

COMPILATION | CORONAVIRUS

12-13 MAY 2020 AS OF 1630

Overview: Driving coverage was Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell's warning that the U.S. could suffer a long, painful downturn if Congress does not provide more economic relief to prevent a wave of bankruptcies and prolonged joblessness. There was also substantial coverage of the warning from the FBI and DHS that Chinese and Iranian hackers are targeting U.S. organizations conducting COVID-19-related vaccine research. Leading defense-related coverage was U.S. Army Europe's announcement that Exercise Allied Spirit with Poland will take place in June.

The announcement of U.S.-Polish training exercise Allied Spirit was covered primarily in defense outlets, which reported on resuming allied exercises following the "pandemic pause" (*AFP*), and noted the Army's statements that it plans to take precautionary measures against the virus. The exercise, which will involve 6,000 U.S. and Polish troops, was to be part of the division-scale DEFENDER Europe exercise before it was canceled earlier this year due to the coronavirus, according to several outlets. USAREUR said that many of the strategic readiness goals had been achieved by the time the drills were halted, but that future European exercises are being discussed with objectives similar to those initially planned, *Army Times* reported.

Other DoD-related news:

- Pres. Trump plans to name the head of U.S. Army Materiel Command Gen. Gustave Perna and former GlaxoSmithKline executive Moncef Slaoui to lead Operation Warp Speed, described by *Bloomberg* as a "Manhattan Project-style effort" to develop a COVID-19 vaccine.
- AFCS Gen. Goldfein discussed in an interview with *Politico* his concerns about how to "reverse the damage" on the service's recruitment efforts caused by the pandemic, which he said has caused a 50 percent decrease in the number of recruits coming into basic training. He also noted the "resets" he has instituted to combat what *Politico* referred to as an "erosion in readiness."
- *Military Times* reported on concerns among defense health officials that patients are delaying treatments at military treatment facilities due to the pandemic. They wrote that 50 percent of available appointments remain open and a 30 percent decrease in prescriptions being filled at MTFs and retail pharmacies.
- House Democrats' latest coronavirus relief bill includes financial protections for service members prevented from relocating by the stop movement order and eligibility for National Guard and Reserve members deployed for at least two weeks on domestic coronavirus response missions to receive free mental health care at veterans' facilities. (*Military Times*)
- Former NGB chief, Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum (ret.) argued in *The Hill* that Guard personnel responding to the pandemic should receive full medical coverage now and qualify for transitional medical coverage upon completion of their service.
- *Task & Purpose* criticized the Army for using the Joint Analytic Real-time Virtual information Sharing System (JARVISS) tool to monitor online sources to help installation commanders better understand how COVID-19 is affecting their community. The outlet notes JARVISS is typically used for monitoring terrorist activity and active shooters, and claims the COVID duties could be done "for free" using Google tools.

Other relevant/global news:

- Chinese and Iranian cyberattacks against U.S. firms and institutions could be hampering efforts to find a COVID-19 vaccine, the *WSJ* reported. In a potential shift in how the U.S. government views cyberattacks, some U.S. officials said this aggression raises the prospect that it could be seen by the Trump administration as an attack on U.S. public health "tantamount to an act of war."
- Sec. Pompeo praised Israel's willingness to share information during the pandemic, which he contrasted with countries that "try and obfuscate and hide" information, which many reports interpreted as a jab at

China. (Reuters) Sec. Pompeo also claimed that Iran was continuing to “foment terror” during the pandemic. (AFP)

- The *WSJ* reported on Chinese efforts to stall investigations into the origins of the virus, while *Fox News* covered a CIA report that China threatened to cut ties with WHO’s coronavirus investigation team if the agency declared a global health emergency as the country tried to stockpile medical supplies at the start of the crisis.

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1. Pompeo says Iran trying to ‘foment terror’ during pandemic – 5/13

Agence France-Presse | Not Attributed

US Secretary of State Mike Pompeo accused Iran on Wednesday of using its resources to “foment terror” even as its people face the Middle East’s deadliest coronavirus outbreak.

“Even during this pandemic the Iranians are using the ayatollah regime’s resources to foment terror across the world, even when the people of Iran are struggling so mightily,” Pompeo said in Jerusalem ahead of talks with Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu.

“It tells you a lot about the soul of those people who lead that country,” he added.

The trip to Israel was Pompeo’s first abroad in nearly two months amid the COVID-19 pandemic.

The US top diplomat wore a red, white and blue mask as he descended from his plane in Tel Aviv, but he and Netanyahu were without masks when they met at the premier’s office.

Netanyahu said that Pompeo's one-day visit was "a testament to the strength of our alliance."

He also praised Washington's continuing pressure on Iran, a country he claimed was persisting with its "aggressive designs and its aggressive actions against Americans, Israelis and everyone else in the region."

Pompeo and Netanyahu were also expected to discuss US blessing for Israeli plans to annex Jewish settlements and other territory in the occupied West Bank.

West Bank annexations were detailed in President Donald Trump's controversial Middle East peace plan, which was categorically rejected by the Palestinians.

For other major powers, Israeli annexations in the West Bank would amount to a grave violation of international law.

2. US army resumes Europe exercises after pandemic pause – 5/13

Agence France-Presse | Not Attributed

US military exercises in Europe that were suspended because of the coronavirus pandemic will go ahead next month but in a scaled-back format, the Army said Wednesday.

US-Polish exercise Allied Spirit, originally planned for May, will see the mobilization of 6,000 soldiers from the two countries from June 5-19 at the Drawsko Pomorskie base in the north of Poland, the army said in a statement.

"All COVID-19 precautionary measures will be taken to ensure the health and protection of participating armed forces and the local population," it said.

The 4,000 US soldiers that will take part had already traveled to Europe for Defender-Europe 20, the biggest US military deployment in Europe in 25 years.

But the pandemic prompted the Pentagon to freeze all US military movement around the world.

The new exercise will feature a Polish airborne operation and a US-Polish division-size river crossing.

By the time US troop movements to Europe were halted in early March, more than 90 percent of the equipment earmarked for Defender-Europe 20 had been loaded on aircraft or ships bound for Europe.

More than 6,000 soldiers and 3,000 pieces of equipment arrived in Europe, and over 9,000 vehicles were moved to training areas in Germany.

"Overall, despite the adjustment to the exercise due to COVID-19, many of the strategic readiness objectives were met," the army statement said.

Over the coming months, more exercises will be held to use the resources mobilized for Defender-Europe 20, which originally called for the dispatching of 20,000 US troops as far afield as Ukraine and the Baltic states.

This amounts to a daunting logistical challenge and a special deployment that reflects the strategic upheaval triggered by Russia's annexation of Crimea in 2014.

3. Defender Europe-linked exercise gets green-light in Poland - 5/13

Army Times | Kyle Rempfer

An exercise involving 6,000 U.S. and Polish troops originally scheduled for May to coincide with a larger division-scale exercise will now occur on June 5-19 at the Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area in Poland.

Exercise Allied Spirit will involve about 4,000 U.S. soldiers from the 1st Cavalry Division Headquarters, as well as the 3rd Infantry Division's 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team and 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, Army Europe officials said in a press release.

Approximately 2,000 Polish soldiers from the 6th Polish Airborne Brigade; 9th Polish Armored Cavalry Brigade; and 12th Polish Mechanized Brigade will also participate.

Allied Spirit was originally intended to be one of the many linked training events across the continent comprising the much larger Defender Europe 2020 exercise. The division-scale exercise was designed to test the deployment of roughly 20,000 U.S. soldiers from the continental United States to support activities across 10 European countries.

"Modified from its original design to ensure the safety of soldiers due to COVID-19, the U.S. and Polish bilateral exercise will feature a Polish airborne operation and a U.S.-Polish division-size river crossing," the Army Europe release reads. "All COVID-19 precautionary measures will be taken to ensure the health and protection of participating armed forces and the local population."

Even though Defender Europe was considerably scaled down due to the coronavirus pandemic, Army Chief of Staff Gen. James McConville said in March that the movement of equipment and soldiers to Europe still accomplished "strategic readiness" goals.

"We were able to get our forces over there, we have [drawn] from the pre-positioned stocks and we're still able to train with our allies and partners, although at much less capability," McConville said previously.

When the deployments from the United States to Europe were halted, more than 90 percent of the equipment tasked for Defender Europe — including 6,000 soldiers and 3,000 pieces of equipment — had already been loaded on aircraft or ships bound for the continent, Army officials said in a statement. More than 9,000 vehicles were also moved from Army Prepositioned Stocks to training areas in Germany, the statement added.

Despite assurances that strategic readiness goals were met, Army Europe is planning additional exercises over the next few months utilizing many of the original Defender Europe training objectives, the command said.

Army Europe's 10th Army Air and Missile Defense Command and the 41st Field Artillery Brigade are anticipated to participate in exercises in the Baltic Region. The 173rd Airborne Brigade is also planning airborne operations in the Balkans and Black Sea Region.

"Details of these training events are still under development and subject to change," the Army Europe statement reads.

4. EU official warns of extremists exploiting virus outbreak – 5/13

Associated Press | David Rising

BERLIN — The European Union's counterterrorism official is warning that the coronavirus pandemic is being used by extremists as an opportunity to spread their message and could be exploited to carry out attacks.

In a confidential briefing to member nations obtained Wednesday by The Associated Press, Counter-Terrorism Coordinator Gilles de Kerchove cautioned that right-wing extremists and Islamic militants "could view attacks on medical personnel and facilities as highly effective, because these would generate a massive shock in society."

He noted that in the U.S., the FBI in March shot and killed a white supremacist while trying to arrest him for plotting to blow up a hospital treating COVID-19 patients, after initially considering an attack on an African-American school, mosque or synagogue.

From past experience, he said it's known that "terrorists and violent extremists, aiming to change societies and governmental systems through violence, seek to exploit major crises to achieve their objectives".

De Kerchove noted that the Islamic State group, for example, emerged after the U.S.-led invasion of Iraq and then gained strength during the Arab Spring uprisings.

In Europe, left-wing extremists are paying "extensive attention" to the pandemic, blaming governments and "the capitalist system as a whole" for it, saying politicians have underfunded health care services, de Kerchove wrote in the analysis provided to EU member nations on May 7 and first reported Wednesday by Germany's Die Zeit newspaper's online edition.

IS has "incited its supporters in the West to take advantage of the current crisis to stage attacks," but so far there has been no uptick in any violence, he said.

Currently, most extremists seem to be using the crisis for propaganda purposes, taking advantage of the fact that with lockdown measures people are spending more time online than usual.

"To increase their support base, violent extremists use people's insecurities, vulnerabilities and grievances, creating a simple narrative which 'explains' problems by blaming outsiders," de Kerchove wrote.

"Infidels' or 'apostates' serve as scapegoats for jihadists, members of ethnic and religious minority groups for right-wing extremists, and 'class enemies' and 'capitalists' for left-wing extremists."

5. Prodded by US, Mexico aims to restart industrial plants – 5/13

Associated Press | Mark Stevenson

MEXICO CITY — President Andrés Manuel López Obrador pledged Wednesday to begin reopening Mexico's economy next week — encouraged by U.S. officials — even as hospitals from Mexico City to the border reeled under the pressure of the largest one-day jump in COVID-19 case numbers and the lack of testing made decision-making difficult.

Economy Secretary Graciela Marquez said the reopening would be "gradual, orderly and cautious," and that by May 18, industries like construction, mining, and car and truck manufacturing would be allowed to resume.

Mexico's top advisory body on the coronavirus pandemic, the General Health Council, said Tuesday it had decided to classify those industries as "essential activities" that are allowed to continue working during a lockdown aimed at fighting the spread of the novel coronavirus.

Mexico has been under pressure from U.S. officials to reopen auto plants because without them, integrated supply chains would make it hard for plants in the U.S. and Canada to reopen.

The announcement came as hospitals from Mexico City to its northern border with the U.S. were nearing overload, and manufacturing workers in border cities like Ciudad Juarez had only recently been sent home following protests prompted by the wildfire spread of the coronavirus through their plants.

Mexican health officials on Tuesday reported its largest single-day jump in COVID-19 case numbers, with 1,997 new cases and 353 deaths, bringing the total to has over 38,000 confirmed cases and almost 4,000 deaths.

Officials have acknowledged the actual infection numbers are many times that number. Mexico has done relatively little testing, with about 120,000 coronavirus tests reported so far in a country of almost 130 million. That is equivalent to only about 0.6 people per 1,000 inhabitants tested, the lowest rate in the Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development.

That will make it hard to judge whether the re-opening will risk a renewed upsurge in cases.

Susana Prieto, a labor lawyer who advises workers at border assembly plants known as maquiladoras, said the decision showed the government was yielding to pressure from multinationals. Workers in Ciudad Juarez have staged walkouts and protests to get firms to shut down and send them home with full pay during the lockdown.

Now, even though there have reportedly been dozens of deaths among maquiladora workers, the government wants to put some plants that produce car seats or wiring harnesses back to work.

“Is it safe?” Prieto asked ironically. “It is safe to say that the president of Mexico is a puppet of Mexican and foreign (businesses) that do not care about the lives of Mexican workers?”

U.S. officials have urged Mexico to open plants, suggesting the supply chain of the North American free trade zone could be permanently affected if they didn’t resume production.

Christopher Landau, the U.S. ambassador to Mexico, launched a Twitter campaign last month, writing “There are risks everywhere, but we don’t all stay at home for fear we are going to get in a car accident ... The destruction of the economy is also a health threat.”

Ellen Lord, U.S. undersecretary of defense for acquisition and sustainment, recently said that Mexican plant closures were affecting U.S. companies.

But the pressure for reopening is building as well in Mexican states where the lockdown has caused huge job losses.

Carlos Joaquin Gonzalez, the governor of the Caribbean coast state of Quintana Roo — home to resorts like Cancun — said his state has lost 22% of its jobs after about 8 million people cancelled trips to the area this year due to pandemic.

“Obviously, this requires us to think about reopening — as soon as possible,” Joaquin Gonzalez said.

For most people, the new coronavirus causes mild or moderate symptoms, such as fever and cough that clear up in two to three weeks. For some, especially older adults and people with existing health problems, it can cause more severe illness, including pneumonia and death.

Nationwide, Mexico has lost about 500,000 jobs due to the pandemic, and the auto industry appears eager to get back to work.

Volkswagen de Mexico said last week it is planning to reopen its assembly plant in Puebla state and its engine factory in Guanajuato state on June 1.

General Motors said it hadn’t fixed “an exact date” for reopening its plant, also in the Guanajuato city of Silao, but some workers there reported getting notices to report for work on May 18. Ford said, “We are waiting to receive (government) approval to operate.”

Officials also said other businesses and schools would begin to reopen. Marquez said that schools and businesses would be allowed to reopen in about one-tenth of Mexico’s townships that have no recorded cases of coronavirus. There are about 269 such “townships of hope,” that neither have active cases in their own territory nor in adjoining townships. They are largely located in rural areas in north-central and southeastern Mexico.

A new, four-color coding system will be in place by June 1 to tell people and businesses what activities are allowed. But López Obrador said it would be left up to individual states to act as they say best. “We are not going to fight,” the president said.

The government of Mexico City, which has been hardest hit by the virus and where most of the hospitals are full, announced that manufacturing and construction can restart on June 1. Restaurants and department stores can open at one-third capacity starting June 15, and sports events can be played without spectators. Schools will re-open sometime in August.

6. Trump Taps Ex-Glaxo Official and General to Lead Vaccine Race – 5/13

Bloomberg News | Jennifer Jacobs and Drew Armstrong

President Donald Trump plans to name Moncef Slaoui, the former head of GlaxoSmithKline Plc's vaccines division, and Gustave Perna, a four-star U.S. general, to lead a Manhattan Project-style effort to develop a vaccine for the novel coronavirus, two people familiar with the matter said.

Slaoui, 60, and Perna will oversee the initiative known as Operation Warp Speed, according to the people, who spoke on condition of anonymity ahead of an announcement expected later Wednesday. Slaoui will work on a volunteer basis.

The Trump administration project seeks to produce 300 million doses of a Covid-19 vaccine by the end of the year, hastening development by simultaneously testing many different candidates and beginning production before they've completed clinical trials.

The program will pull together private pharmaceutical companies, government agencies and the military to try to cut the development time for a vaccine by as much as eight months, according to two people familiar with the matter. Slaoui will serve as the program's chief adviser while Perna will work as the chief operating officer, the people said.

In 2017, Slaoui retired from Glaxo, where he had worked for almost 30 years. The London-based company credits him with overseeing a vaccines pipeline that produced Rotarix, used to prevent diarrhea in infants, and Cervarix, to protect against a viral infection that can lead to cervical cancer.

Perna has since 2016 served as the 19th Commander of the U.S. Army Materiel Command, which manages the service's supply chain worldwide. He was previously the Army's deputy chief of staff and oversaw policies and procedures for the service's logistics.

Slaoui sits on the boards of several companies involved in the vaccine chase, presenting a potential conflict of interest. He's been a board member of Moderna Inc., one of the leading U.S. companies developing a vaccine, since 2017. And last month he joined the board of Lonza Group AG, a Swiss medical company that has contracted with Moderna to manufacture its vaccine. He's also on the board of SutroVax Inc., a closely held vaccine developer.

As a board member in 2019, Slaoui earned \$490,000 from Moderna, including \$65,000 in cash and \$425,000 in options awards, according to a corporate filing.

He's a partner at the venture capital firm Medicxi, and is on the board of the Human Vaccines Project, a nonprofit enterprise that attempts to accelerate vaccine development by better understanding the immune system, and has said it will try and accelerate work on a coronavirus inoculation.

Slaoui earned a doctorate in molecular biology and immunology from the Université Libre de Bruxelles in Belgium, according to a 2017 press release from Moderna. He completed his postdoctoral studies at Harvard Medical School and Tufts University School of Medicine.

--With assistance from Tony Capaccio

7. A delicate balancing act: The US government must juggle a pandemic and the FY21 budget – 5/13

Defense News | Robert DuPree

For the past few months, the U.S. federal government has been, quite understandably, totally focused on addressing the enormous health care and economic impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic. These efforts will necessarily continue to be front and center in the weeks and even months ahead, no matter how rapidly the curve flattens or declines, as different sectors and regions reopen.

But to move the country forward, Congress must prepare to do its regular business for the year, which largely means tackling appropriations bills. Congressional staff have reportedly been doing the prep work to get spending bills ready for whenever the House and Senate can safely convene to work on them (or to do much of this work remotely).

The American people — including federal contractors large and small, and our employees — are relying on Congress to check its partisan impulses and figure out how to do two things at once in the coming months: Continue to combat the COVID-19 crisis, and develop fiscal 2021 funding bills for all federal departments and agencies to meet our nation's needs.

Unfortunately, there are some who are already taking a simplistic view, saying Congress will be so busy dealing with the pandemic that it will have to just give up and pass a continuing resolution to fund the government beyond the election into next year or even for a full year.

On the contrary, the pandemic is exactly why Congress should be doing its work and completing updated appropriations bills on time.

First of all, in these extraordinary times, the country doesn't need appropriations bills which merely extend the decisions made on spending last December, when Congress finally completed action (over two months late) on FY20 appropriations bills. The COVID-19 pandemic was just a blip on the horizon at that time. For FY21, the country needs updated spending legislation that more accurately reflects the greatly changed world we now face. Moreover, departments and agencies also need the flexibility to enter into new contracts to meet new needs, which is generally prohibited unless expressly provided under a continuing resolution.

Further, Congress and the administration must come to grips with the elephant in the room — the strict annual spending caps imposed by the Budget Control Act of 2011, as amended. To mix metaphors, this law is no longer just an elephant, it's an emperor who has no clothes.

Congress has modified the BCA's statutory spending caps a number of times over the past decade (thus, the above caveat "as amended"). Now we're about to face the final year of the law's spending caps, and what do we find? The caps are a joke. The caps were meant to limit discretionary spending each year, but Congress has repeatedly found ways around them. This has usually been done in one of two ways.

The first is by including some amount of normal baseline defense spending under the category of overseas contingency operations, or OCO, which is "wartime" funding; this occurs even when unrelated to America's overseas/wartime military efforts. OCO spending is exempt from the BCA caps, so funding part of the base Defense Department budget this way enables the law's defense-spending cap to be technically met while also understating the Pentagon's non-wartime expenditures.

The second way is by designating certain spending as "emergency" expenditures. Yes, these are almost always for valid, unforeseen emergencies, but it is still spending that would otherwise exceed the discretionary caps. Only Congress can wave a wand and say: "No, it doesn't exceed the cap — it's for an emergency."

To be honest, the caps painted an unrealistic picture of efforts to control federal spending anyway. By only being applied to discretionary spending, exempting massive entitlement expenditures and interest on the debt, the caps presented a partial picture of true federal-spending restraint to begin with.

And now the COVID-19 crisis has resulted in multiple legislative packages being enacted, which the nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office estimates could add over \$2.7 trillion to the current year's deficit. But because they are loans or designated as "emergency" spending, they don't violate the caps. They just add to the deficit.

In reality, true federal spending has soared far past the stable level of spending that the caps were purported to achieve when the BCA was first enacted. Yet, the caps are still in place for next year, which will impact the congressional appropriations process by either preventing the spending needed to address current needs, or leading to further contortionist efforts by legislators to circumvent the caps.

So let's quit pretending. Congress and the administration should agree to repeal the final year of the caps as part of the next COVID-19 legislative package so appropriators can be upfront about the spending needed without having to hide so much of that spending behind the "emergency spending" loophole.

Be transparent, and admit the country is, like during World War II, spending a whole lot more than anticipated to meet the crisis.

And most of all, get the job done by acting in a bipartisan fashion to pass appropriations bills by Oct. 1, 2020, that accurately reflect our real needs and expenditures. Admittedly, that may not be easy to do in an election year, but the nation and the federal contracting community are depending on Congress to be able to manage the COVID-19 crisis response, while simultaneously conducting its regular business.

Robert DuPree is manager of government affairs at Telos Corporation. He focuses on political developments in Congress and the executive branch, including the federal budget, appropriations process, national defense and cybersecurity. He previously served as legislative director for a senior member of the U.S. House of Representatives.

8. No COVID impacts on Apache production, supply chain, says Boeing – 5/13

Defense News | Aaron Mehta

WASHINGTON — The COVID-19 pandemic has not had an impact on production and delivery of Apache helicopters, but Boeing is closely watching the international supply chain for signs of slowdown, a company official said Tuesday.

The coronavirus impact going forward is difficult to predict, said T.J. Jamison, Boeing's director of Vertical Lift International Sales. Still, he expressed a belief that the company should be able to stay on track with its plans to produce over 100 Apache models in 2020.

While production on the CH-47 Chinook and V-22 Osprey in the Philadelphia area was stopped for two weeks in April, the Mesa, Ariz., Boeing plant that produces the Apache never had to stop work. However, there have been a number of individuals working remotely, primarily from the sales team; it will likely be a month or more before those people are all back working at their desks, Jamison said.

Some international customers have signaled that "we might need a potential slowdown in operations. But not one has said, 'Hey, we need to cancel these orders because of the COVID-19 issue,'" Jamison said, later emphasizing that "there have been no cancellations. And there have been no significant requests for delay."

However, just like the Pentagon, the company is keeping a close watch on the international supply chain. For the Apache, that includes fuselage production in both Hyderabad, India, managed by Tata, and Sacheon, South Korea, managed by Korea Aerospace Industries.

Boeing's decision to maintain two suppliers for that production has "served us very well" in the current situation, per Jamison, who noted that while India is currently being hit hard by COVID-19 and is undergoing government-mandated shutdowns, the KIA plant is able to keep production on track.

“We really do not like to have a single point of failure with any of our components that we receive through the supply chain,” he said. “There hasn’t been a dramatic impact to the supply chain today. Again, I don’t have that crystal ball and I can’t tell you how this pandemic is going to play out. But right now, there hasn’t been a dramatic impact.”

9. Pentagon’s European exercise campaign resumes with US-Polish drill – 5/13

Defense News | Sebastian Sprenger

COLOGNE, Germany -- Following a lull in military exercises due to the coronavirus pandemic, U.S. Army Europe plans to resume its wider training campaign with a drill in Poland next month.

The June 5-19 exercise, Allie Spirit, will take place at Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area in northwestern Poland and is slated to include a Polish airborne operation and a U.S.-Polish division-size river crossing, according to a statement issued by the Wiesbaden, Germany-based command.

The drill was originally planned for this month as an ancillary event to U.S. European Command’s large-scale Defender Europe drill. Military officials have vowed to implement health precautions to protect participants and the local population.

For the reemergence of the Defender Europe campaign, exercise planners are able to work with equipment stocks that were previously drawn from storage sites in Europe or shipped from U.S. installations before the order to halt the deployment came down in March.

“In total, over 6,000 Soldiers and 3,000 pieces of equipment arrived in Europe, and over 9,000 vehicles were moved from Army Prepositioned Stocks to training areas in Germany,” U.S. Army Europe said in a statement.

Officials claim that “many of the strategic readiness objectives were met” despite the monthslong pause.

Of the 6,000 soldiers to be involved in Allied Spirit next month, roughly 4,000 will come from U.S. Army units, including the 1st Cavalry Division Headquarters (Forward); the 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team; and the 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division, the command statement read.

The 2,000 Polish participants will come from the 6th Polish Airborne Brigade; the 9th Polish Armored Cavalry Brigade; and the 12th Polish Mechanized Brigade.

The drill in Poland picks up on the overarching theme of deploying allied formations from Germany to would-be hot spots on NATO’s eastern flank, with sizable rivers presenting obstacles along the way.

The topography in northern Poland resembles that of the Missouri lake region, which means proficiency in so-called wet-gap crossing operations is paramount in massing allied troops to reinforce the Baltics just to the east, Lt. Gen. Ben Hodges, a former commander of U.S. Army forces in Europe, told Defense News.

“In actual conflict you can’t assume all the highway bridges would still be standing,” he said.

NATO armies have the capability of building ad hoc bridges for tanks and other heavy equipment, most notably the U.K. and Germany with their M3 amphibious vehicles. “The problem is there is not enough of it,” Hodges said.

The shortfall puts the spotlight on the larger problem of military mobility in Europe. The Defender Europe exercise and its offspring drills are meant to test the flow of personnel and equipment across borders on the continent. The tasks involve sorting out the bureaucratic and infrastructure-related differences impeding the rapid transit of cargo.

Meanwhile, an envisioned multibillion-dollar European Union fund aimed at boosting all aspects of military mobility among member states stands to be all but axed as the bloc's focus shifts to economic recovery following the coronavirus crisis, according to a Reuters report this week.

NATO officials have had a keen interest in the money, as it would inject military specifications into infrastructure planning all over the continent.

Camille Grand, assistant secretary general for defense investment at NATO, told Defense News the objective will remain a priority regardless of what happens to the EU funding commitment.

"I'm afraid it is heavily connected to the overall outcome of the budget discussion, and we won't see the outcome until the end of the year," he said in an interview last month.

If the fund were to go away, he said, individual nations would have to step up in seeing their bridges, tunnels and railway upgrades through.

"It's the sort of investment that it would be great for the EU to invest into this and that we highly welcome at NATO, but it is not something that is out of reach. It might take a little longer or will have to be financed through other means, but at the end of the day it's not a showstopper," he said.

As for the work to streamline cross-border transit procedures, that's moving "quite rapidly, both in an EU and NATO context," he said.

According to U.S. Army Europe, future drills are planned in the Baltics involving the command's 10th Army Air & Missile Defense Command and 41st Field Artillery Brigade. The 173rd Airborne Brigade is also planning airborne operations in the Balkans and Black Sea region.

10. Despite coronavirus, Space Force prepping for back-to-back rocket launches – 5/13

Florida Times-Union (Jacksonville, FL) | Emre Kelly

The commander of the Space Force's local wing says teams are ready for this weekend's back-to-back rocket launches despite the coronavirus pandemic.

The commander of the Space Force's local wing says his teams are ready for this weekend's back-to-back rocket launches, possibly breaking a decades-old mission cadence record despite the ongoing coronavirus pandemic.

45th Space Wing Commander Brig. Gen. Doug Schiess said Tuesday he expects about 300 people – military and civilian – to support Saturday's launch of an Air Force X-37B spaceplane from Cape Canaveral's Launch Complex 41. A United Launch Alliance Atlas V rocket will take the 29-foot-long secretive spacecraft to orbit sometime between 6:30 a.m. and 11 a.m., though an exact time has not been released due to security reasons.

If X-37B flies as planned, the Space Force will turn around and support a SpaceX Falcon 9 launch with 60 Starlink internet satellites from Launch Complex 40 less than a day later.

"That would be about 20 hours, which would break our record of last August of 34 hours," Schiess said of the mission slated to fly around 4 a.m. Sunday. "That hasn't been broken in about 30 years."

About 200 people, including firefighters, security, and launch support, would be on-hand for Starlink's eighth mission. Schiess said the difference in 100 or so staff between Atlas V and Falcon 9 is due to the latter's use of the Autonomous Flight Safety System, or AFSS, which can automatically destroy Falcon 9 rockets in the event of emergencies. Atlas V rockets require more staff in the loop because they use flight termination systems, or FTS, which require human input.

The tight scheduling of the two launches doesn't mean the 45th is entirely back to normal, however, as Schiess said his teams are still expected to follow coronavirus-related guidelines. Some base amenities are back online, but when it comes to launch support, one of the new rules includes masks.

"We are all wearing face coverings anytime you enter into a building at Patrick Air Force Base or Cape Canaveral Air Force Station," he said. "I worked a SpaceX launch just recently and we wore space coverings the whole time."

In some operations centers, Schiess said, personnel are taking temperatures before staff begin working at consoles. In total, 11 people connected to the bases have tested positive for COVID-19, though none of those include active duty military members.

Outside the gates of the Space Force's two local bases, however, things are more complicated for locals and visitors. NASA Administrator Jim Bridenstine has urged spectators to stay at home for the upcoming May 27 launch of astronauts on a Falcon 9 rocket, while Brevard County Sheriff Wayne Ivey encouraged visitors to come as long as they followed Centers for Disease Control guidelines.

Schiess didn't immediately recommend that people stay at home, but did say NASA and SpaceX will be providing comprehensive live streams. In the past, Cape Canaveral Air Force Station has issued passes to people with access for launch viewing opportunities, but that will not be an option for the May 27 flight, known as Demo-2.

"I think we're going to do a great job of providing streaming opportunities for everyone to see that," he said. "We tell everyone here to do the right thing, which is to keep yourself physically distanced from others, wear a face covering when possible, and use good hygiene."

"I would tell the public that we're going to have great opportunities for them to watch this in a streaming capacity," he said.

11. Bowing to Russia, U.N. Halts Funding for Pandemic Relief in Northeastern Syria – 5/13
With Putin's help, Assad has constrained the capacity of the United Nations to deliver health supplies in Syria's opposition-controlled territory, which faces rising risk of coronavirus.
Foreign Policy | Colum Lynch

Facing pressure from Russia, the chief ally to Syrian President Bashar al-Assad, U.N. relief agencies have been instructed to stop funding programs by private charities transporting lifesaving health services across the Iraqi border to northeastern Syria, dealing a blow to international efforts to respond to the coronavirus pandemic in opposition-controlled territory, according to diplomatic and relief sources and confidential U.N. guidance.

The United Nations informed its relief agencies several weeks ago that they were permitted to fund private charities operating in northeastern Syria only if they were registered in Damascus and authorized to work there by the Syrian government, which has proved unwilling, or unable, to meet the region's health needs. The funding freeze comes as the World Health Organization (WHO) and other U.N. relief agencies have raised concerns that they lack sufficient access rights to respond to the health needs of some 2 million people in the region.

The aid crisis in northeastern Syria—which is inhabited predominantly by Kurds, displaced civilians, and anti-government groups—has worsened since the U.N. Security Council, acting under pressure from Russia, shut down a U.N.-sanctioned humanitarian aid hub on Jan. 10 at the Yaroubia crossing on the Iraqi-Syrian border. That deprived the U.N. of an explicit legal mandate to serve the region. The border crossing served as a key pipeline for WHO and private relief groups delivering medical assistance into northeastern Syria. Efforts by the U.N. to identify alternate routes to fill the gap have so far proved unsuccessful.

"[N]ew options are needed to fill the significant gaps and to continue the humanitarian assistance previously delivered through Ya'rubiya," WHO warned the U.N. Security Council last week in a confidential memo reviewed

by Foreign Policy. “The urgency to respond is not only to control transmission in NES [northeastern Syria], but also to limit the spread of other areas of Syria that have not yet been affected.”

A bipartisan coalition of U.S. congressional leaders has urged the Trump administration to counter efforts by Russia, backed by China, to eliminate the aid crossings and to either ensure that U.N. agencies can continue to fund vital cross-border aid operations or form a coalition of like-minded countries to pick up the financial slack.

“[T]he closure of the Ya’rubiyah border crossing between Iraq and northeast Syria has hindered the overall humanitarian response and disrupted the UN’s ability to deliver specialized medical equipment,” the chairs and ranking members of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee and House Foreign Affairs Committee wrote Tuesday in a letter to U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo. “Without access to these border crossings, the UN has been forced to suspend funding for many of its NGO partners, who must now rely on alternative, woefully inadequate, and easily manipulated means to deliver aid, such as land-based convoys from Damascus.”

Following the council vote on Yaroubia, Mark Lowcock, the undersecretary-general and emergency relief coordinator in the U.N. Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA), appealed to the U.N. Office of Legal Affairs (OLA) to advise on the legality of continuing U.N. financial support for aid operations in northeastern Syria, according to four diplomatic and relief sources. OLA, according to those sources, concluded that the U.N. could only fund agencies registered and approved by the Syrian government. An internal U.N. paper, reflecting the new understanding, outlined more than two dozen U.N. activities that would “remain lawful” in northeastern Syria after the closure of Yaroubia. It recognized only the “funding to NGOs operating in NES who are authorized to operate by the Government of Syria.” U.N. officials, meanwhile, advised aid groups that the funding spigot would be turned off.

It is unclear whether Russia directly pressed the U.N. to cut funding to aid groups. But Russia’s U.N. ambassador, Vassily Nebenzia, recently made it clear that Moscow vigorously opposed reopening Yaroubia. “The Government of Syria is doing its utmost to fight the spread of COVID-19 despite cruel unilateral sanctions,” Nebenzia told the council in late April. “We strongly urge our colleagues not to waste their time on looking for a way to advocate, explicitly or implicitly for getting Al-Yarubiah back and saying that this be the ‘only solution.’”

The decision triggered fierce pushback from some U.N. relief agencies and private aid groups, which privately protested that the policy would result in a steep deterioration in humanitarian conditions in northeastern Syria, where the vast majority of people live in camps and communities outside of government control. Lowcock’s office subsequently backtracked, informing front-line relief groups that they shouldn’t consider any U.N. guidance on the legality of funding legally binding. One official familiar with the debate said the U.N. agencies are exploring ways in which they can help private aid agencies continue their work. But officials said new financial support from the U.N. has stopped.

Zoe Paxton, the relief coordinator’s chief spokesperson, denied the claims that the U.N. lawyers had ever issued an official opinion prohibiting funding for cross-border operations. “OCHA did not seek, receive or share official guidance from OLA that UN agencies could only provide funding to NGOs that operate in northeast Syria with the approval of the Government of Syria,” she told Foreign Policy. “Similarly, OCHA did not seek, receive or share official OLA guidance that UN agencies could not fund NGOs that provide cross-border assistance.”

“The Security Council decided not to renew the United Nations’ use of Al Yarubiyah border crossing,” Paxton added. “The United Nations continues to do everything possible to get help to people in need in northeast Syria, including by advocating for expedited and unhindered cross-line humanitarian access.”

The U.N. Security Council granted the legal authority to U.N. and private relief agencies in 2014 to deliver humanitarian assistance to millions of civilians in opposition-controlled territory through crossing points in Iraq, Jordan, and Turkey. The arrangement was established in response to Syrian efforts to use food and other humanitarian aid as a weapon of war, cutting off humanitarian assistance to communities suspected of sympathizing with anti-government forces. Syrian opposition forces also laid siege to government-controlled

towns—though on a far smaller scale. Syrian authorities also routinely removed medical supplies from trucks entering rebel-held territory from Damascus, claiming they could be used to treat fighters.

The cross-border assistance has provided millions of civilians in opposition-controlled territory in northwestern and northeastern Syria with their main source of humanitarian assistance. Only a fraction of assistance to opposition-held lands comes via cross-line aid shipments that travel from Damascus to opposition-controlled territory and are approved by the government.

Syria has long opposed the cross-border aid pipelines as a violation of its sovereignty, claiming that aid trucks are used to supply weapons to anti-government forces. In December, Russia and China vetoed a Security Council resolution that would have extended the mandate to run cross-border operations for more than a year. But several weeks later, on Jan. 10, Moscow negotiated a compromise that permitted aid to continue to flow through Turkey to northwestern Syria but ended Security Council approval for the Yaroubia crossing, the key entry point for medical supplies provided by WHO.

In a recent paper prepared for the 15-nation council, WHO raised concerns that the remaining aid pipeline from Damascus would not be able to meet the needs of civilians in northeastern Syria. “[I]n recent months the supply chain from Iraq has become less effective and reliable,” according to the WHO paper.

An early draft of the paper called for the “re-opening of Yaroubia crossing as a matter of urgency,” but the proposal to reopen Yaroubia—which is vehemently opposed by Russia—was subsequently eliminated from the final paper. Instead, the revised version merely noted that the Damascus aid pipeline would not be able to address the needs posed by the coronavirus and that there was a need to find alternate routes.

The U.N., meanwhile, has explored the possibility of filling the supply gap by channeling aid through informal Iraqi crossing points, including the Kurdish-controlled border crossings at Walid and Fishkabour, which relies on damaged pontoon bridges, or a larger crossing point in Tal Abyad, Turkey.

“UN and NGO partners agree that the cross-line option cannot be adequately expanded to meet the needs in NES and will not be sufficient to support an effective response to COVID-19,” WHO reported. “Over the past three months only 31% of NGO-supported facilities have received medicines, supplies and equipment through cross-border mechanisms, including hospitals in Tabqa, Ar-Raqqa and Al-Hasakeh, and facilities in IDP [internally displaced persons] camps.”

Hardin Lang, the vice president for programs and policy at Refugees International, said much of the aid that does reach the north remains in government control.

“Anyone who thinks northeast Syria is going to be a priority for the regime is dreaming,” Lang said. The Syrian government, he added, “has a well-established reputation of manipulating humanitarian assistance coming into the country.”

Elizabeth Tsurkov, a fellow at the Foreign Policy Research Institute who has interviewed health providers throughout the region, echoed Lang’s concern.

She noted that the vast majority of aid flowing into northeastern Syria following the closure of Yaroubia went to a state hospital in Qamishli. Facing criticism, she said, WHO has since sought to distribute health care assistance more widely throughout the region. But she said very little coronavirus-related material is finding its way into opposition-held territory. The challenge at Qamishli, she said, is that patients must cross government checkpoints to get to the hospital. Most military-age men, she added, are unwilling to go to the hospital for fear of being recruited into the military or reserve service.

“A large share of the population cannot access the services at Qamishli hospital,” Tsurkov said. “It is only accessible to people perceived as loyal to the regime.”

12. China put pressure on WHO to scale back coronavirus warning to stockpile supplies, CIA believes: report – 5/13

Fox News | Barnini Chakraborty

The CIA believes China tried to prevent the World Health Organization from warning other countries about the novel coronavirus outbreak in January as it worked feverishly to stockpile medical supplies from countries around the world, including the United States.

The CIA report, titled "U.N.-China: WHO Mindful But Not Beholden to China," accuses China of threatening to cut ties with WHO's coronavirus investigation team if the agency declared a global health emergency, Newsweek first reported on Tuesday.

The threat to hold back lifesaving information about an outbreak that's killed close to 300,000 people worldwide is the third such report that's emerged from a Western intelligence service this month about Beijing's questionable steps during the early days of the pandemic and is likely to further inflame tensions between the two global superpowers.

Last week, Germany's *Der Spiegel* cited a German intelligence assessment that accused Chinese President Xi Jinping of personally threatening WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus on January 21.

In that incident, the WHO dismissed the claim that Xi himself intervened but refused to address whether any Chinese official made an effort to delay the announcement of a public health emergency.

WHO spokesperson Christian Lindmeier told Newsweek that the organization does not "comment on specific discussions with member states" but added that WHO "has acted in accordance with its mandate as an evidence-based technical organization focused on protecting all people, everywhere."

"WHO bases its recommendations on science, public health best practices, evidence, data, and the advice of independent experts," Lindmeier said.

He also claimed Tedros did not communicate with Xi on Jan. 20, 21, or 22 but that Tedros and his senior team met with Xi in Beijing on Jan. 28. However, he said the issue of a public health emergency of international concern (PHEIC) did not come up during the meeting.

When WHO declared a public health emergency two days later, the health care arm of the United Nations went to great lengths to absolve China of any wrongdoing — a move that irked world leaders like President Trump, who eventually withdrew funding from the WHO in April because it was too "China-centric." After Trump suspended funding, China announced it would be giving WHO an additional \$30 million.

"Let me be clear: This declaration is not a vote of no confidence in China," Tedros said on the day he announced the global health crisis. "On the contrary, WHO continues to have confidence in China's capacity to control the outbreak."

On Friday, Trump slammed WHO during a meeting with Republican lawmakers.

"What World Health Organization got away with is unbelievable. They're a pipe organ for China, so I'm going to make a decision very soon," he said about the future of America's relationship with the organization.

China has worked overtime to push back on accusations it has in any way contributed to the killer contagion spreading and has praised itself at every turn for a job well done. It has tried to pitch itself as a nation ready and willing to help other countries struggling with COVID-19 when in reality, it seems Beijing is simply fixed on shirking the blame.

In May, a four-page Department of Homeland Security intelligence report obtained by The Associated Press also accused China of covering up the extent of the outbreak to stock up on medical supplies it needed to respond to it.

In April, a European Union report that accused China and Russia of running a "global disinformation campaign" was significantly scaled back after pressure from Beijing and fears that, if China was blamed, it would withhold much-needed medical supplies around the world as retaliation.

13. Doug Collins backs Senate's call for China sanctions: 'They deceived the world' while people died – 5/13

Fox News | Joshua Nelson

Rep. Doug Collins said Wednesday that Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., is right to bring forth a bill imposing sanctions on China for their mishandling of the coronavirus outbreak, explaining that a House version is in the works.

"China deceived the world while people were dying. They were taking precautions inside their own borders while yet letting people go internationally," the Georgia Republican lawmaker told "America's Newsroom."

Collins called for an "independent investigation led by the U.S. and others" to make sure that China is "held accountable."

"The Chinese officials who did this, they need to be in a position where they can be sanctioned, where their assets are frozen. Those are the kind of things we'll look at in this bill. We also need to be able to make sure that there is now accountability for this," Collins said.

Collins' comments came after Graham introduced legislation that would allow President Trump to impose a wide range of sanctions on the Chinese government if it refuses to cooperate with an international investigation into the origins of the coronavirus.

The COVID-19 Accountability Act would require Trump to certify to Congress that China had cooperated with an international coronavirus investigation, led by either the U.S., an ally or a U.N. body, closed all relevant wet markets, and released Hong Kong pro-democracy protesters arrested during the crisis.

If not, then Trump would be authorized by Congress to impose a range of sanctions -- including asset freezes, travel bans and measures barring U.S. institutions from making loans to Chinese businesses.

The bill is co-sponsored by Republican Sens. Thom Tillis of North Carolina, Cindy Hyde-Smith of Mississippi, Mike Braun of Indiana, Rick Scott of Florida, Steve Daines of Montana, Todd Young of Indiana, Jim Inhofe of Oklahoma and Roger Wicker of Mississippi.

Collins said that Trump initiated a move against China first. Collins also explained further how the bill will hold China accountable for "being a bad actor" in the coronavirus pandemic.

"In fact, [Trump] actually started this when he [announced] the Chinese travel ban, which actually folks on the left criticized. He understood this, but now it is time to give him the tools that he can use, that we can now use to actually hold China accountable where it really hurts the most: in their travel, in their money, and in their manufacturing."

Collins said that the bill will also raise the standards for the manufacturing of pharmaceuticals in China.

"Things that are manufactured [in China] need to come up to the same standard as we see here. This is a bill that I am proud to partner with. We're going to see it in the House."

14. Rep. Will Hurd: Coronavirus recovery — Western nations can limit further damage from China. Here's how — 5/13

Fox News | Rep. Will Hurd

How far will the Chinese government go to make its economy the most influential in the world? That's a question national security experts have been discussing for years, and we now know. Based on the Chinese Communist Party's (CCP) attempt to rewrite the history of the COVID-19 pandemic, they are willing to use aggressive disinformation to achieve their aim.

Over the past few months, the CCP has falsely claimed the source of COVID-19 was the U.S. Army and Italy. They then amplified disinformation about the U.S. response to the pandemic.

These efforts are designed to achieve three goals: Save face with a Chinese populace devastated by this deadly epidemic, distract the world from the Chinese government's lack of transparency on the spread of COVID-19, and drive a wedge between the United States and our international allies.

General Secretary Xi Jinping, though clearly concerned about his standing in the CCP given their bungled response and draconian efforts to deal with COVID-19, has recognized the opportunity to use this global crisis to supercharge the Chinese government's stated goal to become the world's sole superpower by 2049.

In addition to claiming COVID-19 is a bioweapon created by the U.S., the CCP is utilizing government-backed media outlets and officials to spread the narrative that China defeated the virus and is the leader in helping the rest of the world — by sharing medical expertise and providing personal protective equipment — through this global crisis.

Russia and Iran are echoing this disinformation to distract their own populations from their ineffective responses to the virus and to sow doubt in the international community about who is the more responsible global superpower: the United States or China.

Unfortunately, years of effective Chinese diplomacy and influence-peddling in Western capitals have made fighting this messaging campaign more difficult. Some of our allies have been lulled into complacency and failed to grasp the severity of the threat posed by the CCP to our economies, security and values.

America and its allies must remain the world's centers of innovation and technological advancement, and the only way to achieve this goal is to strengthen our alliances not weaken them.

For example, European support for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), formally endorsed by more than half of the European Union's members, has helped normalize an initiative that has left many countries trapped in debt, expanded China's global influence and exported China's surveillance state.

The Chinese impact on European domestic economic projects allows them to gain influence on issues of foreign policy like getting countries to block the EU from condemning the CCP's human rights record despite indisputable evidence of the CCP's mass imprisonment of over one million Uyghurs. However, more than 125,000 confirmed European deaths from COVID-19 may revoke the free pass Xi has been enjoying in Europe.

Many of our most important allies, such as Australia, the United Kingdom and France, have joined our calls for accountability and transparency. Our allies' demands for more information about the origin and spread of the virus have been met by the typical CCP response of diplomatic coercion. Chinese officials even went so far as to threaten Australia with a boycott of its goods and services.

The way the United States and our allies can insulate ourselves from further damage from China is by improving economic cooperation. Given our globalized economy, fully decoupling from China would be impossible and unwise. Instead, America and its allies must remain the world's centers of innovation and technological advancement, and the only way to achieve this goal is to strengthen our alliances not weaken them.

In our own hemisphere, the U.S. should focus on strengthening North American competitiveness through the U.S.-Mexico-Canada Agreement (USMCA) to provide an alternative to supply chains in China. Additionally, western companies, not CCP-backed ones, need to lead in the development of advanced technologies like artificial intelligence, quantum computing and 5G.

To achieve this goal Washington and our allied capitals must work together on strategies that coordinate efforts across government, academia and the private sector to advance research, development and adoption of new technologies.

The chaos and destruction brought upon our society by COVID-19 and the CCP's lack of transparency have crystallized the thinking of many Americans on the nature of the China challenge. Nine in 10 Americans view China as a threat and 62 percent see it as a major threat.

As we try to move from the prevention, containment and mitigation stages of this global pandemic to the control and recovery phases, we can't forget the geopolitical reality of these final two phases. If we want to not only recover but be in a better position than we were when the world started dealing with COVID-19, then the U.S. must reassert our role as the global leader and lead the world through this pandemic by strengthening our alliances.

Standing together, we can meet this challenge with renewed vigor and help create a better world after a pandemic that has taken far too many lives.

A former undercover CIA officer, entrepreneur and cybersecurity expert, Will Hurd is the U.S. Representative for the 23rd Congressional District of Texas. In Congress he serves as a member of the Appropriations Committee, and as Ranking Member of the Subcommittee on Intelligence Modernization and Readiness of the House Permanent Select Committee on Intelligence. Follow him on Twitter, @HurdOnTheHill.

15. Is the threat from ISIS really more significant because of COVID-19? – 5/13

The Hill | Jason M. Blazakis

Murmurings that Salafi jihadist groups such as ISIS and al Qaeda aspire to take advantage of the COVID-19 pandemic have reverberated through the online prism most of the world currently inhabits. While ISIS and other groups certainly have touted the desire to strike against its infidel enemy, the West, whether the organization has the reach to do so is worthy of close examination.

In ISIS's weekly publication, al-Naba, the group called for the mujahideen to carry out strikes against the West during the pandemic. Both al Qaeda and ISIS also have claimed that COVID-19 is God's retribution for the West's decadence. In al Qaeda's propaganda arm, As-Sahab, the group pronounced that COVID-19 has exposed the West's "brittleness" and the coronavirus is "God's smallest soldier."

ISIS and al Qaeda's verbal banter notwithstanding, can these groups realistically cash in on the COVID-19 crisis, or are their missives nothing more than empty threats?

Propagandists who tout ISIS's millenarian apocalyptic ideology, one that embraces the notion of end-times, are weaving narratives emphasizing how a global pandemic that has killed more Americans than did U.S. involvement in the Vietnam war fits ISIS's worldview. Ideology is often a key driver for those willing to join radical groups such as ISIS or carry out acts of violence in the group's name.

With the dissolution of ISIS's physical caliphate, adding members to the fold is critically important. At the group's zenith, tens of thousands of foreign fighters from across the globe heeded Abu Bakr al-Baghdadi's call to create an Islamic caliphate that harkened to the times of the Prophet Muhammad. ISIS's ideology, strength of its leadership, and territorial conquests allowed it to overtake al Qaeda as the preeminent jihadist group. The erosion

of the group's access to territory, and the death of al-Baghdadi, however, give the organization one key pillar to rebuild the group: ideology.

By connecting its ideology to a crisis narrative — COVID-19 — the organization may try to build upon its ideological foundation. Practically, is that really happening? The answer is more nuanced.

First, the group's new leader, Abu Ibrahim al-Hashimi al-Qurashi, appointed last fall, needs to demonstrate relevancy by increasing the organization's operational tempo. In April 2020, in Iraq alone, ISIS may have been responsible for more than 150 attacks. This uptick of ISIS activity, though, is more likely a result of the instability in Iraq because of the diminishment of the U.S. force posture throughout the Levant than the COVID-19 pandemic. The Trump administration's decision to scale back U.S. engagement in Syria and Iraq has provided ISIS's new leader an exploitable power vacuum. And, of course, that rollback of U.S. assets predates COVID-19. Further, al-Qurashi took the reins prior to the pandemic.

Second, ISIS's motto — remaining and expanding — is part of the organization's effort to demonstrate its broad reach. At the group's zenith, in 2015 to 2016, the organization received oaths of allegiance from terrorist leaders (and thus their groups) spanning the globe. This positioned ISIS to create a series of so-called provinces and networks to grow its caliphate well beyond the contours of the Middle East. This expansion of the ISIS brand also allowed the organization to take credit for attacks carried out by its overseas network — giving the impression that the group could strike anywhere.

In April 2020, ISIS announced responsibility for a series of attacks, including a horrific massacre in Xitaxi, Mozambique, that resulted in more than 50 deaths. This attack, however, was more about taking advantage of an unstable country in the middle of an intensifying conflict than the COVID-19 pandemic. ISIS's propensity to take advantage of civil conflict and state instability allowed it to gain power in Syria, and ISIS leadership clearly is again following that script.

Third, between 2015 and 2017, ISIS's use of external operatives to strike the West in places such as Brussels, Paris, London and other locations was critical for generating fear, a desired end-state of terrorism as a tactic, in its target audiences. An ancillary benefit was creating an atmosphere of success that, inevitably, benefited al-Baghdadi. With those blows against the West, al-Baghdadi and his messengers could highlight its success via its propaganda machine, which focused on bringing in more finances and recruits.

As al-Qurashi tries to rebuild ISIS he also has looked westward. In April 2020, German government authorities foiled a purported ISIS plot in Germany targeting U.S. military facilities. The operatives, all hailing from Tajikistan, already had procured their weapons for the thwarted attack. Again, given the complexity of an attack on a well-fortified overseas U.S. military installation, it is likely that the ISIS plot began well before COVID-19 was labeled a pandemic.

While it remains possible that Salafi-jihadist groups could leverage the global public health crisis to carry out acts of terrorism, it seems more likely that any ISIS resurgence is tied to pre-existing counterterrorism strategies and decisions. Moreover, ISIS's new leader needs to consolidate power and demonstrate success.

ISIS is more likely to take advantage of the instability in failed states than to actually depend on the spread of COVID-19 to project its strength. The pandemic makes for a strong talking point for the group, but it probably is not anything more than that. More productive of an answer to ISIS's blather is for the United States to rekindle the key partnerships that were fundamental to the success of evicting ISIS from its territory. One important first step is to quickly resume the capacity-building efforts in Iraq that remain a key aspect of Operation Inherent Resolve.

Jason M. Blazakis is a professor of practice at Middlebury Institute of International Studies, director of its Center on Terrorism, Extremism, and Counterterrorism, and a senior research fellow at the Soufan Center. From 2008 to August 2018, he was director of the State Department's Office of Counterterrorism Finance and Designations.

He also worked at State's Bureau of Intelligence and Research and was a domestic intelligence analyst with the Congressional Research Service. Follow him on Twitter @Jason_Blazakis.

16. National Guard on COVID-19 frontlines must be protected - 5/13

The Hill | Lt. Gen. H. Steven Blum (Ret.)

The crisis swept in fast, at the speed of an onrushing hurricane — because it was a hurricane.

Peaking at category 5, Hurricane Katrina pummeled the Gulf Coast of the U.S in August 2005. As chief of the National Guard Bureau, my job was supporting governors with an intensity equal to the storm. That is what 50,000 National Guard personnel did in 2005. Fifteen years later, that is what 46,000 National Guard personnel are doing to battle COVID-19.

Big lessons were learned from Katrina. We are using them now, but others we need to learn again. One was in the Oval Office. When President Bush asked about federalizing the National Guard under Title 10, a consensus emerged: Leave mobilization to governors under Title 32. This allowed flexibility, as governors directed action under Title 32, federal government paid. The decision worked then and is working now.

Other lessons were also learned — big lessons. We forget them at our peril. One is that National Guard personnel are cut from different cloth. They are often first to volunteer, first to the frontlines and last to receive benefits or recognition for what they are doing.

In Katrina's aftermath, the National Guard, active military services, federal, state and local civilian authorities worked together — if not seamlessly, systematically and selflessly — to preserve order, assure public health and safety, rescue those in need and begin a long, difficult process of recovery.

In the battle against COVID-19, National Guard volunteers are again working hand-in-glove — literally — with state and local authorities across the nation, from coast to coast, north to south and in U.S. territories. This crisis is different. It affects more states, is more insidious and hidden to the eye until it strikes. It can bring down Guard members — and their families. That said, none of this has deterred the Guard.

Operationally, 80 percent of those who stepped up are on Title 32 orders, state direction but federally paid. Another 6,600-plus are on "state activated duty." They are literally on the frontlines, distributing food to hundreds of thousands in hard-hit "hot spots," in hospitals backing-up medical staff, disinfecting nursing homes, transporting the dead from New York, manning operations centers and conducting countless high-risk missions every day.

One issue requires immediate attention: Many of these brave men and women are without full medical coverage. If their initial orders were 30 days or less, they get no TRICARE — or defense medical coverage. If they are on "state activity duty," they get no federal coverage. When they complete their service, they get no transitional medical coverage. That is not right.

Take the last issue as an example of what we should be doing — and are not. When members of the Guard deploy overseas and return, they have six months transitional medical coverage. By contrast, after throwing themselves into the teeth of America's worst health crisis in a century, putting their families also at risk of COVID-19, they have no transitional medical coverage.

These "frontline" National Guard volunteers are hit twice — some missing medical coverage as they serve, all missing transitional coverage when they roll off orders. We can do better. We must do better by these patriots.

In short, men and women of the National Guard — like nurses and doctors — are on the frontlines. They are there by choice. They are other-regarding people, signed up to do what they are doing and have no regrets. In Katrina's aftermath, we had casualties. We have them now.

That is why we must look after these courageous young Americans. Congress and others involved should be asking: What can we do to help all in uniform — medical and National Guard — who are helping us get through this with their unique experience, training, can-do and never-quit attitude.

The highest honor of my life was leading selfless patriots of the National Guard. They do not seek attention and seldom get it. They do not ask what their country should do for them, but what they can do for their countrymen. They do not expect special treatment, look for headlines or handouts — they measure their self-worth by their labor, long hours and love of country.

That is why, from Katrina to COVID-19, we should be looking after those who are looking after us. They need full medical coverage now, serving and in transition off orders — no exceptions. Their families need this coverage, too. That is a small ask for those who ask nothing.

Yes, we will have “lessons learned” and “future gap analysis” work to do after this crisis, just like Katrina. But at this moment, we have one urgent mission: Get the country through it.

If there were ever a time to protect men and women of the Guard and their families, it is now.

--Lt. Gen. H Steven Blum was chief of the National Guard Bureau from 2003 to 2008 and the deputy commander of the U.S. Northern Command from 2008 to 2010

17. DOD funding syringe projects in hopes of fall vaccine arrival – 5/13

Inside Defense | Tony Bertuca

The Defense Department has announced a \$138 million contract with ApiJect Systems America to "dramatically expand" U.S. production of domestically manufactured, medical-grade injection devices starting by October 2020.

The contract will enable ApiJect and the U.S. government to launch "Project Jumpstart" and "RAPID USA" to help fight COVID-19, according to Pentagon spokesman Lt. Col. Mike Andrews.

"Jumpstart" will "create a U.S.-based, high-speed supply chain for prefilled syringes beginning later this year by using well-established Blow-Fill-Seal (BFS) aseptic plastics manufacturing technology, suitable for combatting COVID-19 when a safe and proven vaccine becomes available," he said. "By immediately upgrading a sufficient number of existing domestic BFS facilities with installations of filling-line and technical improvements, 'Jumpstart' will enable the manufacture of more than 100 million pre-filled syringes for distribution across the United States by year-end 2020."

The contract also enables ApiJect to accelerate "RAPID USA," an effort to upgrade existing facilities to support production of over 500 million prefilled syringes in 2021.

"This effort will be executed initially in Connecticut, South Carolina and Illinois, with potential expansion to other U.S.-based locations," Andrews said. "RAPID will provide increased lifesaving capability against future national health emergencies that require population-scale vaccine administration on an urgent basis."

The new production capability will help decrease U.S. dependence on offshore supply chains and older technologies, Andrews said.

Some experts, however, have questioned whether a vaccine will be available by fall and predict additional challenges.

18. Are military patients delaying the health care they need? – 5/13

Military Times | Karen Jowers

With a drop in the number of patients seeking health care at military treatment facilities during the coronavirus pandemic, defense health officials are concerned that some patients may not be getting the care they need.

About 50 percent of available appointments are being filled at military treatment facilities, said Regina Julian, chief of the health care optimization division at the Defense Health Agency, during a town hall meeting May 13 held by the COVID-19 Military Support Initiative.

Officials have also seen a 30 percent decrease in the amount of prescriptions filled at MTFs and retail pharmacies, said Air Force Col. Mark Gmehlin, acting chief of DHA's pharmacy operations division.

The demand for health care hasn't necessarily dropped.

"We think patients may be delaying some care," Julian said, adding that MTFs are now trying to reach out to patients with complex medical needs, or cancer screening or other screening needs, to have them come in for appointments.

During the pandemic, like other health care facilities, "we continue to provide medically necessary care," she said. "We have plenty of access."

For those with medical needs that are not COVID-19 related, she encourages patients to contact their MTF through the secure messaging system; call the nurse advice line; book a telehealth appointment line, or call the appointment line. She notes that the process may start with a telehealth consultation, but if providers can't address the issue through that virtual consultation, they'll see the patient in the MTF, she said.

"If a provider needed to see you face to face, we have a deliberate way to have you come in to protect you and our staff," she said.

"For patients, the thing that keeps me up at night, is delaying something longer than it needs to be, leading to a poor outcome," Julian said. "Please give us a call. We want to address things early and often."

With the 30 percent decrease in prescriptions being filled at MTFs and at retail pharmacies, Gmehlin said, he's concerned that some patients with significant medical conditions, such as heart conditions, have stopped taking their medications. Some may feel safer staying at home than going out to get their medications. The mail-order pharmacy benefit hasn't seen a drop.

Health officials need to figure out why people may have stopped getting their prescriptions, and learn how to better meet those patients' needs, he said.

Asked about whether MTFs or pharmacies will be covering COVID-19 antibody testing for military members or family members, Gmehlin said there is no "end state" yet.

"Once we get more information on COVID itself, how it's evolving, how we test for it, if we have some opportunity to spread testing out across clinics, but we'll also have some pharmacy involvement. Pharmacies, where capable, will provide some of those services." He noted that network retail pharmacies already do a good job with vaccines for beneficiaries.

Of the 9.5 million beneficiaries, 7.1 million use pharmacy services, Gmehlin said. The pharmacy supply chain has remained robust, he said, and there are no long-term outages forecast.

However, DHA has placed temporary quantity limits placed on some items because of increased demand. That included limitations on hydroxychloroquine, because of a 10-fold increase in demand sparked by initial interest that it might reduce the severity of COVID-19, he said. The drug is used mostly for treatment of lupus and rheumatoid arthritis, and officials needed to make sure there's enough for those patients.

Officials have also put limitations on quantities of albuterol inhalers, because as hospitals have switched to multi-dose inhalers in treating COVID-19, the supply dropped quickly.

In both cases, DHA will be taking another look at the supply situation within a few weeks to determine if they can remove the quantity limits, Gmehlin said.

Of the nearly 700 pharmacies at MTFs, the only one closed is the one at the Naval Branch Health Clinic Northwest in the Portsmouth, Virginia, area, primarily because of the deployment of the hospital ship Comfort and the current quarantine period for the service members after the mission to New York, he said. It will hopefully reopen soon, he said.

But there are currently six pharmacies at bases where retirees' access is limited to certain days — Edwards Air Force Base, California; Moody Air Force Base Georgia; Beale Air Force Base, California; Joint Base McGuire-Dix-Lakehurst, New Jersey; Cannon Air Force Base, New Mexico; and Shaw Air Force Base, South Carolina.

Retirees and their family members aren't currently able to get prescriptions filled at MTFs on Nellis Air Force Base, Nevada, and Goodfellow Air Force Base, Texas, so those beneficiaries are getting their prescriptions filled at retail pharmacies, or through the mail order pharmacy benefit.

Pharmacy staff members at MTFs are following safety precautions, such as providing curbside pickup with runners going back and forth between the building and cars to provide patients with their medicines, Gmehlin said.

19. Masks are the uniform of the day for the rank-and-file — why aren't the brass following suit? – 5/13 *Military Times | Geoff Ziezulewicz*

All ranks of the military have become mindful of masks in recent months.

A cloth mask is worn not to protect yourself from COVID-19, experts say, but to protect others from you.

They help prevent the spread of infectious droplets that can linger in the air long enough to be inhaled by your battle buddies, especially for those not exhibiting any symptoms.

From recruits on Parris Island to shipmates at sea and the personnel locked down at the nuclear war-ready Cheyenne Mountain complex, the military is masking to keep those personnel safe when six feet of distance isn't possible.

So why isn't the brass following suit?

An official White House photo from a meeting President Donald Trump held with national security officials this past weekend — including Defense Secretary Mark Esper and the Joints Chiefs of Staff — shows leadership sitting around a table officiously.

The meeting took place during a time when the virus has moved beyond some abstract threat to U.S. military leadership. Still, they sit within six feet of each other and no one is wearing masks.

Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Michael Gilday is in isolation this week after coming into contact with a family member who tested positive for COVID-19. The head of the National Guard Bureau, Air Force Gen. Joseph Lengyel, initially tested positive before subsequent tests produced a negative result.

The brass answers to the president, but despite the recommendations of his public health experts, and cases popping up in the West Wing, Trump has indicated he won't wear a mask.

"I just don't want to wear one myself," he said during a coronavirus briefing last month, according to POLITICO.

The president's refusal to follow basic public-health guidelines put the service chiefs in an awkward position last weekend, according to Dr. Dean Winslow, a retired Air Force colonel and infectious disease doctor at Stanford University.

"I don't blame the generals that were in that picture for not wearing masks," he said. "They were in a difficult situation. It would have come across as being disrespectful if they had all been wearing masks and the president...and secretary of state were not."

Winslow, who served in Iraq and Afghanistan, caveated his thoughts by noting that he takes "very seriously being respectful to the commander in chief and the current leaders in all four branches of the military."

Still, Winslow said, "I think the serving chiefs and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff are put in a bad position by the president and the vice president."

"Right now we're in the midst of a global pandemic," he added. "The leadership of the (U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention) and (National Institutes of Health) have said that the uniform of the day is that, if you can't maintain six feet of distance, you should be wearing a mask."

If Trump, Pence and his cabinet wore masks, the uniform of the day for such situations, "it would send a very powerful message," Winslow said.

"It's analogous to if you're a police chief or sheriff, you follow the speed limit," he said. "You want to set the example for everyone else."

A White House official told Military Times this week that "everyone in attendance was tested" before Saturday's meeting "as they were in close proximity to the President."

A mandatory masking policy for White House staff was stood up this week after Trump's military valet and others at the White House tested positive for the virus.

Questions regarding whether the service chiefs have received guidance on masking in Trump's presence were referred to White House officials, who did not answer as of publication.

Trump has touted "big progress" against the virus as experts continue to warn of serious consequences if the country reopens too quickly. Throughout the reopening debates, masks have become a powerful symbol.

"Photographs of powerful people wearing masks in the middle of a pandemic sends different messages to different people," said Alice Friend, a former Pentagon official who is now a senior fellow at the Center for Strategic and International Studies, focusing on civil-military relations.

"Some people interpret it as they're behaving responsibly ... other people might look at the picture and get nervous."

Still, Friend said she doesn't think rank-and-file troops will take their masking cues from the service chiefs.

"I think most folks in uniform are going to follow the orders of their immediate commanding officers," she said. "For a broader audience, I don't think it sets a good example."

20. No coronavirus co-pays for vets, more servicemember financial protections in latest emergency spending plan – 5/13

Military Times | Leo Shane III

A new \$3 trillion emergency coronavirus spending plan unveiled by House Democrats this week includes additional financial protections for servicemembers trapped in place by military travel stops and guarantees that veterans won't face co-pays when seeking treatment for pandemic-related treatments.

The massive spending bill has already drawn praise from Democratic leaders but scorn from Republicans who have called it too far-reaching and expensive. Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., has said the measure has no chance of passing the Senate.

But in an interview on CNN Tuesday, House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., argued the new legislation is needed to provide more financial assistance to struggling families and dramatically expand available testing to allow businesses across America to safely reopen.

"There's a bigger commitment to testing and to meeting the needs of localities," she said.

Although the overall package faces slim prospects of becoming law in its current form, many of the military and veterans provisions within it are non-controversial and could become parts of future compromise spending measures.

That includes increases in grants for homeless veterans, further extending deadlines for veterans to file new disability claims, suspension of VA debt collection until at least 60 days after the public health emergency is ended, and eliminating "copays or cost-sharing for preventative treatment or services for COVID-19, including the administration of a vaccine."

Bill authors also included extra money in the package for the purchase of personal protective equipment for home health aides and veterans' caregivers.

For active-duty troops and their families, the bill would allow service members to end home and vehicle leases as well as cable and telephone contracts when their scheduled military moves are postponed or cancelled because of coronavirus stop-movement orders.

Defense Department officials cancelled nearly all military travel in late March and announced those restrictions will remain in place until at least June 30.

National Guard and Reserve members deployed for at least two weeks on domestic coronavirus response missions would be eligible to receive free mental health care at vet centers under the House measure. Some veterans facing new financial hardships as a result of the pandemic would qualify for full VA medical benefits as well.

The House proposal also mandates a report on the potential impact of coronavirus-related closings and restrictions on overseas voting in the upcoming November presidential election. Defense and State Department officials would be charged with making public "plans to mitigate any COVID-19 related impacts on overseas voters seeking to return their mail-in ballots."

In early April, lawmakers approved a \$2 trillion emergency spending package which included nearly \$20 billion for VA and \$10 billion for the Department of Defense, mostly for medical response to the outbreak.

House members are expected to vote on the proposal on Friday.

Nearly 83,000 Americans have died from complications related to the fast-spreading virus in the last two months.

21. Security clearance concerns and the COVID-19 pandemic – 5/13

Military Times | Andrew Bakaj

While there are those who say that during the COVID-19 pandemic “we’re all in this together,” the truth of the matter is that some have, or will be having, a substantially more difficult time getting through this period compared with others. Some will have contracted the virus, and of those who do, the impact will vary in severity.

The same is true with the economic and psychological impact the nationwide shutdown has on each one of us. This is something that can directly impact a clearance holder’s or applicant’s ability to maintain or obtain a security clearance.

On March 23, 2020, the director of the National Counterintelligence and Security Center (NCSC) issued a statement concerning this very issue. The director wrote that NCSC is “acutely aware of the potential for economic hardship on security clearance holders” and that those impacted should not be “unduly penalized because of circumstances beyond their control.”

This is consistent with the position the Department of Defense took following the 2008 Great Recession. Moreover, in the statement NCSC pointed out an applicable mitigating factor, which reads as follows:

“...the conditions that resulted in the financial problem were largely beyond the person’s control (e.g., loss of employment, a business downturn, unexpected medical emergency, a death, divorce or separation, clear victimization by predatory lending practices, or identity theft), and the individual acted responsibly under the circumstances.”

While this should provide some comfort to clearance holders and applicants, the mitigating factor provides a condition, noting that while circumstances beyond an applicant’s control could mitigate the concern, the individual must also act “responsibly under the circumstances.” What does that mean?

Managing spending is an obvious consideration, but this alone may not be feasible for an individual or a family to meaningfully address the financial strain. So, what else can be done? The answer is there are a few things that can be done not only to alleviate the financial pain, but also to create a record that shows that you acted “responsibly” in trying to manage the financial crisis.

Mortgage holders should immediately contact their banks and see if the mortgage payments can be deferred for a period of time due to financial hardship. Renters should also see if landlords are willing to work with them in suspending payments.

Those who have student loans should immediately contact their lender and ensure that the banks are permitting them to defer payments for a few months.

Perhaps most importantly, everyone should reach out to their local bank to identify a financial adviser who can go through their expenses and develop a plan to tackle the financial concerns head on.

In addition to doing the above, individuals need to memorialize their interactions with the creditors and their financial adviser. For example: while it would make sense to speak with a financial adviser by phone or video conferencing, it is prudent to follow-up the conversation by email to ensure a record exists. Typically, a financial adviser will provide written guidance on how to tackle the problem, but it can’t hurt to begin producing a contemporaneous written record. This is critical because should an adjudication proceed to revoke or deny a clearance, this documentation will go a long way to establish that the individual acted “responsibly” under the circumstances.

Additionally, financial strain alone can lead to other issues, to include depression and increased alcohol consumption. Moreover, those who have been diagnosed with depression, anxiety, or already have a dependency on alcohol, this experience can trigger those conditions. Combined with a sense of isolation and lack of control a quarantine or sheltering in place can cause, even those who have not been diagnosed with these conditions may find themselves experiencing it. And for those who have experienced loss — whether it as

a result of the virus or not — this, along with the restrictions placed on family, being able to say “goodbye” to loved ones can only exacerbate all of this.

Psychological conditions, alcohol consumption, and illegal drug use are among the guidelines that can trigger an adverse security clearance action. Luckily, what can help preserve the clearance is also “good” for the individual, and that is seeking counseling.

I have had countless clients express to me that they think that seeking medical or psychological help will be viewed negatively by clearance adjudicators. Candidly, when I first became a federal employee myself, I thought the same thing. However, nothing can be further from the truth. In fact, seeking counseling for these and other issues is actually viewed positively. In fact, under the adjudicative guidelines, seeking help and following through on guidance provided during the course of counseling does act as mitigating evidence, thus protecting the security clearance.

And why is that?

The answer is that the adjudicators understand that we’re all human beings and nothing ensures an individual’s trustworthiness, responsibility, and good judgment than an individual taking control over their situation by seeking professional guidance to ensure they are living their lives in a healthy and productive manner.

Over the years we have seen members of the armed forces, our intelligence community, and government contractors experience the difficulty that comes with serving the nation in a war zone. To take a position that would result in them ignoring the PTSD or other conditions that may emanate as a result of their service would not only be contrary to the interest of our national security, but heartless as well. Seeking help is not a sign of “weakness,” as some have thought. It’s a sign of strength because it underscores that the individual is not only self-aware, but responsible to ensure they are healthy.

In a nutshell, in a time where many are experiencing financial distress, the feeling of isolation, and the sense of lack of control, it is prudent to take control of the situation by working with others to seek advice on how to best work through the challenges you face. Not only can this help alleviate the underlying financial or other concerns, it creates evidence to show that you acted “responsibly” under the circumstance, thus protecting your security clearance.

Andrew Bakaj is a former intelligence officer and criminal investigator. He represents individuals in adverse security clearance actions, whistleblower activities, and individuals, corporations, and organizations who are facing criminal and/or administrative investigations. He is a leading expert in security clearance matters. In his professional capacities, Andrew has advised and counseled numerous senior U.S. government officials in a variety of legal and investigative areas.

22. Fed Chair Powell Says Economy May Need More Government Support – 5/13

The Federal Reserve chair warned of dire consequences if a lasting economic downturn is not averted with a forceful policy response.

New York Times | Jeanna Smialek

Federal Reserve Chair Jerome H. Powell said an even stronger fiscal policy response might be needed to restore economic prosperity as a downturn “without modern precedent” strikes the United States, one that brings the threat of long-lasting damage.

“The recovery may take some time to gather momentum, and the passage of time can turn liquidity problems into solvency problems,” Mr. Powell said at a Peterson Institute for International Economics virtual event. “Additional fiscal support could be costly, but worth it if it helps avoid long-term economic damage and leaves us with a stronger recovery.”

The Fed has rushed to support the U.S. economy as coronavirus fears sent markets sharply lower in late February and lockdowns took hold in March, leaving workers jobless and businesses without income. Mr. Powell and his colleagues slashed interest rates to zero, rolled out unlimited bond buying meant to restore order in government bond markets, and unveiled nine emergency lending programs in partnership with the Treasury Department.

But Mr. Powell reiterated on Wednesday that the Fed's programs, which will buy bonds from companies and local governments and make loans to midsize businesses, can only temporarily supply credit to ruptured markets. The Fed does not have the ability to make grants, which may be what companies and households need to make it through.

He characterized the Fed's ability to help as a "bridge across temporary interruptions to liquidity." But he suggested that more than a bridge may be needed as huge uncertainties continue to confront the economy, from the speed of reopening to the scope of testing and timing of a vaccine.

"While the economic response has been both timely and appropriately large, it may not be the final chapter, given that the path ahead is both highly uncertain and subject to significant downside risks," he said. "Since the answers are currently unknowable, policies will need to be ready to address a range of possible outcomes."

Coronavirus lockdowns have left more than 20 million people out of work, disproportionately hitting service sector workers, many of them low-income and without savings.

"The scope and speed of this downturn are without modern precedent, significantly worse than any recession since World War II," Mr. Powell said Wednesday, noting that "the job gains of the past decade have been erased."

He pointed out that the burden often falls on the most disadvantaged, explaining that a Fed survey set for release on Thursday will show that almost 40 percent of people who were working in February and were members of households making less than \$40,000 a year had lost their jobs in March.

Mr. Powell warned of significant drawbacks that could come if the current recession is drawn out, from "lasting damage" to the economy's productive capacity to "avoidable" household and business insolvencies that weigh on growth for years to come. He also cautioned that long stretches of unemployment could erode worker skills and leave families struggling with huge debt loads.

"We ought to do what we can to avoid these outcomes, and that may require additional policy measures," Mr. Powell said.

Mr. Powell's comments come as Congress begins to hash out the future of the government's coronavirus response. House Democrats on Tuesday unveiled a \$3 trillion relief measure, which included aid for struggling states and another round of direct payments to Americans. Republicans dismissed the package as exorbitantly priced and overreaching.

One of the main programs to help businesses get through the lockdowns, the Paycheck Protection Program, has nearly exhausted its \$660 billion in funds, and many companies are now beginning to worry that the eight-week loans will not be enough as the virus persists.

Mr. Powell, who President Trump appointed, has long warned that the government needs to get its spending under control, but has recently said that now is not the time to worry about the deficit.

"Now, when we are facing the biggest shock that the economy has had in modern times, is, for me, not the time to prioritize considerations like that," he said. He added that time will come "a few years down the road, when the economy is well and truly recovered, or at least mostly recovering."

Mr. Powell beat back at the idea that the Fed could cut interest rates below zero in a bid to shore up the economy. Markets have been chattering about negative interest rates over the past week after futures contracts began to imply that the Fed's main policy rate will dip below zero around the end of 2020. President Trump has regularly called for a negative rate policy for competitive reasons, including on Twitter this week.

Central bank officials have consistently pushed back on that idea, often suggesting that key United States markets are structured in a way that could make the costs of negative interest rates outweigh their benefits.

"This is not something that we are looking at," Mr. Powell said. "The evidence on the effectiveness of negative rates is very mixed."

23. POLITICO Pro Q&A: Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein – 5/13

Politico Pro | Bryan Bender

Gen. David Goldfein is entering the final stretch of his four-year stint as chief of staff of the Air Force, but it may be the most challenging period of all.

He says one of his biggest concerns between now and his departure in September is how to reverse the damage the coronavirus pandemic is inflicting on the service's ability to secure its most precious resource: the tens of thousands of new recruits it brings in every year.

The good news is that, so far, the Air Force has been able to sustain all its essential missions. But the social distancing and other measures put in place in early April have meant it is only bringing in only about half the new airmen it needs to maintain force levels — and ultimately carry out a host of operations.

"I'm only taking about 50 percent of my usual recruits coming into the Air Force through basic training," Goldfein says. "I certainly can't sustain 50 percent until we get a vaccine. ... That concerns me."

He has few illusions that the service will be able to turn the pipeline back on fully anytime soon. But he has ordered commanders across the Air Force to report back to him with a plan next month to "reset" the service for the next year or more. He wants it well before "the first return of the next wave" of the virus is expected this fall.

"So what do we need to do? Where do we need to invest? How do we need to adjust operations so we can get to a sustainable model for operating with the virus in our midst?"

Goldfein — whose nominated replacement Gen. Charles Brown recently had his confirmation hearing — also spoke about the progress he believes he has made on goals he set early in his tenure. Those include reorganizing operational squadrons, overhauling how the Air Force develops officers and enlisted personnel and accelerating the evolution to an "ultra-connected" force that places just as much premium on data — "the currency of future warfare" — as it does on weapons.

"That's a tough argument to have in a town that's quite frankly traditionally been focused on the things," he says of prized weapon systems.

But in his view there is no alternative. "You don't do artificial intelligence unless you have access to data," he said. "You don't do hypersonics and long-range of fires unless you have digital architecture and the ability to close the entire kill chain. You don't do directed energy. You don't do ... so many of the game-changing technologies."

This transcript has been edited for length and clarity.

How are you tackling the erosion in readiness from the pandemic?

So our first reset was on 1 April and the task to all my commanders was: "What are those missions that we perform for the nation for which we will get no relief, nor should expect any relief," despite at the time an expected infection rate of about 20 percent. [Such as] a safe, effective nuclear deterrent, space operations ... cyber operations, defense of the homeland.

So we looked at every one of those key essential missions and we restructured ourselves to provide both depth and breadth. So even if we ended up with a 20 percent infection rate, we could still maintain operations. ... Readiness has not been significantly impacted for those key mission, mission essential tasks.

You were planning for a 20 percent infection rate across the Air Force?

We're not even anywhere near it. So we've been very pleasantly surprised and ... very happy with the outcome of the measures we put in place. I'll give you an example: We've put about 8,000 young people through basic military training since we put our measures in place. We've had six test positive. So the measures that we're taking have been very successful.

How are you preparing for the long haul?

So our next reset will be on 30 June. And the question I've asked commanders is: "OK, now how do we reset the Air Force to continue to survive and operate with a cyclical virus?" In our minds [it will be] upwards of 12 to 18 months until we get a vaccine.

What do you see as your biggest readiness challenges?

I'm only taking about 50 percent of my usual recruits coming into the Air Force through basic training. I certainly can't sustain 50 percent until we get a vaccine. So the task is, "all right, we may not get to a 100 percent, but let's at least get to about 70 to 75 percent and be able to sustain that." So what do we need to do? Where do we need to invest? How do we need to adjust operations so we can get to a sustainable model for operating with the virus in our midst? That's our next reset.

So the highest priority is recruit training?

The top of the list for me is pipeline training. These are folks that come into the Air Force and then we take them through a series of training before they're qualified to do a particular mission. Right now we're operating about 50 percent of a normal pipeline throughput. That concerns me, which is the reason we're really focused on that part of our reset. We got to get from about the 50 percent mark back to about 75 percent.

Have you set a timeline for that?

I picked 30 June for commanders to report back to me on reset options. I set that date because I want to make sure that we have the new procedures in place before what the scientists tell us could be the first return of the next wave [of the virus], which is sometime in that late August, early September time frame.

And so I may be totally wrong on that. I'm just paying attention to the models like everyone else. Hopefully, like our prediction of a 20 percent infection rate, our predictions of a return of the Covid are also off. I don't mind predicting a bit more pessimistic and being pleasantly rewarded because of our efforts. Because the alternative is certainly not where we want to be.

You laid out a series of priorities when you became chief in 2016.

It has always been focused on three words: joint warfighting excellence. How do we transition this Air Force into the force that we need to be given the growing threats globally and especially as laid out in the National Defense Strategy?

There were three key elements. We started off with focus first on "let's get our fighting formation or fundamental fighting formations fixed inside the Air Force." That's squadrons. And we really focused on not only resources but decision authority, development of squadron commanders, ensuring that they have the resources they need and that they're really thinking about the kind of warfare that is coming in the future.

That leads into the second big area, which is joint leader development. It's not just about technology. It's about the leaders. What are the key experiences? What are the key educational opportunities? How do we make sure that we understand as much about naval and ground warfare as our Navy, Army and Marine Corps teammates understand about air power? So we've been really overhauling our talent management within the officer and [non-commissioned officer] corps.

That third element is this transition from an analog force that's somewhat connected to a digital force that's ultra-connected. And this is all the work that we've been doing on joint, all-domain command and control. That's the more technological elements to it.

It's all about fighting formations, grooming the right leaders and teams and making sure that we connect this force in ways that it's not connected.

How would you grade your progress on those focus areas?

I'm actually pretty satisfied with where we've landed over the course of [these] four years. ... There's still work to do in all of these areas. I think we have made some pretty significant progress in squadrons. We've stood up a new foundational commanders course and the feedback I'm getting on it is just spectacular. We've really come a long way on the leader development.

We're just putting some of the final touches on the largest overhaul of the officer talent management and promotion system probably since the early '80s. You don't issue personnel policy from the top down. You generate it from the bottom up. And so we have taken our time to get commander buy-in at every echelon of command so commanders feel like they own it and can tell airmen why we're doing it.

We have an upcoming four-star Corona, which is our four-star conference. We'll do it virtually. And we're going to make some of the next big decisions on this journey. And it's come a long way. And what I'm excited about is it's taken root. You know, as a chief, you plant a seed, you hope they hit fertile soil. Sometimes it hits rocks and these have hit some fertile soil.

What do you believe needs to change about the weapons modernization portfolio?

Modernization today is different than modernization that perhaps you and I grew up with, where we focused on the platform, the aircraft, the sensor, the weapon. The currency of future warfare is data. Who has access to it, who can manipulate it, who can write code at the speed of relevance and who can understand more about the operating environment while denying an adversary the same. And so through that lens is why you see us focus so much more on ... the highway than focus on the trucks. That's a tough argument to have in a town that's quite frankly traditionally been focused on the things, the trucks.

So in preparing for future warfare the service may have to forego some of its legacy systems?

That 2030 [military] campaign allows me to take some risk in the near term to ensure I really focus on the right kind of modernization for the future, which is focused on data, focused on digital engineering and transitioning to this digital force that fights as a team.

Because you don't do artificial intelligence unless you have access to data. You don't do hypersonics and long-range of fires unless you have digital architecture and the ability to close the entire kill chain. You don't do directed energy. You don't do ... so many of the game-changing technologies. And so you can't skip that [digital] step, as much as you may not want to have to invest there.

24. Citing coronavirus, U.S. board delays Federal pension fund investment in Chinese stocks – 5/13

Reuters | Alexandra Alper

WASHINGTON - In the wake of White House pressure, an independent board charged with overseeing billions in federal retirement dollars announced on Wednesday it would indefinitely delay plans to invest in some Chinese companies.

In a statement, the Federal Retirement Thrift Investment (FRTIB) board cited a "meaningfully different economic environment" due to the coronavirus pandemic and the nomination of new board members to explain the deferral.

The FRTIB oversees the Thrift Savings Plan (TSP), a retirement savings fund for federal employees and members of the military, which includes a \$40 billion international fund that was slated this year to begin tracking an index that includes Chinese companies under scrutiny in Washington.

The administrators froze the plan days after the Trump administration told it to "halt all steps" tied to shifting its \$40 billion international fund track the MSCI All Country World ex-U.S.A. Investable Market Index.

The decision marks a win for China hawks in Washington, who have taken advantage of deteriorating relations with Beijing over the origins of the coronavirus to push measures that are tough on China.

The Trump administration recently released rules to make it tougher to export certain types of advanced technology to China and is accelerating efforts to remove global industrial supply chains from China.

President Donald Trump has accused Beijing of failing to alert the world about the severity and scope of the virus, which has killed more than 80,000 Americans and originated in the city of Wuhan, China late last year. China has denied the accusations.

Editing by Mike Collett-White

25. Focus on COVID-19 battle, France tells China after Taiwan warning – 5/13

Reuters | Gabriel Crossley and John Irish

BEIJING/PARIS - France dismissed Chinese warnings on Wednesday about selling arms to self-ruled Taiwan, saying it was implementing existing deals and that Beijing should focus on battling the COVID-19 pandemic.

China's foreign ministry warned Paris over a contract for Taiwan, which is planning to buy weapons from Paris as part of an upgrade to a French-made warship fleet bought 30 years ago.

China says Taiwan is part of "one China", and that this principle must be accepted by any country with which it has diplomatic relations. Arms sales to Taiwan are always highly sensitive and regularly prompt a strong reaction from Beijing.

The French foreign ministry responded by saying it followed a "one China" policy as agreed with Beijing in 1994 and continued to urge both sides to hold dialogue.

"Within this context France respects the contractual commitments it made with Taiwan and has not changed its position since 1994," the ministry said in a statement. "Facing the COVID-19 crisis, all our attention and efforts should be focused on battling the pandemic."

The timing of the dispute is awkward for Paris, which has ordered millions of face masks from China because of the coronavirus outbreak.

Last month, the French foreign ministry summoned China's ambassador over posts and tweets by the embassy defending Beijing's response to the pandemic and criticising the West's handling of the outbreak.

"COMBAT NEEDS"

Taiwan is mostly equipped with U.S.-made weapons, but in 1991 France sold Taiwan six Lafayette frigates, to China's anger. France also sold Taiwan 60 Mirage fighter jets in 1992.

Taiwan said last month it was seeking to buy equipment from France to upgrade the ships' missile interference system.

In Beijing, Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said China resolutely opposed any arms sales to Taiwan.

"We have already expressed our serious concern to France," he told a daily news briefing. "We again urge the French side to abide by the one China principle and withdraw the arms sale plan to Taiwan to avoid harming Sino-French relations."

Taiwan's Defence Ministry quoted the navy as saying it was following related procurement regulations for the arm purchase to meet its "combat needs". It declined further comment.

Taiwan media reported that Taiwan was proposing to spend around T\$800 million (\$26.8 million) on the DAGAIE missile interference system from French firm DCI-DESCO.

Taiwan says it needs to upgrade its armed forces to deal with a growing threat from China, which has stepped up military drills near the democratic island.

China describes Taiwan as its most sensitive and important territorial issue, and has never renounced the use of force to bring the island under its control. Taiwan has shown no interest in being ruled by autocratic China.

Additional reporting by Yimou Lee in Taipei; Writing by Ben Blanchard; Editing by Nick Macfie and Tim Heritage

26. Pompeo lauds Israel over coronavirus cooperation, raps China – 5/13

Reuters | Dan Williams

JERUSALEM - U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo praised close ally Israel on Wednesday for sharing information during global efforts to combat the coronavirus pandemic and took another swipe at China over what he said was its lack of transparency.

U.S. and Israeli statements during Pompeo's eight-hour visit to Israel reaffirmed strong bilateral ties but did little to explain why Pompeo felt a need to see Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu in person in the midst of a health crisis.

Pompeo's lightning visit touched off speculation in Israeli media that Israel's mooted de facto annexation of Jewish settlements and the strategic Jordan Valley in the occupied West Bank was the main reason for the trip.

But neither man made any direct public mention of the issue. The Palestinians seek the West Bank for part of a future state and are boycotting President Donald Trump's administration over its perceived pro-Israel bias. They have rejected Trump's peace plan under which the vast majority of settlements would be incorporated into "contiguous Israeli territory".

Trump and his senior officials have engaged in a war of words with China, where the new coronavirus first emerged, accusing Chinese authorities of failing to inform the world fast enough about the dangers it posed and muzzled those who raised the alarm. Beijing strongly denies the charges.

Addressing Netanyahu at the start of their three-hour meeting, Pompeo told him: "You're a great partner, you share information - unlike some other countries that try and obfuscate and hide that information - and we'll talk about that country, too."

Pompeo did not name China and did not give specific examples of Israeli cooperation in the fight against coronavirus.

FRICTION

Israeli business ties with China are an irritant in Netanyahu's usually close relationship with the Trump administration.

The United States has previously cautioned Israel against potential security threats from Chinese investment in its economy, prompting the Netanyahu government to set up a committee last October to vet such projects.

A U.S. State Department spokesperson briefly summed up the Pompeo-Netanyahu meeting as a discussion of "our nations' ongoing efforts to mitigate the COVID-19 pandemic and counter Iran's destabilising influence in the region, as well as the steadfast U.S. commitment to Israel's security."

Pompeo also held talks with Benny Gantz, Netanyahu's political rival turned designated coalition partner, a day ahead of the inauguration of Israel's new "unity" government.

Netanyahu's new government plans to begin debating extending Israeli sovereignty to settlements and the Jordan Valley in July.

With Palestinian leaders warning that such de facto annexation could imperil the already limited cooperation between the sides, there has been a spike in violence in the West Bank.

On Wednesday, Israeli forces killed a Palestinian teenager during a raid near the city of Hebron, the Palestinian Health Ministry said. The Israeli military said Palestinians had thrown rocks and fire-bombs at the soldiers, slightly injuring one of them.

A day earlier, a Palestinian stone-thrower killed an Israeli soldier who was taking part in an arrest raid near Jenin city.

The Palestinians have tried to rally European states to oppose any Israeli annexation, as France pushes for the EU to consider punitive economic measures should Israel declare sovereignty in the West Bank.

Additional reporting by Ali Sawafta in Ramallah; Editing by Jeffrey Heller and Mark Heinrich

27. Army to resume large-scale exercise in Europe, but with coronavirus precautions – 5/13

Stars and Stripes | John Vandiver

STUTTGART, Germany -- Thousands of U.S. and Polish soldiers will participate in drills next month, marking the first time since the coronavirus crisis began that American troops will assemble for a large-scale exercise in Europe.

"All COVID-19 precautionary measures will be taken to ensure the health and protection of participating armed forces and the local population," U.S. Army Europe said in a statement Wednesday.

Called Allied Spirit, the drill is connected to the scaled-down version of Defender Europe-20, a series of events that was intended to be among the largest Army training efforts on the Continent since the Cold War.

USAREUR said Allied Spirit, which was originally scheduled for May, will be held at Drawsko Pomorskie Training Area in Poland from June 5 to June 19.

About 6,000 U.S. and Polish soldiers will take part in the exercise, which will involve a Polish airborne operation and a U.S.-Polish division-sized river crossing, USAREUR said.

Roughly 4,000 U.S. soldiers will come from the 1st Cavalry Division Headquarters (Forward), the 2nd Armored Brigade Combat Team and the 3rd Combat Aviation Brigade, 3rd Infantry Division. Some 2,000 Polish soldiers will come from airborne, cavalry and mechanized units.

In March, the Pentagon ordered a halt to deployments for Defender-Europe 20 because of coronavirus concerns. Major parts of the exercise were eliminated, including an operation that involved paratroops dropping into the Republic of Georgia and the Baltics.

Defender, originally intended to include 20,000 U.S.-based troops, was designed to showcase the military's ability to mobilize large numbers of forces for missions in Europe. Such capabilities have become a priority amid concerns about a more aggressive Russia.

The Army had already deployed 6,000 troops, including a division headquarters and an armored brigade combat team, when the decision was made to reduce the exercise. About 90% of the equipment also had already been loaded on ships or aircraft.

Many strategic objectives were met despite the cancellations, USAREUR said.

However, the Army is planning exercises over the next few months that will aim to achieve some of Defender's previous goals, including drawing from Army pre-positioned weapons stocks around Europe.

Also, the 10th Army Air & Missile Defense Command and the 41st Field Artillery Brigade are expected to participate in exercises in the Baltic region, while the Italy-based 173rd Airborne Brigade is planning airborne operations in the Balkans and Black Sea regions.

28. The Army is using its multi-million dollar terror-tracking software to do something Google does for free – 5/13

Task & Purpose | Haley Britzky

Sometimes, the answer to a problem is right in front of you. But sometimes, if you're the military, that's way too easy and you need to make things a little more complicated just because.

In this case, the Army has started using a system originally meant to help monitor terrorism threats to assist with the fight against the novel coronavirus (COVID-19) by alerting installation commanders to news and updates relevant to their communities — something that, one can argue, could be done for free by Google.

The Joint Analytic Real-time Virtual information Sharing System (JARVISS) — purchased by the Army in April 2018 for \$12.5 million and typically used for monitoring terror-related activity and things like active-shooter situations, according to FedScoop — is now being used to help installation commanders better understand how COVID-19 is affecting their community so they can make informed decisions.

And while that is a valid and well-intentioned goal, it appears that the bulk of what JARVISS does for commanders is what tools like Google Alerts and push news notifications do for, well, everyone else with Internet access.

“As the Army phases into a steady state of operations, which is really operating in a COVID environment, JARVISS has the capability of assessing the COVID-19 threat, providing commanders with tools needed to make appropriate decisions,” Maj. Gen. Kevin Vereen, the U.S. Army Provost Marshal General and head of U.S. Army

Criminal Investigation Command, told reporters during a call on Monday alongside James Allen, the JARVISS program manager.

The system itself is a mobile and desktop app used to store open-source information from places like social media, news, blogs, and government sources, Vereen said.

Allen explained that the system primarily looks at relevant changes in a community, including things like stay-at-home orders or "prohibitions" put in place by local authorities.

Vereen said that JARVISS sends alerts "sort of like when you get a ... breaking news story that automatically comes to your phone in sort of a message," and that you can program it to focus in on one specific area: "It can be programmed so that it's geospatial in nature, looking at a specific location."

For context, Google Alerts does something eerily similar: users can choose key terms, such as "Fort Bragg," for example, and determine what sources they're interested in seeing (news, blogs, books, etc.), and how often they want to be alerted to new content from those sources that include their key terms (as it happens, once a day, or once a week).

And the best part is, it's free!

On Monday, reporters asked what kind of information is furnished through the JARVISS network and what kind of decisions it's helping commanders make. Does the system provide information on testing capabilities in the area?

No, Allen responded.

Another reporter asked if the system was being used to help determine when and where recruits could ship out to basic training given that some were delayed depending on what area of the country they were coming from and if that area was considered a hot spot for COVID-19.

Not exactly, Vereen said; other data sources are being used for that.

Yet another reporter asked if maybe JARVISS shows how many positive COVID-19 cases are in the community outside an installation and, more broadly, positive case numbers within the U.S. military?

Nope — unless those numbers are in a local media report that JARVISS picks up.

"If there's information that, either through a media source — whether that's local news that's sort of hot topic information, in some cases our JARVISS system will pick that information up and will actually push that information to you," Vereen said.

Vereen added that soldiers don't necessarily need JARVISS. After all, they probably have other tools that do the same thing.

"I think our soldiers are equipped with so much other data applications that I would tell you, they probably have something similar to JARVISS — and I'm not necessarily saying it's better — but one thing about our generation of soldiers is they're very good at getting information, and so I don't think there's a lack of information on their part," Vereen explained.

"They probably have more than we would ever be able to think of. But I know that for this tool, for JARVISS, really what we want to be able to allow are our commanders, our leaders...to be able to make decisions so they can protect the force, protect the service members...and their families."

When Task & Purpose asked for further clarification about why the system was necessary as a middle man between the source of the information and the commanders who need it, Allen disagreed with the characterization.

"JARVISS isn't really a middle man, but it's kind of wading through everything and pulling out the most important, relevant information to save commanders the time ... This is kind of ... hand-picking that data that's emergent and relevant and getting it to them in a very quick and efficient manner."

All this is not to say that JARVISS isn't useful in other situations; it was originally developed after the Fort Hood shooting in 2018, per an Army release, and is "designed to target criminal activity and natural disaster information." Vereen explained that it is used to pull information from local and state law enforcement reports, and there is surely a benefit in having immediate alerts from law enforcement about an issue unfolding near an Army installation.

But in this case, it seems the COVID-19 information Army leaders are looking for is already available on the broader Internet — and the tool they're looking for, that can alert them to what's important and relevant to their installation, already exists.

Ah, the beauty of technology: if it exists for free, there's a good chance the Army will pay for it.

29. SecDef Esper uses the USS Theodore Roosevelt to tout America's naval supremacy amid the COVID-19 crisis – 5/13

Task & Purpose | Jared Keller

As far as optics go, this isn't nearly as bad as the 'Mission Accomplished' banner on the USS Abraham Lincoln, but it's pretty damn close.

With an aircraft carrier and destroyer sidelined by novel coronavirus (COVID-19) outbreaks, Defense Secretary Mark Esper took to social media to tout the U.S. military's naval supremacy in the face of the global pandemic.

"No other power on earth can match the capabilities and reach of the U.S. Navy," Esper wrote in social media posts on Twitter and Facebook.

But there's a problem, obviously: to illustrate America's naval power, Esper (or his public affairs officers) opted for a photo of the USS Theodore Roosevelt, which is currently laid up in Guam with 1,102 positive cases of COVID-19.

This is maybe not the best visual for Esper to use for a few reasons.

First, it's not accurate: While Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike Gilday recently touted that six Navy aircraft carriers are currently under way in a rah-rah echo of Esper's digital hull-slapping, the Theodore Roosevelt is still preparing to go back to sea after a through scrub-down and quarantine effort.

Indeed, the Theodore Roosevelt photo isn't just inaccurate, but frustratingly tone-deaf when contrasted with actual recent photos from the vessel — namely this one of service members preparing to embark at Naval Base Guam after weeks in quarantine:

Second, the Theodore Roosevelt is currently less the symbol of U.S. naval power it should be and, at the moment, a symbol of the Navy's disjointed leadership. After all, the vessel's outbreak sparked a series of events that began with the ouster of its commanding officer and ended with the resignation of the acting Navy secretary. Like the USS Kidd, also sidelined by a COVID-19 outbreak, the Big Stick is not exactly synonymous with resilience at the moment.

On its own, the use of the Theodore Roosevelt might appear just a ham-fisted error, but its accidental use in Esper's message helps underscore just how desperate U.S. military leaders are to portray the Navy as essentially unmarred by the virus even as the service stops releasing data for positive cases on various vessels.

Indeed, despite Gilday's previously-mentioned touting of America's carrier force, the Navy had previously announced that sailors aboard 26 warships had contracted COVID-19 while sailors aboard an additional 14 vessels had recovered from the illness.

Beyond the Roosevelt and the Kidd, none of the affected vessels were at sea, a statistic that prompted Esper to boast just last week that only two outbreaks among the 90 vessels currently under way constitutes "a pretty good record."

"The statistics show that the safest place to be is on a deployed Navy ship as compared to one that's in port," Esper said.

But as Task & Purpose previously reported, an April 30 report from the Defense Health Agency contradicts Esper's assessment, noting that DoD shipboard populations "are at increased risk of COVID-19" whether they're in port or not due to close quarters and cramped workspaces.

Esper can cheerlead for the Navy's resiliency as much as he wants, but the Pentagon will eventually reveal the truth behind how the service actually handled the COVID-19 crisis: On Monday, the Pentagon's Office of the Inspector General announced an investigation "to determine whether the Navy has implemented policies and procedures to prevent and mitigate the spread of infectious diseases, such as coronavirus-disease-2019 (COVID-19), on ships and submarines."

One day, the Theodore Roosevelt will return to the high seas with the full might of its carrier strike group, a shining symbol of American power. But until then, Esper's digital tributes aren't coming across as the powerful message he probably intended.

30. China Wants to Help the World Fight Coronavirus – 5/13

Scapagoating and finger-pointing are pointless. This is a battle no country can afford to face alone.

Wall Street Journal | Xie Feng

In 1666, as bubonic plague swept Europe, residents of the tiny village of Eyam in England's East Midlands elected to quarantine themselves in hopes of protecting neighboring communities. When the lockdown was lifted in November 1667, 260 of the approximately 800 residents had died, but the self-isolation worked. The illness was contained.

In early 2020, caught in the Covid-19 outbreak, Wuhan, a transport hub of 11 million people in China's Hubei province, locked itself down for 76 days. Making tremendous sacrifice against all the odds, it created a strong first line of defense for China and the world.

Covid-19 has thrust the world into uncharted territory. Among the countries hit by its first wave, China took a "closed-book exam," with uplifting results that have informed other countries' decision-making in the "open-book tests" that followed.

While China never intends to export its system or model, its efficiency, spirit and sense of responsibility in the lifesaving battle against Covid-19 should be obvious. But some have started rumors that the coronavirus was produced synthetically in China. Social media amplifies these falsehoods. Tasuku Honjo, a Japanese Nobel Laureate from Kyoto University, was forced to issue a public statement denying that he had claimed the virus had been "manufactured in China." Some American politicians touted evidence—none of which has been produced—that the novel virus originated in a Wuhan laboratory. But even the Trump administration's own scientists, including Dr. Anthony Fauci, have dismissed such theories.

Identifying the virus's origin is a serious scientific issue. It is up to scientists to research and draw evidence-based conclusions. Politicians shouldn't meddle in the process, much less stigmatize others.

Outbreaks have occurred world-wide, and there is dispute about where the virus first appeared. A pneumonia of unknown origin with flulike symptoms was seen in some countries in late 2019. According to recent research by University College London's Genetics Institute, the pandemic may have started sometime between Oct. 6 and Dec 11. A growing number of countries have found that their assumed "patient zero" had not traveled to China and that the local dominant strains of the virus are different from those in China.

China was the first to spot and report the outbreak, identify the pathogen, and share its genome sequence with the World Health Organization and the rest of the world. Yet China has been accused of coverups and delays and put in the dock. At the same time, those who failed to test, report and act in a timely fashion are passing judgment on others. Isn't it a bit ironic?

As the timeline changes and possible cases are discovered in other countries that predate those found in China, some are anxious to shift the blame instead of reflecting on their own failures in the virus's early days. Was it because they lacked the techniques, or perhaps a sense of responsibility? Could there have been any undercounting or even coverup? Should a country be labeled as the origin of the virus, held accountable and made to pay for others' inept responses simply because it was the first to report what it found? If so, what country will be willing to test people and honestly report the findings in the future?

Some are taking things further, trying to make a fortune out of the pandemic. They have demanded reparations from China, a chilling reminder of the Boxer Indemnity foreign powers coerced China into paying more than a century ago. As a Chinese proverb goes, "A gentleman pursues wealth in a righteous way." Blackmail and plunder are surely not the correct response to a pandemic.

Some others have seen the crisis as an opportunity to cut off trade and decouple economically from China. This has caused bottlenecks in global industrial supply chains and will only set back the recovery of frail economies.

Fighting Covid-19 should be everyone's first concern. The enemy is the virus. Scapegoating China will neither make up for the time that has been lost, nor save the lives that are at risk. We are teammates in this battle, not rivals. Countries need not compete with or envy each other, still less point the finger at or turn against one another. In fact, quite the opposite is necessary. We need to show sportsmanship and team spirit, give teammates who perform well a pat on the back, and lend a helping hand to those in need. After all, this is a fight nobody can afford to lose, one we must win together.

When disaster struck, people in Eyam and Wuhan made their heroic choices. They are the epitome of responsibility, self-sacrifice and solidarity. Such spirit defies time and space, transcends national, ethnic, religious and ideological boundaries, and inspires the international community to set aside prejudice and differences and unite as one. Not only has it kindled our hope of prevailing over the ongoing pandemic; but it will also light our way to a better future.

Mr. Xie is commissioner of the Chinese Foreign Ministry in Hong Kong.

31. Chinese, Iranian Hacking May Be Hampering Search for Coronavirus Vaccine, Officials Say – 5/13 ***In a possible escalation, U.S. to accuse China of actions some officials consider attacks on American public health***

Wall Street Journal | Gordon Lubold and Dustin Volz

WASHINGTON—Chinese and Iranian hackers are aggressively targeting American universities, pharmaceutical and other health-care firms in a way that could be hampering their efforts to find a vaccine to counter the coronavirus pandemic, U.S. officials said.

Since at least Jan. 3, the two countries have waged cyberattacks against a range of American firms and institutions that are working to find a vaccine for Covid-19, the disease caused by the coronavirus, officials said.

The attacks have raised the prospect among some officials that the aggression could be viewed by the Trump administration as a direct attack on U.S. public health and tantamount to an act of war, they said, because the attacks may have hindered vaccine research in some cases. Such an interpretation would represent an escalation of how the U.S. government views cyberattacks against the country.

The issue has sounded alarms across the government. The Federal Bureau of Investigation and the Cybersecurity and Infrastructure Security Agency, the cyber wing of the Department of Homeland Security, on Wednesday are expected to issue what officials called a “public service announcement” with respect to China, saying Beijing is sponsoring widespread cyberattacks intended to steal vaccine research. The FBI and DHS declined to comment.

The Trump administration also has collected intelligence that Iran or its proxies separately have been targeting some of the same facilities, according to senior administration officials who declined to provide additional details. One technique Iran has favored is so-called password spraying, a relatively unsophisticated hacking technique that attempts to compromise an organization by rapidly guessing common account-login passwords.

The effects of the attacks on efforts to find a vaccine were hard for U.S. officials to quantify, and they declined to provide evidence or to detail the intelligence on which their assessments are based. Intelligence gleaned by the administration in recent weeks formed the basis of the assessments, officials said.

Administration officials said China was the primary adversary conducting cyberattacks amid the coronavirus outbreak, with its attacks more widespread and frequent.

The attacks themselves have been disruptive, undermining the efforts of American research institutions and firms trying to find a vaccine for Covid-19, officials said. It wasn’t clear if the damage to some of the research was intentional or not, officials said, likening such instances to a house burglar who by cleaning his own fingerprints causes inadvertent damage to the home, officials said.

U.S. officials said that even an errant keystroke by a hacker targeting such health-care facilities could “irreversibly harm” efforts to find a vaccine.

“It is difficult, and sometimes impossible, to know what motivates such malfeasance, but any such activity carries with it the risk of triggering accidental, disruptive effects,” one senior administration official said.

China and Iran historically have denied targeting the U.S. with cyber espionage. Chinese Foreign Ministry spokesman Zhao Lijian said earlier this week China opposed cyberattacks of all forms and was leading in the research for a Covid-19 vaccine and treatment.

“It is immoral for anyone to engage in rumor-mongering without presenting any evidence,” he said in a briefing Monday.

The decision to publicly call out China comes amid a global race to find a vaccine to control the coronavirus outbreak. Securing and producing vaccines in mass quantities could take at least 12 to 18 months, top government scientists have said, but reaching that goal first not only would help restore public health and economic stability, but potentially would hold enormous geopolitical implications.

It is unusual for the U.S. government to formally blame another country for cyber activity so quickly after an attack is identified, given sensitivities around classified intelligence. Wednesday’s alert won’t contain technical information demonstrating how officials have arrived at their conclusion of China’s involvement in coronavirus-related cyber espionage, but such information may be shared with relevant organizations privately, an official said.

Universities and research institutions have long been of interest to Chinese state-sponsored hackers intent on pilfering biomedical advances and gaining access to classified defense projects and other sensitive information. Due to their collaborative nature, they are widely viewed as weak points for hackers to target.

Entities working on biomedical research “were being targeted long before this crisis arose by the Chinese,” said John Hultquist, the director of intelligence analysis at the U.S.-based cybersecurity firm FireEye. Mr. Hultquist said FireEye had seen evidence that Iran and Russia had both targeted U.S. medical research groups during the pandemic, but China may have had a head start.

“China had already recognized the value of these targets,” Mr. Hultquist said. “They are just more invested in targeting them right now. And they’re not alone.”

Among Iran’s recent targets is the pharmaceutical company Gilead Sciences Inc., which has produced the antiviral drug remdesivir that was recently given emergency-use authorization by the Food and Drug Administration as a potential Covid-19 treatment. Reuters previously reported on Iran’s suspected attacks against Gilead.

32. On the Ground in Wuhan, Signs of China Stalling Probe of Coronavirus Origins – 5/13

Beijing at first appeared to be homing in fast on the source of the virus

Wall Street Journal | Jeremy Page and Natasha Khan

WUHAN, China -- Around 1 a.m. on Dec. 31, Lu Junqing woke to a phone call from his boss at a local disinfection company. Get a team together and head to the Huanan market, he was told: “Bring your best kit.”

Mr. Lu knew the market, a sprawling maze of stalls near a railway station, but had no clue it was the suspected source of a mysterious illness spreading across this city, later identified as Covid-19.

When he got there, local officials directed him to a cluster of stalls selling wild animals for meat or traditional medicine. There were carcasses and caged live specimens, including snakes, dogs, rabbits and badgers, he said.

As his team started to spray disinfectant, the officials began taking samples from the stalls, sewers and goods, Mr. Lu says. They got his team to help with the dead animals, picking out feces and fur with tweezers, and sealing them in plastic bags.

More than four months later, Chinese officials have yet to share with the world any data from the animals Mr. Lu and others say were sampled. Beijing now appears to be stalling international efforts to find the source of the virus amid an escalating U.S. push to blame China for the pandemic, according to interviews with dozens of health experts and officials.

The lack of transparency and international involvement in the search has left room for speculation and blame. It also troubles health experts and officials who say finding the source is key to preventing the same virus from jumping again from animal to human—potentially unleashing another wave of disease.

Initially, Chinese officials seemed to be homing in quickly on the origins of the pathogen, they said. China’s disease-control agency said in January it suspected the virus had come from a wild animal at the Huanan market and that identifying the beast was “only a matter of time.”

Since then, Chinese officials have increasingly questioned whether the virus originated in the country and rejected calls for an international investigation from U.S., Australian and European officials.

China-U.S. relations have deteriorated as each side has aired allegations about the virus's origins. Chinese officials have suggested, without presenting evidence, that the outbreak stemmed from U.S. soldiers visiting Wuhan for a sports competition, which Washington denies and many scientists have dismissed as groundless.

President Trump and senior U.S. officials have alleged that the virus might have escaped from one of two laboratories in Wuhan doing experiments with coronaviruses in bats but haven't publicly shared evidence backing that claim. Beijing and the laboratories deny that, and several foreign scientists familiar with those experiments said they doubt the virus leaked that way.

China's National Health Commission didn't respond directly to detailed questions about the search for the virus's origins, saying only that it should be left to scientists.

"The virus should not be linked to any particular country, region or people," it said in a faxed statement. "Every country in the world should join forces and work together, rather than blaming each other and shirking responsibility."

China isn't the first country to resist an international investigation of a health crisis on its territory, and its early focus on controlling the virus is understandable, health experts said. They also said China had learned from the severe acute respiratory syndrome, or SARS, outbreak in 2002-3, when it was slow to close wildlife markets where that virus spread to humans.

Yet China has only made public the genetic sequences of "environmental samples" from the market's sewers, stalls and a garbage truck—not material directly from any animals—Chinese and foreign researchers say. Some say they've been told by Chinese officials that animals taken from the market were destroyed. Several Huanan market vendors said they had not done tests to establish how many of them were infected.

Although Chinese officials said they were tracing the suppliers of wild meat in the market, they have not published any information on those people or animals they handled.

Meanwhile, China has frustrated efforts by foreign officials and researchers to join the hunt. When a World Health Organization mission visited Wuhan and other Chinese cities for nine days in February, Chinese officials and researchers appeared to be committed to the search, according to three people on the trip. They said they didn't go to the Huanan market, but discussed it and the potential animal origins of the virus with Chinese counterparts.

"Everyone acknowledged the importance of this," said Clifford Lane, the clinical director at the U.S. National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, who was part of the WHO mission. "My impression was that they were looking at it, they were thinking about it."

Officials from the Chinese Center for Disease Control and Prevention told the mission they would eventually be able to create an epidemiological map of the market showing details such as which animals were where, and which patients visited which section of the market, according to Dr. Lane. Such a map has yet to be shared.

The China CDC didn't respond to requests for comment.

The WHO has since made regular requests for updates on the search from the Chinese government, but has received none, the organization said in an emailed response to the Journal.

China's National Health Commission informed it only that those efforts were now being led by the Ministry of Science and Technology, the WHO said. The WHO also requested an update from the ministry but received none, the statement said.

China's Ministry of Science and Technology didn't respond to requests for comment.

“Information from these investigations is essential to public health, as it may hold the key to preventing further introductions” into the human population, the WHO said. It also said it was discussing with China another mission to the country, focusing on the virus’ origins. Asked about that, China’s foreign ministry said it would continue to cooperate with the WHO.

The Food and Agriculture Organization, a United Nations body trying to help coordinate research into animal origins of the virus, has been trying to get a team into China for weeks, according to people familiar with discussions. It planned an expert mission to China in mid-March but the trip has been postponed until at least the end of May, one of the people said.

The FAO said in an emailed statement: “We currently have no missions or official travels planned anywhere due to the pandemic situation.”

EcoHealth Alliance, a nonprofit organization based in New York that has been studying coronaviruses in China for 15 years, has also offered its help, said Peter Daszak, the group’s president. The group helped establish that the coronavirus that caused the SARS outbreak originated in bats and jumped to humans in a market in southern China, probably via catlike mammals called civets.

He said his partners in China had been unable to investigate the market. “It’s really so sensitive now because of the conspiracy theories being put forward in China and the USA. In any case, I suspect it’s simply too late,” he said.

Likening the market to a potential crime scene, he said that since evidence there appeared to have been contaminated or inadvertently destroyed, the better option now was to test more widely for the virus in wild animals and humans who come into contact with them.

“It won’t be fast and it won’t be easy but we will get there, and it will need cooperation between China and other countries including the U.S.,” he said.

Sensitive questions

Many health experts believe the new coronavirus lives naturally in bats and probably jumped to humans via another wild animal, possibly a civet cat or pangolin. The virus could have first jumped to a human at the Huanan market or it could have infected someone elsewhere, possibly a wild-meat trader, who then visited the market.

These are sensitive questions as much of the wild-animal trade in China is illegal and strict sanitary checks are required but not often done on those that can be bred and sold legally.

Huanan vendors and shoppers were reluctant to talk about the wild-meat trade. Some said they had seen various live and dead animals on sale—often in unsanitary conditions—at about 10 of the roughly 1,000 stalls in the market, which mostly sold seafood and closed on Jan. 1.

Among them was Dazhong Livestock and Game, which recently opened a new outlet in another Wuhan market. It offered live or dead animals including baby crocodiles, arctic foxes, raccoon dogs, bamboo rats and civets, according to a version of its now defunct website archived in July 2019.

Another vendor a few stalls down said that Dazhong had sold animals including dogs, snakes, donkeys and birds, often butchering them on site, but that he’d never seen illegal wildlife there.

Wang Konglin, Dazhong’s owner, said in an interview that he stopped selling wild animals several years ago, and has since sold mainly beef and mutton. He said Chinese authorities had tested and questioned him but found no signs of infection or wrongdoing.

“I’ve never seen a pangolin, let alone sold one,” he said. “Or a civet.”

Some researchers and wildlife activists suspect that illicit animals were either not kept at the market or whisked away before Chinese officials arrived.

Mr. Lu, the 31-year-old manager of the Jiangwei Disinfection Company, said he didn't see any civets, pangolins or bats when he and his team arrived at the market to start spraying it down on Dec. 31.

Officials from the China CDC's local office were already there, and another team from its Beijing headquarters arrived on Jan. 1, when the market closed and vendors were ordered to leave all food products behind, he said.

Over the next few days, he said, he saw China CDC staff sampling and removing some of the live and dead animals. The officials got his team to help take about 70 to 80 specimens of feces and fur from the dead ones, mainly dogs and rabbits, he said.

Local officials didn't mention the disease on the first day, he said, and he used a regular concentration of 500 mg of chlorine dioxide per liter of water that day. He quadrupled the concentration the next day, after he learned more. The mixture was so strong it corroded much of his equipment, he said.

The China CDC's official account says only that its team from Beijing arrived on Jan. 1 and collected 585 "environment samples" from sewers, stalls and a garbage truck, and that 33 of them tested positive for the virus. Of those, 14 were from the area trading wildlife, it said. It doesn't mention animal samples.

When health experts from Taiwan and Hong Kong visited Wuhan in mid-January, a local CDC official told them no wild animals were found at the market, and such things were rarely eaten locally, according to one person present, who also said there was no discussion about other kinds of animals.

Ian Lipkin, a virologist at Columbia University who visited China in late January to help combat the virus, said his Chinese contacts told him that the China CDC did take samples from animals and meat at the market.

Dr. Lipkin, who also helped tackle SARS, said that George Gao, the China CDC chief, was initially convinced that the culprit was a bamboo rat, a rodent often sold as meat in China.

"After they went through and did this exhaustive search of the live and the dead and the frozen animals in various freezers, and they didn't come up with anything, they had to revise their model," said Dr. Lipkin.

He said Dr. Gao had told him that Chinese scientists had found the virus in the environmental samples but had been unable to identify which animal they likely came from.

There was "too much contamination, various animal parts, various species," Dr. Lipkin said. Dr. Gao didn't respond to requests for comment.

Dr. Lipkin said he and a Chinese counterpart had since proposed other ways to identify the source of the virus, including by testing blood samples of pneumonia patients across China from before December to see if it might have originated somewhere other than Wuhan.

Chinese authorities have yet to provide access to the relevant samples, however, according to Dr. Lipkin's Chinese counterpart, Lu Jiahai at Sun Yat-sen University.

The consensus that bats were the most likely original host derives largely from a research paper published on Jan. 23, which concluded that the genome of the new virus was 96% identical to that of another coronavirus previously found in bats from southwest China.

Among the paper's authors was Shi Zhengli, an expert on coronaviruses in bats at the Wuhan Institute of Virology—one of the places that U.S. officials have suggested was the source of the virus. She didn't respond to requests for comment.

A week later, China CDC researchers published a paper also concluding that bats could be the original hosts, but suggesting the virus spread to humans via another wild animal at the Huanan market, because most bats hibernated in December and none were sold or found at the market.

The conclusion that the virus likely came from an animal made it an issue not just for the WHO but for a lesser-known international body of which China is also a member, the Paris-based World Organization for Animal Health, or OIE. It brought together experts from around the world to form an informal advisory group, which held the first of several teleconferences on Jan. 31.

The meeting's minutes say that samples were taken from several animal species at the market, and none tested positive, but "information about the number of samples and species sampled was not available."

The group recommended a thorough investigation of the wildlife trade in China, including any criminal involvement, as well as management of wet markets in Wuhan, among others. It is unclear how many of its recommendations China has adopted.

The OIE said in an emailed statement that it was liaising with Chinese veterinary authorities and had offered to help investigate the origins of the virus but no arrangements had been made yet.

It said Chinese experts were involved in several of its technical groups. The agency's minutes in recent months say the experts shared that Chinese scientists had tested domestic animals as well as animals on fur farms and found no trace of the virus. There has been no mention of the Huanan market in the minutes since the first teleconference in January. Some researchers believe the opportunity to investigate the market has long since passed.

"The problem is that this should have been done in late December or early January," said Dirk U. Pfeiffer, a professor of veterinary medicine and epidemiology at the City University of Hong Kong who is a member of the OIE's advisory group.

"It is now too late, which means we will have to rely on other indirect evidence, and therefore proof of cause will be close to impossible."

—*Qianwei Zhang in Wuhan and Phred Dvorak in Tokyo contributed to this article*

33. Post-pandemic, our military needs to adapt – 5/13

Washington Post | David Ignatius

Here's a fact that ought to startle every American who assumes that because we spend nearly \$1 trillion each year on defense, we have primacy over our emerging rival, China.

"Over the past decade, in U.S. war games against China, the United States has a nearly perfect record: We have lost almost every single time."

That's a quote from a new book called "The Kill Chain: Defending America in the Future of High-Tech Warfare," the most provocative critique of U.S. defense policy I've read in years. It's written by Christian Brose, former staff director of the Senate Armed Services Committee and a close adviser to late senator John McCain (R-Ariz.). The book isn't just a wake-up call, it's a fire alarm in the night.

Brose explains a terrible truth about war with China: Our spy and communications satellites would immediately be disabled; our forward bases in Guam and Japan would be "inundated" by precise missiles; our aircraft carriers

would have to sail away from China to escape attack; our F-35 fighter jets couldn't reach their targets because the refueling tankers they need would be shot down.

"Many U.S. forces would be rendered deaf, dumb and blind," writes Brose. We have become so vulnerable, he argues because we've lost sight of the essential requirement of military power — the "kill chain" of his title — which means seeing threats and taking quick, decisive action to stop them.

How did this happen? It wasn't an intelligence failure, or a malign Pentagon and Congress, or lack of money, or insufficient technological prowess. No, it was simply bureaucratic inertia compounded by entrenched interests. The Pentagon is good at doing what it did yesterday, and Congress insists on precisely that. We have been so busy buffing our legacy systems that, as Brose writes, "the United States got ambushed by the future."

We should reflect on America's vulnerability now, when the world is on lockdown and we have a chance to reassess. A new world will emerge after the global coronavirus pandemic, one in which China is clearly determined to challenge the United States as a global power. The propaganda wars over the origin of the novel virus that causes covid-19 are just a warm-up for the tests that are ahead.

China's military isn't focused on projecting power, as ours is, but instead on preventing U.S. domination. Rather than match our fleets of carriers and squadrons of jets around the world, Beijing developed precision weapons to prevent the United States from mobilizing these forces. An example is the DF-21, the world's first ballistic anti-ship missile, which Brose says is known as "the carrier killer."

The Pentagon wants to confront the Chinese challenge, but it insists on keeping the same vulnerable, wildly expensive platforms at the center of the United States' military power. And Congress demands adherence to this status quo. When then-Defense Secretary Jim Mattis and then-Navy Secretary Richard Spencer tried to retire an aircraft carrier in 2019, Congress refused. Expensive fighter jets have a lobby, too. As Brose notes: "There is a reason why parts of the F-35 are built in every state in America. . . . It is political expediency."

When the Pentagon tries to innovate, it's too hidebound to maneuver and adapt. A classic example is the Army's \$18 billion misadventure known as "Future Combat Systems," which was supposed to coordinate modern weapons but turned out to be less agile than a Sony PlayStation.

Brose argues that it's time for a radical rethink. Rather than building weapons for an outmoded strategy of projecting power, we should instead be arming ourselves in an effort to "deny China military dominance." That means many cheap, autonomous weapons at the edge of the perimeter, rather than a few exquisite ones that are vulnerable to attack.

These smart systems exist: The Air Force's unmanned XQ-58A, known as the "Valkyrie," is nearly as capable as a fighter but costs about 45 times less than an F-35; the Navy's Extra-Large Unmanned Underwater Vehicle, known as the "Orca," is 300 times less costly than a \$3.2 billion Virginia-class attack submarine. But these robots don't have a lobby to rival the giant defense contractors.

Brose envisions a military version of the "Internet of things" — smart systems at the outer edges of our defenses which can blunt China's dominance without breaking the budget or risking all-or-nothing confrontations. "We have the money, the technological base, and the human talent," he writes. What we lack is the will to change.

The question for Americans to ponder, in Brose's simple formulation, is "how the future can win." We have a window of time now, thanks to our enforced lockdown, to do some creative thinking about defense. It would be foolish to enter a new, post-pandemic world with the same old hardware.

34. Russia's coronavirus cases are spiking and the health system is struggling to keep pace – 5/13
Washington Post | Robyn Dixon

MOSCOW — When Russian authorities ordered half-trained medical students into hospitals dealing with the covid-19 crisis, the students said they felt like raw military conscripts being sent into battle, barely trained to shoot.

In a sign of the crisis roiling Russian hospitals facing the covid-19 pandemic, university heads last month ordered students to do compulsory practical work in hospitals, where staff complain that they lack protective gear.

At least 169 medical staff have died in Russia, according to a memorial list created by Russian doctors, in the absence of any national official count on the numbers who died or fell ill from covid-19.

The growing fissures on Russia's health system is just one part of a growing crisis that is adding more than 10,000 covid-19 patients a day — catapulting Russia into second place behind the United States in terms of cases.

"I am worried of course. Everyone is concerned. It is dangerous, and no one wants to get sick," said sixth-year medical student, Svetlana, assigned to work as a nurse treating covid-19 patients. "We have a lot of work, lots of patients, and one nurse for 40 patients."

Stevlana, from Medical University No. 1 in Moscow, gave only her first name in fear of repercussions from the university and other authorities. She said hospital staff do not have the recommended N95 masks and have to reuse protective suits, which sometimes get holes.

Virus reaches Kremlin

It is also a critical test for Russian President Vladimir Putin, whose state-crafted image of total stewardship has taken direct blows by the pandemic as he delegates much of the response to provincial bosses and others. On Monday, Putin acknowledged that half of Russia's doctors had not been paid promised bonuses for working on the pandemic.

The virus, too, has pushed its way into his inner circle. His spokesman, Dmitry Peskov, is hospitalized with covid-19. Last month, Russia's prime minister, Mikhail Mishustin, tested positive.

But Russian officials assert that Putin is not at risk. He has spent the past weeks at his retreat outside Moscow.

Meanwhile, Russia has struggled to respond to spike in cases, leaving health-care workers fighting the system they work in. Some have taken to social media with anguished cries for help or to simply vent. At least three health-care workers havemysteriously fallen out of hospital windows in Russia in recent weeks, highlighting the escalations in the health system.

Alexandra, another student at Medical University No. 1, said those students who refused to work would not be given the credit required to pass and faced effective expulsion. She also gave only her first name in fear of reprisals from authorities.

Russia on Wednesday reported a total of 242,271 novel coronavirus cases, a daily increase of 10,028.

Although the caseload continues to rise, the rate of daily increase has slowed. Russia has reported 2,212 deaths, but it counts covid-19 cases much more conservatively than other countries. Many deaths among covid-19 infected patients have been attributed to other causes.

Health officials say that Russia's high case numbers are due to its testing: around 6 million tests performed so far. Yet doctors complain that the tests are inaccurate in around 20 percent of cases, throwing up false positives, exposing medical staff and patients to further risk.

Around a third of Russian covid-19 cases require hospitalization, according to health officials.

Hospital crisis deepens

In a St. Petersburg intensive care unit Tuesday, a doctor watched in shock as a ventilator exploded in flames, killing five covid-19 patients, the second such incident in days. On Saturday a patient with the virus in Moscow died when a hospital ventilator caught fire.

Russian authorities on Wednesday ordered a halt to the use of ventilators produced by Urals Instrument Engineering Plant, part of a state conglomerate Rostec, which also manufactures military hardware and is under Western sanctions over Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea from Ukraine.

But the decision raised questions as to how the country will cope as covid-19 cases continue to climb.

The Industry and Trade Ministry earlier designated the Urals Instrument Engineering Plant as its sole ventilator supplier, planning purchase 5,700 units for Russian hospitals, Russian news agency Interfax reported.

A Ministry spokesman said Monday that an examination must not only focus on the ventilators but on the conditions of their use. Some have suggested that faulty wiring may have caused the fires, with multiple electrical devices in use in ICU wards.

The lack of protective equipment and resulting sickness among health workers has seen doctors walk off the job, fearing infection and death.

Hospitals have emerged as super-spreader sites, with the infection sweeping through covid-19 wards, known in Russia as "red zone" wards and so-called "green zones" or "clean zones" for other patients.

At least 400 hospitals had been identified as covid-19 hotspots, Russian Health Minister Mikhail Murashko said Wednesday, calling it the kind of thing that "tends to happen." He said the situation was "tense but controllable."

St. Petersburg governor, Alexander Beglov, said 1,465 medical workers in that city alone had been infected with covid-19 since the outbreak of the pandemic, RIA Novosti reported.

Questions on Russia's count

"The risk of getting covid-19 in the clean zone of a covid-19 hospital is very high," said Alexandra.

She said some students who had been contacted by hospitals to start work had been given no choice on whether they would work in red zones or green zones.

"We are talking about very serious infection and forcing students to work with such an infection and calling it practical work is inadmissible," she said. "It's a violation of our right to life."

Students including pregnant women, young mothers, those with underlying health conditions that put them at risk and those with elderly parents whom they could infect, were ordered to work in hospitals treating covid-19 patients, she added.

"We are concerned that we won't have personal protective equipment. There are shortages that we all know about, so where are they going to get the necessary quantities for us?" she said.

Alexey Erlikh, head of the cardiological intensive care unit, Hospital 29 in Moscow, who helped launch the online memorial list of medical workers who died of covid-19, said the tally did not purport to include all deaths, relying on colleagues and family reporting to the organizers.

"It is very important to be open about it and technically it is possible to count them," he said. "I feel bad that the officials are talking about sacrifice of medical workers and yet they do not count the sick and dead ones. I can only use a bad word for it."

He is now treating covid-19 but said neither he nor his colleagues had been paid extra as promised by Putin.

"The existing health-care system is coping with the situation," said Murashko, the health minister. "We have developed a system which balances out the numbers of hospitalized and discharged patients."

Natasha Abbakumova contributed to this report.