



## **A Fireside Chat with SEAC Ramón “CZ” Colón-López**

**August 1, 2023**

**Lt. Gen. Bruce “Orville” Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Welcome to Air & Space Warfighters in Action. I'm Orville Wright, President and CEO of your Air & Space Forces Association. Thank you to all the people joining us online and from across the globe.

It's a real honor today to be here with a senior enlisted advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, "CZ" Colón-López. CZ is the only Airman ever to serve as SEAC since the position was created in 2005 as the most senior enlisted member in the US military, he advises the Chairman on all issues that impact the enlisted force. That means his focus is ensuring the enlisted force is properly trained, postured, and sustained. CZ is a true and proven warrior, a special operator who has served in every operating theater and virtually every major operation over the past 33 years. All that comes to an end in November when CZ will retire and be succeeded by Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, Troy Black.

Before we begin, I also want to take a moment to give special thanks to our sponsors listed on the screen. We are grateful for their continued support in making Warfighters in Action possible.

SEAC, thank you so much for joining us today. It's an honor.

**SEAC Ramón “CZ” Colón-López:**

Thank you for having me, General.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce “Orville” Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Well, let's get started with a question just to get rolling, and as the only Airman ever to serve as SEAC, and after nearly four years now as the SEAC working primarily for General Milley as our Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, you've seen a lot, COVID, the Afghanistan pullout, a pivot to the Pacific. So we've seen changing needs from the force and needs for the force. You've also seen the force, the joint force, the joint war fighting force from a whole new perspective. How has it changed your understanding of what it takes to support our joint warfighters and be decisive at the merge?

**SEAC Ramón “CZ” Colón-López:**

Well, I think that a lot of the things that we factor when we look at the requirements and the needs for the force in the future are based on our historical deeds. Our successes, our failures, we just got done with 20 years of comeback in the Middle East. Before that, we had other engagements that we learn from.

But as we look at the enemy, the way that we see it here in the near future, and we look at great or strategic power competition, I believe that we need to condition our forces not only to be technologically advanced, but also intellectual and resilient enough to withstand whatever the fight brings to them. Now, we know that technology is a double-edged sword, and it can basically help us a lot when it comes to our advantages on the battlefield. But what happens when that gets shut off and then we have to rely on the flesh and bone to be able to go ahead and make that decisive action, take that decisive action to be able to continue to bring the fight to the enemy? So we need to strike a balance somewhere in there between intellect and courage to be able to make sure that we have the best people on the battlefield.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce “Orville” Wright, USAF (Ret.):**



Intellect and courage. I'm with you. Exactly what it takes, and certainly this generation of joint warfighters shows that to the world every day. So beyond that, CZ, what do you think, SEAC, what do you think is your biggest success? But maybe beyond that, advice for the next generation of senior leadership at your level, the Chairman and the next SEAC, what's your advice as well as what do you think you've accomplished as a success for them to build upon?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Well, General, you went through a long list of things that we have experienced over the past four years, COVID, civil unrest, withdrawal from Afghanistan, the fight in Ukraine and so on. And one of the biggest successes that we have had is in the middle of all of this churns and the narratives that accompany every single one of those situations is to maintaining the troops' focus on what they're here to do, and that is war fighting. Now that is not what has always been put out in media and other spaces, but it has been my duty to make sure that I go back and counter with facts to keep them focused on what they're there to do and making sure that the nation is in good hands when it comes to national security.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Could you add a little bit on, and do you often reference the threat, a different set of threats, more dangerous, I think you and I would share than maybe any time in the history of our nation across the national security apparatus? So could you talk about what you share with the troops in your own view of threats? And you certainly got a joint warfighter level of experience to face threats directly and obviously prevail.

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Well, the nature of the enemy that we can potentially face in the near future is totally different from what we got accustomed to fighting over 20 years. Counter insurgency is much different than dealing with a foe that has nuclear powers. The stakes are higher and what we used to refer to as being outside the wire, when you really think about it against a strategic power competitor, everyone including our families are outside the wire. So we need to take that into the calculus on the decisions that we make when it comes to escalation, when it comes to the use of power to go ahead and inflict that will on the enemy to either stop or get with international laws. It's more critical now than ever because we're not only fighting an enemy, we have to deal with the repercussions of what happens with their counteractions and how is that going to affect our families and our people back in the homeland. That is the main concern that I have when it comes to strategic power competition.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Sure. I think we share in that view that family readiness really is combat readiness. Could you share with us and the audience a bit your advice really on a top number, pick 1, 2, 3, or 5 challenges that families face today that really senior leaders across the national security apparatus from Congress to OSD really need to get our arms around so that the public better understands those needs for our families in their own selfless sacrifice, if you will, to support the nation's security to defend the nation?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Well, I will be the first to say that our families are really the foundation of our courage and our ability to go ahead and project the instrument of war worldwide. Without their support, we couldn't do it. And I know from personal experience. And one of the biggest challenges that we have when it comes to them is misinformation. We used to say in our communities, happy wife, happy life, right? Well, that applies



to every single dynamic of the families of today because if they're not fully willing to accept our responsibilities, our service members, or if they think that the institution is rotten for whatever reason, they will lose that support and that mechanism and they will no longer believe on what we're there to do when we deploy.

Recently, I was quoted by saying that misinformation is a hypersonic weapon of mass disruption and everybody's vulnerable to it, and that weapon is being actualized right now as we speak. So we need to make sure that number one, our families have the resources that they need to maintain resiliency in the home front. Number two, we need to make sure that they have the right information to make decisions on which direction their family needs to go, whether their staying service, continue serving, and so on. Number three, we need a whole of nations supporting mechanism from our elected officials to the veteran support organizations, to the people within the Department of Defense to be able to continue to care for them and make sure that we have their best interests in mind. And lastly, to make sure that when something goes wrong, we go ahead and put our best foot forward to be able to help them out.

And that is really at the core of my position as a senior enlisted advisor to the chairman. I listen to their needs, I bring them up to the decision makers, and we take immediate action just because we don't have time to dance around those subjects. If it's impacting somebody else's life, chances are it's impacting thousands of others, and we need to make sure that we do right by them.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Yeah. Well, I would offer that there's no doubt in my mind that certainly our Secretary of Defense, Secretary Austin, General Milley and you are all about every day trying to take care of our families. Are there specific issues, opportunities, challenges that you're working from childcare to schools, education, spouse employment opportunities, for example?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

All of the above. As a matter of fact, just this afternoon, the servicing enlisted advisors and I are having a meeting with Personnel & Readiness, Office of the Secretary of Defense for Personnel & Readiness on the taking care of people, memorandums that the secretary has been rolling out and gauging the progress of every single one of those initiatives that we put forward with the spouse employment, childcare, healthcare, many things that are on the table right now. We're taking a very aesthetic approach to make sure that we gauge the progress as we move along and continue to message that to the force because we no longer live in a place to where we have to go ahead and wait until everything is done so that we can tell people. People want information, people need information, but most importantly, people like progress. And if you're staying stagnant, that doesn't sit well with the force. So we're doing everything in our power to make sure that we continue to inform them on the progress that we're making and the things that we're doing to make their lives better.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Would you like to just build on that and talk about, for the audience, two or three points on where you've made progress at the unit level? Again, pick one, childcare, medical support, education opportunities, spouse employment opportunities.

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

So on the spouse employment opportunities, clearly we have been working with the White House with both administrations since I've been the SEAC, on making sure that we have better reciprocity when it comes to licensure, that we have better opportunities for them to be able to have a place where they



can actually look for jobs as they move along. And also the services have taken opportunities to make sure that they prolong assignments to make sure that families have a little bit more stability. That is just one example.

On the education side, we have expanded the way that we educate both officers and enlisted and utilizing a method that is called outcomes based. This is what we need you to do. This is the knowledge that we're giving you right now. And that knowledge is dynamic in nature because we know that something that is relevant today, next week, it may be relevant. So we need to have the flexibility to be able to change that course of instruction to fit the situation that we're dealing with.

And lastly, on the healthcare, the Joint Chiefs and the Chairman and the Secretary of Defense have been working with DHA and the Department of Veteran Affairs to make sure that we collaborate better to provide better care for our people. So those are just three examples of some of the initiatives that we're taking. Those

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Are great examples, and thanks again for your leadership. No silver bullets in this. It just takes constant hard work and leadership, like I know you and General Milley and Secretary Austin continue to bring to the fight, so thank you.

Let's talk just a bit, you've talked really about retention as a national security imperative. How about recruiting? And I know you can talk at length about how you're interacting across the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard, and certainly across our Space Force to recruit. We see, we know that there is recruiting crisis or challenges? I'm sure there are opportunities there. So could you talk just a bit about recruiting?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

So I think if we're going to speak about recruiting, we need to speak also of accessions. And recruiting and accession separated from retention because this is a totally different dynamic. When it comes to attracting the talent that is in the nation right now, we need to do a better job of putting the narrative of the purpose and the value of a generational commitment to national security. And I don't think that we have done everything that we can to be able to be as aggressive as we need to be with that particular messaging. In parallel to that, we are saturated in a highly negative environment to where everything that is said about the Department of Defense, nine out of 10 topics are negative in nature. Whether it's that our Soldiers, Sailors, Airmen, Marines and Guardians are rapists, that our junior service members, specifically the elicited, are going hungry because they're not being compensated enough. Whether somebody's saying that we're woke. Whether somebody's saying that our focus is on everything else other than war fighting. All of those damaging narratives are impacting the way that people think.

And if you look at the composition of the armed forces on any given time, it is less than 1% of the population. And even that 1%, their families, they don't really understand what we do on a day-to-day basis. So what about the other 99% of our society that has no clue what service is all about, but all they hear is that negative narrative? I think that as a nation we can help each other out and start talking about the value of service. And I can tell you, as a poor kid growing up with nothing to being the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and having the access and the opportunities that I have had to help people, will never dream something like this will happen in my life, but it happened because I joined the United States Air Force.

We need to start talking about those stories instead of the one-offs that happened, while they're horrible in nature, the same thing is happening in society, but nobody's highlighting all of the stuff that is



happening in our colleges, in certain parts of our country. They zero in on the military for some reason. And I would like for people to just go ahead and take a pause on that and just take it for face value, that there's accountability. We have different laws to deal with these things and we just need to continue doing that.

And on the other side of that is that we need to have a lot of the people that have benefited from the actions of our warfighters to be able to tell those stories about, "Man, I remember September 12th, 2001, and I remember the pride that I had when Johnny so-and-so, Susie so-and-so from my neighborhood ended up deploying forward. Susie didn't come back. She sacrificed her life for her country. But you know what? She took an oath to do that? She fully understood what that oath was all about." And that message needs to be ingrained into our people's youth, into our population, and our youth to be able to understand really that this is a generational commitment, that all of us need to do this at one point or another because somebody's always looking in to see how they can disrupt our way of life, our democracy, and go against the ideals of what being an American is all about.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

SEAC, I am right where you are, the joint warfighter ethos that is still deeply embedded in today's war fighting force is not talked about enough. So I'm going to tell a quick story, a warfighter story, and then I'd like you to tell one, because you're out there, you're seeing what these young men and women do. So be thinking about a good example of just how good our soldiers, sailors, airmen, Marines and guardians are.

So here's my story to get started, I was just at Minot Air Force Base, the 5th Bomb Wing, the 91st ICBM Wing. I met a second lieutenant and a couple staff sergeants who were defenders. And as defenders, fully equipped, very capable with a whole range of weapons, the young second lieutenant I met, when I asked her if she would, in her responsibility for security of the most lethal weapons in the world, that would be Minuteman III missiles, her responsibility and accountability for the most lethal weapons in the world. I said, "Would you shoot me if I crossed a red line here?" She goes, "Sir, absolutely." And she can't wait to be upgraded to be a convoy commander that would be responsible for a convoy with Minuteman III ICBMs rolling on public roads across North Dakota. Second lieutenant, Air Force Academy graduate leading staff sergeants, average age, way less than 25, responsible and accountable for the most lethal weapons in the world. So that's my story, over to you.

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Well, and that story is pretty common because what we find out is that for whatever reason these young men and women actually join the service, that flips when they understand what their roles and responsibilities are. And I'll give you one story... I'll give you two because I think that we need to bring the total force into this as well.

So the first story is when we were doing the retrograde from Afghanistan and United States Transportation Command was looking for a better tracking mechanism to be able to go ahead and track all of these flights and ships that were coming in and out of different places. And of course, you put that up for bids, it's going to cost you millions of dollars, right? Here comes this crew led by an E-5 that actually say, "Hey, we're programmers. Let us give this a shot." And they ended up putting this thing in less than a week, I believe. I may be misquoted on that. But very fast, and they pushed it forward and they put it in place at the cost of commendation medals. That is the talent that we have in the Department of Defense right now. America's sons and daughters that are given an opportunity to go ahead and do something, whatever that may be, based on their specialty, and they do it well.

The second example is in Somalia International Airport. We are training the Danab forces out there, which is basically kind of like the Special Forces equivalent, and there was a lot of equipment that were coming in, but the accountability for that equipment was horrible. And here comes this army staff sergeant from the Reserves, and in one deployment he ended up programming an entire system of accountability that got everything down to the single weapon and where that weapon was located. When I talked to that staff sergeant, I was like, "What is your background? Who are you? What do you do?" He's like, "Well, I'm an MIT guy, in my reserve time, I do the soldier stuff, but I just took whatever I do on the outside and put it in here." I was like, wow. So when we talk about the total force active duty and we talk about the capabilities that our people bring, man, that is our youth coming in to do something greater than the purpose that they had on the other side of things and they're serving their nation. So those are my two stories.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Well, enthralling, I'd like to just ask you if you've got an experience as you were deployed all over the world, the JTAC, PJ business, what you did defend our nation is remarkable in many ways. Some of that you can share, some of it you can't share. But as you're talking to a future PJ, is there a war story or two, combat operations story that you'd share with them to both encourage and guide in how to handle the reality of a combat operation, a shoot and fight?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Well, there are many scenarios and clearly there are far many more valiant PJs than I have ever been. So I always consider myself in the company of remarkable warriors. And when I gauge my actions in combat and the things that I had to do, it's the necessity of, I mean, it's not an extraordinary, it's just really what we trained to do.

But the one thing that I will pass on to any young para rescue man or special operator is that complacency will be the biggest killer that you can ever face. When you start getting comfortable doing certain things because of repetition, because of expertise, that is really when you fall on your face flat. So I will encourage every single one of them not to do that. When it comes to their skills, I mean, it's something that you have to continue that muscle memory to make sure that you do it. And I have a quote in the back of my coin that says, "Amateurs train until they get it right. Professionals train until they cannot get it wrong." And that is really what we do every day. It's not checking a box and getting a form filed in so that you can get pay or what have you. It is because that is the expectation on the battlefield when all the variables are working against you and you have to take action at that very moment. So that is probably the best advice that I will give.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

That's great advice for all of us. Train and prepare, not just to get it right, but to never get it wrong.

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Absolutely.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Especially given the responsibilities we have for the most lethal forces in the world. Well, some 17 plus deployments that you and Janet, as your spouse and your family went through together. No doubt it took a toll on you personally and professionally. And you've made this statement in public that you've actually lied, and I'll tell you, I have too, on periodic health assessments over 17 years and the flight



surgeon's the last guy you want to talk to until the wheels come off. And how did that personal experience you went through as you eventually got to a decision point shape the ways you as a leader face challenges like suicide in the ranks?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

I always relied on humility as the foundation of my approach to anything that we do. A lot of that because I grew up with nothing, came from nothing, and actually the Air Force gave me an opportunity to do something with my life. But it was that same attribute that I violated because of my ego as a warrior, specifically in the company that I kept with SEAL, Special Forces and others. And as I continued to deployed after the second, third, fourth time, it became the norm. This is what we're supposed to feel. This is what we're supposed to be numb to. This is what we're supposed to go ahead and embrace, embrace the suck because this is our life. In parallel, our families, were noticing changes and we refuse to listen because that's just the way things were. And it was all that ego, that ego of nothing can kill me, nothing can hurt me, I'm the master of my own destiny and so on that eventually was our biggest detriment.

For me, like you said, for close to 15 years, I was telling everybody that I only had two beers, ate all my vegetables and never smoked. I mean, and a lot of people laugh when I make that comment because they're doing the same thing right now. And two concerning errors in there. Number one, that we're not being truthful with the way that we're really conditioning the human weapon system. But the most concerning thing is that we're not trusting the institution that is supposed to be there to help us, for whatever reason it may be, whether it's the actions of a particular surgeon at one point saying, "No, you need to be put on ice. You're no longer going to deploy because we need to take a closer look at this." And people not wanting to go ahead and get rid of their purpose when they're already struggling with other things. And that's the one thing that they can always go back to feel alive.

So what I learned is that when I finally came clean, there was a huge weight off my shoulders. Of course, my family was relieved because I was finally doing what they have been asking me to do for a decade and a half. And life eventually and progressively started getting better, started getting better in the sense that I'm realizing that I am not superhuman, that I do have flaws, that I have faults, that I have weaknesses that I need to address. And I started to really think about the many people that cared about me that actually said, "You know what? I am so glad that you're finally doing this." If that helps to de-stigmatize the system, the one variable that we don't trust the system, so therefore we're not going to be truthful, and if that helps my peers, the many peers out there, and when I say peers, I don't mean the special operations community. I mean everybody that has gotten into a gun fight that has been dealing with some kind of stress to come forward and get help, we're going to be in a better place. Health is health and we need to continue to promote it that way for people to be able to get it when they need it.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Is there a spiritual dimension to this, chaplain support that you'd like to share or encourage?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Yeah, obviously there's about eight domains that come into play in this, anything from financial stability, family stability, psychologic issues, you're talking about nutrition, you're talking about finance and the spiritual aspect of things. We have a very robust religious system in the Department of Defense from chaplains even all the way up to people that do not believe. But the beauty of it is that it doesn't matter what denomination you have, you're always going to have that support, whatever it may be, everywhere we go. And we need to continue to make that available for people. And sometimes that is

really what helps them go ahead and gravitate towards something that is going to give them the strength that actually moves forward. And I will tell you that for me personally, the biggest pillar of strength was Janet, was Janet. I talked to a lot of people in the process of doing this, but the most impact I got was from the person that was actually going to bed with me every night that was telling me all along. So she's the one that I actually give the credit to

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

How many years?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

We've been together now, 27 years.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Well, please thank Janet for her service and her courage as you go to phase two here. We're going to go to the audience, but before we do that, as the audience warmed up and I'm reminded to remind those who would ask questions on the net to please unmute your mic. SEAC, could you just offer a couple thoughts as you would encourage and provide advice to Sergeant Major Black as he steps into your shoes?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Yeah, to Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps Black, Troy, a dear friend of mine, and we have had several conversations. The institutional changes that are going to take place here in the next four years are basically going to be the focus of his tenure as SEAC number five, and that is going to have to do with pay and compensation, that is going to have to do with the military healthcare system, and that is going to have to do with the way that we treat and maintain and continue to go ahead and enhance our human weapon system. So those are three priorities that Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps, soon to be SEAC, Troy Black is going to have in the forefront on his responsibilities working alongside with the incoming chairman.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Well again, thanks SEAC. We'll go to the audience now. And to test the system, first question will come from Chris Gordon who writes for our Air & Space Forces Magazine. So please, Chris, let's see if we can hear you and get the first question rolling. Hello, Chris?

Well, Amy, how about helping us out with any additional questions, reaching out to the audience? And I got lots of questions I can ask. Yeah, as we get the audience up on the net. As you've traveled around the world, have you been in and out of the INDOPACOM theater lately? And could you talk about sort of an update on how the end INDOPACOM on leadership looks at the China threat and then the relationships were also building and rebuilding, including deployments to the Philippines and Australia, or anything else you'd want to talk about way out West, please?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Yes, the leadership in INDOPACOM is very credible. Admiral Aquilino clearly has a lot of experience in the aerial operations. And his senior enlisted leader, David Isom, is a SEAL teammate of mine back when we E-5. So I have known him, we went to war together. So leadership wise they're in great hands. Partnership wise during great hands, because while we don't have a NATO in the INDOPACOM region,





we have a very, very strong alliance that has been working together for decades to make sure that they keep any threat to a minimum and make sure that we continue to abide by the rule of international law. The partnerships, and also the access in the region is great. You mentioned the Philippines as an example. We have been in and out of the Philippines for ages now from cold bases, warm bases, and now episodic engagements and deployments to and from just to make sure we maintain the proper access to be able to have the global reach that we need.

And then some of our other key partners, you mentioned Australia as an example, our engagements and exercises just keeps getting stronger and stronger. As a matter of fact, the Australians this year created the first member or generated the first member to fill the position of SEAC in the Australian Armed Forces in the Five Eye construct. So now they have an equivalent to my position here in the United States. But everything is very transparent and seamless in that particular region. I did some time in Okinawa, Japan working with the Japanese Armed Forces, and we have not only partnerships, but we have friendships all around the region.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

You bet. Well, let's go back to Chris Gordon. Chris, see if we can get your voice.

**Chris Gordon:**

Yes. Can you hear me?

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

You bet.

**Chris Gordon:**

All right, thank you. Yes, sir. As you've highlighted in many of your comments already, there are many tremendous stories of service and I think we see retention levels are doing quite well. So on the recruiting side, how specifically do you tell those stories? You highlighted combating some misperceptions, but what specific forums, what tangible forums can you go through to actually go about that? Because I think there's broad consensus on some of the problems that need to be addressed regarding that, but what about implementation?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Well, implementation is critical, and I will tell you that, and this is the advice that I provided my leaders at the Pentagon, is the messaging cannot be internal primarily. We need to rely on outside entities to be able to go ahead and propagate the message alongside with the Department of Defense. And what I mean by that, the use of influencers. We have people that have very wide casted nets out there with big followings that have some kind of connecting tissue with the Department of Defense. Those are the experiences that we need people to start talking about. We need to communicate with the industry, the film industry, TV industry to be able to give us a little bit more leeway to be able to go ahead and highlight the good of serving in the military service.

And lastly, a lot of our own private organizations that are really looking to help us when it comes to any particular issue, whether it's wounded warriors, whether it's financial stability and so on, to also speak on the positive of why they're doing what they do as an organization to make sure that we maintain the lethality required to go ahead and fight a determined enemy. So those are just a few examples of what we need to do with this recruiting effort to be able to go ahead and move the ball forward.



**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Chris-

**Chris Gordon:**

All right. Thank you.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

... Okay. Chris, did you have a follow-up question? If not, we'll go to Susana Curatolo.

**Chris Gordon:**

You can go ahead to the next question.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

All right. Susana? And please unmute your mic if you're still up with us. And if not, Susan, we can go to Albert Lee from Defense Archives. Okay. Well let me read... Yeah, go ahead Albert.

**Albert Lee:**

All right, to start off, my first question, since the story of the reservist who was with MIT got mentioned, what are the services doing to make people of such backgrounds be more interested in serving as compared to working at Netflix, Apple, and the likes?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

So this topic of conversation comparing a lot of the industry that is out there that is pushing forward some pretty attractive packages for our youth in comparison to what the service does for them. And I will take healthcare as an example because I have heard horror stories from people that are actually going to certain civilian healthcare institutions or programs in compared to what we get in the service. Now we have our own issues and problems when it comes to our healthcare, but every institution has got their challenges and we just go ahead and work through those.

But the one thing that youth will not get working at Netflix or working at Starbucks or some of these other very attractive packages is a sense of purpose. I mean, when you have your grandchild on your lap, how much are you going to talk about the great coffee you make versus service to nation? And that is just one small example. Where are you going to have the best opportunity to do something that is actually going to impact the lives of many across the globe when it comes to the service that you're willing to go ahead and put forward because you took an oath to the nation? And what about the pride of being one of the many service members that have taken that generational commitment to this nation? I say that we need to speak more on that context of what is it, what is the meaning of service versus compensation packages because you can compare the two all day, but when it comes to the purpose that you're going to have in life, that does not compare, not even close.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Thanks, SEAC. I think-

**Albert Lee:**

And-



**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

... Go ahead, please. Please, Albert.

**Albert Lee:**

... All right. So I guess that feeds into my next question and that's about the negative perceptions of service that SEAC mentioned earlier. We've heard stories about how there's mold in all the buildings, the entire issue with how families at Joint Base Hickam were notified about the Red Hill fuel leak. What sort of policy changes can be made to deliver tangible, positive and preferably high profile improvements for warfighters and families that normally would be affected by these things?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Well, so the first thing that I would address is we as a society tend to generalize, and the first statement was there's mold in all the barracks. And that is not the case. There's mold in some barracks, but that comes with the environment and so on. There's mold in many buildings, but somehow if it belongs to the Department of Defense and the military, I don't know why it gets over sensationalized and then it becomes like the world's falling apart to where the services are actually running due diligence to make sure that they take care of the issues.

The second part of that is that take Red Hill as a perfect example on that. Yes, there were some missteps in there, but the one thing that I can guarantee you is going to happen is that there's accountability for those actions because we have a higher standard when it comes to the way that we operate in everything that we do from garrison to combat to taking care of our families.

And then the last thing that I will say is that at times we're not always going to get things right, but you can always count that there's going to be people that truly care that are going to take the issues head on and they're going to go ahead and rectify, correct or prevent them in the future. But that is something that we as leaders need to do and continue to do when these issues arise.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Well thanks, SEAC. We'll go to Susana if she's that voice. Otherwise, I'll go ahead and read her question. What is our readiness in Burkina Faso and Niger given the intense changes presently occurring, in particular, the role of special ops contracted forces?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Well, we have a very robust presence across the globe. In Africa, I was the senior enlisted leader for United States Africa Command for three and a half years, and we had rotational forces coming in from these hotspots where we can potentially have conflict. And also we have rotational forces when it comes to training those troops to be able to self sustain organically based on the rules of their own governments. That posture changes episodically from time to time, and it is persistence. We have security force assistant brigades, we have state partnership programs that continue to engage our partners and allies, specifically in East Africa, the regions that you mentioned. And we will continue to do that as long as the partners welcome us to be able to provide that advice and be able to train their forces.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Great. I think we've got Susana up on the net. Susana, test your mic. You have a question, I think. Go ahead.



**Susana Curatolo:**

Can you hear me?

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

We can. Thank you.

**Susana Curatolo:**

Excellent. I have two questions that I posted for CZ. The first one, with the policy changes process presently occurring in the constitution of our forces. And the second question is more specific regarding readiness of our forces. What is our readiness in Burkina Faso and Niger given the intense changes presently occurring, in particular vis-a-vis the role of special ops contracted forces? Thank you, CZ.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Thanks Susana. Could you tell us your background or your organization?

**Susana Curatolo:**

I'm President of Fundamental Research Lab for Materials and Superconducting Processes for Military Applications CZT Inc in Overbrook, Kansas. And we've been in operations since 2000.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Thank you. Thanks for joining us today. SEAC?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Hey Susanne. So you actually came in broken on the first question. I got the second one on readiness, but the first one we did not hear your questions. Can you please repeat the first question?

**Susana Curatolo:**

Yes, sir. The question is how does the warfighter ethos stand up to the policy changes process presently occurring in the constitution of our forces?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Well, on that one, I will need to know specifically which policies and which changes you're referring to because that is a very, very broad question. And specifically if you're talking force composition on any particular area of operations, that is information that we do not divulge publicly because of the element of surprise. But if there's any specific policy that you're actually wanting to touch upon, please tell me.

**Susana Curatolo:**

In particular, I was triggered for this question on your earlier comment regarding the transition of, for example, intellectuals like engineers, physicists and specialists in theoretical matters into the forces versus the standard archetype of the warrior in the trenches. And I personally believe that there's more [inaudible 00:43:02] and that SEAC and hopefully your advice to the Chair can give so that the public can understand how our forces are changing in terms of the changes that are occurring in the world, especially in the battlefield. Thank you.

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Well, Susanne, the first thing that I will say is that the warrior is not changing. The warrior evolves, and the warrior evolves to any specific threat. But at the end of the day, the actions are the same, and that is war fighting. It is good to have skills, but the one thing that will require unquestionably is courage. And that is the courage to go and fight the enemy. So make no mistake, that is the number one priority of the Department of Defense when it comes to a global posture.

Now on the second question, you mentioned the readiness. And if you're talking about any particular posture when it comes to any conflict that happens worldwide, we can respond in a moment's notice. And that has happened over and over again, whether it's a hostage rescue, whether it's responding to a threat that is near one of our adversaries or one of our allies, whether it's responding to national disasters, we have the ability that it is unmatched across the globe to be able to do that. And we will continue to do that. But when it comes to the warrior ethos, that is never going to change. And that is a basic requirement and tenant of every young men and women that comes into the Department of Defense to serve our nation. So I want to make sure that we're clear on that one.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Thank you very much. Thank you. Susanne. Can we go to Ted Monakis? Please identify your background, your organization, Ted, and ensure you're off of mute. Please, Ted Monakis? Okay, I can read the question. Ted asks, "Given the opportunity to serve, CZ, as the SEAC, what do you understand is the chairman's legacy for leaving the warfighter and the Department of Defense better than you both found them in terms of technology advancements, integration of advanced technologies and mission accomplishment in support of the National Security Strategy and the National Defense strategy?"

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

I will have to say bar none, that one of the Chairman's main priorities that General Milley has taken on is making sure that we have systems that actually speak to each other. And General, you know from your background, that that hasn't always been the case. Proprietary systems sometimes become a disadvantage for us because we cannot communicate transparently across a similar mission set that were undertaken. So that is something that he has taken on as the global integrator to make sure that we have the systems and processes in place for combatant commands to execute their war fighting missions. When it comes to the Constitution, I will be the first to say, or one of many to say that that has been in the forefront of General Mill's tenure here, making sure that we as a Department of Defense remain apolitical, that we as the Department of Defense remain truthful, honest, and loyal to our oath, and that we as the Department of Defense are ready to go ahead and execute whatever task, whatever the nation needs us to do when that flag goes up. And it is my confidence that we're able to do that.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Thanks, SEAC. I'm going to ask a question on behalf of Doug Ware. CZ, SEAC, **Ramón Colón-López**, you spoke about quality of life issues for military families. How do you think that affects recruiting difficulties in the modern landscape? How visible are those issues to those who may or may not join the military? And what more can the military do to connect with young Americans who aren't currently interested in serving? You spoke to this somewhat already, but please, to reiterate some of your very good and very important salient points.

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**



Yeah, I'll take education as an example because here recently the nation was talking about loan forgiveness for school debt. And my point has always been, we already have that in the Department of Defense, it's called the GI Bill. Not only do you get free education, but you also get to serve your nation and you get a skill, you get a trade that you may be able to use on the outside and credibility to boot because you're going to become a global entity and not just a hometown person. You get exposed to so many cultures, so many methods within the Department of Defense and also to a global environment that is foreign to a lot of people that never travel.

So I think that there's a lot of benefit from the way that the military employs and actually assigns our people and trains them for any young men and women to benefit from it. And at the end of the day, if they do two, four years and they end up having an overseas assignment and they get some schooling done and everything else, they're far ahead, more than when they came in into the service because of the opportunities that they were given. And they also have an experience that very few are going to be able to compare with when it comes to their travels and their interactions with other people.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

I'm with you, SEAC, the opportunity really to achieve at the highest levels of human endeavor.

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Absolutely.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Let me press on a little bit to open up in the context of opportunities, open up recruiting opportunities, open up opportunities to serve to an ever wider spectrum of the population. And I know we've done studies on who the pools across our demographics that are out there for recruiting. But broadly, and I think you made some of these points already, how do you explain the opportunities to an ever wider population cohort?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Well, I've always stated that we are our best recruiters. We meaning every single service members. For a fighter pilot to go back to his hometown or her hometown and be able to tell the story of, "There I was at one point in my life just where you are right now. I decided to go ahead and put my mettle to the test and this is where I am today." I think it resonates with a lot of people and it may pique their curiosity to go ahead and come into service.

For me personally, coming from a background that didn't speak English, coming from a background that didn't really have exposure to any special operators because in our poor communities we weren't surrounded by SEALs, Special Forces and so on, it was basically tradesmen and you were supposed to do what your neighbors were doing. To be able to be exposed to someone that came from that same place you came from and open your eyes that even though you may be living in this environment today, that doesn't have to be the case for the rest of your life because you can have a way out. And that way out for me was that recruiting office with Technical Sergeant Derek Reason, the recruiter that actually got me into the Air Force and the opportunities that I was given to be able to go ahead and put my mettle to the test and rise up to the occasion without preferential treatment and without any benefits, just because I was different. I have clearly experienced meritocracy for what it is, you put in the work, you best your opponents and you rise up to the occasion. It is that simple.

That is an opportunity that is accessible to any young men and woman from every corner of our nation to serve us, to serve with us, to be our teammate in the Department of Defense.





**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Perfect. We're going to wrap up here shortly and I have just another question or two. We really appreciate those who've been online today and the questions that have been asked. We're running out time. So as we wrap up here, CZ, how do you stay in such great shape? What are some tips for those of us who are getting wiser but never older to stay in shape? Do you work out every day? And what do you do?

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Well, I have had to evolve when it comes to my physical training habits. I cannot run as much as I used to run, bad knees, but I never let that be a crutch or an excuse not to stay in shape. And the reason I stay in shape number one is because all the way up until the end of my days as an active duty member of this institution, I am a warfighter. And if the flag goes up, how dare I am not ready to go ahead and do whatever the nation needs me to do.

The second thing is that there are many young men and women right now that are probably looking at those excuses, well, I'm working too much. I don't have the proper diet and everything else. You have to be a visible example for the change that you want to see. And if they see it in the old man, how dare they do not when they have their golden years just there in front of them, the peak of their youth.

And then the last thing is just out of self-respect. I am a human that actually figure out my purpose in life. There's a certain image that comes along with that purpose in life and that is wearing the uniform. And who am I to disgrace that standard as a senior leader by not doing what the nation asked me to do? And that is to be ready anytime to go ahead and go anywhere and kick someone's ass.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

Amen. Well, again, thanks to all for joining us today and to our audience online again, thank you for tuning in. Please be sure to join us again for this Thursday, August 3rd for our next Warfighters in Action event with Major General John Klein, Commander of the US Air Force Expeditionary Center. And also I know many of us are looking forward to 11-13 September at National Harbor for our AFA Air, Space & Cyber Conference. I think it's going to be bigger than ever.

But let me just close with this, CZ. From Orville Wright to Chief Master Sergeant and SEAC **Ramón Colón-López**, thank you. In my 35 years or so in serving our Air Force, I'm only alive, only alive because of great NCOs. And I can't even begin to express how much I applaud, appreciate your leadership. I would also offer that for those of you who are considering staying in our military, and I hope sharing a message to join the military, the gift of military service is that I can sit here knowing as I look across the table that I can trust you implicitly. My kids, my family, my car, my dog, everything dear to me and my life. So CZ, thank you, thank you. And please stay in touch. AFA will always be on your wing, brother.

**SEAC Ramón "CZ" Colón-López:**

Thank you General. Appreciate it.

**Lt. Gen. Bruce "Orville" Wright, USAF (Ret.):**

God bless.