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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. MALONEY: Good afternoon. My name is Suzanne Maloney. I'm vice president and director of Foreign Policy at the Brookings Institution. On behalf of the Foreign Policy Program and our Strobe Talbot center for Security, Strategy, and Technology, I'm delighted to welcome you to this very special event to discuss the book "The Inheritance," authored by our friend and former Brookings colleague, Dr. Mara Karlin, who now serves as assistant secretary of defense for strategy, plans, and capabilities at the Pentagon.

"The Inheritance" is a timely study of the effects of nearly two decades of war on the Department of Defense. The book shines a particular spotlight on foundational issues facing the military, focusing on the health and readiness of the people, processes, and relationships of which it is composed. The United States relies very much on our military. Our military responding to Russia's reprehensible invasion of Ukraine. It is degrading the capabilities of terrorist organizations worldwide. It is modernizing in concept and in capability to defend and pursue U.S. interests around the globe. In addition, of course, to maintaining security assistance programs, engaging in regular partner trainings and exercises, providing crisis response and disaster relief, and much, much more. Very often we discuss these demands rather clinically, in terms of outcomes and efficiencies, threats and responses, priorities and strategies.

"The Inheritance" is a book that reminds us that these conversations about what the U.S. military should do, where it should do that, with what, and why, cannot take for granted the military itself. The book calls our attention to the people who choose to serve in the military and with it those in the Department of Defense, to how they understand the role of the armed forces in U.S. foreign policy, to how they can know when they are executing that role well or can recognize when change is needed, and to how the institution of which they are a part connects with and to American society and our system of governance.

"The Inheritance" puts these crucial matters front and center at a time when the services and the nation are coming to terms with the meaningful effect and outcomes of the post-9/11 wars in Iraq and Afghanistan while also grappling with uncertainty about the demands of the future international environment.

We have an absolute embarrassment of riches here today to take up these questions and to help us think about how this recent past can inform our approach to the future. Each of our panelists not only is an esteemed expert in matters of defense strategy and policy, but each of them are also careful and sensitive observers of the composition and operations of the military services themselves, of their interactions with other government agencies, and of civil-military relations.

Let me introduce them very briefly.

We are joined by visiting professor of strategic studies and senior fellow of the Merrill Center at the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies, Nora Bensahel. She is the co-author of the recently published book, "Adaptation Under Fire: How Militaries Change in Wartime", and currently serves on the executive board of the Leadership Council for Women in National Security.

We're also joined by Ambassador Eric Edelman. He's the Roger Hertog distinguished practitioner-in-residence, at the Philip Merrill Center for Strategic Studies at Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies. During his distinguished career he served as Undersecretary of Defense for policy as well as U.S. ambassador to Finland and U.S. ambassador to Turkey. He has held many other notable roles, including as chief of staff to Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot, for which our Strategy Center at Brookings is named.

We're also joined today by senior fellow and director of foreign and defense policy studies at the American Enterprise Institute, Kori Schake. Dr. Schake has also held many illustrious roles in government, including prominent positions in the State Department, Department of Defense, and the National Security Council.

Our discussion today will be moderated by another first-rate scholar of defense and strategy, Melanie Sisson, a Brookings fellow in our Talbott Center.

Briefly, before I turn the mic over to my colleague, Melanie, a final reminder that we're on the record today and we're streaming live. So please send us your questions via email to Events@Brookings.edu or via Twitter using #TheInheritance.

And, now, over to you, Melanie.

MS. SISSON: Thanks, Suzanne, very much. It's entirely my pleasure to join you in welcoming our panelists and our audience today. I'm so pleased to have this opportunity to continue the

very timely and important conversation that Dr. Karlin has started with her book, "The Inheritance". And I have it here. For those of you who are visual learners, this is the excellent book that we're going to be discussing today.

In the United States we simultaneously are grateful for the work U.S. military does and we are also prone to taking it for granted, and certainly for the last three decades to take as given its status as the most capable and powerful fighting force in the world. Dr. Karlin's book though pushes us beyond thinking of the military as an aggregate whole by examining its internal complexities of structure and process, but also of people and relationships. It raises questions about how civilians and soldiers regard each other, about the military in politics and politics in the military, about how the people who fight wars are affected by their purposes, courses, and outcomes, and of course much more.

We are fortunate to get to consider all of this today with Kori, Nora, and Eric. And I don't need to guild the lily on that, but it is quite a triumvirate.

And before we get too far along though, I thought it would be really useful to start by unpacking what we're really talking about when we use the term "U.S. military". And so, Kori, if you wouldn't mind starting us off by refreshing us on the origins and current composition of our all-volunteer Force please.

MS. SCHAKE: Sure.

So, the American military is comprised of 1/2 of 1 percent of our population. And what's important to know about it? So, the American public knows almost nothing about the American military. When Jim Mattis and I did our surveys of public attitudes for the book "Warriors and Citizens" in 2015 people couldn't come within a factor of six of the size of the Marine Corps or the Army's budget. And so, there is a tendency by our military to think that translates into them being so isolated from society, which is less true than they would like to believe of themselves. And the myth is that the American military draws on lower socioeconomic categories of Americans. And that is flat not true.

The other thing that is flat not true about the American military that often believed is that they are more conservative than the rest of society. That in fact if you normalize for education and income, the views of the American military are in no way distinctive from the view of those categories of Americans writ large.

And maybe I'll stop there.

MS. SISSON: Great. Thanks.

And, Nora, I want to sort of turn to you to maybe sort of break some of that apart even further if we can and look at through the differences and compositions that were just sort of described for us the active and reserve component, along with the National Guard.

MS. BENSAHEL: Sure. There are two big pieces of the U.S. military. The active military is what most people think of when they think of the military. Those are the people who are in uniform every day and it's their full-time job. And there are about 1.3 million Americans who serve across the military services in the active force.

But there are also reserve forces, what's known as the reserve component. And those are essentially the part-time soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines who have a regular civilian job but serve in military units. The old recruiting slogan was one weekend a month, two weeks a year, although for many it is much more than that. And they are a vital component of U.S. military power.

There are two pieces of the reserve component, and this gets very confusing because one piece of the reserve component is the service reserves, the Army, Navy, Marine Corps, and Air Force reserves. And those belong to the military services. They are under the chain of command of the president, of the commander and chief of the U.S. military, just like the active forces are, but they serve in this part-time role, often support roles, but not exclusively.

But the other part of the reserve component is the National Guard. We have an Army National Guard, an Air National Guard that exist in all 50 states, the District of Columbia, and three of the U.S. Territories. And their relationships are a little bit more complex. On a day-to-day basis they work for state governors under Title 32 of U.S. Code and they are responsible for responding to natural disasters and other things that the governor orders them to do. But they can also be Federalized, put under Federal command where they report then to the President of the United States instead of the governors.

For the purposes of this discussion, I think it's really important to note that the U.S. military could not have fought in either Iraq or Afghanistan without immense contributions from both of those reserve components, both the Guard and the service reserves. The U.S. active Force was simply too small to be able to take on the responsibilities in those wars and needed very much the additional

manpower and capabilities provided through the reserve component.

MS. SISSON: Great. Thank you. And that is indeed an important point.

And we'll pick up on a couple of the themes that you both have interwoven in your comments. First though I want us to look, Eric, at that five-sided building, the Pentagon itself. And if you could give us a brief overview of its structures and major sort of organizational elements. And even, if you can, fit in a little bit about how they relate to one another.

MR. EDELMAN: Thank you, Melanie. I'm delighted to be here with both Nora and Kori, both actively currently colleagues, but also former colleagues in various guises. And full disclosure requires me to tell you and the rest of the audience that Mara was my special assistant and has worked with me both at SAIS and was on the staff of the National Defense Strategy Commission I co-chaired with Gary Roughead. So, my remarks are not going to be completely neutral about Mara and her book. And she covers a lot about the role of the Pentagon in the policy process, which really goes to your question.

The Pentagon of course is comprised of the three military services and the service secretaries and service chiefs, the Joint Staff, headed by the chairman and the vice chairman, and of course the Secretary of Defense and the Office of the Secretary of Defense, which serves under the Secretary, including a variety of Undersecretaries. I think last time I looked I think it was 44 statutory undersecretaries, of whom Mara is one.

The National Security Act of 1947, that essentially created that organization, created some inherent tensions between the military services and the civilians. I know at least Kori, and I think Nora, have heard me in the past say that Edwin Corwin, the great scholar of the Constitution, said that the Constitution was an invitation to the Legislative and Executive to fight over the conduct of American foreign policy. I always extended that to the National Security Act of 1947, which I think is an invitation to civilians and military officials to struggle over the course of both military and national security policy.

And we have certainly seen that. Mara covers that really in the book in which she talks about a crisis of meaningful civilian control and describes the relationship between civilians and military as a relationship adrift. I think a crisis of meaningful civilian control maybe goes a little further than I would. I don't think there is truly any question about civilian control of the military. But there is a very serious imbalance in advice to the President and to the secretaries who served during the course of these

20 past years of war between military and civilians. It's been a long time building and I think it is a result of a variety of different factors, not the least of which is that the Goldwater-Nichols Act created these very large permanent combatant command staffs, enhanced the role of the chairman and the joint staff. But on the civilian side, we haven't seen as much attention and legislation to it, and we've had in fact, because of political polarization in the United States, and a whole host of other reasons, chronic vacancies in those presidentially appointed positions.

And so, we can talk more about this during the course of the hour, but there has been I think an imbalance that has developed. Mara kind of goes into that in some detail. And I think it's an issue that has to some degree been exacerbated, not because either of the two secretaries, who I'll mention in a moment, did anything personally to do this, but because both Lloyd Austin and James Mattis were recently 4-stars, the imbalance in military advice I think has been sort of accentuated and exacerbated in some ways.

MS. SISSON: Thanks.

Kori, it looks like you have something you would like to say?

MS. SCHAKE: Yeah. I don't want to disrupt the flow of conversation you're directing, Melanie, but at some point I'd like to get in on the fight about whether there is a crisis of meaningful civilian control, because I disagree very strongly both that there is, but I also have an explanation for the phenomenon that Eric accurately described, which is the rescission of civilian — not authority, but influence in the civil-military advice (inaudible).

MS. SISSON: Kori, I will be delighted for you to take up those issues and we can proceed now. I am not stuck to any particular flow. So please continue.

MS. SCHAKE: Okay. Thank you for that indulgence, my friend.

What you can see in the polling data is that support for the American military is traditionally not very high, and it hasn't actually gone up as a result of the 20 years at war. In fact, in the last few years, it's dropped pretty substantially. But what has dropped dramatically and much more is public admiration for their elected leadership. And so, there is a big imbalance, and it results in the phenomenon Eric described, which is elected officials hiding behind public admiration for the military. It's George W. Bush sending Dave Petraeus up to Capitol Hill to defend the strategy of the surge, it is

appointing recently retired senior veterans to cabinet positions. Most egregiously, the case of the two most recent secretary — or two of the most recent secretaries of defense. That this isn't something the military is attempting to create and what it is is civilians wanting to have the protection of public support for the military in order to get public support for their policies. And the only way this is going to stop happening is if we get more Mike Flynns — and John Allen was also a pretty egregious violator of civil military norms at the 2016 presidential conventions — that the only thing that's going to fix this is the public ceasing to have so much more admiration for the military that they have for their elected officials. Because that's what drives everybody to hide behind the military in order — you see it in campaign ads, you see it all over the place, and it's a political phenomenon. It's not something we can fix by other means.

MS. BENSAHEL: If I could jump in on that. I agree with everything that Kori said — not surprisingly. But I would distinguish between levels of civilian control. You know, Eric said at the beginning that no one fundamentally questions civilian control over the military. I think that's true. I've never heard anybody in the military question the president and the secretary of defense being the, you know, two highest positions in the chain of command.

But, Kori, I think a lot of what you were talking about is the relationship between elected officials and the U.S. military. I think there's also a relationship that I don't think is very healthy at all right now, which is between the military and civilian defense officials in the Defense Department in particular, but just a general view about the role that civilians should play in formulating defense strategy. I think that there have been two very, very pernicious ways in which the military has taken the inheritance of the past 20 years and turned it into some self-serving narratives. One of them is what I have heard explicitly, which is that civilians basically should not have anything to say at all about how the military conducts its operations, that civilians should set the objective and then leave the military to execute it in the best ways that it sees fit.

On one level that sounds like it would not be objectionable, right? People in the military are the experts in the profession of arms. But civilians and Department of Defense civilians beyond simply the secretary of defense and of course the president as the commander in chief, have a constitutional role to play in overseeing how the military conducts its operations in questioning the ways in

which the general officers and their staff come up with military plans. Not because of anything pernicious or that they're not to be trusted or anything like that, but because the military perspective in foreign affairs is a narrow one, as it should be, on the use of force. And, you know, that civilians even within the defense establishment have a responsibility to think in a broader way and see how the ways in which the military uses force affects other elements of national power and the very delicate balance that an administration is trying to achieve. I think that has been exacerbated, frankly, by the last two secretaries of defense and I will particularly call out Secretary Mattis when he was in office, who I heard say directly to me at one point that civilians have no business telling the military what to do. If you haven't been there fighting, I was told, you have no right to talk about how the military should do its job. That's just profoundly wrong. And I see that narrative coming out more and more from people in the U.S. military. I think that's one of the dangerous inheritances that they have taken away from the past 20 years.

MS. SCHAKE: Okay, but, Nora, that's not new, right? That's Huntington's view of the military's role. And that's the Powell Doctrine's view. That was the view of almost everybody who (inaudible) combatant in the Viet Nam War. So, I agree with you that that tension is there, and I also agree with your conclusion, that I've never seen a good military plan that the military produced without political insight, advice, you know, guidance and deep involvement. But I don't think that's the result, as Mara suggests in the book, of 20 years of being at war. I think it's a fundamental tension that's always present.

MS. SISSON: Well, Kori, if I can follow up on that quickly. It is as you note, not a new tension. We've spoken about this for decades, and in particular since the Viet Nam War, and there have been some very important studies of precisely this relationship as a result of that. And one of the things I wonder about is where these dueling conceptions come from. So, we talk about it coming from experience, but we can also talk about the educational structures that support the people who go into high office politically and the people who go into serve in the military and become the leadership. And right now, there is actually a renewal of this conversation about are we teaching the right things in our war colleges, are we teaching the right things in our professional schools for policy makers.

And so I'd be interested in your views, all three of you collectively, about sort of the sources of these tensions, if there is a way to resolve them, if it's a healthy or unhealthy tension over time,

and what you think about sort of the role of these professional education universities that at some point or another we've all been either in or are currently sort of contributing to?

MR. EDELMAN: Melanie, let me sort of take up your challenge if I can on a couple of levels.

One, I think it's important to unpack a little bit of what we're talking about. I mean I think Nora and Kori both have made some very important points about this inherent tension. This is an inherent tension in the system as I said in my opening comments because the National Security Act kind of creates this. I mean and if you look at the histories of the Office of the Secretary of Defense, I mean the sort of through line going back to Forrestal is the development of civilian staff capable of controlling this large military institution and being able to provide advice to the secretary of defense and to the president about how they ought to think about these issues in the broadest possible way, as Nora and Kori were both saying.

So, Kori was talking about the sort of perception of politicization of the military, of the officer corps. And I do think that is a big problem. I think it goes back to the Clinton Administration, frankly, where we started getting this quadrennial. You know, at every political convention both parties trot out whichever flag officers have endorsed them. It was Admiral Crowe in the case of Bill Clinton, who was the most important one, but then both sides have done it. I'm being bipartisan in my comment. But the result is that — and I've seen this happen as a career official. You know, I was involved in every transition from 1980 until 2009, and you could see each new administration come in and look at the Clinton generals or the Bush generals or the Obama generals or the Trump generals now. So, I mean people get promoted, they take on jobs in each administration. They shouldn't be held accountable under any reasonable definition that the four of us would agree to of civilian control of the military, that the military officers are responsible for what the civilian masters did, but the political figures frequently treat – – and the political appointees frequently treat them that way. And so that I think is one source of the problem.

The other source of the problem is something that I think Goldwater-Nichols has sort of contributed to, which is this notion that the chairman is the senior military advisor to the president, and he provides his best military advice to the president regardless of politics. This is something that Mara treats

very, very well in the book and has treated in great detail in other things that she's published. And therein I think lies a problem that I know I experienced. I mean because at the very senior levels that we're talking about here, the cabinet, sub-cabinet levels and the assistant secretary levels, you know, policy advice and military advice, the line between the two is not clear. It's a very permeable line. And although I try to refrain from sort of really getting into my military colleagues, and counterparts business when I was undersecretary, invariably I would make comments I'm sure that drove them crazy because I would say why can't we use this unit or that unit to do X or Y.

On the other hand, I found it really infuriating that my military colleagues, while chastising me if I ever strayed into the military lane, they didn't seem to think that giving policy advice was out of their lane somehow. And so, there is this tension that is invariable. You know, I actually think some of the problems comes because both in our policy school and our military schools, to go back to something Kori said, we still teach Sam Huntington as the be all and end all of civil-military relations. And I think that is a huge mistake. Because the notion that sort of the — with the professionalization of our military that they do the military piece, and the civilians do their thing. It is just a false picture of how it really works and should work.

MS. SCHAKE: I agree very strongly with what Ambassador Edelman just said, that the notion that the president states a clean crisp political objective and then it goes hermetically sealed over to the military, which comes up with an X = 12 plan that they send back to the president, not only is that not how it does work, it's not how it should work, right. The President of the United States is the only person who has the grave responsibility and the authority to determine how much political effort, how much treasure, how many lives to run the risk of in order to achieve objectives. And if you have a Huntingtonian system, you get much more brittle political planning — excuse me, military planning, you get much appreciation by the military and the risk tolerance and resource tolerance of the political leadership. And in my experience involved in war planning, what happens when it's done right is the president can almost never really be clear about here is my political objective, because I typically have six or seven things, some of which are essential to achieve, some of which they would like to be products of how we do what we do. And the military should never say here are three potential courses of action, they should be listening incredibly carefully attuned to the risk tolerance of the political leadership because

that's how you get the slow evolution of a military that understands what the president's trying to achieve and how much she or he is willing to risk. And a president that understand what is and is not achievable by the use of military force and what else in the non-military tools of the American government are going to have to be thrown into the mix on what kind of scale and what kind of time sequencing in order for tactical military force to achieve a bigger objective than just winning an engagement.

MS. BENSAHEL: Kori, I think that's exactly right, and I think both of you have rightly pointed to the Huntingtonian influence as not a realistic representation of what does or what should happen. And yet it is still taught as the foundation of a lot of how civil-military relations are supposed to work.

When I made my earlier point, I said that I thought there were two narratives that are coming out of the inheritance — as Mara titled her book — of the recent wars that I think are problematic. And the second one interacts with the one that I mentioned earlier about, you know, that civilians should have no part to play in the decision making. Kori, you're right, that's not new, but I think that it has taken on a particular strength in the — you know, after the ending of the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan because of the fact that these wars did not end in victory. And at best Iraq looks inconclusive and now Afghanistan looks, of course, after 20 years, after the withdrawal as if it were a total failure.

And one of the lessons that I think many in the military — not all, but too many people I will say in the military are drawing from this is to further distinguish between their military efforts and civilians in an effort to blame civilians for what went wrong. And this is — you know, my shorthand for this is people in the military saying — although they don't say it in these words — you know, we want our war, the tactical fight on the battlefield. You civilians, you lost war at the strategic level.

Now, I am the first to say that civilians made horrendous mistakes in the recent wars. And I take that so seriously I wrote a book — I literally wrote a book on it, about the planning for Iraq. So, I am sympathetic to the fact that civilians made many mistakes. But this military —

MS. SCHAKE: It's a very good book, incidentally.

MS. BENSAHEL: Thank you very much, Kori.

MR. EDELMAN: It is a good book. It is a good book. I'll second that.

MS. BENSAHEL: This idea of, you know, we want our war on the tactical battlefield I

think is very dangerous because, first of all, it's not what wars are about, right. And the war colleges teach more tactics and operations than they do strategy, even at the most senior levels. That's what the military tends to focus on. They don't operate well at the strategic level. And Kori was talking about some of the reasons — the factors they don't weigh into their decision making.

But even more importantly, by saying we want our wars, but the civilians lost it, it relieves them of any introspection for any military errors. And the military also made an enormous number of errors in the recent wars.

So, again, I am sympathetic to the argument that the civilians made terrible mistakes, but the combination of this narrative of, you know, we want our wars, we did our job on the battlefield and you can't question how we choose to achieve our aims. Kori, you said that's not new in history. You're right, it's very reminiscent of what happened after Viet Nam, another loss after a long and protracted war. The Army in particular took some great lessons from that, built up a whole new doctrine of how to fight the Soviets afterwards in its rebuilding from Viet Nam. But it also made some incredibly terrible mistakes in that process, including removing the strategic element of war from their considerations and how its taught. And thus, furthering this idea that civilians shouldn't have any place telling the military what to do.

So, because we're focusing on the military inheritance, because that's what Mara's book sets up to do, I'm emphasizing the military side of that in particular.

MR. EDELMAN: If I could just pick up a little bit on what both of you have been saying.

I think one of the really most striking things out of Mara's research and enormous number of interviews she did with people, is the relative lack of introspection on the part of the military. And she also does I think an excellent job of, you know, cutting through the superficiality of the thank you for your service, you know, sort of motif that so many people address these issues with, which ends up sort of covering up all these tensions and not really allowing them to be aired in a reasonable way.

I guess what I would say about, you know — I think the book you and Dave have done is terrific, Nora, but I would ask what war that you and I study or that Kori has studied as kind of military historians, did the military and civilians not make terrible mistakes in? I mean it's endemic to the study of war is that it's not a very neat process. Whenever you step off the line and start a military conflict, you don't know exactly how it's going to end. And one of the things I found persistently irritating in a good

way, you know, reading Mara's book, was the constant whining that she reports from military officers saying we didn't get adequate guidance from the political leadership. You know, and I thought to myself, okay, well what guidance would you have found good guidance. I mean Lincoln's guidance to Grant was I want you to follow and destroy Lee's army if it takes you all summer. Okay. You know, that doesn't really help very much to the commander in terms of all the tactical issues he faces, but it is pretty good strategic guidance.

You know, I was struck as I heard Nora talking about the surge decision that President Bush made and I happened to be sitting in the tank when he discussed that decision with the service chiefs and the chairman and vice chairman in December of 2006. And what was really striking was the process had been on going internally and our colleague Peter Feaver has, and Hal Brands at SAIS has documented this in their book, "The Last Card". The process had been ongoing for several months to generate the options for a surge of forces into Iraq to enable a fully resources counter-insurgency strategy, which was sorely needed because the way we were fighting was not appropriate to the conflict we were actually engaged in.

It was very interesting. When the President first broached this, the chief of staff of the Army said to him, Mr. President, I'm not sure the public will support that. And the President, a little more politely than I would have had I been in his shoes, said well, general, thank you very much for that political advice, but why don't you leave that part to me. I'll kind of take care of that. And then another service chief said to him, who would in the future go on to be chairman, said I really worry that this will break the Army if you do this. And he said, well, I don't think anything will really hurt the Army more than coming back from Iraq with its tail between its legs so, you know, I think —- and in the end, we can have a debate about the long-term success, the surge was very successful in reducing the level of violence in Iraq throughout 2007 and '08 to the point where Iraq was able to become actually a functioning, if not high functioning, pluralistic state with elections and governments and what have you and enabled a drawdown of U.S. forces over time.

So that was because of civilian intervention, not because the military came up with it. And I think that is an example of why you have to have this tension and you have to have the civilian involvement.

MS. SCHAKE: One of the complications — I'm sorry, Melanie.

MS. SISSON: Not at all. Please finish your thought. And then I am going to ask us — this has been really rich and wonderful, and it pains me a little bit to leave a discussion of all of the legacies, but at some point I do want us to convert over to talking about some lessons for the future.

But, please, after you, Kori.

MS. SCHAKE: I was just going to add a little bit of data on public attitudes. That's relevant to this.

One of the reasons that — one of the ways in which it's very hard to impose the accountability that Nora rightly seeks on the military for lost wars is that the public doesn't. The American public blames the political leadership for losing wars. The survey data on this is quite solid that the public actually thinks the president is the guy who decided to go to war, he's the guy who decided what the strategy and resourcing should be. So that leaves an enormous amount of space for the kind of self-indulgent, it wasn't my fault (inaudible).

And the second thing that's interesting is in surveys of public attitudes in the military in the last three years, again, there was no diminution in public support for the military for the conduct of the wars in Iraq or Afghanistan, even after the abandonment and the disgraceful display at the end of Afghanistan. The public punished the President for that. You can see the drop-in support for the President. The only thing that drops public support for the military is the belief that they are engaging in non-military political activity, right. So General Milley in combat fatigues in Lafayette Square, giving testimony on critical race theory. The public actually wants the military to behave politically, but when they do, the public likes the military a lot less. And so, there is a near-term incentive to do stuff like offer your views about pressing social issues. But the public punishes the military with reduced support when the military indulges in it.

MS. SISSON: Great. Well, thank you all. I'm sure that a lot of these themes will actually continue to be part of the conversation moving forward.

I do want to pick up on this idea, I think Eric you mentioned about, you know, we know that the sort of old (inaudible) about, you know, all plans fail but planning is essential —I'm paraphrasing, right. But the idea that plans are brittle and that therefore I know, Nora, that you and Dave, your

wonderful book on military adaptation, is about sort of acknowledging that, recognizing it, embracing it to a certain extent, and looking at how militaries adapt.

And so, I'm curious for each of you, but to start with Nora, to weigh in a little bit about some of the things the military learned during the course of these post-9/11 wars and sort of your notion of how those will or will not — those lessons will or will not equip the military well to adapt to the new environment of peer competition and what that entails for the military.

MS. BENSAHEL: Well, those are actually two different questions, even though they logically make sense and follow from each other.

I have been, as you can probably tell, fairly critical of the military for not learning enough lessons from the past two decades, for the reasons that we've been debating and speaking about. Because I think the first step towards being adaptable and being able to change in the future involves diagnosing what you've done poorly in the past.

The Army in particular, although all the services do a version of this, they do that extraordinarily well at the tactical level. They do after action reviews to study everything that went wrong, there's a culture of openness and honesty in an effort to improve. But that goes away the higher you get in the chain of command, and at the strategic level is virtually nonexistent.

And so, one of the things we found in the book is that at the tactical level on the battlefield soldiers, sailors, airmen, and Marines were actually quite adaptable and figured out what they needed to do. It was at the strategic levels and at the institutional levels in the Pentagon where the most egregious failures to adapt were. And so, our book, "Adaptation Under Fire", talks about some of the things we think that the military needs to do to become more adaptable at that more senior strategic level.

I think that's going to be ever more critical in the future because, simply put, the U.S. military has a tremendous amount of adapting to do in the future. In the book we talked about you always have to adapt, you never get it right. That is a truth across history and that will continue to be true.

But there are some reasons to expect that that adaptation gap between what you expect it to be and what the war actually looks like are going to be even greater for the United States than for its potential adversaries. There are a number of those, but the one I would emphasize most is simply that the U.S. as a global power has more to do in the world. Very often when we talk about adaptation,

people say a very polite version of, oh, yeah, well who's more adaptable than the U.S. military. And I answer honestly that I think the U.S. military is probably still the most adaptable military in the world, although now I put in a little asterisk for the Ukrainian military, which is doing enormous successful adaptation above what might have been expected. But that still can mean that the U.S. is not adaptable enough. If China knows where it's going to fight in the future, right, it's going to fight in its neighborhood, we know where Russia is going to fight, it's going to fight in its neighborhood, but if you're the United States, I don't know if the U.S. military is going to be fighting in Russia or China or in North Korea or Iran or a country that seemed as inconceivable as fighting Afghanistan was on September 10, 2001, or against non-state actors or hackers, right.

So, the scenario space that the U.S. military needs to prepare for is really enormous and I think because of that needs to do a much better job of adapting. And, again, to tie it more back to this conversation, the first step towards doing that is being honest about where you've been and where your shortcomings have been.

MS. SISSON: Eric, Kori, I'd invite either of you to add your perspective on that.

MR. EDELMAN: Well, I worry — Mara talks a lot about the revival of the Powell Doctrine, which was the Weinberger Doctrine as well. And I do worry about that. I mean that is the notion that — to go back to my earlier comment — that the military basically wants strategic guidance that says go in, use overwhelming force, win a victory, and then go home. And it would be nice if the world was like that and all military conflicts could end that way, if all of them could end as decisively as World War II ended, which I think is the sort of thing that looms in people's minds, signing a document on the foredeck of the U.S. Missouri. I mean the likely conflicts, including with Russia and China, that we might be finding ourselves in in the next some years are not likely to be that neat and tidy.

And so, I really worry that people mentally are preparing for a world that hasn't existed since mid-20th century and is not likely to exist in our lifetimes again in the future. And you see this in the planning sometimes. I mean this is a very important point, by the way, that Mara makes in her book, and it goes to the question of adaptation. The question of civilian — and it's really kind of what we all three have been talking around, which is the role of civilians in reviewing the war plans. I mean that is the most serious thing that the Pentagon does is to prepare for the use of force, to put people's lives at risk and in

harm's way.

And I think all too often our military colleagues do have the view of civilians really can't help us with this, although the record is clear that civilians have helped a lot. I mean going back to Lincoln again. But not just Lincoln. I mean the role that I think then Secretary Cheney played in the planning for the first Gulf War was actually quite important because the persistent questioning that he did of the military plan led to some adaptations of the plan that turned out to be quite powerful and decisive in winning that war with very minimal casualties.

And so that role of adaptive planning, which had stopped almost entirely in the Trump years, at Mara points out in the book, is terribly important, but it means civilians actually have to step up and do their jobs. Now, I remember when Gary Roughead and I were co-chairing the National Defense Strategy Commission we were getting a lot of pressure from staff, from the Senate Armed Services Committee in those days, to recommend things that would augment the authorities of the civilians in OSD to deal with this question of global force allocation, which has been a big issues since the 2018 NDS, and because of language that Congress had included in previous NDAAs that made the chairman the global force allocator, which has some merit because someone has got to adjudicate among these combatant commanders we created, all of whom have these sort of medieval feudal fiefdoms that they don't want anybody encroaching on.

But there has to be some civilian input and I think that's one of the places where the balance of political advice — this is not a purely decision, which theater to give preeminence to, it's a political decision. The civilian side has to be involved.

I think Gary and I, and I think all of our commissioners agreed that there is plenty of authority in Title 10 for the undersecretary of defense for policy, whom I used to be, to advise the secretary on these war plans. So if the civilians step up — and they have to have the backing of the secretary — that's crucial — if the secretary empowers them, as Bob Gates did me when he was the secretary, to make sure that the combatant commanders know they really have to come through the civilians in order to get their plan to the secretary — Mara has a wonderful anecdote she recounts of Secretary Rumsfeld reviewing one of these plans. A commander comes in and says I'm here for you to approve my plans, sir. He said, no, you're here for me to improve your plan, which is exactly right.

MS. SCHAKE: So Eric's point about the military can't be —- shouldn't be expected to and cannot responsibly decide which theater to give priority to, this is exactly FDR in World War II, where the military chiefs were unanimous for most of the conduct of the war that the Pacific ought to be the theater of priority and the president of the United States understood in a way they did not that if either Britain or the Soviet Union capitulated to Nazi Germany, there was no constellation of powers that could overturn that. And so, the president rightly chose a Europe first strategy.

Melanie, I loved that you quoted Eisenhower's fabulous line that plans are useless, but planning is everything. And it comes in exactly this context. During the Berlin crisis in 1961 a young assistant secretary of defense, named Paul Nitze, came up, ran a planning process that had 128 distinct contingency plans for a response to the Soviet Union interdicting Western access to West Berlin. Not one of those 128 plans envisioned what actually happened, which is the East Germans building a wall to block off East Germany, not West Germany. And so, I mean that's exactly the reason planning helps you develop the reflexes to be adaptive, as Nora and Dave's excellent book outlines.

One other thing I want to emphasize though is my favorite part of Mara's terrific book is her recommendation that you need to cultivate a culture of skepticism because that is my strongest takeaway for what produces good military planning and what produces healthy civil-military relations, which has the trust to say what if that doesn't work, how do we hedge against the potential failures of our plan, as very good strategist is fundamentally a desperate paranoiac. And if you're not worried about what's not going to work, what's not going to happen, who is going to let you down, then that produces not just bad planning, it produces bad strategy. And I really like the way Mara interrogates that in her book.

MS. SISSON: Well, one of the things that is clear is that Mara has enough insight in her book to fill two full hours. Unfortunately, we only have one today. So, I am going to make sure to put in an audience submission of a question here for you in the last few minutes that we do have.

And I think it's a very important one, which is we are in a period where recruitment is challenging. We just —- we're relaxing requirements. I think just today saw that the most recent relaxation had to do with tattoos, for example. And so, things are changing. This is not the first-time recruitment has been difficult, to be sure. But the question is from our viewer, what is your perception,

perspective on the overall health of our all-volunteer Force today?

MS. SCHAKE: I think it's incredibly healthy. And we need to remember that recruiting standards aren't the law of gravity. They are political choices based on the expectation of need and availability.

You know, when we were conscripting 10 million young Americans during World War II, more than 20 percent of them were not permitted to serve largely because of poor nutrition coming out of the Great Depression. So, you know, recruiting standards are choices, they're not absolutes and you can change them for all sorts of reasons that do not — we shouldn't equate a change in recruiting standards with either lower standards. Because very often it's just, as with tattoos, a sign of societal change, right. We were worried about tattoos because we thought it signified gang associations and we now think they're personal expressions of artistic or social sensibilities. So, what changed was our societal understanding about tattoos, not that we are dropping standards precipitously to permit it.

So, it's a social construct, it's not the law of gravity.

MS. BENSAHEL: I agree with Kori on that. My personal recommendation for a recruiting standard that needs to be re-looked is that the military excludes anybody who is on antidepressants. And coming out of a pandemic, especially, that needs to be re-looked. That does not necessarily have a negative service impact frankly.

The reason why you're seeing these changes though is because military recruiting is hitting perilously new lows in terms of the — it's not just the recruiting, the numbers coming in haven't yet — but the eligibility to be recruited is hitting very drastic new lows. Usually for the past several years it's been fairly consistent, but only 30 percent of the eligible American youth in terms of age in that target recruiting area — only 30 percent of Americans in that age bracket have been eligible to serve because of various medical, physical, other constraints. Obesity is the biggest one. That accounts for 10 percent of people who are excluded from eligibility for service. And there are some good reasons for that, although they do make efforts to address that recruiters do with individuals. But that plummeted for the Army this year fairly suddenly from 30 percent to 23 percent. And that's why you're seeing efforts to expand eligibility on these things like tattoos that I think Kori explained very well.

But I'm a little less sanguine than she is on the health of the all-volunteer Force. It is

absolutely without question the best most professionalized military that the United States has ever fielded. But it has one incredibly negative downside for all of its immense successes, and that's that it has essentially severed the American public from a personal relationship with the military, which underlies a lot of what we're talking about here. It is now — the statistic that worries me even more than this 23 percent of youth are even eligible to serve — the statistic that frightens me is that it's not just this half of 1 percent who serves, it's the same half of 1 percent. It's the children of people who are already in the military. Up to 80 percent of people coming in the military have a family member in the military and as many as 40 percent have a parent in the military. And not even — by a family member, it's brother, sister, aunt, uncle, grandparent, or that order. It's not like cousins or anything. It's that —

MR. EDELMAN: It's immediate family.

MS. BENSAHEL: It's immediate family, right. To me that is a very unhealthy sign for the future because depending on any one segment of the population to continue to populate the U.S. military is dangerous and fragile. And it also has immense civil-military consequences, only some of what are what we have talked about today.

MR. EDELMAN: I mean, look, I agree with Kori that the Force we have today is an incredible Force of young people who have done amazing things over the last 20 years and paid a price for it. But like Nora, I'm actually quite concerned about the future of the all-volunteer Force. The propensity to serve is dropping. Nora has already talked about the difficulty of increasingly larger numbers, larger percentages of young people not being able to meet the physical standards.

In addition to the familial nature of what Nora talked about, there's also a geographical distribution issue, which is that AVF is disproportionately from — you know, essentially below the Mason-Dixon Line. And I do think we have a danger of the all-volunteer Force becoming in essence a military caste. And that I think is something that we do need to pay attention to and keep our eye on.

MS. SISSON: Kori, did you have one last quick addition?

MS. SCHAKE: Yes, just one last quick addition.

My main concern about the all-volunteer Force is its affordability. As we continue to under spend for the Nation's defense, that the Force is becoming expensive in ways that we are allowing their pay and benefits to crowd out other crucial elements of defense spending.

MS. SISSON: Well, again, just reinforce the point is we could fill another whole hour. So many of these things that are so important we had to sort of just skim the surface of. So hopefully you'll be willing to come back.

I can't thank you panelists enough for this really lively exchange. We're very grateful to you for sharing your expertise, your insights, your views with the Brookings audience. My thanks to the audience for tuning in as well. And we hope to see you again in a format like this sometime soon.

Please, if this doesn't get you interested in buying Mara's book, it's clear that nothing will. So please go and continue to enrich yourself with this content and subject matter.

Thank you all very much. Have a good day.

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