



## Fireside Chat

### **Moderator:**

Shannon Bream, FOX News Channel

### **Speaker:**

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr., Chairman, U.S. Joints Chiefs of Staff

###

Mr. Ben Sutton:

As Air Force Chief of Staff, Charles Q. Brown, Jr. had a motto – signature motto: “accelerate change or lose”. He talked about it on this very stage last year at the Reagan Defense Forum, but since then he has received a promotion. Since September passed by the Senate, approved by the Senate, he’s become the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs, but he says that he’s still sticking to that motto. In an October 2<sup>nd</sup> message to the joint force, he wrote, my conviction to accelerate change has not wavered. As we have heard today, America must invest in our armed forces not only to keep up with the times, but to stay ahead of the curve and to stay ahead of our adversaries. So we look forward to hearing General Brown’s vision for achieving that, and how the man the President described as a top-notch strategist plans to approach his new role as the principal military advisor to the Commander-in-Chief, Secretary of Defense, and National Security Council.

A couple of points about his resume. General Brown is a command pilot with more than 3000 flight hours. He’s a former F16 fighting Falcon instructor, a former fighter squadron commander, and currently a trailblazer as the 21st chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. Now, one recent profile on him called General Brown, “a different type of top general for the U.S.” The reporter wrote that General Brown is quiet, known for listening more than he talks. That may be true, but today he’s here to talk and we’re here to listen. Ladies and

gentlemen, please join me in welcoming General CQ Brown, along with our moderator Shannon Bream, Anchor of Fox News Sunday.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

Mr. Chairman, general, good to see you again.

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Good to see you as well.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

So two months on the job. By the way, what wasn't on his resume? I did find out ahead of time that you smoke a mean Thanksgiving turkey.

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

I do.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

So multi-talented on multiple fronts.

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Brisket actually is my specialty, but for the holidays I do smoke Turkey.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

Okay, we'll take your word for it. Maybe we'll invite ourselves over sometime. I want to start with where you started your first message to the joint force on October 2nd. You said trust is the foundation of our profession. It's one of the things that the Reagan National Defense Survey looked into, asked people how they trust and how much confidence they have in the military. 46% said a great deal. Some said 32%. Those are good numbers, especially when you look at the rest of the list like Congress, people don't feel the same way that they do about the military. But you want to build that trust and confidence. What are your goals and hopes for that?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, when I think about trust being the foundation of our profession, it starts with our members. It's what we do to support every one of our members in uniform, and what we do for their families. Because that trust brings them in as recruits, but it also retains that talent and those military families. The other part of that trust is what we do for the nation and how we engage with all parts of America, how we engage with our elected leadership so they can look at our United States military and have that trust that we will do what the nation has asked us to do. At the same time as we build that trust and confidence, I also know that we're the most respected military in the world. Many of the militaries around the world want to be like us, and the key part is to maintain that trust, continue to build that trust, and that's where my focus is as a chairman. And I personally think I have a personal responsibility to set the example and that's what I've tried to do throughout my career as an officer in the United States military.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

And you've talked too about wanting to build the bonds of trust between civilian and military leadership. How would you assess where that stands right now?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

I assess it's pretty good, and part of that is it's just kind of how I try to operate personally. When I wrote "Accelerate Change or Lose," one of the key words in there was the word "collaboration". That's the way I've operated throughout my career. That's the way I continue to operate today. And one way to build trust is to be able to sit across the table from somebody and have a conversation even if you disagree, because I do believe there are many times there's things we do agree on and that's where the conversation should start before we start talking about what we disagree about. Because we can actually start to move and make progress together on the areas that we agree on as we work through the details of where we may have a difference in opinion.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

And one of the places we do see some agreement on Capitol Hill, which is relatively rare these days, is in wanting to take care of our military. Current members, our veterans as well. How we get there has sometimes gotten caught up in some of these battles over funding. The Secretary touched on this as well. What does it do not only to operations but to morale for our service men and women in uniform when we kind of lurch from spending to spending crisis to spending crisis? You've got the NDAA to get done by the end of the year too. What's the impact of that?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, here's what I'll tell you, Shannon. When I go out and travel and meet with our service members, they're not focused on some of those issues. They're focused on warfighting and doing what the nation's asked them to do. Now they'll ask questions why? And we have some very smart and talented young members who ask some very hard questions when you go out and engage with them. They're focused on making sure they have capability. I think the response that I have with the service chiefs is to highlight why this is important, why getting a National Defense Authorization Act is so important, why getting an on-time budget and not having a continuing resolution – that provides and ensures that we fight from an advantage and that we can put the capabilities into the hands of our warfighters much more quickly than we do today. Again, as I said, my acceleration, my focus on acceleration has not wavered, and everything we can do to make sure we're providing capabilities for our service members so we fight from an advantage.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

Do you feel like you've been able to communicate that with folks on the Hill, the urgency of that for all of those reasons and goals that you mentioned?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

I think so. I told my staff this when I was the Air Force chief, when I go over and testify and members of Congress are repeating back "accelerate change or lose" to me, we're starting to see the same sight picture. The fact that when we go over and talk to members

REAGAN NATIONAL DEFENSE FORUM 2023 FIRESIDE CHAT

Page 3 of 11

Note: The following is the output of transcribing from an audio recording. Although the transcription is largely accurate; in some cases, it is incomplete or inaccurate due to inaudible passages or transcription errors. It is posted as an aid to understanding the proceedings at the 2023 Reagan National Defense Forum but should not be treated as an authoritative record.

of Congress and we do classified briefings and we start talking about the threat and we have the same sight picture and agree there's some things we need to do that'll help our national security but also the security with our allies and partners, it starts to resonate. And that dialogue has to continue over and over again because there's always someone, there may be a handful that haven't seen it yet, haven't had that intel to understand why all this is important.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

Well, and the Secretary talked about so many of those places around the world, why it's so important right now that you all are fully equipped and funded for all of the challenges we're facing. So let's talk through some of those because they showed up quite a bit in the Reagan National Defense Survey that came out this week. 51% of Americans now say that they see China as the greatest foreign threat. I thought it was at least surprising to me that 74% of them said they fear we could actually be in a war with China within five years. What would you say to the American people out there responding to the survey who now view China with increased worry and concern?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, first thing I tell them is they ought to be very proud of their military, that we're ready for whatever comes our way. But at the same time, we want to be so ready that we don't have a conflict. And as we hear and it says peace through strength, our strength that we demonstrate as a military will help bring that peace, and the better we understand the threat environment and the fact that the American people start to recognize where the PRC is as a challenge helps us all so we're all moving same way, same day. It's not just what the military does, but it's what we do diplomatically, what we do economically to be able to compete where we need to, but also cooperate where there may be opportunities.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

One of the wins that the Biden administration took away from the meeting between President Xi and Biden was the reopening of military-to-military communications. Can you tell us an update on how that's going and why that's critical to avoiding the things that people are worried about in the survey?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, I'm standing by. Realize the President just met here just a few weeks ago, and the opportunity to have dialogue, whether it's with our allies and partners or with our adversaries are really important. I think with our adversaries, it's to prevent miscalculation. And I'll just use my own personal experience. I was the air component commander during the ISIS campaign when the Russians came into Syria, and we started out with an unclassified phone line and a Gmail account, and that was a way for us to communicate with the Russians. It was very helpful to help prevent a miscalculation because it was more of a deconfliction. And so the opportunity to talk to our adversaries to understand what we are both doing and permit that miscalculation, at the same time, the dialogue that I have with allies and partners is important. I've been in the job for two months, I've probably had about 40-plus engagements. About half of them are my counterparts, some of them multiple times. And those are important because they

provide me a perspective. As I was introduced, I do listen because when I talk to my counterparts, they share with things with me that they have an appreciation because for their part of the world, they grew up there and they have probably a deeper sense of what's going on than I do, which helps me in my job as the Chairman when I provide advice.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

So let's stay with China, because this issue of competition versus conflict, the President says we're going for the former, not the latter. And there's a lot of information in the survey about how people think we're doing on that front. A majority of Americans think over the next 10 years, according to the numbers in the survey, that China will outpace the US on both military power and economic strength. What's your outlook on that?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, my real role here and job is to actually make sure that particularly on the military side, that doesn't occur. Which is why I'm so focused on accelerating change, which is why I'm focused on the collaboration we do, particularly having come out here the past couple of years, not only here to Reagan, but also out to Silicon Valley and looking at how we work together on our national defense and how that helps us economically. And the combination of those two continue to make us a very strong nation. And as Secretary Austin highlighted, our leadership is important around the world, both from a military standpoint and an economic standpoint.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

And one of those ways that it's really on the stage, the world stage right now is this issue of China and Taiwan, which was also covered in the survey. 73% of people responded to the survey this year that they were somewhat worried about the possibility of China actually invading Taiwan. You said in the past you don't think it will be an actual physical operation to take Taiwan. It's logistically very difficult to do that, but there are other ways that China will pressure Taiwan. So how do you see that playing out?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, just think about what happened in Hong Kong. The first thing I would say is we want to be, and we all should be worried whether it's going to happen or not. And part of the reason why deterrence is so important, so a conflict does not occur, but if you look at what happened in Hong Kong and even some of the things that the PRC is doing today is putting pressure on Taiwan, putting pressure on countries in the Indo-Pacific, whether it's be economically or somewhat militarily, that we've seen continued pressure to wear in this case Taiwan down or others down to their own gain. And we've got to pay attention to that, which is why I go back to really over the course of the five years when I was the Commander of the Pacific Air Forces before I became the Chief of Staff of the Air Force, watching how many of the nations in the region and, out of the survey, the American public starts to see the PRC as a challenge, and now we're able to highlight those things together, which helps with deterrence.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

A lot of the survey focused of course on Ukraine and Russia as well. So let's look at that one. Who is currently winning the war was the question asked in the survey this year, Russia 31% responded, Ukraine 34%, and neither 23%. So the battle lines have not changed significantly in the last few months. So where do you see this ultimately resolving? Is it a matter of Ukraine retaking everything that they'd like to get back? Is it a matter of some other kind of negotiated truce with Putin?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, I would just tell you with any military conflict, you don't solve it completely by military means, it ends up with a diplomatic solution. And I can't predict the future on how it's going to end, but I think we can help shape it, and the way we can help shape it is the work that we've continue to do in support of Ukraine providing them capability. In the time that I've been in this position, I've had a chance to participate in the Ukraine defense contact group a couple of times and the number of nations that are contributing to Ukraine's support is important. I talk to General Zaluzhnyi on a fairly regular basis, as a matter of fact, I talked to him earlier this week on the approach that they're taking as did the Secretary while he was in Kyiv just before Thanksgiving. And our continued engagement with Ukraine and our continued support are important, partly because Russia is one of our challenges that's laid out in the National Security and National Defense Strategies, and the work we have to do there is important to get to a better place in the long run.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

70% in the survey also said that they have real concerns the conflict will spill over into a NATO country, then directly forcing the US into this battle. Any thoughts on where you see Putin going? Do you think that's more or less likely now, almost two years into this?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, what I see right now is if you think about what Putin intended to do from the very start and the territory he gained and the territory he lost in Ukraine, things have not gone according to his plan. One of the key areas of that, I think because of what happened in Ukraine, NATO is stronger than it's ever been. In fact, it's larger now with Finland, and Sweden soon to follow. And because of that strength in the dialogue with many of our NATO partners, we're all committed to ensure this does not expand into NATO and go broader.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

That's also against the backdrop of the Middle East, which is obviously front and center. So let's talk about Iran. There have been more than 70 attacks on US troops in the region believed to come from Iranian proxies. What do you say to critics who feel like we haven't had a forceful enough response to that?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

What I will tell you is we've been focused and striking at a time and place of our choosing. We've done things to increase the force protection for our forces that are deployed into the region. And one of the key goals after 7 October was to not let the

conflict expand. And so we're being very thoughtful about the approach we take and I do that when I provide my advice, how best to respond, but also not to broaden the conflict.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

So with all these multiple challenges out there, there are questions in the survey as well about how we manage all of these different things. One of the questions asked: regarding the war in Ukraine, how worried are you about US military aid to Ukraine causing the US to deplete its weapons stockpile? And now we're obviously assisting Israel and other areas as well. Some 63% said they worry about the depletion of our assets, military assets. Can you address that?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, what we've gone through as we've supported both Ukraine and Israel, we go through our own analysis. We have what we require in order to execute our operational plans, and we go through that level of analysis as we make decisions of the support and security systems we provide for both nations. At the same time, there's opportunity with that supplemental Secretary Austin highlighted, it goes back into our defense industrial base to build out capability not only for our allies and partners, but also for us. And that to me is important because it helps us continue down the path of modernization and to bring in capability and the defense industrial base supply chain, all those are important to our defense. The last thing I'd say on that is many of our allies and partners like US equipment and US capability, and so to be able to get the funding and the supplementals in place to continue to provide support for both Ukraine and Israel also supports us and our defense industrial base as well.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

So that's the physical and kinetic, but I know that you're always looking forward to the future of fighting and technology as well. So let's talk about artificial intelligence, also shows up in the survey when Reagan asked if the military should integrate more use of AI, about half of the Americans said that it's too soon. They don't want to comment on that or assess whether that would be a good match. But of those who did weigh in, more than half of them said in the survey, they think it's a bad idea for the military to be using AI. So how do you address those concerns?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, the first thing I think about is AI has opportunities and capability. The way I think about using AI is first of all, we have operational problems that we have to solve as a military, and AI is not the panacea that's going to solve all those problems, or you just can't sprinkle AI dust on everything and it's going to make life better. What we do have to do is look at where AI has a practical application based on what we're trying to achieve. If you think about it, AI is going to help us to make decisions faster, to be able to do things faster, but we're going to still have one of our service members has to make the final decision. And so, it'll help us with speed, agility, and I think there's some real value there. I would also highlight we've already gone down a path of autonomy in certain areas, whether it's autonomous capability that provides us greater ability to do things without putting our service members at risk or autonomy in some of our weapons systems. Matter of fact, I flew out here in one of our C-37s, it's got a lot of autonomy in it

that helps make decisions so that the pilot and the operators can actually monitor and execute the mission. So AI has some value, but we just can't say it's going to solve all of our problems, but it does provide us some capability and there's still a lot to learn with AI going forward.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

So I thought it was interesting in the survey that although there seemed to be a real hesitation among the American people for our military to be using AI, they also expressed the concern and the worry that China would outpace us when it comes to things like AI.

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, that's the other part of this is that not only do we want to take a look at the technology that we're going to be able to use, we also need to watch how our adversaries may use that technology, whether it be AI, cyber, space, helping outline the norms of behavior of how that capability may be used just like we do in other domains of air, land, and the maritime.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

You mentioned cyber, which is where we're going next. Also in the survey, asked how concerned are you about the threat of cyber attacks, of the following in the next five years, extremely or somewhat got us to 86%. Tell us about where that is on the threat level for you.

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, from a cyber standpoint, it's something that we have to worry about across the nation. And the reason I say that there's aspects of what we do in the Department of Defense to protect our weapon systems, but we also think about our national critical infrastructure that needs to be protected. That's not necessarily part of the Department of Defense, but we need to work very closely with other parts inter-agency of the US government of how we protect that capability from cyber-attacks. And we've seen that with Colonial Pipeline and other cases of ransomware attacks done by either state or non-state actors. And so for all of us, it's something we need to pay attention to.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

So we talked about AI and that our survey respondents were worried about China outpacing on that. So we asked also about cyber capabilities and whether we're superior or China is on that front: US superior about 24%, about the same 32%, 33%, the largest group there, thinks that China is superior to us when it comes to cyber attacks. So how are we addressing that?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, we're going to always work to improve ourselves. And I realize it's a survey, but as I read our intel, I feel pretty confident in our capabilities across not only cyber but AI and other technology. But we still can't rest on our laurels. Again, this is why I keep saying accelerate change, which means we've always got to continue to look at it and



analyze where we sit and associate with these various technologies and the things we're doing to continue to move ourselves forward.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

So as we sit in the middle of all of these challenges here, there are some recruiting goals that have been missed by some of the branches. So the defense survey also asks if a close friend or family member were considering joining the military, would you encourage them or discourage them? 51% said they would encourage people. What is your message to the next generation to being open to joining, to wearing the uniform, even more broadly, to be excited or encouraged about being part of this?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, the first thing I highlight is just the great opportunity, and the fact that we as a nation talk about the value of service, whether it's in uniform or working as a civilian, whether it's in the Department of Defense, or some other part of our government or parts of your community, how important it is. And then just I think about the opportunities and the things that young people will have the opportunity to do if they were to join our military. And we've got to talk about that. And partly the reason I say that is because I believe young people only aspire to be what they see or know about. If you don't know about the opportunities of serving in the military, you may never pursue that career field. I'd say from my own personal experience, this whole thing was my dad's idea, supported by my mom, "Four years in the military will not hurt you."

Ms. Shannon Bream:

Several decades later.

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

And so my degree is in engineering, I was going to be an Air Force engineer for four years and get out, got a ride in a T-37 when I was in college, one of our trainer aircraft, had the helmet and the parachute and did acrobatics. And I go, that's kind of fun. I think I want to do that. And I became an F-16 pilot and I still get to fly today. And so it's those kinds of opportunities I think that you just don't know until you have a chance to experience it. And whether you stay for just a handful of years or you stay for a handful of decades, there are great opportunities serving in our military,

Ms. Shannon Bream:

By the way, being a pilot, is it ever hard for you to sit there while someone else is flying the plane?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Oh yeah, it is. You can hear things. You're always wondering what they're doing up there. It's like riding in the backseat when your spouse is driving. Yeah, it's not –

Ms. Shannon Bream:

What's going on up there.

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

We've all been there. I can tell by the laughter.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

Yeah, I would feel very good if I got on a plane and I spot you there, I'd feel like we're in good hands. Let me ask you this also, in your first message to the Joint Force, you said that honing our warfighting skill has primacy in all we do. And you've touched on that many times. The survey asked if there was any part of the respondents who thought that we're too focused on social issues in the military at the expense of warfighting. About a quarter of people said they thought that was a problem. What do you say to them?

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

I would say honing our warfighting skill has primacy in everything we do. That's why we exist to fight and win our nation's wars. We're going to be so good at what we do that our adversaries go, not today, not tomorrow, not ever. And we do that because we bring in our nation's best from all backgrounds. And I'm extremely proud of our service members, every single one of them. Right before we started lunch today and we had the honor guard, I went over to talk to those young sailors, and I started asking questions about how long they served. And this young lady had been in the Navy for just about a year and a half. And she said to me, thank you for your service. I said, thank you for your service because we're in this together and we are. I am just so amazed by the young people that come into our military and when I go out and talk to them, they're focused on warfighting, they're focused on getting the mission done, and they're amazing young people and I'm just proud to be able to work with them.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

Do you think that, and you touched on this a little bit, do you think that part of young people not signing up is that they don't know about the opportunities? Maybe they don't know somebody in uniform we're at some of the lowest levels, in our recent history anyway, for people knowing, having a family member, a neighbor, somebody who's actually serving.

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, if you go back to the end of the Cold War, and as we started getting smaller and fewer bases in our communities and the young people having fewer connections to somebody, whether it's a relative or a neighbor that they know has served in the military. And so one of the goals we have to do as a nation is to talk about our military and the opportunities. And I try to do that when I go out and travel. You don't know what you don't know. My dad was the one that, as I said, kind of pushed me into this and there's a lot of things I didn't know, and I stuck around partly because I'm still having fun doing what I do.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

We can tell. Okay, I like to save my most controversial question for last, because now you're warmed up. Next Saturday, Army or Navy? I mean, I feel like as a neutral Air Force guy, you -- weigh in.

Gen. Charles Q. Brown, Jr.:

Well, actually this year I've had a chance to go to the Navy-Air Force game and then the Air Force-Army game. And I got asked the same question. And so next Saturday, I actually just look for a good game.

And so, seriously, because at both of those, I said if we could get it down to the fourth quarter and it's down to the last play, that's the kind of game you want to have. You don't want a blowout. Or take it overtime, make it interesting. I mean, I'm a huge football fan, so I like an interesting game versus a blowout. And I think one of the things that when our service academies get on the field and great competition, great rivalry, but the thing I enjoy most is when they all come into our services. And they can talk about the rivalry, but it's what we do day in and day out as a team to protect our nation. And again, I couldn't be prouder of them. I look forward to shaking hands with the midshipmen and cadets while we're out there and watching a good game.

Ms. Shannon Bream:

So, warrior, patriot, war fighter, and a diplomat too. Chairman, General, thank you.

###