. It depends on, I think, often where we are in a decision, where we're going with a decision. As an example, if we're going to move force structures someplace, you know, when we make the decision and how we approach Congress with that decision is different. So I think part of that is in the report.

Are we ready to show everything? Are we ready to kind of lay out A through Z branches and sequels? We might not be ready to do that yet in a written form because maybe decisions aren't made all the way.

The other part, I would also say, is, again, sometimes we don't understand why the report's being asked for. And if we don't understand why, you know, is it because we didn't give the full disclosure? Is it because we didn't go down the road of A through D ways and means? Then sometimes we answer the question we want to and not the question that's being asked.

So I guess I would couch it in those two ways and things that I think about with all of that, so.

SPEAKER: General, on behalf of Brookings and the federal executive fellows,  
thank you very much for your time and insight.

MAJOR GENERAL ROBINSON: Thank you. Thank you very much. Thank you.  
That was fun. (Applause)

SPEAKER: A quick break and then we'll start our next panel scheduled at 1:20.

(Recess)