

General Charles Q. Brown, Jr.
Chief of Staff of the U.S. Air Force

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DWG: This is a Defense Writer's Group conversation with General Charles Q. Brown, Jr. who is the Chief of Staff of the United States Air Force. Sir, it's really an honor to have you with us. I'm going to recognize people to ask you questions basically in the order in which they signed up. We were just joking about how quickly people do that, knowing that that's the system. But I'm going to ask one first question.

When you started as Chief, you wrote a sort of strategic view that the Air Force needs to accelerate change or lose. And you said if it didn't, it would not remain competitive and that the consequences could be profound.

I think I'll just start by asking you, what could those consequences be and what steps have you taken so far in the first, is it six months? As the military leader of the United States Air Force.

General Brown: First of all, thanks, David. I appreciate the opportunity to be back with you and talk a little bit broader than just the Indo-Pacific.

What do I see at risk for us and why I wrote the accelerate change or lose. It really, the first thing I think about is our national security. Aspects of our national security. And when I see our competitors modernizing in advance of their capability and we don't advance at the same pace, the advantage we have starts to erode. So it's aspects of our national security.

I also think about great power competition and when you're competing. You don't want to compete from a disadvantage. You want to compete from a position of advantage.

The other part I think about is our airmen. We have quality airmen and I want them to be able to serve in a force that has a quality of service, that has the right equipment, the right tools for them to be successful. If they find that we are not moving

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fast enough in some cases they may decide to do something else.

So from that aspect, that's why I wrote it. That's what I think is at risk. And what have we done so far?

Part of this is internal to the Air Force and I kind of outlined that in accelerate change or lose. There's some things internal to the Air Force we need to take a look at in our own decision-making process, in our own government structures. So we've actually done a review of our government structures, which we had a number of. My sense is they all thought they were making decisions that may be canceling each other out.

Tied to that is increased dialogue with our major command commanders and an enterprise approach to how we make decisions. With that I want to actually be very open and transparent and engaged with our industry partners, with members of the Office of Secretary of Defense and Members on the Hill early in office. As a matter of fact right now I'm in Grand Forks and I just spent time with Senator Hoeven and Senator Cramer, had dinner last night and half the day today with them just talking about what we're seeing here at Grand Forks, and I want to model that across the other congressional delegations.

I think that dialogue back and forth will be very important for us to be able to come to a situation where we can accelerate change, because I can't do this by myself. I've got to work with OSD, industry and the Hill to move forward.

I think we're making some good in-roads with relationships, and it's about making relationships. We may not see exactly eye to eye but we can actually have a conversation about what is the best approach to ensure our national security so we can accelerate the change and stay ahead of our competitors.

DWG: Gotcha. I'd like to follow up but I'm not going to because there are so many others who want to ask questions.

Scott Maucione of Federal News, if you're on, you're next. And Lee Hudson of Aviation Week, you'll be after that. Scott, are you on?

DWG: I can't believe I was the first to sign up. Thank you for doing this so much, General Brown. I wanted to ask you, you recently have changed some of the standards for women in the way

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that they can wear their hair. The Air Force is trying to be a little more open in the way that it recruits people and retains people. So could you give us an idea of maybe a few of the other things that you're thinking about through personnel? I know that you've changed things throughout the years but is there a preview of some of the issues that you may be thinking about in the future that may help with retention and retainment?

General Brown: Sure. Thanks, Scott.

One of the key areas for us is as senior leaders and really Headquarters Air Force is to listen. And that's an aspect when we did our Race Disparity Review, but the women's hair, I'll share with you, there's a Women's Initiative Team that had a full-out campaign to talk to us about women's hair. And they sent photos, they had endorsement letters from all the levels of chain of command, and we listened. So that's one area.

It's the other aspect of how we now are taking a look at what our Diversity Inclusion Council, at various aspects of how we promote, how we provide opportunity, and how we look at some of the data that we have and some of the positives we have that may restrict or, I wouldn't say restrict. It's more different demographics that are disadvantaged. And how we open up that aperture to see are we opening up opportunities for everybody to make it equitable in their ability to compete for the opportunities I think they all deserve. If you're talented, you should have that opportunity. So there's that aspect.

And as you look deeper into our report, next week is the 60 day after our report was done, and from that we've asked the Air Staff, those that are primarily responsible for each one of the recommendations, is to report back what they found are the root cause, and then identify other areas to move forward on. So it's really how we provide promotion and career opportunities, because we may have some policies in place that actually make it tougher for certain demographics. They can be unbeknownst to us. I mean there may have been something we've had in place for a while and one of the areas, for example, that we're looking at that I've been interested in here recently is those that want to go to pilot training. We have a scoring system that allows if you have private pilot time you can actually boost your score. I did not know that until just a couple of years ago. I did not have any, I had zero private pilot time when I came into the Air Force and I know my parents could not afford to get me private pilot time.

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So there's things like that we need to take a look at. Are we putting certain demographics of our force at a disadvantage unbeknownst because we have a policy that sounds good but doesn't open up the door to give them the full opportunity to reach their full potential.

DWG: General, just to clarify on that report, can you explain that one more time, that's coming out next week? The report is on women's hair, or it's broader personnel issues?

General Brown: It's a Racial Disparity Report we released on 21 December. There's a 60 day piece that we had to come back now and look at some of the root causes, identify those. So those will come back to myself as the Chief of Space Operations and the Secretary, and then every six months we're going to go into a deeper dive to assess where we are as we go forward. So this is a 60-day after the Racial Disparity Review that we finished up in December.

DWG: Thank you very much.

DWG: So Lee Hudson of Aviation Week, you're next. And if you're on, Helene Cooper, then you're after that.

DWG: Thanks for doing this.

My question has to do with Joint All Domain Command and Control. I know in the fall the Air Force and the Army had their staff talk and one of the topics was JADC2 and how the services can work together.

Could you provide detail of what came out of that now that it's been a few months and where you see it going in the next couple of months?

General Brown: Thanks, Lee.

What I see is a level of momentum between not just the Air Force and the Army but the other services as well. And it's also the discussions we've had with the Joint Staff, particularly the J6, Lieutenant General Crall. What the Joint Staff is doing is laying out some level of standards on how we do data and digital architecture that the services all need to line up behind because that's what's going to really empower us to be able to connect like we talk about in JADC2.

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The Air Force has our Advanced Battle Management System which is our Air Force program. The Army has its Project Convergence. The Navy has Project Overmatch. And the Marine Corps has a similar approach. So it's a dialogue we're having. As a matter of fact I just sat down with the Chief of Naval Operations last week to talk a bit more about what they're doing, what we're doing, and either get myself and General McConville, we talk about getting back together because one of the things we talked about was to get together on a regular basis so we could track progress and hold ourselves accountable because invariably, if the senior leaders are getting together asking questions, that's going to help move things along. It's really opening up the dialogue on how we move data. It's really about how we move data and to me that is the key part, and there is a DoD data strategy that all our Chief Data Officers from all the services are coming together. So what we see is a lot more dialogue between the services on data, how we move information and the connectivity in how we have some level of standard so we can all plug in and move the data back and forth very quickly.

DWG: There are a few people who have called in on the phone so I can't tell whether you're on or not so I might be calling out names here of people who aren't actually on.

Helene Cooper of the New York Times, are you on the line?

Failing that I'm going to go to Tara Copp of McClatchy Newspapers.

DWG: Thank you so much for doing this, General Brown.

I wanted to ask you specifically about female minority pilots and just how closely you're looking at the very few members of female minority pilots the Air Force has and if you're thinking about any specific programs to try and build those numbers up. Thank you.

General Brown: Really not only minority women pilots but just really across the board, but this in particular.

One of the things I've always believed is young people only aspire to what they've been exposed to. So one of the areas that we're looking at or actually putting into place is some of our flight academies that approach young people in junior high school

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and high school so they have exposure to the opportunity to go into aviation career fields. That's external to the Air Force before they even come into the Air Force. The other is, those that are in the Air Force we have pilot step programs to help them understand what it takes to apply to go to pilot training.

Then the other part that I'm focused on, I actually spent a couple of Saturdays ago with our A1, our Chief of Personnel and some key folks to look at some of our demographics by career fields and identify some areas where we have quite a bit, in this case I know quite a few, and just minority at large, and I've used this in other forums. About two percent of the pilots in the Air Force right now are African American. That was 30 years ago. The numbers are roughly about the same today and that's got to change. So this is why we look at the criteria to come into pilot training, changing some of our scoring systems to open up the aperture. We can open up the aperture but we also have to have willing candidates as well. One way we get that is to be able to expose them, show them the opportunities that might be available to them. They may not have thought about it. And it's not only them, it's also their influencers. It may be their parents or aunts and uncles and cousins or brother and sister that served. But these are opportunities within our Air Force and do not self-eliminate just because you don't think you're qualified. That's another area as well that I want to focus on.

So there's different initiatives that were working through, but it's going to take a concerted effort on our part, my part in particular as the Chief of Staff, but I think it's something that's in the realm of the possible and it's got to be something that we just don't do for a little while. It's got to be something that we make part of the way we do business across the Air Force.

DWG: Thank you. And just a quick follow-up. I know the Air Force has looked previously at the rates of failure in initial flight training and I was wondering if you're using this as kind of a scrubbing, a review of the initial flight training washout rate is still needed to see if there were any systemic issues or biases that might have played a role in having so few female minority pilots. Thank you.

General Brown: We are looking at that as well, and looking at - I think of them assessing their training, and so our training in the past was more focused on meeting a timeline. Now we're a bit

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more focused on ensuring our pilot training trainees actually learn differently from when I went through. So for example, if you go very [well], you would sit down for a period of time for the rest of the pack to catch up. We're changing that approach and making it more student focused and so if they're motivated they could actually accelerate their training as well. So it's really opening up the aperture and assessing those areas of how our airmen learn differently from the way I grew up and some of us that are more senior, and changing our approach. That way we can understand what that wash-out rate is, and if we have a different approach, you know, more of a visual learner versus a hands-on learner, what approaches we can take to look at that wash out rate.

But it's also the assessment before we get there, and that's part of - I think there's other ways to assess now, particularly when you look at the video gaming industry and the tools that they - the hand/eye coordination that's key to flying an airplane. There's other ways to assess folks before they come to pilot training as well, for the initial flight training.

DWG: Caitlin Kenney of Stars and Stripes, if you have a question you're next. And then Todd South will be next after you.

Todd South of Air Force Times? Are you on?

Ellen Mitchell of The Hill?

Valerie Insinna of Defense News?

DWG: I am on, thank you so much for doing this, General Brown.

I wanted to ask about F-16s. In an interview with Aviation Week a couple of weeks ago Dr. Roper mentioned that the Air Force was considering buying additional F-16s. I was wondering more generally the Air Force's thinking about balancing F-35, F-15EX, maybe F-16, maybe NGAD, and when might we see some decisions on what the Air Force's future TacAir mix is going to look like. Thanks.

General Brown: Thanks, Valerie.

One of the areas we're pushing to is a TacAir study for the United States Air Force, to look at what is the right force mix. Because I think there is a need for 5th Gen capability, there's

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need for NGAD and that particular capability to remain competitive against our adversaries. Then there's other, for lower end - there's a high end fight, there's also a mix for a low end fight. I don't know actually it would be F-16s. Actually I want to be able to build something new and different that's not the F-16 that has some of those capabilities but gets there faster using a digital approach, whatever comes next. I realize that folks are going allude that it will be a particular airplane but I'm open to looking at other platforms to see what that right force mix is.

That TacAir mix has to do some analysis to show what is the right mix not only in capability but also in numbers to assure we are going to be successful in future conflicts. That requires some modeling and simulation and analysis and that's what I plan to do here over the next, over the upcoming months to get there.

And as we really get into FY23 and the budget for FY23, that's where I see that we'll really make some key decisions. Realizing I can make recommendations. I don't actually have the final vote because again, I have to work with OSD and with the Congress. But that's why the analysis to me is important and the dialogue is important going forward so we can actually have a good conversation about what is that right mix force and have a good understanding of shared understanding with some other key stakeholders.

DWG: Dmitry Kirsanov of TASS?

DWG: Good afternoon, General and thank you so very much for doing this.

I wanted to ask you about Open Skies Treaty. With the new U.S. administration in place is there a chance that we are going to see the United States coming back with a treaty? What do you personally advocate?

And secondly, sir, very quickly if I may. On the B-1B deployment to Norway. Are we going to see any more missions like that in the future or it's a one-off event?

General Brown: Thanks Dmitry. I'll probably have to defer to the administration on their approach on Open Skies. There is value in the Open Skies, in the ability for both nations to be open and transparent, so I'll wait for guidance from the

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administration when they ask for my assessment.

On the B-1, we are actually, that's the capability of global air power and the B-1 and our Bomber Task Force and the ability to operate from and be prepared to go any place, anywhere, any time. And what I would tell you is you can expect that we will operate our bombers anywhere any time, any place. So will it happen again in Norway? Probably a good chance. When? It could happen at any time. And so from that perspective, this is all about competition. And if I told you exactly when it was going to happen, I'm not going to be competing because you guys would report it, when it's going to come. What we try to do is keep our adversaries guessing. I want to make sure the chess pieces are moving on a regular basis and they're not what I would say super glued to the chess board so that we're very predictable. That's the beauty of air power. The ability to actually go any place, any time, anywhere. You can expect you'll see more bombers flying around the world to do exactly that.

DWG: Thank you, sir.

DWG: Mandy Mayfield of National Defense Magazine; and Ellen Milhiser, you're after that.

DWG: Thanks for doing this, General. I wanted to ask a follow-up to the new air study that you were just speaking about to determine that right mix of aircraft for the service.

Just to be clear, you're saying that the service, or you plan on conducting that study over the next couple of months. Can you give any more details about what that will look like?

General Brown: What I want to do is not just with the Air Force, it's with CAPE to do the analysis. Naturally if I just do the Air Force study it's just an Air Force study, but if we do it with CAPE we also get the perspective as we work with OSD. So I'm not sure it will be done in the next couple of months because there's work to be done. In the upcoming months as we start to build FY23, this will help inform the decisions that I think I need to make internal to the Air Force and what I would recommend on what that force mix might be.

I will also tell you, I don't think that everybody's going to exactly agree with what I say. But I want to actually have a starting point as a point of departure and a point of dialogue on

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what is that best force mix. Then if we decide to go down a different path, there's a little bit of risk associated with that. My job then is to articulate what I think that risk might be with a different approach.

So that's kind of where I'm headed on this. We've talked about doing this in the past. We've done aspects of it. I've seen it earlier in my career. We haven't done it recently. And then the one other part I would add to this is, we have a very, the average age of our fighter fleet right now is about 28 years. That's not going to compete well against our adversaries and this is why we need to modernize and this is why this force mix study is going to be important, so we can actually bring down the average age and then have something that's going to be relevant not just today but well into the future.

DWG: Ellen Milhiser of Synopsis, if you have a question now's the time.

DWG: Good afternoon, sir. Thank you for doing this.

I was wondering if -- this morning Pentagon witnesses before the House Armed Services Committee indicated that about a third of service members refused the COVID-19 vaccine. I was wondering if y'all are finding that to hold true within the Air Force and if you track refusals, and if you do anything to try to convince people who initially refused to get the vaccine.

General Brown: We're not right now tracking, but I do know that some of our airmen have declined for the moment. As a matter of fact I had a conversation with some airmen here at Grand Forks today. I said you don't need to tell me whether you're taking it or not, that's your decision, but I just want to get the atmospheric. And what I sense right now is there are some that are waiting to see what side effects folks are having, or what the results of the, as others get the vaccination. I've heard anecdotal stories of airmen have declined and after they have some of their friends take the vaccine and have minimal to no side effects, then they change their mind. So the more information we get out about the vaccine itself, the reaction to the vaccine, and then the further we can go.

The other part, and I'll just share this with you. We may be seeing this outside the military as well. The comment is, if I take the vaccine I've still got to wear a mask. And part of this

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is the reason why we're taking the vaccine is so that all of us can get out of wearing a mask much faster. So part of it's an education piece as well. It's got to be more than just airmen talking to airmen.

For example, we just did a short video from our Surgeon General community that was sent out to our wings to help broader educate our airmen about the vaccine and the benefits of the vaccine in the long run. So part of it is the continuous dialogue. And those of us who get the vaccine, I've already had my first job. As a matter of fact I get the second one on Friday. Is me talking about the fact that I've had both shots and how it impacted me. And the more we do that I think the more we'll get airmen and the general populace to take the vaccine.

DWG: Dan Sagilan of PBS News Hour, and Michael Gordon after that.

DWG: Thanks. The number of sexual assaults in the Air Force has more than doubled in the last ten years, from 624 in 2008 to 1,600 in 2019. All the services have seen increases like this. Is this a success or is this a failure?

And for years, some Members of Congress have been advocating taking the commanders out of the chain of command in dealing with felony crimes. Do you have a view on this?

General Brown: Dan, I take it, it's a double-edged coin. You can talk about success because there's more reports, but it's a failure because we still have a high number of reports. So that's my concern. That is not the environment that allows our airmen to reach their full potential. So it's something we've got to continue to work on.

I realize that as you mentioned the Members of Congress have an opinion on this and taking certain felonies out of the chain of command. This has been an ongoing dialogue. I do think as we pull forward on this because I see kind of where the trend line is going. There is potential that it could be taken out of the chain of command. I think part of this discussion needs to be the best approach going forward that does the best for not just our airmen but for all of our service members so they get - we go through the right process to ensure we hold those accountable that commit a sexual assault or a felony, at the same time supporting the service member that is the victim. So from that

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perspective, I wouldn't tell you one way or another. I like having it in the chain of command ideally, but I also realize that part of the discussion, and we have not made progress - we can't do the same thing and expect a different result which means I'm open to actually having a conversation of what are the other ways we might do this going forward.

It's kind of a round-about answer, but it's a double-edged coin, as I said, a double-sided coin that makes it a bit more challenging versus - is a different approach going to make it better? That's what I want to make sure of as well. We want to make it better, whatever approach we take.

DWG: The number of retaliations has gone up and up and up and up. So if it's a good thing that more and more people are reporting it, then how do you explain the number of retaliations going up?

General Brown: I'll have to get some more information on that one, on retaliations. I'm not tracking the number of - I realize the reports are going up, but the retaliations, I don't know that I've seen that data to say retaliations are going up to verify that.

DWG: Michael Gordon of the Wall Street Journal, and then John Tirpak.

DWG: General, you discussed the Tactical Air Study that you're commissioning in conjunction with CAPE and Secretary Austin also has his Global Force Posture Review which I guess will determine some fundamental questions about where assets need to be.

What is the interrelationship between these two efforts, if there is one? Don't you need to get the sense from the Defense Secretary where the forces are to inform your Tactical Air Study? How does that work?

General Brown: Right now, Michael, I wouldn't say they're aligned. This is something I've talked about before the current Secretary came in with CAPE and the previous SecDef, that we needed to do this.

So I think the Global Posture Review will help inform and vice versa. So I need to understand really where the administration is and where the department is and where the Secretary is on

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Global Posture Review which will help inform the TacAir Study. Ideally, the timeline that he's on and the timeline that I'm able to align this, but I think the dialogue back and forth between the two will help shape the Global Posture Review, at the same time the Global Posture Review will help shape our TacAir Study based on the way the priorities of the department are laid out.

I don't want to do my TacAir Study in a vacuum and not listening to the other things that are happening inside the department. That would be naïve of me to do that, so I've got to have that dialogue and help inform, or at least talk about what the risk is between the two. If there's a difference in the Global Posture, and realizing that I make a recommendation with the Secretary and the Secretary takes that to the President. I think that dialogue's going to be important as we do this.

DWG: I'd like to ask one quick follow-up. For the longest time as you know far better than I, the Air Force would talk about the requirement for 386 squadrons and reporters like myself would say to General Goldfein, well, you're never going to have that. He said look we just tell them what we need. Congress will decide what we can afford.

You obviously have a more nuanced view since then and you've talked about building capability that would approach that.

But what does that really mean? What kind of concrete metric are you using for sizing the Air Force and making these decisions about these tradeoffs between capacity and capability if you're not going to use a specific number that most people have long assumed will never be realized.

General Brown: I go back to the 386 was in answer to a question, what do we need, and it's what General Goldfein described.

This is where I really look at the analysis of the right force mix and being able to use modeling and simulation to look at what is the right force mix to get those capabilities.

For example, if my programmer comes to me and says here's the number of airplanes we're going to buy, the question I have for them is, for that number of airplanes what capability does that provide me? You can get to a green eyeshade number of airplanes for a certain cost. So I can buy a lot of a certain type of airplane but not have the capability required. So I've got to

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understand that. And that's to me why I say if I don't get the 386 I've got to have the maximum capability for the dollars that we put against it. Otherwise I can just buy a lot of things and not be very capable. So I want to get as close as I can to 386 capability with the force size that I have with the dollars that we have available and make that case. That requires a level of analysis. Not just opinion. It's got to be analysis.

I have a degree in engineering so I'm all about numbers and facts. That's the way I approach things and that's what I expect from our Air Staff and that's what I'm holding them accountable to. You just can't come and give me your emotion, you've got to bring me the facts in order to convince me. Because I'm going to carry it forward to the department and over to the Hill.

DWG: John Tirpak of Air Force Magazine, and then [Gayat Reem].

DWG: Good afternoon, General. Thanks very much.

I've watched almost every media engagement you've done since becoming Chief and what I seem to hear from you a lot is that the MAJCOMs and the Air Staff are giving you a lot of pushback and also from the COCOMs on your divestiture plans. I hear a lot of frustration from you about that. Have you straightened out the MAJCOMs about who's the Chief? And can you also talk to us about what's in the Force We Need Implementation Plan that's going to Congress in the near future?

General Brown: John, I'm not seeing that pushback, and you may be talking to some folks I'm not talking to. I've talked to the MAJCOM commanders and they're on board. Now there may be pockets at lower levels of their staffs that are involved with a particular platform, a capability that they don't want to retire because that's what they grew up in.

I think the MAJCOM commanders understand I'm the Chief. And they understand that I'm going to do [inaudible] level decisions and we're already having those conversations because I'm already making some decisions. But I told them they're not going to be popular. If I don't do that, we don't accelerate change.

I'm not shy about that. There are going to be some folks who don't like me or don't like what I decide, but I want to move forward with what I think is best for the Air Force. That's why I think we're having I think with the MAJCOM commanders some good

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dialogue as we go forward.

Now for the combatant commanders, they have a different perspective because their time horizon is much different than mine. They're worried about the next two to three years. I'm worried about the next two to three years but I'm also worried about the next 10 to 15 to 20 years. And this is why I say we've got to balance risk over time.

I should not own all of the risk. So from a readiness standpoint it's got to be shared risk between the combatant commands and the services. That's the bow line we've got to have. And I'm happy to have the dialogue. Actually, I know all of them and served with most of them. Some of them very closely. And they may have a different opinion but it's not just what we do for this particular command. I'm thinking about the combatant commanders that are three to four to five down the line. But we want to set them up for success just like we're setting up these combatant commanders for success. So that's why that dialogue has got to happen. And again, we're not always going to agree but we've actually got to get to a spot where we don't put everything at risk into the future while we're trying to burn down risk today. So there's going to be risk across the board. That's the way I look at it.

DWG: Is that Force We Need Plan going to be on time? And can you share with us what might be different from the last iteration?

General Brown: My guys are working through aspects of this right now and I don't have details I can share with you right now on where those are. But what I will share with you is, as I look across the Air Force what we try to do is because of the way we have done things in the past, and not to disparage my predecessors, but just the way I've watched the Air Force over the years, we've kind of built from the bottom up with the MAJCOMs and they're trying to do the best they can within their portfolio. What we've got to do is actually look across those portfolios a little bit better and some top-down direction from myself and the MAJCOM commanders of how do we - we can't gold plate everything. So I can have a number of things that are half gold plated so I can figure out what are the things that actually have to have the right capabilities. That's what I'm focused on. Which then means you're going to have to make some tough choices going forward. Those tough choices are the choices we're making

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for the Air Force. At the same time I've got to talk to OSD and congressional members that may have a different opinion. So that's what I would tell you where we're headed on some of these, where we've got to make some tough calls. And if you decide not to make that tough call, it's going to impact our capability in the future and I've got to be able to communicate that.

DWG: [Gayat Reem] of FlightGlobal and then Marcus Weisgerber of Defense One.

DWG: Thank you, General.

My question, just to follow up on this conversation around potentially buying more F-16s or something else. The something else sounds like, and maybe I misunderstood, you're talking about a clean sheet design. Should we be thinking about this as like a clean sheet 4th generation type fighter aircraft? I'm trying to better understand what you meant by that.

General Brown: I want to entertain a clean sheet design of something that's not necessarily 4th Gen but may not necessarily be complete 5th Gen either. You've also got to take a look at there's some other low-end type things that aren't the high end fight and we need to have the right force mix. This is why I want to do a TacAir Study. So at lower end, 4.5 or 5th Gen minus, what capability do I need? Then how many of them do I need? And if I can do a clean sheet that would actually be a jump in technology and realize the first time the F-16 flew was in the mid '70s. The software, if we're going to do software defined and we have the capability to do something even more capable for cheaper and faster, why not just buy something off the shelf? Let's actually take a look at is there something else out there that we can build? That's what we learned with our E-Series approach with the T-7. What we learned with NGAD.

So the question is what is the son of NGAD? Does it have to be a kind of full-up 6th Gen capability? Or can it be something we can build from the same approach using digital engineering and provide something that is capable, that doesn't necessarily have to be an F-16 or something [inaudible].

DWG: Briefly, what sort of improvement could you get that you wouldn't be able to get on an F-16?

General Brown: Open mission systems. Being able - if I can

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actually have additional computing power and I can update code very quickly. So having flown the F-16, and you wait for an OFP. I forget what the acronym stands for. Operational Flight Profile I believe is what it stands for. We have to wait for those and it's every couple of years.

I was just at [Kessler One] yesterday and they said instead of waiting a year and a half, you could do this within a matter of minutes by updating the code on the airplane and particularly if you saw a new threat, versus the way we've done things in the past. You don't have that in the F-16 today. You don't have that in a number of our aircraft today. That's where we need to go. So you're using software to change our approaches and stay one step ahead of our adversary. Even if the airplane isn't changed, the airplane actually changes because you're able to push more information through it, change how it reacts to threats. That's the aspect that we don't have today in an F-16, for example.

DWG: Marcus Weisgerber followed by Bryan Bender.

DWG: Thanks for taking my question.

General, Will Roper before he left, he expressed some concern about consolidation within the defense industry, and I was wondering from a military perspective, as the person in charge of all the airmen using a lot of these weapons that are made, are there similar views being shared about consolidation within the defense industry by the military leadership? And I ask this largely because there's this pending Lockheed buy of Aerojet which makes a number of the weapons that you use on your aircraft.

General Brown: There is an increase in numbers of defense contractors. There is some concern that we want to make sure that they are all sustainable and survivable over time and we don't have, you know, we get down to one or two and then that's all we have. And so that's one.

But if you go back to the previous question about open mission systems, if you're able to say it's going to be a black box this size, anybody can write the software for it, that is a way to actually open up a bit of the competition and look at other ways we can bring in capability and be modular in approach.

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Those are the areas that I think will be important. It may not be a traditional defense contractor that does it, but it's someone who actually knows how to write code for certain things that can actually, with all the computing power, bring some capability to a platform. It drives competition and that competition I think is important. Not only the great power competition I talked about earlier, but the competition internal because we've all seen it. It helps drive the price down, it helps bring the capability faster. And that's accelerate change or lose. That's what it's all about. That competition - it's not only against our adversaries, it's internal for us as a nation that we actually have our defense industry working with some non-traditional partners. And that's the thing that Dr. Roper was able to do. It opens our eyes a bit more on how we might approach things in the future.

DWG: Bryan Bender, Politico. Then it will be Kim Underwood of SIGNAL Magazine.

DWG: Thanks, General.

Two questions. As you know, Secretary Austin has recently announced a force-wide stand-down for commanders to address this issue of extremism in the ranks, trying to get at this potential problem of white nationalism and other racially motivated ideology that might be seeping into the force.

I'm curious if you can give us a sense of sort of your thoughts on how much of a problem this might be. I know that part of this is gathering the data, but your sense as a senior officer, how much of a problem this might be.

Also the second problem would be how do you think the military can go about rooting this out but not overreaching and making it a witch hunt, if that makes sense, where political views get sort of melded together with extremist behavior. Thank you.

General Brown: I wish I had an easy answer. I don't know how big it is, I'll just be honest with you. I sense it's fairly small, but I don't know what I don't know. I think the events here earlier this year kind of highlighted to us there's probably some blind spots that we all have on where this is. So from that aspect, I don't know what it is.

I know some of this, just based on the analysis, I would say it's

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not really analysis. The results after, information that we're seeing after 6 January. But I'll also tell you that the DoD Diversity Inclusion Task Force that was led by Secretary Barrett before she departed, and that report came out on roughly 15 December. There were 15 recommendations. The last two of those recommendations were on extremism.

So we already as a department, we knew there was an issue but I don't know that we fully understand the extent.

Now how do we actually approach this so we don't make this - how do we root it out or don't make it a witch hunt?

The first thing I'm focused on is what it is to be an airman and the oath that we all took, and really our core values. From those core values and the oath we took, that's what right looks like. And I will tell you the majority of our airmen live and breathe the oath that they took and our core values. And there's a smaller percentage that in some cases fall short.

What I want to do is emphasize the good things about our Air Force. At the same time we also need to understand things are probably not conducive and aligned with those core values. That's the approach I want to take, so you're not really, we're not making it a witch hunt but you can figure out that one of these things may not be like the other and we don't fully understand that. And what I've told our commanders, I've talked to the MAJCOM commanders. For some of these it will be a gray area and we don't really, how do you balance this? We don't have all the answers on this right now, so that's part of this stand-down and review and the conversations that our airmen will have and the feedback we'll get from them and the approaches we need to take not only as a service but also as a department on how we approach this and how you define it because that's been part of the conversation. Where does the line get drawn on the definition. And many of us, we all have different opinions about this and this is part of the work we will do with the stand-down and as we go forward I know internal to the Air Force and I would expect the same across the department.

DWG: Kim Underwood and Riota Day will be next.

DWG: Thank you for your time today, sir.

Could you give us an update please of the roll-out of F-35 to

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Europe, to RAF Lakenheath? When is this happening in '21? I think that's FY21. I don't know if it's calendar '21. And kind of what sort of preparations on the U.S. side does the Air Force provide as far as infrastructure and combined training? I know obviously the ties with RAF there are very strong, but how do you handle that?

General Brown: A lot of that goes into planning that we've been doing over the course of the past several years as we look at a bed down of new platforms. Because it's an overseas location it's really working, again, working with our partnership in overseas locations on the construction, if there's additional MilCon that's required, and training airspace, and the like. Because the UK and the Royal Air Force already has F-35s - a number of our partners in Europe already had F-35s - we've got a pretty good foundation.

One of the things that General Harrigian, the Commander of USAFE, AFAFRICA, he has an F-35 User's Group that meets on a regular basis to talk about all our F-35 partners there in Europe and we're doing the same thing in PACAF. So the dialogue with our partners there on how best to be able to train together on the F-35 and what we've learned from each other as we operate the F-35.

So that's where we're headed. I think we're on a good path. I haven't heard anything that says we're not. I'm optimistic that as you bring that capability in - our partners are already operating it and they're actually a little further ahead of us operating in Europe than we are, and there's some good things that we've learned from them as they've actually operated there in Europe.

DWG: Riota Day of Gigi Press, then Frank Wolf.

Hearing none, Frank Wolf of Defense Daily.

All right, Theresa Hitchens of Breaking Defense.

DWG: Thank you, General Brown, for doing this today.

My question is about the Joint Warfighting Concept that's supposed to come out here I guess at the end of February and the question of long-range fired. It seems to be one of the areas where we really need to do some service deconfliction and you have even raised the idea of a roles and missions look at that

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issue.

Six months in, do you still feel that way? What do you feel needs to be done? Have you had a conversation with the Army, with your Army counterpart General McConville about this like you've had a conversation about JADC2?

General Brown: I think there's -- I wouldn't necessarily go through a complete roles and missions but I do think as we go into the Joint Warfighting Concept and we look at gaps, seams and overages of capability, this is where the discussion has to occur on aspects of roles and missions. So having watched the services go through a full roles and missions commission and open up and go all the way back to the Key West Agreement, I don't think that's what we need to do.

What we do need to look at is as we go look at the Joint Warfighting Concept where we have those gaps, seams or overages. I have talked to General McConville about this. We both provide that capability, as well as the other services. And this is why I think we've really got to, as you go through the Joint Warfighting Concept, is not only looking at offensive capability but also look at our defensive capability, look at our logistics, look at our command and control to see where we have some disconnects. I believe the Joint Warfighting Concept as you go through this process will help identify where we need to put more focus on.

Ideally, as the way that General Hyten's trying to use the JROC, the faster JROC validates what the services are doing as joint, would I expect to see talking to him, the JROC will be a little bit more directive on things that we need to do to ensure we have joint capability going forward. So that's what I see happening. I think there will be an ongoing dialogue between the services on this as well and with the Joint Staff and the JROC.

DWG: So just to follow up, do you see the JROC playing a role in adjudicating those specific area, roles and missions questions? How do you see that process working?

General Brown: I think there's going to have to be something other than the JROC here. It will have to be a bit more with OSD on having to open up the conversation on roles and missions. I think the JROC will help inform because it will help us define where those gaps, seams and overages might be. And then one way

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that OSD actually determines how it works out is when each of the services submits their budget and there's a give and take between the services, and that's a way that they can also be influenced. But I do think particularly as we have this new team under Secretary Austin's leadership and DepSecretary Hicks, I think these are conversations we need to have as we go forward and we look at the Joint Warfighting Concept as one way to inform where we as a department need to head. Not just on long range fires, but the other capabilities as well.

DWG: Tony Capaccio of Bloomberg.

How about Mark Satter of CQ Roll Call?

DWG: Hi, General, thank you for doing this. I want to follow up on the extremism question and I'm just wondering if there's any indication of how the Air Force will approach the service-wide stand-down. I saw some reporting, I think it was last week, that said the plan was still in the works and I'm just wondering if there's any update on that.

General Brown: Kind of what I alluded to in the previous answer, I start focusing about what's right about the Air Force and what we expect from our airmen. So we open on core values. Then very similar to the way we've done other stand-downs here most recently when we did our Resiliency Tactical Pause. We provide tools to our command teams and our leadership teams across the Air Force and allow them to shape how they would actually execute their particular stand-down.

The feedback that I've received, and as the PACAF Commander when I was doing that, but also as I talked to squadron commanders here today, they like the flexibility. Each squadron is a bit different. Each location's a bit different. And if I get very prescriptive with the Secretary and the Chief of Space Operations then it doesn't go very well and we don't actually get to the desired result we want to have.

Allowing commanders to be commanders and have the flexibility to meet the intent, give them the tools, and one of the things we also laid in is we're going to build something that they can phone a friend - they run into a complex issue that they can't answer, we want to be in support of our commanders in the field as they engage with our enemies. So that's the approach.

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So really, my intent, our intent really is by next week is to push out that information to our command teams and leadership team and then allow them the opportunity to start executing to meet the early April suspense that we have to actually have the stand-down.

DWG: Tony, I know you're on, do you want to ask --

DWG: Yeah. I screwed up the mute, sorry.

General, F-35. How serious is the engine shortage from your standpoint? You've got a four star and three star review down at Tinker today talking about it. What's your level of concern about the shortfall? And how does the F-35 fit into your accelerate change or lose and your Action Order D in terms of - how does it apply to that program?

General Brown: One of the things that, I've sat down with our leadership team. I've also sat down with the JPO to talk about F-35s and the F-35E. And one of the things when you roll up data, you can look at it from one perspective, from the JPO's perspective, but the Air Force right now has the largest and most mature F-35 fleet. So what we are seeing based on the use of the engine, in some cases they're failing a little bit faster in certain areas, but it's also because of the high use rate. They've been deployed to different locations and that extra time on the engines is causing them to fail a bit sooner. So what we really want to do is understand what are the options we have with the engines we do have, to accelerate some of those changes on the maintenance side and the depot side. At the same time I want to moderate how much we're using those aircraft. As I described, it's like your Ferrari. You don't drive your Ferrari to work every day. You only drive it on Sundays. This is all high end. We want to make sure we don't use it all for a low end fight when we want to save it for the high end fight. Which goes into my force design.

We're building this not only for today but also for the future, and what you don't want to do is actually burn up that capability now and wish we had it later. So that to me goes into the force design but also the readiness that we want to preserve. Not only for the air crews but also for the aircraft itself. We don't want to burn up its service life - we want to do it smartly. There's going to be some tension associated with that and I fully expect that. But that's my job is to dialogue on that. This is

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why I have three and four stars there so we can dive a bit deeper and don't - I'd rather know the information. That's the challenge of being the Chief of Staff of the Air Force is folks don't want to bring it to you until they think they've got it all solved. I want to know soon. I can't do anything about it at the 11th hour and we may only have an hour. I'd rather be involved early in the process so we can actually correct course much sooner than later.

DWG: Can I ask you an Indo-Pacific question? Now that the Secretary says that China's going to be the pacing threat in DoD planning, how does that translate into the Air Force bomber presence in the region? I know you don't have a permanent rotation at Guam, but are you mulling other opportunities to demonstrate Air Force presence in the region, a la the Super Bowl flyover with your three bombers?

General Brown: There's a lot of things we can do. This is why when I talk about my action order on competition it's understanding the things that we can do that push the buttons for our adversaries.

Bomber flyover over the Super Bowl, that's one of them. A Bomber Task Force. That's another. How we do dynamic force employment with other capabilities, that's another. So we have a lot of tools in the box, it's just how we use them.

And again, I want to do things to keep our adversaries guessing. Agile combat employment and how we bounce around different regions. Those are areas that help us to compete and send the right message. Not only what we do in action but it's also what we put into the information space. And to me that's important. We've got to be thoughtful about it. We just can't do it, send bombers out and not really think through it. We've got to think through it and what is the desired effect we want to have with every action we do. That takes deeper thought on our part but it also takes deeper thought to understand our adversaries. That's what I'm challenging our force to do, to include myself. We've got to understand what we're doing and so we're not just burning JP8 because we can, we're burning it with an intent of something we're trying to achieve in mind.

DWG: In 2021 do you anticipate more bomber presence flights in the Indo-Pacific region, specifically around China?

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General Brown: I'm sure there will be a nexus. If I do it all in the Indo-Pacific then I'll hear from EUCOM or CENTCOM. So there will be a nexus. Again, that's the beauty of air power. We can go wherever we want, just tell us where you want it. And that's the dynamic we'll have as we work with the Chairman and the Combatant Commanders and the other Joint Chiefs on where we place not just the bomber fleet, other force capability that the United States Air Force has. We can get there pretty quickly.

That's the one thing I enjoy about being an airman, we can do things fast.

DWG: We've got just a couple of minutes left and I'm wondering whether there's time I can tell two people they can ask one question without a follow-up or whether you have to be out at exactly the top of the hour.

General Brown: Two questions, no follow-ups.

DWG: The last two questioners will be Oriana Pawlyk and Pat Host of Jane's.

DWG: Thank you so very much. No follow-up, I promise. With the racial disparity review that came out in December, I believe that the review included an examination of military justice data that dated back to 2012. The IG, General Sam Said at the time, said that no individual reports from airmen prompted further criminal investigation, administrative review or discipline but now that you've had some months to sit on it, have you seen any further adverse actions against airmen since that review came out? Has anyone been looked into by OSI or any of these things?

General Brown: Not that I'm aware of. I talk with General Said on this topic quite often and he has not brought anything to my attention that I'm aware of. But I appreciate the question. I will take a look at it and see if there's something else out there that I'm not aware of, but right now I have not seen anything.

DWG: Pat Host.

DWG: Hello, General Brown. Wondering how committed are you to keeping the Agility Prime eVTOL program moving forward now that Will Roper is gone?

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General Brown: I think we still have a commitment to move it forward. As a matter of fact we've got a conversation about this. There is some capability with it, and the fact that we're working with some of our industry partners and others and small partners, we're headed down a path and we have money committed to it. I think it's important not only for the capability but also for our credibility. And we just don't jump ship because Dr. Roper - the approach Dr. Roper's taken, I appreciate. Because it's a disruptor and that's what's going to change our Air Force and we've got to be willing to do that. And if we're not then we might as well [throw] it in now. That's why I'm serious about some of these things we're doing. We've got to change our approach and this a way to help us change our approach. It also changes a bit of our culture about how we approach things and that to me is a positive on how we think differently about how we, the capability, how we work with smaller companies to move forward, and how we might actually do a [inaudible] separately with an eVTOL type system versus maybe a C-130 for example. A different approach. It may be cheaper and it may confuse our adversary. So that's what I see from there.

DWG: General, thank you again so much for spending time with us today from your travels. And thank you to the Air Force for the wonderful relationship that we've had over the years and really very much have now under your leadership, thanks to Brigadier General Rider and all the other folks who make it possible. We look forward to future conversations with leaders in the Air Force and hopefully you again, sir, before too long.

Thank you everyone.

General Brown: Thank you, David, and I'd like to maybe just send a shout out to the Grand Forks team here that actually got this Zoom event set up to allow me to do this on my travels. I look forward to engaging with all of you again soon.

DWG: Thank you so much, sir.

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