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SESSION 5: A COMMANDING PRESENCE:

Moderator: Christine Abizaid, Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Afghanistan, Pakistan, and Central Asia

Peter Feaver, Professor of Political Science and Public Policy, Duke University

General Norton A. Schwartz, Chief of Staff of the Air Force, 2008-2012 and member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff

Julianne Smith, Deputy National Security Advisor for Vice President Joseph Biden

General Philip M. Breedlove, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, 2013-2016.

For conference video: http://whitehousetransitionproject.org/experts-news/events/national-security-transition/

AUDIO TRANSCRIPTION

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MS. CHRISTINE ABIZAID: (In progress) session of the day. First of all, just a brief introduction. Since I'm kind of new to the area and I'm new to this crowd, my name is Christine Abizaid. I was, until August, the deputy assistant secretary of defense for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia. Since then I moved to Austin, so I'm a transplant here like so many others. And I now lead the Defense intelligence -- or sorry, the Defense Innovation Unit Experimental -- it's a very new position -- here for the Secretary of Defense in Austin. It's a new presence we have set up here.

Just want to say a brief thank you to Will, to Bobby, to Steve, to Admiral McRaven, to Admiral Inman. You guys have been very, very welcoming and have been giving me very good advice about how to fit in here in Austin. Though I will say the best advice I've gotten about how to fit in here has been to get a tattoo, and that hasn't been from any of you.

AUDIENCE MEMBER: That was from Admiral Inman.

MS. ABIZAID: That was from Admiral Inman. That's right. I'll be doing that later today, sir.

So a real honor, though, to be asked here to moderate this panel, one that's so near and dear to my heart, about how we, the department, can best effect the presidential transition and the role of the incoming president as commander-in-chief. And I'm honored to be joined on this panel by so many distinguished panelists here.

I'll just do a very brief introduction -- you all have their bios -- and then we'll go right into the discussion.

So first, Peter, thanks for joining us. This is your third or maybe fourth panel here over the course of the events.

MR. PETER FEAVER: Will works me like a rented mule.

MS. ABIZAID: Professor of public policy at Duke University and author and co-author of a number of books, and so many that I couldn't actually read them all in preparation for the panel. So thank you very much for being here. Really looking forward to your thoughts, especially on civ-mil dynamics.

General Schwartz is here with us. He was formerly the chief of staff of the Air Force and is actually one of the panelists who has lived through the transition in the Pentagon, as a member of the Joint Chiefs. We're really looking forward to his perspective. He's currently the president and CEO of Business Executives for National Security, and I was fortunate enough to get some very good advice from him in that capacity when I was DASD for Afghanistan, Pakistan and Central Asia.

Julie Smith, really good to have you here, and also very fortunate to see her in action while she was the deputy national security advisor for Vice President Biden. I was on the national security staff and we got to experience many of those long IPCs or deputies committee meetings and principals committee meetings that everyone has been groaning about over the last two days. Really looking forward to hearing from you. Your role in the Pentagon was also essential in a very important

position in NATO policy.

And General Breedlove, great to have you here. This is your double duty for us, so thank you very much, fresh off of his stint as supreme allied commander for NATO.

So with that, I thought we'd just go down the row. Peter, start with you, and kind of kick us off on your views on this issue of how we best -- how the department best helps the transition process.

MR. FEAVER: Well, thank you. I'm going to make four points regarding civil-military relations. That's the -- sort of the largest aggregate, highest 60,000-foot level, and I think then my fellow colleagues will be able to take it down to a more granular level.

And the first point I'm going to make is the paradox of American civil-military relations. On the one hand, we have an unbroken record: 240 years of not a single coup, not even a coup attempt. This is a record that's the envy of great powers, even industrialized powers around the world. It's a very proud record on the one hand.

On the other hand, since the end of World War II, every incoming administration, and then if there was a change in command in the -- at the Department of Defense within an administration, every new Sec Def came in believing that the civil-military balance had gotten out of whack under their predecessor and that they had to reassert civilian control in some way.

So an unbroken record of civilian control on the one hand, and an unbroken record of concern about civilian control on the other hand, and a sense with every incoming administration that it's time to let the military know the adults are back and in charge.

Second point: Will this hold up with the transition that will start in 2017? Well, we already have a pretty good idea of -- I can tell you with confidence it will be one of two presidents, so it narrows down the assignment for us. How will a President Clinton think about -- fit this pattern of the civil-military paradox? How would a President Trump fit the paradox?

I think a President Clinton coming in might fit the pattern. I think it's possible that the Clinton administration would decide that at least in OSD, the balance between OSD and the Joint Staff is out of whack and that they need to revive the authority and power and influence of the civilian office of secretary of state vis-à-vis the Joint Staff and the combatant commanders. Whether the incoming Clinton administration will feel the same way about White House to DOD, it's harder to say, though there's already a fair amount of White House control of DOD, and whether she would intensify it is harder to say, but I'm pretty confident that the incoming Clinton administration, if there is one, would at least see the need to rebalance inside DOD.

What about an incoming President Trump? This is much, much harder to predict, obviously. But it is noteworthy that he has talked about civil-military

relations more than many other candidates have in the past. What he's said about it has generated a lot of attention. He's said that the generals have been reduced to rubble. I don't think he was referring to you two perhaps, but the -- he has talked about that he will clean house. And so I think it's possible that the incoming Trump administration will believe that he is served by a number of generals that are -- have been picked by Obama, and that may be Obama generals, and it's time for a different set.

So I think I expect that whoever becomes president is going to fit this long-term pattern that I've described.

Third point: Whoever comes in as president is going to be walking into a very fraught civil-military relations. There's a lot of civil-military tension at the broadest level. Part of it is a function of wars that are not going as well as had hoped. Part of it is the residual of choices that are made, decisions that are made that cut one way or friction between State and DOD on counter-ISIL policy, friction between the White House and DOD on the pace of the counter-ISIL campaign.

So friction there, but it's also going to be after an election, and elections are always difficult times for the military. They understand that they are serving a lame duck, but who is still president, and you have one president at a time. But they also know -- consider just the challenge that General Dunford has. He knows that he will be the principal military advisor -- he is the principal military advisor to President Obama, and he will be by law the principal military advisor to the next president, and that's a very difficult position to play. There aren't many people at that level in the government who report directly to the president of the United States who will have to serve this current one and whoever the next one is, and that's a real challenge.

So campaigns are always a challenge, but of course this campaign is unlike every other campaign, and some of the comments that have been made have dragged the military into the campaign in a partisan way or in a policy debate way that the military does not want.

And so the last point about the challenge of civil-military context is that whoever is elected will likely start out with a relative political capital deficit relative to previous incoming presidents. I think there is, sadly, a decent chance that whoever is elected, a significant fraction of the country will believe that the election itself was tainted in some way, and therefore the results are illegitimate. And it's also likely that whoever is president will start with less popularity, less political clout, less of a mandate perhaps, less of the momentum that comes -- usually comes from winning the president.

And so you put all that together, it's a very fraught civil-military condition, which leads me to my fourth point. I knew I had to say something positive and I'm going to do that right now. The next president will inherit a remarkably strong senior military leadership team. I don't believe it's rubble. I don't think anyone who has interacted with this senior military leadership would say that they are rubble.

I'm talking now there's been an almost wholesale changeover at the chief, vice chief and all of the chiefs of staff level. They are strong and also working well together as a team, which hasn't always happened, and many of us who work in the field of civil-mil bet money that they weren't going to be able to work so well for so long under the pressure of sequester. It's really quite a remarkable achievement, and I give general -- first Dempsey and now General Dunford a lot of credit for navigating the inter-service rivalry problems of sequester.

It's also the case that the senior military leadership -- and digging down into the three and two-start level -- have spent a fair bit of time thinking about the civil-military relationship, more so than even previous generations of generals. The last two chairmen, Admiral Mullen and especially General Dempsey, made civil-mil a priority of professional military training. And so pretty much everyone who has two stars and above has at least had some sessions where they've thought about civil-mil.

I can't stay on the good news for too long. The bad news is they'll be interacting with civilian counterparts who for the most part have not spent a lot of time thinking about civil-mil. I have a dog-and-pony show I do with a bunch of folks for -- military officers, I've talked to thousands of military officers about the challenges of civil-military relations. I still have yet to present to a group of Schedule C political appointees. And so this is a civil-military relationship where the agent, the military, they are a disproportionate amount of the actual burden of managing the professional relationship because they've had time to think about it in those terms and the civilian counterparts have not.

Michèle Flournoy and I are putting together an effort to help training, DOD 101, a civil-military relations 101 that we're going to do for -- hopefully for Schedule C appointees that might help in the future. But the better bet is that the military officers will be interacting with very, very busy civilian leaders who have not had the time to step back and think about how you manage the civil-military relationship.

And so the health of the relationship will depend on how well our senior military do to a large extent, and I think that is the most hopeful thing I can say, because I think we have a very good team and I think they will rise to that challenge. But it will be a challenge.

MS. ABIZAID: Let me just echo your call for training for the civilians. As an Army brat, that was all the training I got, so it would have been a good thing.

General Schwartz.

GENERAL NORTON SCHWARTZ: Let me just say that Mike Mullen and his team decided early on, no knife fights in public, and that principle has held for the last seven years.

Let me acknowledge a couple of my alumni here today. Admiral Inman, of course, is a legend around here and one that everyone respects, so thank you, sir. And two of the finest field commanders of my generation are also here, and that's Phil Breedlove and Bill McRaven, so to you gentlemen, it's wonderful to be

with you again. (Applause.)

While serving in the Pentagon over the years, I've observed that one of the most difficult challenges facing its leaders is getting the right people into senior-level positions in a timely fashion. World events do not wait, especially now, and our track record on these lines has not been good. While we'll discuss, I suppose, today some policy issues that will confront the new national security team, I'd like to focus and appeal to all of you to think about the process of assembling a team.

When I came to Business Executives for National Security following military service, I asked what could be done to improve civilian candidates' search, selection, and the on-boarding process that you talked about. To that end, a group of senior business executives and former government officials who had lived in both lives reviewed a number of previous un- or partially implemented recommendations, added some of their own, and endorsed an array of initiatives to improve the presidential appointment with Senate confirmation, or PAS, process.

The following were the top 10 recommendations of this expert panel, which included, among others, Denis Bovin, Ray DuBois, Gordon England, Nelson Ford, Earl Stafford, John Thompson, and Fran Townsend, among others.

Number one, ensure that pre-election presidential transition teams are prepared and large enough to evaluate and rank candidates for the top 50 national security positions at the beginning of an administration and enlist the aid of professional headhunters to match skills to positions as may be required.

Number two, increase the capacity and the level of professional experience in the Office of Presidential Personnel at the beginning of and during the president's term of office, comprised, importantly, of a mix of both political and career personnel specialists.

Number three, continue the process of -- that's an inappropriate word as well -- but eliminating duplication, removing extraneous information in and automating the required disclosure forms; provide financial assistance -- and this is important -- and campaign or national committee reimbursement for attorney and accountant fees and costs associated with preparation of the nominees' disclosure forms.

Number four, establish a system of tiered security background investigations calibrated for the sensitivity of the position and the candidate's prior government service.

Number five, convert more presidential appointee positions to career status senior executive service or Schedule C appointments.

Number six, adjust the rules on the duration of Senate holds to accelerate nominations through the confirmation process; establish reasonable timelines for advice and consent.

Number seven, rationalize and coordinate between the executive branch and the Senate core questions on financial disclosure and other forms that will not unduly tax the time and treasure and, yes, the patience of prospective nominees.

Number eight, set criteria for blind trusts and consider this as a remedy for divestiture, particularly in cases where nominees are seeking mid-career positions; modernize rules on conflict of interest, divestiture, blind trusts and post-government employment generally.

Number nine, calibrate restrictions on post-government employment.

And number 10, prepare presidential appointment and Senate-confirmed nominees to assume leadership positions by establishing a strong executive on-boarding program at the -- for both the executive and staff principal level of supervision.

I think the -- it is important here, as we tilt towards a stimulating discussion of policy and strategic choices with my colleagues, for the country in the next few days and weeks, please keep these talent management considerations foremost in your minds. Because the country must have good people to do this work -- imaginative, centered, strong, and courageous to do this work. This is a time for the best among us. Thank you.

MS. ABIZAID: Thank you, General Schwartz. Julie.

MS. JULIANNE SMITH: Well, thank you. Thank you for the invitation to be here today and for the chance to escape Washington, although I escaped Washington's humidity and was greeted with Austin's humidity today in a thunderstorm. So I just -- the next secretary of defense is going to have just an agenda, an inheritance that's breathtaking, and I don't want to get into every little detail. We could be here all week. I'm sure a lot of issues have come up in the discussions over the last two days.

There's the whole array of external challenges that I understand were discussed yesterday, in particular looking at some of the various regions, whether it's Asia or the Middle East or Europe and Russia. There is a whole new array of tactics that our adversaries are springing on us almost each and every week. And there are also constant calls for reassurance from literally every corner of the world, and often, sadly, that reassurance is preferred in the form of military presence and engagement and posture. And so there's lots for the next secretary of defense to look at from an external perspective, but there's just as much for the next secretary of defense to be focusing on from an internal perspective.

There are countless reform efforts underway or calls for reform in lots of different areas, and we can tick down that list, whether we're talking about all the uncertainty surrounding the budget, whether we're talking about straight up defense reform. You can pick your flavor. There's the civ-mil piece; there's managing the workforce; there's acquisition; the list goes on and on. And of course, as Peter mentioned, the relationship between OSD and the Joint Staff, which is getting a lot of attention, particularly by those sitting outside of government right now generating some new ideas.

But instead of going into that long list of the internal versus the external and this very rich agenda that the next secretary of defense is going to inherit,

I wanted to talk for a minute just about the relationship between the Pentagon and the National Security Council, which, again, I think has been touched on probably throughout the last two days, but just a couple of perspectives from my viewpoint. I started in the Pentagon and then moved over to the White House, and it was a very interesting transition and a lot of lessons learned along the way.

So point number one that I would mention is something that has already been alluded to here on this panel. The fact that the folks that are serving in civilian roles in the national security architecture have largely no experience working with the military at all, and you see this time and time again. They have not only no exposure to the U.S. military but just the general culture, the lexicon, the hierarchy, the traditions, the processes that the Pentagon relies on to do its day-to-day business. And that creates real challenges for the interagency in terms of bringing folks together and trying to get stuff done. It also can breed a tremendous amount of mistrust and complete misinterpretation of what each side is trying to say to each other, either inside the Pentagon as civilians and folks in uniform sit together, or as folks sit in an IPC or a DC or PC, again, bringing together this community as a whole.

And for me, the real frustration with this really was not only kind of these cartoon characterizations that you often hear of the other side, but there are real policy implications. And by that I mean I would often find that some of the policy development discussions or even looking at options would essentially boil it down to a very simple zero-sum game. We were either, in the case of dealing with a particular conflict, looking at doing nothing or -- when it comes to the use of force -- or we were putting on the option of a full-scale, large-scale, multiyear perhaps ground invasion somewhere.

And that's frustrating for the folks obviously in uniform, but anyone who has exposure to DOD, to see the huge gap in understanding of all the array of options that exist between those two ends of the spectrum. And people threw up their hands and say, well, there's no way we're going to do that, so therefore we'll end up over here, and lots of people in the meeting are left scratching their heads, like, wait, I think there's quite a bit in the middle.

But because you have that lack of exposure, literally cases where people at the White House would tell me, oh yeah, I don't cross the river, I don't go over to that building, the Pentagon. It was astounding to me how few people I had worked with in the White House that had literally set foot in the building and to have some appreciation, some exposure at any level.

And so, again, I think that can have policy ramifications in addition to all sorts of just clashes of culture on a day-to-day basis.

Secondly, I would note that at this point, given the level of information that's streaming into the inboxes of someone, say, sitting in the White House, you have people now that have incredible access to what's happening on the ground, say, in a current or ongoing military operation at their desk. So in my case, I was

astounded to see when I was at the White House, I could get live video feeds of what was happening in a conflict somewhere far away around the world, and of course the age of information-sharing and transparency and social media -- you've got all sorts of access to what's happening in real time. But there are tradeoffs with having that amount of information in the hands of, say, a director inside the White House that maybe doesn't need to spend his or her time looking at live video feeds and could leave that to somebody who's really made a career out of it, and leave the big-think policy stuff to some of the directors.

And so yes, you want to share information; yes, you want to have insight into what's happening; yes, the demand signals from the principals are always to know everything about every single conflict and operation that's going on around the world. So the pressure is immense both from within and by our publics, but at the same time it creates real friction because it gives folks sometimes the wrong impression that it's their role to weight in in areas where, frankly, they really lack the expertise and depth of knowledge. And that I've seen in multiple cases creates some real friction.

Again, I don't want so say in all cases it's a bad thing, but certainly there were moments where I felt like people almost had too much information at their fingertips.

The third thing I would mention is that both the Pentagon and the White House right now have real problems -- and Peter is an expert in this, spoken and written extensively on this, far more than I have -- but this question of how both of these institutions are handling strategy at the moment, and really a lack of ability to build in strategic pauses in these agencies. They're running very fast, they're under enormous pressure, and neither one has really found an adequate way to conduct risk assessment, run tabletop exercises, look at forecasting. And because both of them are not doing an exceptional job, they're doing an even more poorly job working on strategy together. They have an array of strategy documents. Of course, you have the national security strategy, which is like a giant Christmas tree, and everybody hangs their favorite policy on it. And then the QDR, which is in the process of kind of coming into another life form, whatever that may be.

But in any case, we have these broad strategy documents. We're not very good at analyzing them, conducting annual reviews, looking back at what we got wrong, where we can make adjustments. In the case of the Obama administration, an administration I work for, they waited a considerable amount of time to put out some of these strategy documents in the first place. And so I think this strategy gap, this inability to build in strategic pauses, and part of that is just the complex and hurried pace in which we all live and work, but because of those challenges it's very hard for the two bodies to come together and articulate a joint strategic vision. What is it we're doing today? It was much easier obviously in the Cold War to outline to the American public and the world what our core objective was.

Today we've got things coming at us from literally every corner of the

world. We've got great power politics, non-state actors, rogue states -- the list goes on and on. How do those two organizations come together to think more effectively jointly as part of the USG, which in theory should be going on, but it's remarkable to me how little thought is put into sessions where they both take a breath and think about the over-the-horizon challenges.

Some of this has changed. Susan Rice came in and went forward with some reforms of the National Security Council. They're now able occasionally to have a deputies meeting on long-term trends, which is a good start. But it's only a start and there's lots of things we could be doing more in this regard, whether it's creating strategic risk cells, or again, conducting tabletops together more frequently -- the list goes on and on.

So all in all, I think there is -- again, the next Sec Def no doubt will have a lot to think about in terms of what needs to be done internally and both in regards to how we position ourselves in the world when it comes to U.S. defense policy. But I think we also have to give some thought about the ways in which our interagency is coming together, or failing to come together, and do a much better job in that regard going forward. Thank you.

MS. ABIZAID: Okay.

GENERAL PHILIP BREEDLOVE: Well, I'd just echo what I said yesterday. Thank you to the teams that are putting this on and supporting us. It's been superb and I have learned a lot myself sitting in the audience. So very important work, and I thank you for it.

I really struggled with what I would talk about during this second session, and we have covered over yesterday most of the big issues. So I asked myself, if I had eight to 10 minutes to spend with the next president, what would I tell him or her? And so at the risk of dumbing this down, I chose the topic of talking about what it means to be a commander and what it means to be a commander-in-chief. Neither of our candidates have ever been -- had military experience, and neither have certainly ever commanded anything. And command is different than leading an organization, and command is different than running a business.

And so I thought I would spend my time about that, and I thought of three -- there's a whole host of words you could talk about. There's a whole host of ideas one would want to pass on to someone. I thought it was well said this morning: Imagine never having been a president, all of a sudden you're a president and the weight of that falling on you. And I remember the weight of command when I had my first of eight commands many years ago, that first day of actually being in command and how different I felt as a young officer about the responsibility that I had for the people that were below me.

And so I picked three words out of many to talk about, and I'll really only expand on one. But the three words are: authority, responsibility, and obligation.

And we've talked a little bit about authority and the authority of

command being very different than that of being a leader or a president of an organization. I like some words that have been said in this state before. You become the decider. You have this huge weight of decision and responsibility for decision sitting on you. You can't turn to someone else, except for maybe your father or your mother or someone like that, to really help you at that point, and you have to pull the trigger, so to speak, and move forward.

Responsibility. A lot of people like to use the term "the buck stops here." There is no more ultimate buck-stop than what you have just taken on in your new job. But I like something that a young man that I've -- has worked for me a few times and now he's one of our new chiefs said. I really love the way he describes responsibility and the way he describes his approach to responsibility. You have a team, and that team is given a mission. Sometimes that team is going to do well, and sometimes that team is not going to do well. In his mind, he captured these thoughts: You always have to understand that you share success and that you own failure.

So when your team succeeds, it's about the team succeeding. It's about what you men and women did for your nation and how you pulled it off, maybe in really tough places and under some pretty tough odds. But when we succeed, the team succeeds. When we fail, the failure resides in me. It's my job to organize, train and equip you to prepare you to go do your mission, and if you fail, it's probably because I didn't get it right. And so sharing the success and owning the failure, I think, is a big part of your responsibility.

Obligation I'm going to expand on, but Mr. President or Mrs. President, you have an obligation to your nation, especially in my field, the security of this nation -- to the troops, to the soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines, Coast Guardmen, and civilians who work under your command. You have a huge responsibility.

And then finally, as some of these gentlemen will tell you who've had to deal with this, you have a great responsibility to the mothers, fathers, brothers, sisters, sons and daughters of these men and women who you will command -- not manage, not lead, or not be corporate president for, but you will command them.

So allow me to dwell on just a couple of thoughts when it comes to obligation because I think it's a two-way street. And I want to talk first about a subject we've already hit here, this civ-mil relationship. It is a two-way street. And so first I'd like to talk about the obligation that I think that we, as senior military leaders, have when we deal with our president.

And that is often talked about, and I'll just peel, I think, the most important one off the top, and that is that we owe you, the president of the United States, our very best military advice. Even when we don't think you're going to like what we're about to tell you, or even if we don't expect it to be well received, we're not obligated to tell you something that you're going to always like because then we might go down a road we don't want to be on. We are obligated to tell you what we think is our best military advice.

You have an obligation to listen. You don't have an obligation to agree

with us or choose the way that we advise, but I think you have an obligation to listen because that's why we're here. We spend a long time getting to the point where we're at, and some of us learned a lot along the ways; others stumbled into a bed of roses. But the bottom line is we owe you our best advice, you owe it to us to listen.

And then finally, you need to decide. No decision is a decision. The speed of things that happen in the dangerous world that some of these folks live in sometimes don't allow us the luxury of not deciding or dwelling. And so you have an obligation to decide. No decision is a decision. You have the authority. You own the outcome. You have the responsibility.

Now if I could use a sports tune. I like to use those because it gives me something to dwell on. But I will tell you that command, in my opinion, is a contact sport. Command is a contact sport not done over VTCs very well. It is about making connection with those you command and making connection with the soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines that they command.

Lots of good things when you adopt command as a contact sport, the most important of which has been talked about many times in the last two days, and that is that those you command will get your unmitigated position, hear your words, not filtered words, watch your emotions as you address what it is we're about to do.

So I wanted to talk a little bit about the NSS. It's been talked much about -- the National Security Council. Fourth estate, as I like to talk about, are OSD and others. These things work well in some cases, and they are there for a great reason. And I think it was said by a panelist just hours ago: they work best when they focus on those things presidential; they work poorly when they serve as filters or delaying functions or confusers of an issue.

And so I've served twice where I had routine, almost daily contact with the NSS or NSC, and I lost count of how many DCs, PCs and occasional NSCs I've attended, and some of them were magnificent and some of them, just like you heard about this morning, five minutes into it people were asking, "Why are we here and what are we trying to decide, because we're hopelessly off-track."

So I would offer to you, Mr. or Mrs. President, that these are great tools used well when they're focused on presidential means and when they clarify and bring speed to decision. They are not useful when they filter. We need to hear what you have to say. We need to see the emotion in your eyes when you deliver your message on occasion. You set the way for how we command.

I think it's instructive to think about the chain of command for the individuals here who have served at this level. For me, a combatant commander, the chain of command is really very simple. There's two people. I work directly for the secretary of defense who works directly for the president of the United States. There are a lot of staffs and organizations in between that that help us to make that chain of command work, but when they start placing the blame on people or when you start sharing the success of your people, that chain of command is pretty straight. One dark line straight up to the secretary of defense, one dark line straight to the

president. Mr. President, I need you to occasionally speak very plainly in those dark lines, and that would be very, very helpful.

This morning, a great leader put some words out there that I thought were very good. The NSS needs to be self-limiting. It needs to devolve or push out authority and mission. It needs to monitor, not drive. And I think those are all good things.

I served under some great folks at the NSS, one of them sitting right back there, Ambassador Jeffrey, who led many of the PCs and DCs that I sat in, and it can be done wonderfully. It can also inhibit sometimes.

This morning, one of our speakers -- no, disregard. Yesterday, one of our speakers, I think in a very innocent way, talked about the president and in the sentences -- three sentences, he talked about the president doing something tactical, deciding something tactical, or being involved in something tactical. I couldn't agree more with the speaker we had earlier today. That's not where the president needs to be.

Mr. President, you hire us to do that. We need your strategic decision-making, we need your strategic guidance, and we need you occasionally to help us in big operational thoughts, but we don't need you to help us turn the squad left or right or to turn the F-16 left or right. We got that. We've been doing that for 39, 40 years some of us.

So I would just echo what was said by that great leader earlier today, that we need our president looking and thinking strategically and operationally, and allow those men and women who you have hired to do this to do the operational business.

I had a few others, but I think I'll stop there. I've probably made enough people in the room mad at this point. But we'll get some good questions. But if I had eight to 10 minutes, I think that's the first eight to 10 minutes I'd spend with the next president. (Applause.)

MS. ABIZAID: So let me just pick up on the thread where you left off, General Breedlove, which is -- and Admiral McRaven, you touched on it a little bit yesterday -- which is the tactical versus the strategic, who do you involve in different levels of decision-making, and how do you adjust the -- how do you find the sweet spot between the tactical and the strategic?

We're in an environment now where the United States military is involved in a lot of very tactical engagements that have very strategic consequences. So how do you find the balance in your engagement as a civilian leader with maybe not the same kind of military experience as your colleagues? How do you find the balance in getting the knowledge you need from your senior military commanders, understanding the tactics that they're going to employ, and trying to understand the strategic consequences if things go right, if things go wrong?

I think this is an important challenge for the next president to find the right balance on, and I think it will speak of a level of trust that the next president has

in his or her military commanders.

So maybe I'll dish that one to you, Peter, first to sort of give us your thoughts on how do you best have that conversation about tactics, operations, strategy in civ-mil channels in a way that's productive.

MR. FEAVER: So I think this is the issue that is the underlying thread of civil-military tension over the last several decades because senior military have in their mind an image of what is proper civil-military relations practice. It's a model that is described by Sam Huntington in "Soldier and the State," and it's one that has the president making strategic decisions and then the military implementing those at the operational and tactical level. As one general described it, "The president tells us where he wants to go and leaves the driving up to us."

The challenge is that presidents have not operated according to that model. That may be the best way it should be done in theory; it's not, in fact, how most presidents do. There is not a fixed dividing line, or rather the dividing line is precisely where the president says it is on that issue, and it can change issue to issue, it can change day to day, it can change based on what is on the news. And how much do you think the Bush White House cared about rules governing the way the night-watch guards in Iraq functioned prior to Abu Ghraib? Was that a presidential-level decision? No, it was not. After Abu Ghraib do you think that that was something that the president needed to come to terms with? Absolutely. And so events can change what is a tactical, minor consideration and elevate it to the strategic.

So the answer is the dividing line is wherever the president says it is, and very often the president says it's in a zone that the military would prefer to be delegated to them, but that's not how the president functions.

MS. ABIZAID: Thanks. General Schwartz, do you have any comments on that?

GEN. SCHWARTZ: I would only add, all of you remember the classic picture in the Sit Room on this extraordinary mission that Bill McRaven ran in May of 2011. I ask you to ask yourselves whether that is the correct model for a way the White House should conduct oversight of a military operation -- in real time. Ideally, I think, that is not the model for conducting such missions. Now, there is no question that the reputation of the presidency hung in the balance. I understand the significance. But think about that picture and the message that it sent. Thank you.

MS. ABIZAID: Thanks. Julie?

MS. SMITH: I would just add to Peter's point about the challenge of maintaining strategic attention, I mean, my favorite example was the Kony 2012 video which I've written about, and it really sticks in my mind as a case where you have this viral video -- 75 million views; the entire world is suddenly focused on this indicted war criminal. We were issuing -- we were moving forward with plans. There were efforts made to try and track him down and capture him. It was not being handled at the highest levels, for all the right reasons, and no one felt that it should be.

But after that video went viral and the only thing anyone wanted to talk about, whether it was your family member or your neighbor or somebody else, was Kony -- how are we -- what are we doing to catch Kony? Suddenly we found ourselves in the Situation Room removing another top-order priority, tucking it aside, saying we'll save this for a rainy day, and putting principals' attention on it.

And I think that really captures, regardless of who's in the chair after January 20th, they're going to have to deal with this environment where it becomes almost impossible to maintain strategic attention. You have to try, but you find that the world has surprising ways. And again, with the arrival of social media on the scene and giving the world a front-row seat on some of this stuff, you feel so compelled to constantly respond to whatever is trending on Twitter, and you may try your hardest to say that's not my top strategic priority today, but before you know it, you're walking into the Sit Room saying, "I guess we're going to have that DC now on capturing Kony," and kind of shrugging your shoulders, like here we are -- who thought we'd be here? But we're doing it.

MS. ABIZAID: Absolutely. General Breedlove, do you want to add anything to the conversation?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: No, I would just say to what General Schwartz said, we often, sometimes in the military, lament the ability to see afar like that, and we often talk about be micro-informed but don't micro-manage.

I would say, though, that it is nice sometimes this ability to reach afar because it goes back to what I said in my opening remarks. Although I hated getting up in the middle of the night sometimes and going to DCs and PCs by video teleconference, if the president was going to be there and I had the opportunity to hear my commander's words, it was important to me. As I said before, hearing the way the words are said, the way the words are used, the emotion of the words, you get a lot that sometimes gets filtered when you read records of decision and NSC papers.

MR. FEAVER: Could I just add an anecdote?

MS. ABIZAID: Sure.

MR. FEAVER: In my experience, the micro-management is what happens above me and command oversight is what happens below me. I remember being briefed -- this is 25 years ago -- on the new technology that allowed combatant commanders to maintain situational awareness of red, blue, green in real time, and this was a new technology that they were very proud of that grew out of stuff from the Desert Storm. And I went to the combatant command, and he was showing this off of what he could do sitting in his office. And I was from the NSC. I said, "You know, the Situation Room would love to have that terminal." And he said, "Oh, no, no, no, no, there's absolutely no need for that to be in the Situation Room." And I said, "Well, I'll bet you one day it will be." And I said, "I'll bet you also if I went down to the unit, they would wonder why you needed this terminal in your office." And I never put money on it, but I'm sure I would have won both of those bets.

MS. ABIZAID: I think that's probably right. Just switching gears briefly, because I talked to both General Schwartz and Breedlove about this separately, but I'm curious, gentlemen, about your views on retired military officers and political endorsements, especially when we've seen a lot of discussion about that in the current political environment. You both rose to very senior levels of the military. We've talked a lot here about the civ-mil dynamic and how a perception of senior military officers engaging in political conversations could trickle down into the ranks. I'm curious about your views on whether you think that that's an appropriate role, even in a retired status, and any other thoughts you want to share.

GEN. SCHWARTZ: Bottom line is I think it's awful with a capital "A." Here's the issue, and I'd certainly be interested to hear others' views on this. But the reality is that Phil talked about best military advice. If the senior civilian leadership of the country has any inkling that the military advice that they are receiving is somehow tainted, that it's not authentic, that it's not objective, that it's not given with only the national interest at heart, that there's some self-interest involved, this means, number one, that the senior civilian leadership will not be well served and it will compromise the civ-mil relationship that you refer to, Peter.

And even more important, you all, if we're not careful, what this can lead to is a perception that -- by senior civilian leadership that there are Democratic generals and Republican admirals, and nothing could be worse for the republic. This is why being nonpartisan is vital. And what has happened has set Marty Dempsey off, it's set Mullen off; you can tell it sets me off. This is not what the country -- is in the country's best interest. Somebody wants to jump into the arena, go for it. But if you want to be on the TV screen at the podium in a national convention and have the subtext to your name as general or admiral, retired, that's awful.

GEN. BREEDLOVE: This -- fighter pilots need repetition, so let me just -- (laughter) -- bear with me while I make a small repetition. I will personalize this rather than cast on anyone else because that would probably start some other conversations. But I've chosen to stay completely out of this fray for the following reason, and it is the lattermost for me that General Schwartz talked about.

If we begin to act political, even just after retirement, what then stops an admiral, a general from being chosen because we might rather have that voice in the afterlife than the other? We want admirals and generals chosen because of their skill in leading soldiers, sailors, airmen and Marines, and delivering security to this nation -- not about how they're going to act when they retire. And so I won't speak for anyone else or about anyone else, but my personal decision is I don't want to be a part of influencing any decisions in the future about who's going to command based on their political leanings.

MR. FEAVER: I just want to speak to this. Jim Golby, who's an Army officer but also a scholar, and I have a project looking at exactly this question. We had a survey in the field, or survey questions, I should say, in the field in August, so after the two conventions. And we did a survey experiment priming people with

information about whether they knew that Mike Flynn had endorsed Donald Trump, or John Allen had endorsed Secretary Clinton. And giving them that information did not change the respondents' assessment of which president would be -- they trusted on national security. So it didn't have effect on that. Particularly when we gave both information that John Allen supported one -- so senior military support one, senior military support the other. No effect on assessments of the president.

But a negative effect on assessments of their trust in senior military leaders. So those who were not told about any endorsements had a higher level of trust, expressed a higher level of trust in senior military leaders. Those who were told about both of them, markedly lower levels. Likewise, those who weren't told said they were more likely to say that they would have been proud if their kids joined the military, but those who were told about both endorsements were much less likely to say they were proud of their kids joining the military.

So the net effect of endorsements may not be to change public attitudes of the candidate, but rather to change public attitudes towards the military institution. It's the last institution in which the public has a high degree of trust. I used to say there's two institutions that the public has a high degree of trust in: the military, and anyone know what the other one is?

AUDIENCE MEMBER: The church.

MR. FEAVER: Not the church, the Supreme Court. I don't have to say that anymore. Over the last 10, 15 years, public esteem of the Supreme Court has plummeted because it's viewed as a partisan institution for Democrats, for Republicans, and one confused individual. And that undermined public support for the Supreme Court, and it's a risk for the military institution as well.

MR. SCHWARTZ: A profound risk.

ADMIRAL INMAN: Christine --

MS. ABIZAID: Yes, sir, go ahead.

ADM. INMAN: -- may I have one? This is my point: 34 years, I have never endorsed a political candidate. But it was more aimed at the people who had worked for me, the people who were still in the acting service watching.

GEN. SCHWARTZ: This is -- Admiral, this is something very important. An obligation of those who are in alumni status is not to make the jobs of their successors harder. Believe me, what Allen and Flynn have done has made Joe Dunford's job infinitely harder.

MS. ABIZAID: So I'm cognizant that we're trespassing on the next panel's time, but I do want to open it up to the audience for a couple of questions. So we'll just --

AUDIENCE MEMBER: (Inaudible) a few minutes late.

MS. ABIZAID: Okay, great. So we'll just do a couple of questions. There's a microphone. The gentlemen in the back.

QUESTION: One of the things that's important is looking at the oath that we take. One of the major problems we have with the oath is so frequently as

military commanders, we reenlist our soldiers and we continue to repeat their oath, which is to obey the orders of the president and officers appointed over me. Military officers, civilian employees of the U.S. government take an oath only to the Constitution. And this is where we have major problems.

We have times when -- and I wrote my Army War College paper on this a long time ago. They wouldn't release it because it does have an episode of a president concealing from the United States something that he was doing that he said he was going to do, and he did it deliberately to affect an election.

So that's where, to me, it's the most important part. I'm not going to mention who it was, what it was. But what do you all think about the oath versus of the orders of the president of the United States?

GEN. SCHWARTZ: Listen, we don't swear allegiance to kings, we don't swear allegiance to sovereigns, and we don't even swear allegiance to presidents. We swear allegiance to the Constitution of the United States. It makes us different. (Applause.)

GEN. BREEDLOVE: And I would offer to you that the three gentlemen here, we got plenty of opportunities to enlist officers as well. So we've said that oath many, many times. I would share with you traveling in South America one time at the behest of our country, and it was in an election season that was also a little bit unnerving to some, and I was asked by one of our South American chiefs of defense, "What are you going to do if the wrong president gets elected?" And we had a great discussion this morning of how many times we have had peaceful turnovers here. And I pointed out to this gentleman exactly what was just said. I basically recited the oath to him and I said I swear to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic. And I think it unnerved him a little bit, but it is what makes us so proud and it's also what General Schwartz and others were just talking about a minute ago, which is protecting the sanctity of what we do as senior leaders as we support our nation and our Constitution, not a man or a woman.

MS. ABIZAID: Other questions. The gentleman right here.

QUESTION: First, I just want to say thank you, gentlemen, and thank you all up there for your service. Sean -- I'm an undergraduate student here, IRG program. Being in the military the last 13 years, some of the topics that you talked about are near and dear to me -- everything from service, what's right, what's wrong. But I keep listening about the civilian and military relationship. What do you suggest for us veterans getting out, getting our education? And we're thinking, do I go back into being a policy enforcer or do I go write policy? I see that there's a disconnect. Do you see that? And what do you suggest to us veterans coming back and what can we do to continue our service?

MS. ABIZAID: Julie.

MS. SMITH: That's a -- we need more time, well. I think, look, there's -- I don't -- I wouldn't want to pick either side for you. That's a personal choice and

you'll have to make it. But I would say that there's lots you can do on either side. And the good news is despite all of the warts that we've outlined here this morning, there are a remarkable number of people on the inside that want to make this work and do make it work each and every day, and for every ridiculous example that we can give you, we can give you 10 examples where civilians and military come together in really unexpected ways each and every day and work in the service of this country for a variety of political motives and motivations, and it's remarkable. Particularly the career civil servants who are there regardless of what's happening in the White House.

And so there's a lot you can sign up for. You can help shape policy. You can go back and serve again. The veterans that I knew that had shifted and transitioned -- and Christy will have views on this -- working all -- everyone here will have views on that -- shifting and becoming part of policy, it's -- we need those voices. We need those perspectives. And the civilians can't do their job in many ways, particularly at DOD but really in any agency, without those voices at the table.

And so you'll find yourself in a very welcome environment. There will be some ignorance and some misunderstanding and there's some mistrust and it gets ugly at times, but I think fundamentally in our hearts, we all understand that each side needs each other. And so as you make that choice, know that there's no wrong side to end up on at the end of the day.

GEN. SCHWARTZ: Step up to the plate.

GEN. BREEDLOVE: Amen.

MS. ABIZAID: Had a question back there.

QUESTION: Last question here.

MS. ABIZAID: Yeah.

QUESTION: Hi, my name is Bret Raven (ph) and I'm a government undergraduate here at the University of Texas. But this summer, I had the privilege of attending the Marine Corps Officer Candidate School, and I graduated on August 6th. And General Breedlove, your comments on the success of our decisions having a direct impact on the lives of the people we command really resonated with me because probably the biggest lesson I took away while I was in training is that as a commander, you will fail, and every single day of Officer Candidate School had its own failure, had its own small failure. But what it taught us is that we have to be resilient, we have to pick ourselves up.

So my question for you, all of you, is what advice do you have for a young commander who is going to be faced with a decision that may impact the lives -- or the success of that decision has an impact on the lives of the men and women beneath them?

GEN. BREEDLOVE: So I'll jump on that hand grenade first and then I'll let others finish up. First of all, thank you for your choice to serve, and I wish you God's blessings as you serve in the future. (Applause.)

I have one axiom that I live by, have for the last -- well, I'm not a

general anymore, I'm a mister, so I used to live by this axiom as a senior military officer. And that was: Take care -- and you can insert Marine or whatever you want, but for most of my life it was: Take care of your airmen and they're going to take care of you in the mission. You're a big part of the mission as the commander, but the older you get, the less it's about your part of the mission and the more it's about theirs. Take care of those Marines and they'll take care of you and they'll take care of the mission. (Applause.)

MS. ABIZAID: I think we're going to leave it there. So let me just thank the panel. You guys, we'll have another chance at Julie and Peter, so hold your fire for the next panel. Thank you very much for the conversation. It was really good. (Applause.)

(Whereupon, the panel discussion was concluded.)

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