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WEBINAR

FIT TO FIGHT: ANALYZING WOMEN'S ROLES IN THE US MILITARY

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TRANSCRIPT

DISCUSSION:

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O'HANLON: Good morning, everyone, or good day, wherever you may be. Around the nation and the world. I'm Mike O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy program at Brookings, where I hold the Phil Knight chair in defense and strategy. I have a real privilege today to host and moderate a discussion with four amazing Americans, three of them women, one a man, all of them retired US military officers who are going to help us understand the role of women in American armed forces today and some of the policy debates and issues that need to concern us in the years ahead. Obviously, this issue has been in the news. Our intention here, however, is broader. We want to talk about the important role that women have really played in our wars going back to the revolution. And Lori Robinson will speak to that in just a minute after I introduce each of our distinguished retired officers. And then we want to bring up to date and talk about each of the careers of the four panelists, what they've seen, the milestones that they've been part of or achieved or experienced. And then bring us up to today with the policy questions that still loom for the nation. Women are playing an incredibly important role in our military. There are almost 18% of the total active-duty force. That's an historic high. It's still obviously less than the fraction of the population they constitute. But what they do is across all military occupational specialties, all tasks, including ground combat, and invaluable for a military that frankly needs them for their skill, for the fact that we need able-bodied and smart and capable and hardworking people to join our military at a time when the all-volunteer force is fraying to some extent in terms of recruiting, but most of all, because of what they bring and what they've continued to bring to the battle, the fight and the all-volunteer force and in fact, the military throughout our history. Let me say a brief word about each and then the way we'll proceed today is as follows. Retired General Lori Robinson we'll introduce just a second, will give us a little bit of a capsule history of the role of women throughout American military history going back to the revolution when they were not yet in ground combat positions, at least not officially, sometimes in disguise, but nonetheless in very important roles in roles that might be broadly described as logistics. And then as we get into the Civil War and World War I, a lot of nursing, but also backfilling jobs back home. Lori's going to tell us that story in some more detail and bring us up to the modern debate, where two crucial turning points that I'll just mention in passing before she delves in more detail were President Clinton's decision to allow women to join most jobs in the military, most professions, most roles, even those that involved a lot of risk. And by the way, women have been taking risk and and suffering casualties going back to the revolution. But Bill Clinton made a policy decision to allow that more comprehensively. And then in 2015, President Obama allowed women to join all positions in the military, provided that they qualified. And, of course, that will be the essence of some of our conversation later on. So we will hear that history. And then starting with General Lori Robinson, and then after her we'll go in order of when they joined the military, retired Lieutenant General Lori Reynolds, retired Lieutenant Colonel Amy McGrath, and retired

Lieutenant Colonel Jay Gallardo. Each will tell a little bit of their story, what they saw, what they experienced, and the evolving role of women in today's American armed forces. Just a brief word about each of these great and amazing panelists, two of whom I've known for a long time, to two of whom I've had the privilege of getting to know this week. And you'll get to know them all. Actually, you probably know some of their stories because they've been remarkable in the annals of American military history and society. Lori Robinson joined the military in the early 1980s through the ROTC program, and the US Air Force was an air battle manager. And she'll explain a little more about what that means. But she was essentially directing a lot of what was going on in combat in the skies above with various aircraft. And her roles were crucial. She also was an instructor at the Air Force Weapons School out in Nevada and had other very important jobs prior to becoming the first woman in US military history to command a combatant command. That was Northern Command just before she retired in the 2018 timeframe. Prior to that, she had led all US air forces in the Pacific at Indo-Pacific Command. Remarkable career, and we're very happy to have her today. Lieutenant General Lori Reynolds also has had a pathbreaking career. She went to the US Naval Academy. She wound up, among other things, being the first woman ever to lead a Marine battalion into combat, which was in Iraq. She wound up being entrusted with running the Parris Island Center for Basic Training for Marines in South Carolina, where she was the first woman to hold that position and has also commanded Marine organizations and units at all different echelons throughout her remarkable career. Before retiring. Just recently, my good friend, Lieutenant Colonel Amy McGrath, hails from the great state of Kentucky, by the way, I should have said. Lori Reynolds is from Maryland and Lori Robinson from New Hampshire. And so we've got a nice geographic representation today as well. Jay Gallardo, by the way, from California. But in any event, Amy, you may recall, just to tee up the history a little bit, Kentucky is a state where when President Lincoln was asked if he thought God was on the side of the Union in the Civil War, he said, well, it would be nice to have God, but what I really need is Kentucky. Given his concern about the border states. And Amy had a distinguished career. She was the first woman ever to fly a combat sortie. And the FAA 18 aircraft. She flew 89 combat sorties in her career. She was both a back seat and a pilot. She deployed three times in combat and also had important roles in the Indo-Pacific theater herself and taught at Annapolis before returning to her great state where she's been active in public service ever since. And then finally, Jay Gallardo was commissioned through ROTC into the armor specialty in the US Army. And among his many accomplishments, multiple combat deployments, but also one of the first Battalion commanders in the US Army and US infantry ever to have women officers under his command. So he's seen that role evolve because, again, remind you basically to remind you that ground combat roles were the last to really be fully opened and integrated to women in US military history. So thank you for your patience listening to me. You

won't have to do too much more of that today. I will, however, just pause for a brief moment to say all of our hearts are with those who suffered tragedy and loss this week. And I want to thank all the first responders because, of course, men and women serve our country in so many ways throughout the nation. And so I think I speak for the entire panel in conveying those sentiments. But thank you for joining us today. And now General Lori Robinson, over to you.

ROBINSON: Thank you, Michael, for that kind introduction. And as she mentioned, all of our hearts are with the families from the accident the other evening. If you don't mind. As you mentioned, I would like to take a few minutes to read about women in the military and in combat, not just during my 37 year, but your career. But since the Revolutionary War, Lori, Amy and I, as well as all of the women in the military, truly stand on the shoulders of giants in the Revolutionary War. Women often followed their husbands in the Continental Army. These women, known as camp followers, often tended to the domestic side of any organization. Washing, cooking, mending clothes and providing medical help when necessary. Sometimes they were flung into the vortex of battle, such as the case of Mary Ludwig Hays, better known as Molly Pitcher, who has earned fame at the Battle of Monmouth in 1778. Hayes first brought soldiers water from a local well to quench thirst on an extremely hot and humid date, and then replaced her wounded husband at his artillery piece firing at the oncoming British. Not unlike women 80 years later who disguised themselves as men to serve in the armies of the Civil War. One of the best examples of a woman who disguised herself as a man to fight in the Continental Army was Deborah Samson from Massachusetts. Amazingly, she also has a paper trail concerning her combat service in the Army, where she fought under the alias of Robert Shurtliff, the name of her deceased brother in the light infantry company, aunt of the fourth Massachusetts in the Civil War. In all of American history, only one woman has been awarded the Medal of Honor. Her name was Mary Edwards Walker, and she was a doctor at a time when female physicians were rare. She graduated from Syracuse Medical College and at the outbreak of the Civil War, traveled to Washington with the intention of joining the Army as a medical officer. When she was rejected, she volunteered as a surgeon and served at that capacity for various units throughout the war years, continually agitating and bugging everybody for a commission. Walker was captured by the Confederate Army in April of 1864 and held for a few months at Castle Thunder Prison near Richmond, Virginia. Finally, that October, she was given a commission and as acting assistant surgeon, the first female physician in the US Army. President Andrew Johnson signed a bill awarding Walker the Medal of Honor in 1865 because she, quote, has devoted herself with much patriotic zeal to the sick and wounded soldiers both in the field and the hospitals to the detriment of her own health, and has also endured hardships as a prisoner of war. During World War I, with millions of men away from

home, women filled manufacturing and agricultural positions on the home front. Others supported on the front lines as nurses, as doctors, as ambulance drivers, translators, and in rare cases on the battlefield. The Salvation Army, the Red Cross and many other organizations depended on thousands of female volunteers. The American Red Cross operated hospitals to care for war casualties staffed by nurses, hundreds of whom died in the service during the war. Thousands of women who served in the US Army Nurse Corps and the Navy Nurse Corps, while the American Expeditionary Forces were still preparing to go overseas. US Army nurses were sent ahead and assigned to the British Expeditionary Force. By June 1918, there were more than 3000 American nurses and over 750 in British-run hospitals in France during the last allied offensive in the summer of fall and fall of 1918, many women, doctors, nurses and aides operated near the front lines, providing medical care for soldiers wounded in combat. Quote from Sophie Gran. I had just given this poor boy anesthesia when a bomb hit. We were supposed to hit the floor, but he was out and I didn't know what was going on. I took a tray and I put it over my head. Not because I was brave. I was just scared. That's Medical Corps anesthetic anesthesiologist Sophie Gran. Gran was one of the first women in the Air Expeditionary Force in France. And the only woman anesthetics – anesthesia – I can't say that word – with mobile hospital unit number one. She became the first president of California Association of Nurse Anesthetics in 1931. World War II, nearly 350,000 American women served in uniform, both at home and abroad, volunteering for the newly formed Women Army Auxiliary Corps WACs. Later, it was renamed as the Women Army Corps, the Navy Women's Reserves, the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, the Coast Guard Women's Reserve, and the Women Air Force Service Pilot, or WASPs and the Army Nurse Corps and the Navy Nurse Corps. As an airman, I'd like to take a minute and say talk about the WASPs. They were stationed at 102, 122 air bases across the US, where they assumed numerous flight related missions. The original layoffs were organized specifically to ferry airplanes and free male male pilots around 900 and all for combat role roles. But the WASPs would go on to the factory, test, fly airplanes, and then deliver it during World War II. Women pilots flew 80% of all the ferrying missions between September of 1942 and December of 1944. The WASPs delivered 12,652 aircraft of 78 different types. And in order to set an example, Nancy Love, who was in charge of training, made sure she was trained and qualified on as many different types of planes as possible. They also told targets for live anti-aircraft artillery practice. And I have to tell you that being in one of the airplanes that was practicing live artillery, I've flown in the back seat during one of those kind of missions; I can't imagine being the person in the airplane towing the and something the tow target for them to shoot at. They also simulated strafing missions and targeted transport and cargo. In addition, a few exceptionally qualified women were allowed to test rocket propelled planes to pilot jet propelled planes and to work with radar-controlled targets. They also flew difficult planes such as the YP-59 and the B-29 Super

for- Superfortress. And that was General Arnold that recruited them to fly those airplanes. Some women served near the front lines in the Army nurse Corps where 16 were killed as a result of direct enemy fire. 68 American service women were captured as P.O.W.s in the Philippines, and more than 1600 nurses were decorated for bravery under fire and military service. And 565 WACs in the Pacific Theater one combat decorations. Nurses were in Normandy at D-plus four. During the Korean War, the reality was that there were 120,000 women on active duty, and a third of them were health care providers. Others stepped up when their country called on them volunteering for service in the Women's Army Corps and the Women's Air Force. In the end, the Navy Women's Reserve and Women Marines. 18 died during the Korean War in service to their country. And finally, during the Vietnam War, over 111,000 women served in American military during the war, the majority of whom were military trained graduate nurses. In addition to army nurses, there were some who served as US Navy and US Air Force nurses. The first members of the Navy Nurse Corps arrived in Saigon in 1963, and each were awarded a Purple Heart after they were injured during the Christmas Eve of the 1964 Brinks Hotel bombing in Saigon. And during the war, there were only nine women who served in a role other than nurse, including Lieutenant Elizabeth Wiley, who worked as a commander of naval forces in the Vietnam Command Information Center, alongside Commander Elizabeth Barrett, who became the first female naval line officer to hold command in an official combat zone. My journey has been amazing. It started, though, before I became active duty. In 1975, the United States Air Force established a test program that allowed women to become pilots and navigators. The test program for pilots began with ten women on August 26th, 1976, at Hondo Municipal Airport in San Antonio, Texas. On September 2nd, 1977, the first class with women earned their wings. The female class pilots, 7708. They were limited to assignments of mobility, Airlift Command, which was flew tankers and flew cargo airplanes, strategic Air Command and Air Training Command flight instructors or technical and cargo pilots. DOD policy barred women for flying in combat. However, women did fly in support of many combat missions, including Grenada, Panama, Desert Shield, Desert Storm and conflicts in Africa. And so when I came in in 1981, got commissioned in 81, joined active duty in 1982. As Michael mentioned, I was an air battle manager. Well, what is an air battle manager? For those of you that are young enough to remember, Top Gun one, at the end, there's a person that's looking at a radar scope and is talking to fighter pilots and telling them where to go. That's what I used to like to say, I told fighter pilots where to go. And it was a career field. At the time, my professor of air science said, Don't join the career field, Lori. In fact, I wanted to be a public affairs officer and said, don't join the career field, Lori, because you'll never get promoted beyond major if you get promoted to major at all. And I was like, That doesn't matter. And he was like, Well, you should talk to your dad about it, because my dad was active duty at the time. I was like, There's no way I'm talking to my dad about it. And so

I had the privilege to be in a weapons controller. And what does that mean? You know, I mentioned that the first women went to mobility air forces. They went to air training command. And so that meant that I was in a support airplane, AWACs, airborne warning and control system that did Southern Watch, Northern Watch and deployed. But I was an instructor at the United States Air Force Fighter Weapons school, the first female instructor there. And what is that? That's the Air Force version of Top Gun. But better. And we. I know, but I was I was I grew up in what we call our combat air forces. So I grew up with fighter pilots. So I learned about combat from that perspective, learning how to breathe, execute and debrief and understand what we were doing out on the battlefield. It was really important. And from there, I had a string of being the first in the combat air forces. But what's important about that, it's not that it was about me, but it was about the institution and having people believe in you and believe in your capability and that you met and exceeded the standard that was out there. First Lieutenant Jeannie Flynn, now Jeannie Leavitt, retired as a major general, graduated number one student in her aircraft that allowed her to pick her aircraft of choice. But as long as it wasn't off-limits, and it was off-limits early during her time going through pilot training, but shortly after she graduated, the secretary of defense modified the combat exclusion policy that allowed women to fly all Air Force aircraft. So it allowed Jeannie to fly the F-15e Strike Eagle. Being one of the first women to fly a fighter, a fighter airplane to go into combat. And the first woman to go into combat as a fighter pilot was Martha McSally. She became the first one and she flew A-10s and she deployed in Operation Southern Watch to enforce enforce the no-fly zone. And so as you go through time, I've had the privilege to watch the increasing role of women in the United States Air Force and across our joint force. And every time the women have met and or exceeded the standard and have been fully participating in the things that we need to do as a combatant commander, I have to tell you, people would say you're the first. And I would say, but I know I won't be the last. And I wasn't. Shortly after that, Jackie Van Ovost and Laura Richardson both became combat commanders. And I couldn't be any prouder. So my journey was great. And I got to watch Jeannie, when she came back, I was the commander at the fire weapons school, the weapons school then, and watch her go through weapons school as the first fighter pilot to do that. And so it was it's been fun to watch the increasing role, but most importantly, watch the contributions that everybody has me. And I'll turn it over to Lori Reynolds.

O'HANLON: Fantastic. General Reynolds, over to you. And thank you very much, Lori Robinson.

REYNOLDS: General, thank, thank you very much for laying that foundation down for us. And also, ma'am, as you know, it's an honor to be on this panel with you and the other panelists. And, Michael, I just want to

say thank you to you and to Brookings for allowing us to have this conversation, because I think it's I think it's important to be able to kind of remind folks of, you know, where we are today. So I am a proud graduate of the United States Naval Academy. I graduated in 1986 and I went into the Marine Corps from there in 1986. There weren't a lot of job specialties that were available to women. You know, for example, in 1986, we still couldn't fly. In 1986, women still couldn't go aboard ship in the Navy. And so at that time, the late 80s, if you if you really wanted to be like a real Marine, you know, you needed to go with a Marine expeditionary unit, you needed to be in one of the three, you know, big tribes, infantry or artillery or or logistics. But I just wanted a job where I thought I could lead Marines, where I could be able to command or maybe, you know, if I was wildly successful, I could be a company commander someday. And so I ended up as a communications officer. And, you know, it was a phenomenal job to do exactly what I wanted to do, which is just lead Marines. I had what I would call a typical career until my goal, as you mentioned, I was assigned to command the ninth Communication Battalion out of Camp Pendleton at, you know, during a layoff, too. And in that capacity, you know, deployed my battalion into Fallujah, Iraq. And we established, you know, the calm network in al-Anbar Province. And we were there for about a year. And, you know, it's just an extraordinary experience. I learned so much. But it was exactly what I came into the Marine Corps to do, right? So to train and to be ready to support Marines in a combat environment a couple of years later, now I'm a colonel. I'm assigned as what was then the MEF headquarters Group. Now we call them MEF information groups. And I deployed that unit into Helmand Province. I was also assigned as the CEO of Camp Leatherneck, which is the far most forward operating base where we established Regional Command Southwest. And just, you know, because I was the base commander, I was also assigned battlespace a Bellwood. I had the special security force of Bahraini policemen that served with us. And, you know, it was during that post for me, you know, I'm 20 some years into my career where, you know, for the first time, you know, as I was getting ready to take command, you know, there was a there was a pretty salty former British Special Forces soldier who who had been kind of coaching the Bahraini special security force that was deployed with us. And he said, you know, I don't know. I don't know if they'll work for you, You know, the first time, like to my face, someone said it's just because you're a woman. But, you know, that was a time for me, Michael, when I just followed my gut. I had a great sergeant major, and as it turns out, what people really needed for me was just good leadership. Give them a place, you know, to meet their own dietary restrictions, just to to worship in the way that they saw fit, sold them into the organization in a positive way. You know what? There were no problems. But this was also a time in my career where, you know, for the first time we had the female engagement teams that were working for the MEF, and they were also, you know, spread out across the Helmand Province. And for the first time in my career, what I observed was women Marines who were specifically

trained for these female engagement team jobs were they were uniquely qualified just because they were women. And it was really interesting to me that the Afghan men would look at the women, these female engagement team members who were at the point, you know, attached to infantry companies, and they saw them as kind of a third sex, like they weren't like male Marines and they weren't like Afghan women. There was like something in between. They were like, what are they? Right? What are these women? But it was they provided access to the Afghan women. They they allowed us to be culturally sensitive as we were doing searches. They were they were gathering intelligence because they could speak to the Afghan women. But it was for the first time in my career where I really stopped thinking about fighting for the right. To just prove myself. Moving from that kind of thinking to know we are here, we're uniquely qualified to do something that the military needs us to do. And it was also during that time where I attended for the MEF, a Women Peace and Security conference that was being held in Denmark. And I learned for the first time about the the strategic implications of women, peace and security, which is basically that when you consider and involve women in peacemaking and peacekeeping and stability operations, you get a better outcome. And so it fundamentally changed how I thought about the value, not just of filling the rank, but the unique value of women in the military. And I don't think we talk about that enough, Michael, but that was I was a colonel before I really kind of the light bulb went off for me. After that job, I ended up you know, I was selected to be a one star. I commanded, as you mentioned, Parris Island, South Carolina, which at the time was the only place where we trained. We did the initial training for women coming into the Marine Corps. And this was also by the time that there was increased conversation about lifting combat exclusion. And so because I had fourth Battalion, which is the female training battalion, this was the place where we had the conversations about what the physical standards were and whether the women would be able to meet them uniquely. What happened during that time? And we could talk about this, I suppose a little bit later. But what we discovered during that time was that we actually had no MLS standards for infantry armor tank combat, and we didn't have any specific training and readiness standards for what it would take to assign Marines into those communities. And so that's when we started. And and I'm happy to talk more about that. I think the bottom line is that to the extent that we have standards today, they were created in the last decade. And and and those Marines who were assigned in those jobs today meet those gender norm standards. And so a lot of talk about standards out there. But if you want to talk facts, that's that's the the fact of the matter. I finished my career that I served as a commander more for cyber of from 2015 to 2018. And then in my last three years as a three star helped the Marine Corps to think about information as a warfighting function cyber space, intelligence, communications, influence. And what's really interesting about the cyber fight and I think the information fight is, is that what you really need in that fight is creativity, perspective, all kinds of different

views, a lot of innovation. And you need the whole picture of a marine, not just the physical qualifications that we always go to when we talk about what it takes to be a war fighter today. And so I think as we continue to, you know, talk about perhaps the the contributions of women and other perhaps minority groups, we have to really think about what the future war fight looks like. And so I'll I'll leave it at that. I was honored to serve for 35 years. And thank you again for a lot of to be on the panel.

O'HANLON: Thank you for telling us what you did in an amazing career and all the breakthroughs and milestones and important achievements. And that leads naturally to Colonel Amy McGrath. We look forward to hearing from you, my friend.

MCGRATH: Okay. Well, good morning. And it's certainly an honor for me to be on with everyone on this panel. My story started really when I was in seventh and eighth grade. And look, I just saw these jets on TV in a documentary, these fighter jets. And I just was like, I want to do that. That is cool. And I, I was a bit naive because I as I started to learn about this, you know, back then, we didn't have the Internet. So what did you do? You went to the library and I pulled out every single book I could pull out on on aviation and aircraft carriers. And I learned very quickly that there were no women doing the job that I wanted to do. In fact, somebody mentioned Top Gun. You know, when Top Gun came out, I didn't even really like it that much because there were no women doing what I wanted to do, which was be the pilot, right? Be the wizo, the back-seater. And so I learned had to learn very quickly why that was. And there was a law in place that was policy in place. And I had to learn about government at that young age because how do you change laws? How do you change federal laws? So I had to learn about the Congress and the Senate, and I became an advocate right at that early age. And I got lucky because in the early 90s, when I graduated from high school, our senior year in high school, we had this amazing thing happen in our country. It's called an election and we had more women elected to Congress that year in 1992 than ever before in history. We had a new administration come in that was more open to women serving in different roles. And in early 1993, a new administration, as was mentioned, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin changed the policy. Right. When I was a senior in high school, I had an appointment to the Naval Academy and I just got lucky. I was in the right place at the right time, entered the Naval Academy. The Congress did rescind that law, did not open up all jobs to women. Still, the ground combat jobs were closed. Submarines were still closed, but aviation was open, including the Marine Corps Aviation, which in the Marine Corps, unlike the Air Force, prior to the combat exclusion law being repealed in 1993 92, the Marine Corps had had all of its aviation closed to women. So they opened all of that up. I graduated from the Naval Academy in 1987 and never looked back,

became a Marine Corps officer. Why? The Marine Corps is the best and one of the most elite. And and I got it. And and and so I got really lucky. And I started out as a back seater, did several two combat tours again in the right place at the right time and the right squadron to deploy to Afghanistan almost immediately after 9/11. And then and we were based out of Kyrgyzstan but flew missions into Afghanistan and and the next year into Iraq. After those combat tours, I was able to go back and become a front seater. Got my eyes fixed, which was amazing, and had a chance to play in the front seat in the same aircraft. So both as a as a weapons officer and then as a pilot did another combat tour after that. So many years of flying for 15 or so years. 14 years of flying my combat tours. Amazing sea stories. It was an amazing time to be on the tip of the spear. And I think the biggest thing for me, when I look back at my Marine Corps career, especially the beginning of it, is. I felt lucky to be able to do the positions that I was able to be in. And as the general said earlier, we stand sort of on the shoulders of giants. I was very aware that the women that came before me did not have the opportunities that I had. They were just as good. And they went through so much. And so I always knew that I wanted to compete and do well and be professional because, you know, I knew these jobs were new to women and I wanted to make sure that the women after me had, you know, the ability to go into them. After my flying days, I went to the Pentagon, did a Pentagon tour, did a tour on Capitol Hill. That was certainly eye-opening. And then to the Naval Academy to teach national security. I taught in political science department about US government, which was amazing, and then retired after that and came back home to Kentucky. And I think just to answer your your initial question, Mike, about the evolution, I know we'll get into it. From what I saw in my experience in fighter squadrons, you know, I came in at a time when the attitude, which was also my attitude was this sort of hate, I'm going to suck it up no matter what. I'm going to take it. And the professionalism was was maybe not not as great as it was in my second tour, my second time back and in the cockpit, I was a much higher rank. More women were were in the cockpit at that time. And I did see a difference. I did see some real positive changes, and that made me super hopeful. And then when I left the military and President Obama, it opened up all jobs to women and we started actually getting standards. And and then I left on a really positive note where things were were changing. Yes, there are still issues. Yes, there's still problems. But structurally, everything was open. And I think we were moving in the right direction. You know, right now, in the current climate, I think there's a bit of a backlash to women in the military. And and I am concerned about that, that that that we may be moving backwards. Maybe we're not. But but that's my general belief and I'm happy to be on this panel.

O'HANLON: Thank you, Amy. And we'll look forward to getting into some of those questions that concern the contemporary policy debate. In a few minutes, I really want to thank you for your amazing service and

your amazing story as well. And now, Colonel Gallardo, if I could, over to you, my friend. Please tell us about your experiences and how you'd like to contribute to this conversation. It's great to have you as well.

GALLARDO: Thank you, Michael. Thank you for inviting me. I'm humbled based on the accomplishments of the other panelists, I'm obviously outgunned and I won't even play anything. So I will start that. I served in the United States Army as an Army officer for 20 years. Throughout my career, I have served in infantry, cavalry and armor formations, deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan multiple times, and some operational deployments to Germany and the Republic of Korea. I've served at multiple levels from platoon leader all the way up to battalion commander serving on division and SEC staffs. So I've had a a variance of experience. I will say to start off with, my wife also served in the Army for seven years. We met in the Army and she deployed to combat as a part of Operation Iraqi Freedom. Notably, I also had the privilege to serve at the Army's National Training Center as both what we call an observer, a coach trainer, to mentor and develop staffs and commanders at levels from triple toon all the way to brigade. And I had the privilege to serve as the operations officer for the National Training Center. In that assignment, I observed 22 brigade combat teams conducting training rotations in preparation for operational elements to include in both the first and second year women integrated into combat arms battalions and then integrated into combat leadership roles across those brigades. As a young platoon leader, I served with some of the first combat arms roles in the war on terror, with women as air defense officers and field artillery officers in Tikrit, Samarra. And also for a brief stint for a month in 2004 in Fallujah. So perhaps I used some of the communications network, which is why my comms actually worked for one month of that deployment. I also had the opportunity through my company, great assignments to serve in the third Armored Cavalry Regiment, where we were a large proponent of the women in the Army push both in the beginning of my career and as I continued to a field grade. And specifically during those deployments, both as field artillery officers and then on a daily basis with our 58 Kiowa pilots and our age 64 Apache pilots interacting daily on deployments to an intimate province. And in Baghdad in 2007, 2009 and 2011 in the regiment as we returned to then Fort Hood, now Fort Cavazos, Texas. Four of my seven staff feel great officers were women in the third Armored Cavalry Regiment, integrating the regimental staff as a part of that introduction of Weta as a battalion, S-3, an XO in a Stryker cavalry regiment. Seven of my staff, lieutenants and captains were women. As we further integrated down to the battalion level combat arms battalions. In my last assignment before retirement, I served as the tying commander for fourth Battalion, sixth Infantry Regiment, third Armored, third Armored Brigade Combat Team in the first Armored Division. I had the privilege in that assignment to command three infantry lieutenants with one promoting to captain role in the battalion and four armor lieutenants, as well as

22 enlisted infantry soldiers in the company, ranging from the rank of private all the way up to sergeants in that battalion. We had two rifle companies, one tank company, a headquarters company, and and my Ford support company. So as a battalion commander, you get the opportunity really to select at the lieutenant level about seven, what we call kingmaker jobs and to promote people to the next level. Of those seven, five of those are executive officers. When I left command, three of my five companies had women as executive officers in that battalion to include an infantry officer, an armor officer and a logistics officer. Additionally, on the broader scale, I served under Major General Laura Yeager, who was the commander of the 40th Infantry Division. In fact, she was the first to call me and congratulate me on commanding an infantry battalion. So an outstanding opportunity there. I served very closely with her as a part of Joint Task Force North and had the opportunity to work directly daily and then on daily phone calls when I was deployed forward to the border during the border crisis in 2017 2018. Additionally, as a part of Joint Task Force North, I served under Lieutenant General, then-Lieutenant General Laura Richardson as the Army North Commander and reported directly as we stood up the mission command element there. Also, we had a prior relationship as she served as the deputy commander for FORCECOM in my role at the National Training Center. And so discussing every, I got the opportunity every month that she came out to discuss the rotations, how we saw the brigades doing their readiness for combat in a very unique experience to spend an hour just she and I going over the readiness for combat our of our brigades and we only have 32 in the regular army. And then again I served as she took command of NorthCom and I served in JTFN, JTFN and and so throughout that, obviously as an inspiration with my wife having served alongside her on a few missions in Iraq, and then throughout my 22 year, 22 year career, I have been privileged and honored to both serve under work with alongside as peers and then most recently command women in the infantry and across combat arms in my organization. So thank you again, Michael, for having me here. As I said, I'm a little bit outgunned, but I will try and do my best here.

O'HANLON: Well, thank you, Jay. And that's a great and inspiring story as well. What I'd like to do now for the remaining 35 minutes is sort of keep it simple and just raise a couple of big questions, many of which have been reinforced by the audience. I want to thank the audience as well for your questions before the event and that are still in coming. I also, by the way, should thank three women who have been important in conceptualizing this event. One is my colleague Natalie Britton, who who's the daughter of Marine but herself works at Brookings. And then Tracy Maese, who is a Marine fellow now at Brookings and has made the connection for us to Lieutenant General Lori Reynolds, among many other things, Tracy's done to inspire men and women in the Marine Corps. She and her husband both served today. And then finally, a former

Marine at Brookings named Amy Ebitz. You may be curious. You might want to Google her article that she wrote five years ago in 2019, sort of a commemorative year on the hundredth anniversary of the 19th Amendment. And she wrote, Why would a woman want to be a Marine? So it's a pretty good read if you're curious and it's relevant to today's topic. So some thanks to them as well. But I want to talk about just really three big questions. One is standards. And General Reynolds, if I could, I begin with you on this, because you talked to me about this over the past week and you've got some interesting stories that you alluded to already about the establishment of standards that are sort of task-oriented as opposed to arbitrary physical standards and how that's evolved. But others can certainly comment, too, after after General Reynolds, that I do want to talk about culture and sort of leave aside physical standards, the complexities of integrating units and whether this is a challenge at any level of military organization and operations in combat. And you know, Jay, you maybe think of this when you are going through all the different women at different roles in the ground combat forces, how has the culture evolved and are there challenges that have to be faced? And by the way, we know there are challenges still with sexual harassment and sexual violence in the military. So this this is a broader issue with a lot of problems in the military and society in general we have to keep working on. So I want to raise the question of culture. And then finally, you know, we can maybe cap off a little bit of this with a discussion about a question that President Trump has raised. That's a fair question. Even if I myself might come up with a different answer or explanation. He's wondered why we have struggled as a nation in modern times on the battlefield. And is there something we're doing wrong within the military that is contributing to our difficulty of achieving positive results in Iraq and Afghanistan? I'll just give a little sneak preview of my own view, which is to say, I think the main challenges have been because of the difficulty of the missions and the evolving strategies that have really been imposed on the military by civilians in nearly impossible missions rather than the technical performance of the armed forces. But it's a fair question, and I think we'll maybe usefully finish on that note. So military standards and specifically physical standards. General Reynolds, could you comment? And I guess the question to put it to a, have we lowered standards as we've tried to integrate more women into the military or is that a false depiction of what's really happened?

REYNOLDS: Yeah. Michael. I would. First off, I just want to say that. You know, again, building on General Robinson's comments about women in the service through the years, an interesting fact is that women have always been volunteers from the beginning of time. We've been an all-volunteer force for 50 years. Women have always been volunteers. And I just think that's worth noting. Let's talk about standards for just a minute. You said, have we lowered standards? I can speak for the Marine Corps. We have not lowered standards.

We have intentionally. So what we learned, as I said, when when we started to talk about combat exclusion and journal officers were asking some really good questions about what is the standard, what is the specific standard that has to be met. Coming out of recruit training to be an infantry officer, were an artillery officer or a combat engineer? And the truth is we didn't have specific standards. There were standards to graduate from recruit training, and they were the same for everybody. So what we did during that time as a Marine Corps, now I'm talking about 2012, 13, 14, that time period was we we went through a very intensive process to kind of unpack exactly what were the physical requirements associated with each of these jobs. And we established entry-level standards by MLS, by military occupational specialty. For example, if you want to be an artillery officer in the Marine Corps, you know, there are unique tasks about like lifting a 40-pound round and putting it in the back of a seven ton truck and doing that so many times, loading that, you know, so many so many iterations in a time period. And those became a test that had to be passed just to go to the school. And I think and we did that, as I said, for every MLS. We also learned in our officer population that we had kind of we had allowed kind of local commanders to kind of establish their own tests for things like infantry officer school. And I think, you know, over time and that was, by the way, impacting our ability to make male infantry officers as well. And so we said time out. Let's make sure that we have the right standard for what the job requires. And so in this way, what I would offer to you is that because we had the conversation about women in combat exclusion, the Marine Corps is now better for it because we now have taken a, you know, a very concentrated and intentional view of what the job requires. And this is it. You either pass it or you don't. And so I guess what I would just offer is that, you know. The fact that there is this narrative out there that we have lowered standards suggests that we have a lot of women that are just flocking into these previously closed messes. And I think the numbers don't bear that out. They just don't bear that out. It's it is physically demanding for some of these jobs. And the women who have been able to pass these tests and go into these jobs have proven that they can do the physical job. And I think Jason would be able to comment on that better than me. But that is the that's the facts as I'm sitting here today for the for at least the Marine Corps.

O'HANLON: Jay, why don't you go next and then we'll go to the to the air women and pilots after after you.

ROBINSON: Airman. Airman. I'm an airman.

O'HANLON: Fair enough. And thank you for that important clarification. Jay.

GALLARDO: General Reynolds, I would echo that exactly. I think we did look in the Army for a brief period as we introduced introduce the the Army combat fitness test. We looked at most standards. So it did force us to do the same as we looked at standards of physical capabilities. But I think more so than that, and I know clearly when we're having a discussion, a lot of folks who are outside the Army who don't understand the complexities that the army is simply more than or the military is more than just a physical job that is a 5% minimum to get into the job. The other 95% is using what is up here. And I did not see a single lowering of standards. What I would say from my own experience that maybe early integration of women into infantry and armor is that the stratification that that I see that existed in male combat arms officers where you had 20 to 25% at the bottom performance, you know, 50% in the center performing well, but not not quite achieving the most qualified. And then 20 to 25% achieving the most qualified standard. I did not see that that stratification with the women in my organization. I saw a larger stratification that that middle block simply did not exist in my small, kind of myopic view of the 12 combat arms officers that I had. I had 1 or 2 that had a struggle achieving the standard. Unless so, physically, they had achieved the physical standards but did not meet the standards of being a referee or a rifle platoon or a technical team there. And then the other 75% were top tier performing. And I will say just as a brief story to bring that home, when we first integrated the brigade, the division made a policy that only one battalion was able to integrate women in. So we got to a certain concentration of women in those organizations. I was not that resilient. I went to my brigade commander and said, Sir, I am missing out on rock stars and I cannot have those folks in my organization, one being my old boss's daughter, who was a young lieutenant, for reasons of course, I could not have her under my command for for obvious reasons, that there would be potential of favoritism. But but I realized that I was missing out. As I as we integrated at the National Training Center, we were more fluid with our ability to task, organize organizations. And I got to platoon leaders fought for about seven hours in dismounted combat, simulated combat in the largest urban training center in the Army. And at the end of that, I leaned to then Lieutenant Marissa Rivas and said, How would you like to be my scout platoon leader? And she said, Sir, don't I have to interview for that? And I said, The last seven hours of a slug in 200 degree heat counts as an interview. And so I'll say that as I was able to to gain that experience, I immediately asked to pull some of those folks into my organization. But at no time did the standards change. At no time did we lower them. And in fact, in a lot of cases, for two specific lieutenants that I had, I think they raised the standards. One of them did become My scout puts you later. The other an executive officer. And I think it pushed those male officers who didn't have to compete with a 20% of the population. Many of those outstanding officers had grown somewhat complacent because they knew that those officers weren't able to come in. As we further integrated across the division through some of the requests of the battalion and brigade commanders. I felt

that it actually raised some of those standards, but at no time did we change physical standards. Pretty rough marches and those things that that's, like I said, 5 to 10% that we generally focus on when we talk about women in the combat arms. None of those were lowered. And in fact, I think across the board, like I said, the other 90%, we generally tend to raise the standard of those around you when you get greater competition.

O'HANLON: Excellent. Thank you. General Robinson, over to you.

ROBINSON: So I, Amy, will certainly talk about standards of being a fighter pilot. I will talk about being part of our combat air forces, and that is obviously our fighter pilots. That is obviously support aircraft like AWACs and Joint Stars, a compass call. And as an air battle manager, we could be air battle managers on the ground or in the E-3, AWACs or joint stars. We have a training shop that does the training, and then there's the shop that's called Standards and Evaluation and the Standards and Evaluation Shop. There's not one standard that says women standards and one standard that says men's standards. It is the standard to pass a check ride and fly on a daily basis and fly into combat or fly and support combat. So I think when I think about standards, I worry the. Most about making sure that everybody meets the standards to go to war. Everybody not just meets but exceeds the standards, if we can, to go to war. Having been a commander of the of the AWACs community, it was my responsibility to assure they were organized, trained, equipped and met the standards to deploy, whether it was to Northern Watch, Southern Watch, Oman, Qatar, Afghanistan, or flew out of Oman to go to Afghanistan. You know, they had to train that way and get ready for it and then a meet and exceed the standards through. Right. We would do check roads not just individually, but we would do check rides as a crew. And so it was important that those standards were met. I would tell you. When I was an instructor. As a captain, I wanted to find a weapons school. You could tell that I met the standard and maybe even exceeded the standard. When the fighter pilots all men because we didn't have female fighter pilots. Jeannie was 1993 and this is 1986. When I go to war, I want Laurie on the radio. And I couldn't have asked for anything else. I met and exceeded the standards.

O'HANLON: That's fantastic. Thank you. Amy McGrath.

MCGRATH: I just have three things to add. Agree with everything that was said already as it was pretty amazing to hear that wish all of the nation could hear that, frankly, and in light of recent comments. One, I think that, you know, who's who's most sensitive to the standards issue, women in the military. Because we

have sort of been saddled with this issue the entire time. And so when we look to our left and look to our right, we want to make sure that everybody meets those standards. So we're very sensitive to this. Number two, in aviation, aviation is is probably one of these jobs where these standards are almost the most objective. I mean, the simulator, the aircraft does not know if you are a man or a woman. It is a machine. It doesn't know if you're black or white. It doesn't know what religion you are. You can either land that thing on the back of an aircraft carrier at night in bad weather or you can't. You either get through the simulator, you know, the emergency procedures, you're able to to safely fly that aircraft or you're not you're able to, you know, get through the syllabus or you're not you know, you meet the standard or you don't. And I just feel like that's important to note. And number three, we did have issues even in the aviation community when we integrated women. And I'll tell you a quick story of of that. What you talked about, Michael, and what Lori talked about with the task standards versus sort of traditional standards. And in when I went through flight school, that was the time when Pensacola took away, if you remember that Officer and a Gentleman was a big famous movie in the 80s. And there was a, you know, an obstacle course scene where everybody has to go through the obstacle course and there's this big wall well that existed at Pensacola. And it was right when I went down there where the Navy had decided we're not going to have that obstacle course anymore. And that was a huge, huge issue at that time. Everybody talked about lowering the standards for women. It just so coincided. But women, by the way, had been going through flight school for, you know, a while prior to that point. But it just so it coincided with the that the time when when some of these more aircraft types were open to women where they decided to take that away. And the reason I bring that up to you is, is simply to say that it happened. It was a huge issue at the time. I went through I got through flight school and 24 years of service and all of these combat missions. Not once in my time in Afghanistan or Iraq did somebody say, you know, how did you complete that mission because you didn't do that obstacle course. None of us did that obstacle course. My point is that when people look at it, do you really need to to do certain things and to to become a pilot? Getting over that particular obstacle course in the sand was more of a tradition as opposed to a no kidding standard. And what did what did they not take away? They didn't take away the standard of being able to swim a certain distance in full flight gear. That makes sense. If you eject that, you go down in the water. You got to be able to survive, maybe help out your buddy survive. So I think it's really important to remember that over the course of the last couple of decades, I think my opinion is that the military has taken a really solid look at all of these different what we call molasses, different jobs, and said, what do we need for that job? And what is just like been around forever, that doesn't matter. And I think we've moved in the right direction.

O'HANLON: Brilliant and I really appreciate the nuance. I think people are learning a lot from your discussions about different types of jobs in the military, different challenges. And I think a corollary to what you all have just said, and I'll ask you to correct me if I'm getting this wrong and I don't have the statistics before me, but from one specialty to another, we have great variation in the fraction of the military today that is made up of women. And the obvious physiological reasons there are certain types of jobs that may be statistically more difficult for women or for most women. And that's why we may have fewer women percentagewise in the infantry than we might in a different specialty. But the standards are being maintained and they're being actually clarified in order to focus on what's needed to do the job well. I think that's the bottom line of what I'm hearing from all of you with a lot of texture and granularity and clarity that comes from your various experiences. I want to note. So feel free if you wish to comment again on that. But I wanted to ask now about military culture today and whether. Women feel at home in the military weather and have adjusted to having women fighting shoulder to shoulder with them. What are the challenges still before us? And to put a point on it. And I think it's important because I hope some of our listeners today are, you know, 18 and 20 year old women thinking about joining the military and being inspired by your stories and maybe being more favorably inclined. But would you recommend such a career to them? Because we still hear stories of military culture, of sexual harassment, of other problems, making service for women quite difficult. And I just wanted to put that question to you as well. And then, as I say, the final question is going to build on that and everything else we've been talking about and try to get at this issue of why is the United States military sometimes struggling today on the battlefield or in in the pursuit of its broader strategic objectives? And I'm referring, of course, most of all to Vietnam, but then Iraq and Afghanistan, where outcomes have not been as good as we would have hoped after much pain and suffering and loss of life along the way. You don't have to get to that just yet, but that's going to be the culminating question. But first, if I could go in reverse order, starting with Colonel McGrath, how do you feel that military culture has adapted to the idea of having women integrated throughout all military occupational specialties and all types of combat roles?

MCGRATH: Well, I'll just start out by saying I think there's there's a, when when the structure changed, when the structure barriers were lifted. I think that was a big step in the right direction to accepting women. Okay. I almost feel like that women were had such a. The deck was stacked against us when when there were barriers, structural barriers of you can't do this job or you can't do that job. Why? Because many jobs to get to the highest ranks in in the military were were some of these jobs that were barred to women. So even in aviation before the ground jobs were open, my pipeline as an aviator didn't require but it was like accepted that you would do a tour as a forward air controller. And I couldn't do that as a woman. So there were once

those structural barriers were lifted. Just like ten years ago. Now, I think that that helps culturally. That said, you know, it's still very hard for women, it's hard for women in broader society to be accepted in male-dominated roles. But I if I was talking to an 18-year-old, as you brought out, Mike, I would say one of the things I loved about the military was that it is a great meritocracy because it's hard for women. But I will say this. When I was in my squadron once, once you've sort of proven yourself, you know, you know, what Marines really cared about. Did the bomb hit the target? Yeah. Can you fly the jet? Are you going to be somebody that has my back if I'm getting shot at? Are you, are you an honorable person? Can I trust you? Are you competent? Do you have integrity? You know that in a sort of what the general said earlier when she knew she was accepted? Yeah. When people said, hey, I want to I want to be by your side on the battlefield. And I feel like that's there. Yes, there are issues. Yes. The culture is is we have problems specifically with sexual assault and sexual harassment. And to to look at that. That issue. It's all about leadership. And leadership at the very top does matter. That is why when you have leaders at the very top. Who have questionable background on on this issue. It makes everybody take a pause because, you know, it's it's sort of like is is this an issue? Where should I sweep it under the table? Is that what's what's the right thing to do now as as as leaders of the top have have have done potentially. Or do I tackle it head on? And that's kind of where we're we're at culturally, I think, right at this moment. But I do think we're moving in the right direction, generally speaking, over the last two decades.

O'HANLON: Great answer. Thank you very much. General Robinson, over to you.

ROBINSON: Thanks. A couple of things. Amy said something in her first chat about her life, talking about how professionally some had changed in the fighter pilot community as she went through and when she came back. I would tell you I saw the same thing. When you're the first and only woman at the United States Air Force Fighter Weapons school and that F-15, F-16, A-10, F-111 pilots in the early 80s, I'm here to the middle 80s, I'm here to tell you who the culture was. Incredible. It was it was amazing. And it's but it's changed and it's changed over time. And it's exactly as Amy said. Can you, can you fly the airplane? Can you put the bomb where it needs to be? Can you give me the right radio call at the right time, you know, so that I can do the things that I need to do? And so and I have to tell you, every single one of my mentors are men. But more importantly, they're great leaders. And that, to me is what I learned was about leadership and watching, watching all that. I do want to make one comment about sexual assault and sexual harassment. I'm going to say two things about that. When one of our chiefs of staff was testifying for his confirmation hearing. And this got brought up because of an incident that had happened in the airports. He mentioned

that that. The military was a mirror. There was some relationship, the mirror to society. And the fact of the matter is, there are no metrics at a university. There are no metrics at a company. There are no anybody having to come and testify about it except for in the military. So it doesn't mean that it's right. That's not my point. It just means that we get a lot of heated light. Which is the right thing to do. But we have to make sure we understand that it exists inside the military, but has gotten better and better. And I'll tell you what I always did. But it exists outside the military, too. And we can't forget that. Personally, when I would take command every time I took command and I had the privilege to command several echelons and several times I would get different groups of folks, whether it was my subordinate commanders, my subordinate senior enlisted advisers, my subordinate flight commanders. And the first, you know, and I would say, here's what I expect from you. Here's what you can expect from me. And by the way, I will not tolerate sexual assault or sexual harassment in this unit. And I made it so that everybody knew exactly where I stood and that I wouldn't tolerate it. Thanks, Michael.

O'HANLON: Thank you. Very inspiring language. Colonel Gallardo, over to you, my friend.

GALLARDO: I think, sure, as we look at culture and standards, I am certain, you know, having gotten to see this from my wife's perspective as a platoon leader in combat 22 years ago in OIF to now, the culture shift, when most of our major who grew up an image of industry, thank goodness as a former officer, being an infantry battalion, I reached out to to one of my platoon leaders and now a company commander in a rifle company and asked her, what did we do well in the battalion and what did we do poorly? And sure, there were a ton of things we did poorly. But she said, I had peers even three years ago that were asked, You didn't choose this most, did you, lieutenant? You didn't choose infantry, did you? And she said nothing was different When we came in. You gave the same exact. I compared notes with the other platoon leaders, both male and female. And you didn't change anything. And those were the standards your major asked me? These are the standards. If you need something, come to me. I have 24 years of experience. You have six months of infantry experience. I am here to help you. And I think I'll quote the arbitrary combat training center. That said, you know, a few years back, we asked, what are the graduation rates for women at Ranger School, which as we know, is one of the kind of the pinnacle standards for the infantry. And they said it's so commonplace. We've we've stopped keeping track. We don't know. And I think that as that goes on, there was never a question with with my peers when we got infantry lieutenants, infantry captains, army lieutenants, where they came from, it was where do they graduate, where are they coming from? What's their background? And I think, as in the last couple of years, as I took command, there was not a question of

who's coming to my battalion. It is what are they bringing? And lastly, I'll say, I think the culture, the more we the further along we get is that we are not making exceptions. You know, there are ten, 20 years ago, my wife was asked, well, this platoon is going to the field. What are we going to do about, you know, separate sleeping areas and things like that? My sergeant major and I slept right alongside the platoons. And it wasn't a question where people were sleeping. You were a leader. You sleep with your platoon in the dirt in the same place. And I think that's a great thing. And what it's done, as both General Reynolds and General Robinson talked about, is there is one standard whether or not you can accomplish the mission, not your gender, not your background. It is can you accomplish the mission? Can you lead soldiers in infantry, ground combat or armor combat? And I think as we as we've integrated more units, people have started to say your qualifications as General, Lieutenant General Hodne said character counts more than resume. And I think that has become a standard across the Army. And those questions of gender have kind of gone by the wayside. And is what are you bringing to the fight? What are you bringing to the team? So I did not see a large I've seen a large shift in the last 22 years, but I have not seen a challenge with the integration of women into infantry and armor formations.

O'HANLON: Fantastic. Thank you, colonel. General, over to you.

REYNOLDS: Well. So two very quick things and then we can get to that last question. I think, you know, and it's been said a couple times, but I think culture is a reflection of leadership. And and one of the things that I noticed in my career is that, you know, there is a difference between an attitude of accommodation and an attitude, a real integration. And it impacts your culture. If you're truly trying to integrate people into your formation. You will do all the thinking that's required. You will make sure that the health care is there. You'll make sure that the uniforms fit, will make sure that the kit works. You'll you'll do all of those things because you actually want to make sure that the integration is solid. If you are simply accommodating, then people can tell that to. Right. And I and I think we really need to think through that as we continue to fully integrate the force. You know, I think in the Marine Corps perspective, for example, history matters, right? All of the stories that we tell, you know, from Iwo Jima and Bellwood and Chosun Reservoir and Fallujah. These are stories of men in combat. And until we begin to, you know, tell stories about Sergeant Nicole Gee, you know, who was standing on the top of that wall at Abbey Gate and holding that baby, you know, a day before she died? You know, Nicole Gee's physical standards, though she met every single one of them, weren't her most important characteristic that day. The fact is she was an American Marine who was just demonstrating humanity. And until we just begin to tell those stories as part of our history and our lineage, culture will be

something that has to be constantly maintained. But no woman should ever have to apologize for their service to our nation. Right. Every life has value. And so for those young 18 year old girls that are thinking about it, I would not have served for 35 years if I didn't think I was serving with the finest Americans. You know, I could like, I just can't imagine serving with a better group of folks. Men, women. Doesn't matter. They were Marines to me. And so why I'm hopeful that that's the Marine Corps that I left behind and that's the Marine Corps that exists today. Am I go ask for your last question. I think you're right. I think the mission clarity matters and that assigning the force that can actually achieve that mission and then staying consistent to that mission. I'll turn it over to perhaps General Robinson, who served at the geostrategic level. But but that's where I am. I think it sure wasn't for lack of trying.

O'HANLON: Thank you. General Robinson.

ROBINSON: Yeah, Lori, I couldn't agree more. Clear, Unambiguous objectives. Clear, unambiguous guidance. And then having the privilege and the opportunity to train, we can use, you know, the I was part of I was the commander of NorthCom when we started going down to the southern border. And I had to ensure that Army North had clear, unambiguous guidance. And I had to get that so that the training could happen. So, so clear, unambiguous objective from the strategic level, clear, unambiguous guidance from the strategic level, and then clear, unambiguous training and expectations as you go down the chain of command when we would have hurricanes. And I had the privilege to be the commander during Harvey, Irma and Maria. I'm here to tell you that, you know, we I met with my subordinate commanders once a day and we would talk about it. And it was my job to go up and out and their job to go down and in and but I had to provide the guidance based on the guidance I had been given, and we all had to talk about it. So, Laura, you couldn't have said it any better. I'm just piling on. But it starts with clear, unambiguous, unambiguous objectives and guidance.

O'HANLON: Jay, anything you'd like to add on this last question of what explains our relative successes and failures over the last generation or so?

GALLARDO: Michael, I would, I would echo what everyone else has said. I think what what was the clear definition of victory? And I wrote the exact same thing on unclear in state where her challenges it's interesting that the questions are coming back to the military when even at all levels we are we were not making the policy what was the. We had vague definitions of victory. We had ever changing standards. I

remember when we were with. Iraqi battalions and Afghan battalions training those organizations and. And the measures of performance and whatnot would shift every month. And so those clear definitions of victory and success were ever changing. And that that was very difficult. As General Reynolds said, it was not for lack of trying, for lack of effort, but it was a difficult end state and an unclear, vague definition of what victory and success look like.

O'HANLON: Colonel McGrath, anything you'd like to add on this?

MCGRATH: Well, I'd just like to say, number one, we we have the best, most lethal military in the world. Okay. With regards to what the president asked with, you know, inferring that the failures of of our military in the past 30 or 40 years. You know, is is sort of the military's fault for these for these wars, not not turning out the way we want. I think we have to recognize that there are certain political solutions that the use of military force as a tool doesn't fix. And and I think, you know, obviously, we we saw that in Vietnam. We saw it to a large degree in Afghanistan and to some degree in Iraq. I. You know, I also feel like if you're looking at and I'll just say definitively, you know, we haven't lost wars because of, you know, things like die or or any of this other stuff that that is sort of brought up. But it's really more of the complexity of the political solutions there. If you look to the future, though, I do believe, and General Reynolds talked about this a little bit, it's very important that we have talent in our military. Okay. The fights of the future are going to require people who are innovative, who are intelligent, who work as a team, who accept others and their roles and talents in that team. If we do not take everybody and take the talent of America, which is very, very talented and all of its people, and have a military that has a culture to want to recruit those talented people, and even more importantly, to keep. Those talented people. We are going to be in a disadvantage for the future. And that is is my concern going forward. And it should be what is people's focus who are leaders of our military and Defense Department going forward, in my mind.

O'HANLON: I can't think of a better way to end this conversation. Thank you all, colonels, generals. It's been so enlightening and so inspiring. And I'm sure not just for me, but for many watching this show from Brookings and from around the country, signing off with best wishes and deep gratitude to the entire panel. Take care. Thank you all.