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**Michael O'Hanlon** Good morning, everyone, and welcome to Brookings. I'm Michael O'Hanlon with the foreign policy program here, along with my colleague Melanie Sisson. We are thrilled to have the chief of staff of the United States Air Force General C.Q. Brown with us today to speak about priorities in American defense planning, the state of the Air Force and the state of the world more generally. It's really a privilege to have the general here. What I'd like to do is just say a couple of words of introduction. Many of you, I'm sure, know him and know of him and his remarkable career. But I'd like to give a proper Brookings welcome, and then I'll ask a few questions, then Melanie will ask a few, and then we'll turn things over to you. We've got up until about 11:15 for this discussion.

General Brown hails from the great state of Texas, he also went to college there at Texas Tech. I believe that's also where a young man named Patrick Mahomes went to college and graduated in 1984 in the ROTC program in civil engineering, has been in the US Air Force ever since, F-16 pilot, 3000 hours of flying, also command positions at the weapons school at Central Command at Pacific Air Forces, prior to becoming the Chief of Staff of the Air Force in the summer of 2020.

There are a couple of other things I really am struck by in his remarkable resume, and one of them is he was a federal fellow at the Institute for Defense Analysis, which is a place I had the privilege of spending a summer one year. They do hard core defense analysis at IDA. And I think it's one of the reasons that in addition to thinking about fancy fighter jets and other things that F-16 pilots often do, that this chief of staff thinks a lot about things like command control, satellite survivability, air base survivability, and some of the nitty gritty that's crucial to how the military functions and how it also deals with the concerns about potential preemptive attack, survivability in high end combat and all the things that we know we have to think about with the national defense strategy of 2022 in this period of peer competition and rivalry with Russia and China.

So with all that said, would you please join me in welcoming General Brown to Brookings. General, thank you for being here. I wanted to begin before we get into some of those technology and innovation and national defense strategy kind of questions with just your take on the state of the Air Force today. And I'm thinking about readiness, the state of recruiting and retention and people, families also combat preparedness in terms of training and mission capable rates. Start with the nitty gritty question on just how are things going at that kind of day-to-day level right now from your vantage point, sir?

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** You know, one of the things I think first of all, thanks again for the opportunity to be here. You know, what I look at is the Air Force is, are, my responsibility to make sure we're as ready as possible. And it's, it's a never-ending aspect of the work I have to do. And so I could never sit, clap at the table and say, okay, we're done being ready. And so from that perspective, what I do see is the from a broader standpoint on capability, I feel pretty confident in the aspect of what we're able to do with the NDAA for the fiscal year 23, as well as appropriations bill to make some progress to make the transition to the future. And so in that aspect, I've been pleased as we start to work with 24, wrapping up the 24 deliberations inside of the building and to preside to the President's budget, I feel pretty good about that one as well, because I think we're making the case of why the Air Force needs to transition.

From a readiness standpoint, you know, there's an area that I do you know, reason why I want to modernize is because, you know, average age of our aircraft is about 30 years old. Most of the aircraft we operate today were around during Desert Shield, Desert Storm when I was a captain. And what we're finding is they're breaking more often, it's taking longer to fix, and it's costing more to maintain those. And so it's that part of the transition. From our people front, when I look at retention, our retention is really about where it was pre-COVID. I mean, there's a little bit of a COVID bump, but we're on average about 90%, both on officer and listed and so from that aspect, I think we still provide great opportunities for those that want to serve.

I think the key part of retention is how we take care of women and families. It's not just what we do, I talk about quality of service and quality of life, quality of service, when our men come to work each day, we provide them all the resources and tools to execute what the nation's asked them to do to the best of our ability. Quality of life is how we take care of them, their families, in their downtime and how we work in our communities. And I have to applaud my wife, Shereen, who started a program with other spouses, it's kind of a grassroots called Five and Thrive, and it's the five key areas that impact military families, not just Air Force families, but military families, childcare, education, housing, health care and spouse employment. And so they've got a small group that's pretty powerful in approaching those areas.

And so and the last one I'll hit on, is on recruiting. I think all the service, as you've all seen, is, are having some challenges in recruiting. We met our goal for, for 2022. We're working towards 2023. And one of the things we did in 2022 is we dipped into our delayed enlistment program, which is kind

of our, our buffer as we go forward in the, what we go, as we go into 23, I think we'll, we'll make our goal on the active side, maybe a little more challenging on the, on, reserve component side because of the retention piece, right. When you retain, they don't affiliate over at the reserve component. So it's a good, you know, two sides of the coin, right? There's some good and bad to that.

But I also think the thing we have to do is how we better connect with those that might aspire to, to serve. The one thing I believe, young people always aspire to be what they see. And as we have gotten smaller, you know, compared to where we were in Desert Shield, Desert Storm, to where we are today, the number of bases we have are smaller, after 911 that, we made it very difficult for people to get on to our bases. You know what I've asked our, our leadership teams to do is open up your bases, get to know, you know, engage with the communities, not just with young people, but with their influencers as well. And then we just got look at some other thing that raises the aspect of do we have any barriers to those that want to serve? And so we're going to look at a number of our different policies that were good, you know, maybe five, ten, 15 years ago. But as we look at today and today's young people, are there are there some things that we need to take a look at? You know, tattoos is one of those you know, you know, a lot more people have tattoos today than when I was growing up.

So we got to think about that when we got to meet some of these young people where they are and and think differently about how we connect with them. And that's a key area we're working on to broaden the perspective and show them the opportunities because there's great opportunities. And the last thing I'll say on this is when I talk to our folks and we also talk about why people leave the military and I asked them that those are around, why did you stay? And for many of us, it's because we love serving. We've had great opportunities. And I can tell you from my own perspective, when I write, read my own biography, I have to pinch myself with all the opportunities I've had. It's almost like a dream because I, it's kind of hard for me to put it into perspective for me, even personally, because the opportunities that the military has provided me.

**Michael O'Hanlon** Thank you. One more follow up on readiness, and then I want to start talking about modernization and national defense strategy. And I realize that there's all sorts of different types of aircraft in the Air Force. There's no single number you could give me for mission capable rates, but in overall terms, have, despite the problem you mentioned of an aging fleet and delayed maintenance, have mission capable rates on balance been improving over this last sort of five year mini defense buildup that we've had, first with President Trump, then with President Biden

and with Congress adding, of course, or don't you necessarily see that progress because the fleet is so old and getting older and we just can't quite keep up with the pace of things. So I know mission capable rates are often individually classified, but if you could give us some overall sense of whether they're getting better, I'd be curious.

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** Well, I think it's pretty balanced. And one of the areas we've also looked at not just on mission capable rates, but we also use the, another metric of aircraft availability because the mission capable rates will be for the aircraft that you have on the ramp. We also want to look at the availability for those that are, because you can think of the whole lifecycle of the aircraft or platform. It's not only what's assigned to the units on the ramp there, but also what's in depot and how long aircraft [inaudible] and aircraft in depot. And all the aircraft is, it's just like your car. You know, the older it is, when you take it to the shop, not only do they find it fix the thing you're looking at, but they also may find something else. And that's the other aspect is you look at aircraft ability.

So I would tell you it's, it's fairly balanced across the board when you look at mission capable rates. But it is a challenge. And what I want to do is, you know, take it off the backs of urban. These are working really hard. They do some amazing things. I'm very, extremely proud of the work that they do on a day-to-day basis to be thought, you know, creative in, you know, one example I use is with adaptive manufacturing to take a look at how do we build parts that, you know, we may have a diminishing supply source and how do we solve some of those problems. And so a lot of hard work, but I'd say it's pretty balanced.

**Michael O'Hanlon** So if I could, I'd like to now get into your priorities as chief for innovation and also the national defense strategy of last fall. And just ask you to begin wherever, Chief, you would like to, in explaining the central thrust of what you're trying to do with the Air Force and how it's going. So you've talked, there's some slogans and some big ideas associated with your tenure as chief. Going back to the Trump era national defense strategy, you talk about accelerate, change or lose. You've talked about concepts like agile combat employment, where you're trying to be able to use more bases in different places to reduce vulnerability or dependency on any one in a place like Okinawa. And of course, there are a number of technologies, hypersonics, AI, all this stuff is in the mix. I'm sure we'll talk about a number of these over the course of the next hour. But if you would just begin, please, with your overall philosophy and what you're trying to do, the biggest idea that you're trying to push in the Air Force and how it's going.

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** I think the biggest thing is accelerate, change, or lose and to be comfortable with make driving change. I really believe that the, you know, having spent quite a bit of time with the United States Central Command at the headquarters at the air operations center in Al Udeid, I just felt as I came into this position that as a 2018 national, National Defense Strategy came out, we were, we need to look at how we stay ahead of where our adversaries are. We are the most respected air force in the world. I want to stay that way. And so the big idea is really how do we make sure that we are doing things based on the threat and, and looking at the threat, look at our capabilities associated with the threat, which means there's areas that we have to make a transition to the future. And that's, that is where the challenge is.

The area that I look at is, you know, for the Air Force, we have more classified programs than, than any other service department the Air Force does. And it's hard to make a transition to let something go, to retire something if you can't see what the future looks like. And so I spend a lot of time engaging with members and their staff to one classified briefings but provide them unclassified talking points associated with we're trying to get done to paint the picture of what our overall capabilities. And so that to me is the, I would say really the big idea, that big idea has not changed since I've come in. I would also say, though, I've got a great partner with Secretary Kendall.

Now, I'm a, I've been an operator in my entire career. I have zero acquisition experience, but I've gotten a gentleman who's written the book on acquisition. Right. And he understands and how he was able to come in with the operational imperatives and between the two of us to be able to drive ourselves as a a department of the Air Force and some key areas to drive capability and then to do the analysis associated with it to make the case that so it's not based just on emotion or it's done on facts and analysis of what it is we need to be able to do to move forward. And that's been helpful to us to make the case for how we need to transition as an air force. I've been very pleased at the fact that we, the two of us, with the rest of the leadership, spent a lot of time diving into the details. And, you know, someone told me one, things that I'm interested in, everybody else is fascinated in. The fact that myself and the secretary spent as much time on some of these areas actually is a forcing function to help us drive the change to where we need to go for the future. So from that aspect, I've been, I've been very pleased, but we've got a long ways to go and we can't rest on our laurels.

**Michael O'Hanlon** So in terms of a long ways to go and all the things you're trying to do, there are a lot of questions I'd like to ask specifically, but maybe a broad way to ask, I'm struck by

your use of the term lose. You know, like there's a real risk of defeat, not to mention of if we fight Russia or China, I would argue we'd already lost just when the war, the very fact of the war beginning and deterrence failing.

But what could make us lose in the greatest probability in your eyes? In other words, is it the vulnerability of key systems that we depend on, the command and control the bases? Or is it not modernizing and becoming more lethal fast enough? I realize you're going to say all the above are important and certainly lethality is crucial, and resilience and survivability are crucial. But if there's one thing that keeps you up at night, is it that we have exposed vulnerable bases and command and control systems that an adversary could be tempted to try to attack, put us on our back long enough to achieve a regional aim? Or is it that we don't have enough high-end combat aircraft or munitions to deliver a lethal punch?

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** You know, I know, I use the term accelerate, change, or lose. But I'll tell you, personal and professionally, I do not play for second place. I don't play to lose. I play to win. And so what I'm trying to do is put, do everything we can across the whole spectrum of not only capability, but capacity to put ourselves in the best position, want to deter because the goal is never go to conflict. But if we do go to conflict, then I want to be in a very good position to operate. And so it's the, I'll just, as I hit maybe a few areas is that the operation [inaudible] actually held a pretty good framework, you know, for, you know, how we look at a resilience based architecture, how we're able to do command and control, whether it's a joint all domain command and control or Advanced Battle Management System, which is the Department of Air Forces contribution to joint all domain command and control. Tracking moving targets at scale, looking at families of systems with crewed and uncrewed platforms with the next generation of dominance. How would we have resilient basing and then how we posture ourselves to with the B-21 as well as how we posture ourselves for conflict.

And so I don't know if there's anyone that would just say this is the one, but I do think we've got to make sure that we're raising all those at the same level. The resilient basing is a, it's something we probably have spent more time on in Europe during the Cold War than now in the Indo Pacific. And I think it's a combination of active and passive systems that play into it, into that resilient basing. That's why agile combat employment is so important for the Air Force to be lighter, leaner, more agile. The more places we operate, the more places that our adversaries need to think about countering us.

And I think it's also the mindset for airmen, that we've gotten used to going to the Middle East, where we have big bases that are already established, and you just show up. We're going to go places potentially in the future where it's you're starting from scratch, and you can't bring everything. But how do you operate in an environment and be able to make decisions about having to call back to, you know, all the way back up to the headquarters? And that, that's what I want to instill in our airmen, that they have the confidence to do the things that the nations asked them to do without having a lot of oversight, you know, provide intent and let them go execute. So it's a really a combination of, of things I would, I would lay out versus just one.

**Michael O'Hanlon** Do you think that in modern warfare, bases can be made inherently survivable or do you feel like the offense just has too much of an advantage and you're essentially doing, you know, damage mitigation with the agile combat employment concept?

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** I think there's a bit of both. I mean, you've got to, you know, the goal here by having agile combat employment is to show that we have a credible combat capability, that we can move around, prove that how we exercise and how we move capability around the world on a day-to-day basis, so you don't get to a conflict. But we also want to make sure we are postured. And so there is the aspect of, you know, when I was much younger, we, we dispersed the aircraft on on bases.

What we're trying to do with agile combat employment is disperse it across bases, so you don't have all your capability on one location but be able to move it around. And we used in the PACAF, Pacific Air Forces hub and spoke process, may have a major hub that has most of your defensive capable, but, you know, you may have six spokes, but only operate at three rotating throughout to keep our adversaries guessing. And so we want to cause there's always gonna be fog and friction in a conflict, but you want to cause even more fog than friction for adversary by by being agile with agile combat employing.

**Michael O'Hanlon** You mentioned JADC2, joint all domain command and control. And I remember just before the COVID shutdown three years ago, we had an event here with with civilian defense scholars, I think Rebecca Grant and Tom Earhart talking about JAD2. And so it was a priority even before you became chief. I wondered if you could, for the general audience, explain a little bit what it is and then tell us how it's going and anything and any key innovations that are related to JAD C2 programmatically that you want to weave into that discussion, I would be curious.



**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** You know, early in the process with the JADC2 there were those that talked about connecting every sensor to every shooter. And I really felt it was more correcting the right sensors to the right shooter at the right time. And JADC2 is, you know, just think about how we operate in our day to day lives when you carry around a smartphone, no matter where you are, you don't care what, you may be paying one telecommunication company to put your cell phone plan. But when you travel around, it connects to whoever. And you can get access to all your data to be able to make decisions or surf the Internet or get to your banking account, whatever. It's the same kind of concept to be able to do that, be able to get the data, put it into a cloud, and then be able to access the data through applications and not do it service by service by service. So we don't have a force kill chain or have a Navy kill chain, a marine Corps kill chain, Army kill chain. It's how do you move that data around to determine who is the best to actually execute against a target or to use that information to be able to make a decision.

The challenge we have as we start this transition is each of the servers that invested in their various command and control systems and how do you then align those. And its goal here is not to, that I have to connect every airplane to every tank, for example, but how do I get my data off my airplanes to an area that if a ground commander or maritime commander needs that information, they can pull it? If we have some level of commonality in how we move data, that is probably the key point. And I will tell you, we are, we are making a lot more progress because I think over, you know, when I first came into this position, it was still kind of a maybe PowerPoint deep, right. We have spent a lot more time with the other services. Back in June, I hosted an event with the other service chiefs to go, okay, let's, let's talk about this because you got to be going on same way, same day. And it wasn't so much what we accomplished in the, you know, 2 to 3 hour meeting we had. It was what it did to energize our staffs to start communicating.

And then I think the last thing I'd say on this is the work that we've done to identify Brigadier-General Luke Cropsey and Dr. Bryan Tipton, to be the acquisition and technical leads to actually bring out their architecture. And the way that Secretary Kendall's described it is we need to build a, a very simple house because we had all these visions of palaces all over the place of what they want to look like. We need to build a very simple house. And what I built on to that is describe once we build that house, then you can customize your house, you know, by adding a pool in the backyard if you want, above and below ground, you want a circular driveway versus a straight driveway. You want a garden

in the back. So we got to build that basic building block. And then from here we can start to expand. And we've got pretty good alignment as we work with the other services to be able to do this.

A key part of this is going to be the space aspect to be able to move the data, which is why the Space Force is so important to be able to lay out that that architecture, because that's about the part where I don't think we really operation we knew we want, but we didn't have the deep thoughts on the architecture, the technical aspects of this. Again, this is where Secretary Kendall with his background, was able to help focus us a bit more, at least in the department of the Air Force and working very closely with the other services and OSD and the Joint Staff to move this along.

**Michael O'Hanlon** So just two more questions for me, and I'll hand off to Melanie. And the first is about munitions. And speaking of things that I know to be important to Secretary Kendall, I've heard him speak on this topic before, and there are times where the U.S. military or the Department of Defense writ large and working with Congress have maybe not prioritized things like munitions enough because we've worried more about the big platforms. Obviously, the Ukraine conflict, as well as the competition with China, have forced us to think a little more about munitions, both in terms of stockpiles and in terms of the supply chain.

So I wondered if you could give us sort of a state of the Air Force snapshot on, on how it's looking on the munitions front. Do we have anything close to the number that we might need for high end conflict. That's question one, part one and then part two, how are we doing at making the supply chain a little more dependable and, and, you know, fixing any of those shortfalls we may have. Right.

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** You know, excuse me, for the, for the Air Force, we are sitting a pretty good spot for most ammunition. I mean, there's a handful the ones that we as you look at, I think about not only capability, but capacity and how you have that balance, because you can have some highly capable weapons that are very expensive, but you may not have the capacity. And that's why this part about JADC2 to be able to do moving target, that skill is really important because otherwise you're going to have a bunch of targets, no munitions or bunch of munitions and no [inaudible] because you came with the information. But we by and large, and then we're doing, you know, deeper dives on these to take a really hard look at where we are from a munitions standpoint. So I feel pretty good. But I know there's, there's a handful, a couple of different munitions without getting the details that we want to make sure we continue to move forward on.

I think COVID has taught us a few things collectively about the supply chains. And, and as I look at the defense and industrial base, there's things that we as a department in OSD has looked at of ensuring that we are postured, and that that's an area I think we will continue to work through to be able to ensure that we have the capacity to move forward. Because if you go to a conflict, then your rate, just like if you go back and look what happened during World War Two, we'll have to and we need to understand that as we go forward. We've talked about how we've been very efficient over the years and in some cases, to be able to move forward, we have to be probably less efficient.

But I think we're also in a different place because of technology where you're able to do with some of the digital engineering type aspects and modular capabilities to be able to, to do things a bit faster. And I've been able chance to visit some of our industry partners to see how they've actually are looking at automation and the ability to build weapons a bit faster than we have in the past. So we were in a decent spot. But what I don't want to do is just in a decent spot, I want to make sure, you know, we have the overwhelming advantage.

**Michael O'Hanlon** Thank you. And now I wanted to for my last question, ask a little bit about sort of a more synthesizing question to ask about time frame for preparing for potential conflict. And again, you and I have both already said today that if the war happens, that's already a failure of deterrence and not the goal. But there have been a lot of people speaking about what timeframe they think a Chinese attack on Taiwan in particular might be the most likely. General Minihan spoke recently to that and suggested 2025. Earlier, Admiral Davidson, the former combatant commander for Indo-Pacific Command, had talked about how he thought Xi Jinping was focused more on 2027. Xi Jinping himself has said he wants a military that's readier more and more capable by 2027, implying that he might want to use it. Other people, I think Secretary Blinken has even weighed in on this topic in the U.S. intelligence community.

So I wanted to ask you from a U.S. Air Force point of view, since your job is to train and prepare the force and therefore, you have to think about the near-term, the medium term and the long term. Do you have a timeframe in mind for when the Chinese threat is the greatest or most acute? And do you think that China is likely to attack Taiwan or is this really is war likely or is it just, you know, something that heaven forbid we have to worry about but really should be able to deter if we get our ducks in a row?

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** Well, let me start off with I can't predict the future, but I can, I can shape it and I shape the future by being ready. And that's, that's where I look at things. I don't see that a conflict is imminent or inevitable, and the goal is to avoid it. And so not knowing when things might occur, my goal is to be ready, you know, today, tomorrow, next week, next year, next decade, and set ourselves as an air force to have the capability, capacity to be able to provide options for the president and to work very closely with our joint teammates and with our allies and partners. And, you know, those that, you know, as you mentioned, there's been speculation, that speculation that, it's not necessarily helpful. I've been disappointed by some of the comments that have been made associated with it, because it takes away from what we're really trying to get to do is to make sure we're going to be ready.

And that's where the real focus is, to be ready and think about it with a sense of urgency. So we don't wake up one day and say, I wish we had done something. We can kind of see maybe some trend line. And so that's that's where I really think about is my responsibilities, you know, less so to try to predict anything. But the goal is to make sure we're as ready as possible, no matter when, and really pay attention to the geostrategic environment as well. So, we, we're doing the right things to be ready and not, you know, as some folks say, you know, fighting the last war, we've got to be thinking about how a conflict might evolve in the future with the changing nature of war and make ourselves ready.

**Michael O'Hanlon** Thank you. Now, in passing the baton to Melanie, let me just say two things about her. She's a, she's, she's a senior fellow, a fellow here at Brookings and a scholar that's achieving amazing things with Barry Blechman, she wrote and co-edited a book called "Military Coercion," which is about the use of US military force since the end of the Cold War, what kinds of deployments and operations are successful for enhancing deterrence and which are less so, and also anybody who hadn't seen her, last Tuesday, House Armed Services Committee testimony, the first big open committee hearing of 118th Congress. I recommend it very highly. It was magnificent testimony. And she made it through four grueling hours of Q&A with almost every single member of the committee present. So, Melanie, over to you.

**Melanie Sisson:** Well, thank you, Mike. That's a very generous introduction. I think I need to bring you around with me everywhere I go from now on. And since you did, I'm going to actually do the reverse and remind the audience that Mike's newest book is available for purchase in the

Brookings Bookstore and is a great, we are told, Valentine's gift, if your special someone is really interested in military history for the modern strategist, it would be the perfect thing. So keep that in mind on your way home. But thank you, Mike and Chief, thanks so much for being here. I really appreciate it.

I wanted to sort of go back up to a big picture question to a certain extent, and it has to do with we hear a lot of buzz words, innovation, modernization, transformation. You've tended to use words like accelerate and transition. And so I'm interested to know if, as you were coming into this role, you had ideas about whether what is really needed is transformation or if it's something that, you know, our foundation, our fundamentals are very solid. And what we need to do is adapt and evolve. If there's a balance between those two, certainly I'd be interested to hear that.

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** I think it's the, the latter. Our foundation is is pretty good, but we just need to figure out how to evolve. And the reason, part of the reason I say that is, you know, from my experience working in combat commands, you know, I was a deputy director of operations in the United States Central Command, Deputy Air Component commander, Air Component commander, then the deputy commander of the command. And I could see that for the combatant commands they live in the now and they don't, they think about the future, but not as much as a service chief. And matter of fact, when I interviewed for this position, I sat down with Secretary Esper. He played me against myself, that I was the air component commander for [inaudible], and I'm going to be the chief of staff of the Air Force. It was an issue. He goes, okay, how would you do this? I said, we need to put all the cards on the table. We need to actually assess how to move forward, which is why I think about it's more of a transition. Because we've got to have capabilities to make sure we're ready today as we transition to the future, which means we can't drop everything and say, hey, we don't need this and move directly to the future and start trying to acquire things.

We've got to make a transition, do it smoothly, which means there's going to be some give and take as as we do that. Also the aspect of accelerate, change, or lose, also know that there's a lot of research involvement that's done outside of the department of defense these days. How do we bring that into the department more smoothly? One of the action— I had four action orders to go with, accelerate, change, or lose— one of those is action order B on bureaucracy. We have a lot of it. And so part of that process is how do we break down some of these barriers? Because I think in some

cases, we have the authority to do things, but we've got a habit pattern of how we operate that we need to break out of and empower those that actually are willing to challenge the status quo.

I mean, that's kind of how I've operated throughout my career. I'm willing to challenge the status quo until, until we come back and go, well, what we're doing is good, but you always want to go back and validate because I really believe the facts and assumptions based on decisions we make all change. And that's why it's really important, I think about the threat and the threat changes as the threat changes, we've also got to be adaptable enough to actually do some change. You know, you can't do big, big swings, but you've got to be able to swing a little bit in one direction or another.

**Melanie Sisson:** And are those areas where you came in thinking that the Air Force really needs to accelerate change, are those things that you saw coming in, what you discovered to be your priority areas once you were in the seat? And are they the same for you now? Have you seen that change over time as well, where you think that that pressing an urgent need for an accelerated transition is.

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** It changed a little bit. I guess the one thing I realized, you know, I had not served in the Pentagon as a general officer last time I served that was, was a colonel. And as an operator, you always want things faster. I probably, my eyes were probably bigger than, you know, by aspiration to be able to go fast was probably bigger than I, but I also knew, as I got mentored by my predecessors, you're gonna have to pick some things that are four-year projects. And this is a cultural shift. And a cultural shift does not happen in a year or two or maybe even four years. But the goal was to set a foundation to start moving forward. And even as I did the action orders, I've done modifications to the action orders because there were some things I knew I wanted to be able to do.

And then as you're, you know, as you lay things out and they meet up with reality, you have to adjust, you know, a couple of examples is from the time I was being told I'd been considered, had my interview with President Trump, two major things happened that I wasn't expecting: COVID, and the death of George Floyd. Okay. And there's and then you can say the invasion of the Ukraine. There's things that happened in your tenure that you got a great plan, and then that was the other thing I'd mention, you can have a great plan, but there's going to be, something's going to happen that you didn't predict that's going to adjust how you're going to go, so it changes maybe the pace, but the intent is still the same.

**Melanie Sisson:** And same question for as you look at the joint force, are there areas that you recognize now that the joint force together needs to accelerate change? Are there particular areas of priority that you've either had identified prior to coming into being chief or that you see much more up close and personal in this role?

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** Well, I think, I think I do think there was the aspect of the joint warfighting concept and that it's really helping us to bring the joint force closer together. And you've got to think about, you know, all the way back to Goldwater-Nichols and were, we weren't so joint. And I think we can always continue to improve our joint operations. I also believe it's not just the joints that combine operations with our allies and partners. Again, this is based on my personal experience because most of my time as a general officer, I've been overseas or serving with allies and partners, commands that were focused overseas. And because of that, I built a lot of relationships and understand the the aspect of being able to work with allies and partners, which is just as important as of working with our joint teammates.

And there is some give and take as you do that. But we're better together than trying to do things separately or saying we're going to go U.S. only or air force only, because we all have different skill sets and expertise that make us an outstanding team. And the joint war funding concept is actually a way for us to coalesce a bit more of that to help look at some of the critical capabilities required for the joint force. And then as we start to resource, how do we determine which of the services takes the lead or how do we share across the services. So we have a range of capabilities to address or operate future operational scenarios.

**Melanie Sisson:** I really appreciated your description in response to Mike's question about JADC2, and in particular because I think you highlighted just how data-centric and demanding that a system like that actually is. Deputy Secretary of Defense Kathleen Hicks has emphasized the importance of data generally in the department's operations, both on the enterprise side of the House and on the mission side. And you also mentioned that you rely a lot on facts and analysis. And so if you can share your assessment of the quality of Air Force data today, if you've seen initiatives undertaken that you think are accelerating change in data in the right direction.

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** Well, we have, a matter of fact, I think COVID also helped us because as we went in to COVID, we were all trying to across the Air Force pull data together to be able to figure out what was going on as we went into the pandemic. And internal to the Pentagon,

they had about 30 different efforts, all decentralized. And what we try to do under the previous vice chief of staff, General Wilson, which is project Brown Heron. Project Brown Heron is really how do we then start to look at our key parts of our data fabric. And we've laid out really six areas where we put our data now. And in fact I have a demo with them later this week. So I think we've made quite a bit of progress in that regard.

I'm doing the same thing for talent management, General [inaudible]. I'm a huge NFL fan. I've been to several facilities; I've watched how they do their player personnel. I want to be able to do the same thing, at least at the general officer level to start, and then be able to go to deeper into the Air Force. And what we're doing is pulling in from existing data sources and having the right people who understand how to do this work with us. And so I do think we're making good progress there in having that. We've got at least, there's a major that's on our staff who's a PhD in data science. I was at the Black Engineer of the Year Awards on Friday, met a young lady who was going to come on the Air Force and whose degree is in data science. And I said, when I was in college, data science was not even a major you could select. That's the part of where we have started, I think, collectively making a shift in the importance of data. And I think we are starting to realize how important that data is.

The other part I'm concerned with that I think about is how much data we're going to have that we may get overwhelmed. And how do you shift, sift through the data to get to the things that you really need to know and not get overwhelmed. And so that's, you know, it's good to have all the data, but now we've got to figure out how to, how to shift through it. And so that, so that you still have a human in the loop who can take some that, has time to do some critical thinking and not have to spend all their time sifting through data.

**Melanie Sisson:** Mm hmm. Well, it's it's really heartening to to hear that there's progress being made. Data work is really hard, which is why we need people getting PhDs in data science and coming in and applying their talents. Another sort of bigger picture, Mike asked about, you know, timelines and Taiwan specifically, what is your view of the role of military force in the US-China relationship broadly, how do you think about what China's ambitions are? Maybe if you have a view of its vision for how it wants to be and behave in the world and, and your perceptions of how they use military force to achieve that and what that means and requires of our military forces in return.

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** Well, there's a couple of things I think through is the, you know, we often talk about the rules-based international order. There's those we've talked about, and I think even



Secretary Austin has mentioned that they're trying to reshape the order into, to their own image or their own liking. I also think about the aspect of the national defense strategy to integrate deterrence. And the PRC is not just looking at things from a military perspective. It is really across the instruments of power. We talk about diplomatic information, military and economic. I do think that for the military, it's a small M, compared to the D, I and E. In the information place, piece, I think another vital point we've got to think about because that changes the perception. Allies and partners or countries in the region, how we, how we all respond to various areas.

From the military piece, I do think about the aspect of us having a combat credible force that sends a message and it can play in the information space, but it helps to back up what we're doing economically as a nation. It also helps to back, and work in support of our diplomats. And, you know, I do think about what we're doing to make sure we have and stay most respect, not just the Air Force, but our joint force as well. And, you know, I do pay attention, of course, to what the PRC is known from a capability standpoint, because I want to make sure we stay ahead of the threat. I can't predict what, you know, the PRC, you know, might do or how they might execute. I just want to make sure that we have all the capabilities, you know, as much as possible to provide the bright options.

**Melanie Sisson:** Thanks. I've got a couple more questions before we turn over to the audience here. But I also want to express some appreciation for the audience members who submit their questions virtually both ahead of time and during the session. I'm going to ask one of those questions from our, from our virtual audience now. And the question is, is what will the future of USAF drone capabilities look like?

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** We're headed down the path to, to have much more capability for uncrewed aircraft. When you look at one of our operation, next generation air dominance, family of systems, we're going down a path of collaborate combat aircraft. In this collaborative combat aircraft is to be able to fly with not just with the, with the end gap, but also looking to see how we could bring with F-35. And so as we look into our future budgets is there's three aspects of this. There's the platform itself, there is the autonomy that goes with it, and then there's how we organize, train and equip to build the organizations to go. And we're trying to do all those in parallel.

So we are thinking through aspects. And as you look at the collaborative combat aircraft, it can be a sensor, it could be a shooter, it could be a jammer. But how does it team with a crewed aircraft? And could you operate it from the back of a KC-46? It will have E7s eventually, could you

operate it from the back of an E-7? Could you operate it from a fighter cockpit? And we're thinking through those aspects. And the other part of that is, it, it saves on a number of, you know, it's, more expensive aircraft you might have, and the actual crew. And so we are really headed down that path. And I think you'll see as we start looking at the, our future budgets and the analysis we're doing as part of the operational imperatives that we are committed to more on crew capability.

**Melanie Sisson:** Okay. Well, I'm going to ask, I think the, the two questions that are on everybody's minds at the moment. The first has to do with your take on the Super Bowl, because you did mention the, you're a big NFL fan. But the second is about the, the events since Friday of objects of some shape and size and origin traversing airspace and being shot down. I will say that I have a 12-year-old son, and this has very much captured his attention and his imagination. He has a lot of curiosities, as I'm sure do a lot of members of the public nationwide. And so I'm hoping that you're able to, to share something about how we reading these accounts in the news can think usefully and productively about what we're seeing and what we should understand about the military response as it happened.

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** Well, for the Superbowl, I was hoping for a good game because the Cowboys weren't in it, I'm a Cowboys fan. The, you know, the events over the, over the past several days and really past couple of weeks, we as a, as a military have the responsibility for homeland defense. And we take that seriously. And, and so the events of, of the high altitude, the very high altitude, the 60,000 feet here that was shot off the coast of South Carolina, I think was a something that got all of our attention as we looked at over the course of the past week or so is the, you know, better scrutiny of our airspace also the adjusting of the radar sensitivities, which means we're seeing more things than we would normally see. But we don't fully appreciate, understand exactly what we're seeing. And so we, you know, as we try to do the recovery efforts for some of the things that we've shot down, we'll know more.

The key part for us is to make sure we are in a position to defend the United States as well as what we do abroad. And as I said, we take that part seriously. My job here is really provide the capability to organize, train and equip, and then in this case and work on General Van Herck at NORTHCOM, NORAD does the operational aspect of the execution, and we want to make sure that he has again, just like anything else we do for any other command, command is ensured that they

have all the capabilities to the best of our ability to do what needs to work the homeland defense aspect.

**Melanie Sisson:** Okay. Thanks very much, Mike. As a moderator, prerogative, I'll give you one last shot to ask a question before we open it up to the audience if you have something.

**Michael O'Hanlon** We'll ask one more thing, which is, General, how do you feel about the trajectory the defense budget is on? Do you feel like we are basically on a good path getting that 3 to 5% real growth that the 2018 National Defense Strategy and the follow-on commission advocated? Do you feel like we're still a little underfunded? How do you look at the overall issue as we're now getting into budget season, it's a warmup question for your capitol hill—

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** I mean, you know, FY 23, we, we you saw what happened there. I can't forecast what's going to happen in 24, but I do see that we, at least for the Air Force, that there are some positive things from a resourcing standpoint. And I would tell you, no matter what the top line is, we've got tough decisions to make, and we've got to make those tough decisions. And one of my responsibilities is to make the case for the resources of the United States Air Force needs in order to be effective member of the joint force. And that's, that's what I'll continue to do. So I feel, I feel pretty positive about the things we're doing. But I also realize that as there's dialogue of this particular Congress of potential funding levels, I would really not like to see a continuing resolution, particularly a yearlong continuing resolution, because all we do is give our adversaries a year to move forward.

We have a number of new starts and in the, the FY 24 budget, and if we go to a continuing resolution, we can't start those. And we just, we just you can't you can't buy back time. And so I do think the current events have actually helped to sharpen our focus on, on our adversaries. February of last year, events of the last week are things that, you know, bring everybody collected together. We got to make sure we're paying attention to what we're doing in, in with our defense budget. How in the aspect of how we spend that money in the defense budget to ensure we have the capabilities that are going to best support. Thank you.

**Melanie Sisson:** All right. Well, thank you for being able to answer not just our questions, but those of our audience as well. We will pass around microphones. If you are called upon to ask a question, you will have one minute to ask your question. At one minute, I will interrupt and move us into the answer part. I would also note that we have talked about the events of the last week, and I'm confident that the chief has shared with us all that he can about those events. So I would encourage

you to think of questions beyond that with this opportunity to, to ask him questions directly. Okay. So let's start with the Air Force federal executive fellow who has done his service here this last year. We're happy to have him. Jason, please.

**Audience Member:** General Brown, thank you for your time. Jason Wolf, Air Force Fellows, my question is we talked about the new technologies on your accelerate, change or lose, as we incorporate A.I. and unmanned systems in the technology, what are the strengths the Air Force can use to recruit and retain the talent in that market space?

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** You know, one of the areas that I am looking at from a talent management standpoint is how do we make sure that those that have these particular skill sets can do and work with control of the Air Force? We have a kind of a what I would say, some traditional paths for individuals, and we have what we call career pyramids that you're probably familiar with, which means these are the squares you've got to fill in order to move up the chain. I want to take a sliver off the side of that and say, you've got some special skills, you don't have to follow the same path. I want to make sure that you continue to have the opportunity to do meaningful work, opportunity to still get promoted and get pay raises. Maybe you don't move. You stay in the same location for a number of years versus our standard 3-to-4-year cycle of movement and allow individuals to progress that way, as well as how do we look at that talent to make better connection to, to industry.

And so as I look at what, for example, our various fellowships or education with industry, we talk about sometimes within our talent management, you know, certain career fields say, well, that's the good deals when you come back, we got a bad deal for you, though. That is a good deal for development, we're gonna make sure we develop that talent and put you in positions where you can continue to build and use that talent. So we're looking at how we do our fellowships, how we do education with industry, but how we have a maybe a different career path, a tech track.

A matter of fact, I just sit down with our personnel team last week. This has been something that I've given them to solve as we move forward, we're also going to do a little bit with some that have very great innovation skills and how do we use some of them across the Air Force as well, and better connect them as well, because we got a lot of innovation going on. But I think it's a, you know, how do you herd all that information and now turn it into a capability? Thanks for the question.

**Melanie Sisson:** Let's see. Let's, let's go over here in the front left just to make sure you have to walk the whole distance of the room.

**Audience Member:** Hi, Brian Everstine of Aviation Week. Good to see you again, General. I was hoping to talk a little bit about ABMS in the context of what we've been seeing lately. Since the beginning of the program, I remember the second on ramp was a NORTHCOM scenario, we've seen the first capability release transition and acquisition program with CBC2, the cloud-based command and control. Can you talk about what the Air Force has learned about its needs for air domain awareness through this ABMS process, how you're getting after it, and how can you ensure that these programs continue, and you look at the long term need instead of necessarily getting distracted by what's been going on the past several days.

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** Well, the key part here is this is why it's you know, Secretary Kendall gave General Cropsey what he says is the toughest job he's ever given anybody. And having sat down we just sat down here last week with Luke and his team. And I'd agree because it is, it's taking all the different capabilities we have and figure out what are the best of breed to build this blueprint of capability that we can move forward. Because we do, as I mentioned just a minute ago, we have a lot of innovation, a lot of work, but are they all contributing to move forward? And that's the part where we're going to have to make some, some tough decisions and be able to take some programs and go, okay, thank you for applying, we're taking you and your money and your capability, but we've got great work we have for you to continue to move this forward. So I feel actually, I personally feel pretty positive based on where we're headed.

It took us a while. Obviously, it took us a while to get here and some experimentation. And that's what the armrests were. They were more experimentation versus how do we turn this into a capability that we're going to scale. So I think we're, we're on the right path now. And I feel a lot more confident because there was a bit of, I would say, in some cases, knocking heads with different perspectives. But we got really cross-functional teams, and this is Air Force and Space Force working together to be able to move forward. So I again, I feel pretty, pretty good about where we are right now.

**Melanie Sisson:** In the middle section with the, the salmon-colored necktie, please.

**Audience Member:** Good morning, General. My name's Major Rudy Novak, I'm Air Force officer as well as a student over at Johns Hopkins SAIS across the street. So in 2015, the DOD

initiated the third offset strategy. My question is, is this initiative dead? Dissolved? Is it evolved or is it still around within the Air Force as the seven operational imperatives?

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** You know, I think it's probably evolved because I don't hear people talking about third offset, except when I get a question like this. But the, the idea of how do we stay ahead of our adversaries and how we do things asymmetrically is the thing I think about. Because if you look at the particularly the PRC, quantity is one thing, quality and how we execute and the value of our airmen and our NCO corps are the things I think about of how that provides a bit of an offset or an asymmetric advantage. And so there is the aspect and also say, just like I highlighted how we better work with, with industry in Silicon Valley, I was in Silicon Valley back in December, I was in Silicon Valley December a year ago. And I will tell you, I felt that this December, the environment changed because it was past February of last year. The markets had changed a bit and there's more of an interest to work with the Department of Defense.

Our job now is not to make it so hard to work with us and to break down the barriers and build really strong relationships because they have an interest in our security just like we do. I think the Export Control Act and the CHIPS Act also were also things that actually helped to sharpen our attention. And so I think there's aspects of the third offset, not initially call it third offset, but the, the approach is, I would say, roughly the same. Taking and using the best of our talent, whether it's in uniform, out of uniform within the government, outside of government, and use that to our advantage for national security. Thanks.

**Melanie Sisson:** All right. Come on over here. Right into the middle section. Sort of a beige jacket.

**Audience Member:** Hi, sir. Thank you. Andy Oare from Shift5. So kind of dovetailing on that question, some great conversation today about the importance of data. How are you considering Secretary Kendall's operational imperatives, in particular OI7, which talks about the readiness and wartime posture to access and in your words, sift through some of that data as it pertains to your weapon systems?

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** You know, I feel, I feel pretty good about it, but I think there's aspects we don't know what we don't know. And, and this is what I mean by that is, you know, how we make this better connection, just, just kind of playing off the last question to those outside of the Air Force that understand how to really operate data. And there's, I mean there's people inside the Air Force

that know how to do this, but not the job to the level that we're probably going to need. Which is a reason why I think about, and I talk about if I think about the Air Force special as we have today, there's some that we have today we probably won't need in the future, and there's probably some that we don't have today that we need more of, like data. And how do you start to build out that career field of those capabilities and say these are valuable to the Air Force and build them into and give them a development path and a career that they can see themselves up to the higher levels.

And so, you know, we've got to be able to, you know, how do we bridge that talent between outside of the Air Force and then also build greater talent internal of the Air Force so we can actually better, better know how to use data? We talk a lot about it, and this is the same thing when we start talking about cyber, probably about 15 years ago, we talked a lot about it, we put it on PowerPoint slides until we actually had to start doing it. And then you start to forget, okay, it's not as simple as a PowerPoint slide and you've got to dive into the details and work through this. I think the same thing as we move into data and there's those that already do it that we can tap into and use their expertise to help teach us how best to do it internal to the Air Force and the Department of Defense.

**Melanie Sisson:** A gentleman here with the yellow lanyard band.

**Audience Member:** Thank you for my, take question. My name is Sangmin, I'm a reporter from Radio Free Asia. I have a question related to North Korea. U.S. and South Korea are focusing on enhancing the effectiveness of U.S. extended deterrence to South Korea in the face of the U.S. and North Korea nuclear threats. In that regard, how U.S. efforts involved with the enhancing the effectiveness of U.S. extend deterrent to South Korea.

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** Well, you, having served in South Korea twice, and understanding how things have evolved over, you know, since I first went there in 1987, the, the aspect of extended deterrence still applies. And you think about what we were able, the strength of the alliance between United States and Republic of Korea and how rock solid that is. But it's also the capabilities that not only that we have on the peninsula, but the key players we have around the world. And when I think about our mission statement, the United States Air Force is to fly, fight and win air power anytime, anywhere. When I talk about anytime, anywhere, we have the capability to have that extended deterrence range around the world to include with the Republic of Korea on the peninsula. And that is all part of what we are able to, particularly with our bomber fleet in particular, is what I'd offer.

And so it's how we work extended deterrence with all the capabilities we have to demonstrate, not just with the, with the Air Force, but with the joint team, but also having watched the Republic of Korea Air Force and its work over the years as well, matter of fact, the, the chief is someone that when I was Kunsan, on as a colonel we were there together at Kunsan, we know each other and a strong relationship not only between our air forces but personally as well.

**Melanie Sisson:** Let's come up here in the front.

**Audience Member:** Peter Semler—.

**Melanie Sisson:** Let's hold on. We'll get you a microphone, please. Thanks.

**Audience Member:** Peter Semler with Capitol Intelligence, BBN. My question is, we know, everybody's noticed this balloon issue has really distracted all public attention from the Russian offensive in Ukraine. Do you think that was intentional or is it a coincidence?

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** I would say probably more a coincidence. I mean, you know, there may be the public attention maybe shifted, our attention hasn't as a department. And so, I mean, we've got to be able to do it for our security, security with our allies and partners. And as I say, we've got to walk and be able to walk and chew gum at the same time and have the capability to be able to do both. And that's, that's what we're doing, is staying focused on, you know, you know, both and really everything else that's going on around the world as well.

**Melanie Sisson:** And the young lady up here in the front, please.

**Audience Member:** Briana Reilly with CQ Roll Call, good to see you again, sir. Base resilience is one of Secretary Kendall's seven operational imperatives. But how do you see the Air Force striking the balance between recapitalizing existing bases and leveraging new investments in sort of this expanded site announcement that we saw in the Philippines recently? I'm just curious sort of what kind of investments are needed to ensure these new sites can be used to their full potential to achieve goals in the region? Thanks.

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** Well, part, part of our resilient basing piece is we think about how we first have some basic capability, how we pre-position, but also how do we assess each of the locations that we might consider and having that access at various locations. And the recent announcement that Philippines provides additional opportunities for access. I just go back to my time as a PACAF commander that those additional ECA sites were actually a conversation even back then, and to see that we are in a position now to move forward provides an opportunity and we, you



know as we start to lay in resources. And so as we lay in our resources, when you look at the operational imperative five and resilient basing, they're not location specific. I mean, there is some location specific type things we want to do, some location agnostic to buy the capability that we could put in various places to go to be able to execute.

**Melanie Sisson:** All right. In the middle section, a gentleman with a blue shirt and I think a blue tie. Yes, you got it.

**Audience Member:** Since we've mentioned Ukraine and there's a lot of talk about improving and upgrading the level of various pieces of equipment we give them. How long does it take to train like a Ukrainian pilot who've used to flying Soviet era stuff and to much more Western aircraft?

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** You know, I have to say, I don't know the answer to that. But I will just tell you this based on how we operate and how we train our, our fighter pilots, we go from one fighter aircraft to another, depending on the, the aircraft. It takes anywhere from two to, 2 to 6 months. And that's, that's typically when we, we have our transition courses from like when we were trying F-4, a number of pilots would come to the F-16, it was about a two to, 2-to-4-month course. And so that's kind of the model that at least the way we operate in term of the United States Air Force. I'll just leave it at that.

**Melanie Sisson:** Another gentleman over here on the edge with a Navy blue jacket and I think a purple tie.

**Audience Member:** Hi sir, Jake Pergande from [inaudible]. Question for you. The Goldwater-Nichols acted as like a forcing function to evolve the military into a joint force. Do you see the services and more importantly, the Air Force being able to do that next evolution that you talk about organically? Or do you see a legislative action force, as like a forcing function to produce that evolution?

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** No, I think there's things we can do organically, but sometimes a little, a little push, every once in a while helps. But the other part, we want to make sure, and this is one of things I've tried to do, and one of the key words I had in accelerate, change or lose is the word collaboration. And that collaboration is my engagement with members of Congress and their staffs so we can talk through things. So you don't necessarily have to have a forcing function and understand what they're looking for, for the Department of Defense to do, they understand what I'm trying to do with the Air Force, and also, it's part of the joint team. And having those conversations because we

don't want is a legislation that makes it really, really hard to actually execute or is broader than we're going to be able to do. And that dialogue, I think, is really important because they get a sense of where I'm sitting, where I'm coming from and vice versa.

And then how do we work more closely together to be able to move things forward with, without, you know, legislation. Now legislation that, you know, I'm not going to tell them exactly what to do, but I'm going to give them some advice. But I also want to get their advice as well. I want to get some things that how they see us and maybe it's just, you know, we're going to be talking past each other until we sit in a room and start having a conversation. And that's to me, is the value of engaging. And I think that's why we are when I think about our, you know, approps. bill in the NDA for 23, because of the engagements I spent a lot of time with, meet with members. Just to me, it's very, very important in their staffs to be able to understand, they understand where we're going and I understand what their concerns are, and we can help work, work this together. And I think that's, that's important.

**Melanie Sisson:** All right. We'll go to the middle section. Navy blue tie, gray jacket.

**Audience Member:** Hey, sir. Major Tony Ferrara, Air Force Fellow at the Center for Security Emerging Technology. I wanted to mention you, so you discussed transitions earlier in relationship to the acquisition of Mission Systems. I'd like to ask you about operational risk. When you consider the role of autonomous systems and CCAs and, and next generation air dominance, how is the Department considering the operational risks to investing in these technologies? Are there roles that we are maybe uncomfortable delegating to this untested technology given we may only have one shot and just one example, as we've heard everything from small and attritable to flying in formation with F-35s, which sound very different in terms of their roles. Thank you, sir.

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** Well, I think it's a range, matter of fact I was sitting down with one of my counterparts and he, we talked about, if you look at a cost, at what point do you say that this is no longer attritable, because you're putting so much capability into it, you're spending so much money, and then you go, okay, that, that's a, you want to get that one back. And so we get really got to think through how we define these. And these are the, right now, these are very broad terms. I think the more we work through the process of developing the capability, but also being pragmatic about how we do this, you don't try to put everything on a collaborative combat aircraft and then now becomes, you know, almost expensive as the crewed aircraft.

So there's a bit of balance of how we, how we go through that. There's got to be some levels of risk. Just think about the how in outside of the Air Force and outside the department, when I go out to Silicon Valley, for example, there's a lot of failure out there, but they're failing forward. And that's the things we're going to have to be able to do to think about, hey, there is some risk there, it may not work exactly, but we're going to learn something with each evolution as we go forward. And I think that's the way we've got to continue to think about how we, particularly with these collaborative combat aircraft.

**Melanie Sisson:** We will do one more. And let's go to the gentleman over here, please.

**Audience Member:** Thank you, Chief, Chad Manske, retired Air Force. Good morning. Thanks for your time. You just recently added a couple of things to your professional development reading list, and I was wondering if you could talk about those and maybe a book or two that you've recently read or dived into and how that impacted you and what we could get out of something like that. Thank you.

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** Well, one of my challenges here is I, I don't get the, I get good recommendations from my, a matter of fact, the guy who does all that sitting right back there in the back. But we talk about the kinds of things that I want to be able to use to connect. And what I've really tried to do with my leadership library versus a reading list is because not everybody takes information the same way, which is why I do books, podcasts and documentaries. And, you know, the, you know, one of the books that we, I think we had on early on that still really resonates with me is "No Rules Rules: The Culture and Reinvention of Netflix," I'm not even sure if that's on the list, is it, it's not, but it probably will be at some point. But, you know, we pick these based on feedback and input from our, our staff. And, you know, my goal was to try to read all of them as I put them on air. And that was pretty aspirational.

But I try to connect to things that our airmen are really interested in and really to be able to take a look at the spectrum of, of topics that go across my action words, you know, A for airmen, B for bureaucracy, you know, C on competition and D on design implementation and how we use those to, to break down barriers. I wish I had my list in front of me so I could actually pick one because I have read a few of them, but I'm trying to think of one that I read here recently. I'm in the middle of the book by Jane McCall on kind of, it's, I can't remember the name of it, but it's really about reimagining the future and how do you look at yourself and put yourself ten years in the future and what would you,

what kind of things would you be thinking about ten years in the future? And you might take a different perspective versus kind of where you sit today, you know, and kind of future casting, where you put yourself in the future and then kind of look, look backwards to where you are today and how do you get to that future version of yourself or whatever the scenario is.

**Melanie Sisson:** And we're currently lobbying for "Military History for the Modern Strategist" to be on the reading list, so stay tuned for that. I can't let you go without asking one more thing. We talk a lot about challenges and impediments and threats and current events and all of those things, but you have a really interesting and important job right now, and I hope that you would be willing to share with us something that's felt like a big win for you, something that's been great about this job, something that you reflect on that exceeded your expectations, anything in that sort of good news category of things?

**Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:** There's a couple, there's a handful of things. The traction with accelerate, change, or lose with our airmen. And when I go out and they talk about the feedback I get from a number of them, how much they appreciate the aspect of trying to drive change, trying to break down bureaucracy, trying to delegate down to the lowest capable and competent level that, like when I get feedback from our airmen. When our members of Congress saying accelerate, change, or lose when I go to testify, that's a, that's a bit of a win because they understand why we need to change. The other things I am, the change in our doctrine, to mission commander. We agreed to that April years ago, almost two years ago.

But just the concept of how do we provide intent to our airmen, how we trust them and how we empower them, and using that as a way to change the culture of the Air Force. Because if we get to a future contention or a conflict, what I really want our airmen to do is be confident that they can make decisions and do things at the lower level without having to come back and ask for permission, because I don't have time to sign permission slips for everything we do. I want to provide intent and let them go execute, and they will probably do more than I ever imagine because I give them the opportunity and they will look at the problem differently than I might. But I've got to give them some, some some guidelines to move for.

I think we've made some progress on, on our diversity, inclusion, equity and accessibility. I chair a diversity inclusion council and it's really trying to break down barriers so every one of our airmen, no matter who they are, can achieve their full potential. I think we made progress on the, on

the NDA in the approps. bill we're going to retire A-10s for the first time it's been something we've been trying to do for a number of years and it's because the environment's changed as well. But it's the fact that I can see that there's a bit of momentum on driving change and how well that's resonate with our airmen and how that is resonating with members on the Hill as well, that to me has been a positive.

The last thing I mean, I'd say on that is I don't care that my name is associated, to be honest with you. I want to do things are going to be enduring well after I'm gone and they can look back and someone, if someone were to look back and go, CQ Brown was part of that, fine. But I just want to make our Air Force as capable as possible and leave it because one day I'm going to retire, and I want to be able to sit back like Chad Manske here and be relaxed because we've got great airmen that are doing great work and I want to make sure that I'm doing everything I can to make them successful.

**Melanie Sisson:** Well, Chief, on behalf of Mike and myself, sincere thanks for coming to share your thoughts, your insight and your experiences with the Brookings audience. This is a really valuable period of time to get to spend with you. So thank you very much and thank you, audience. We hope you'll join another Brookings event soon. Have a wonderful day. Thank you. And don't forget to buy the book.