Overview: Driving coverage was encouraging data from the first vaccine tested on humans by the drugmaker Moderna. Leading defense coverage was an Associated Press report on retention rates increasing across the services due to the uncertainty caused by the pandemic.

The AP, in a widely distributed and repurposed article, reported that thousands of service members are choosing to stay in the military due to the economic insecurity caused by the pandemic. The article notes that most of the services are below their recruitment goals, and the increase in retention will help “offset” those numbers.

Other DoD-related news:
- Sec. Esper will give the recorded keynote address to the Naval Academy’s Class of 2020, academy officials announced and the Capital Gazette reported.
- ABC News and other outlets continued reporting on sailors testing positive after returning to the USS Theodore Roosevelt, noting they were asymptomatic and that “Navy officials aren't sure what's going on.”
- Bloomberg Government reported on the planning efforts underway and factors under consideration to begin reopening the Pentagon. The article drew from a draft of the plan obtained by the outlet and extensive comments from Mr. Hoffman about the conditions needed to bring back more of the workforce.
- The Intercept reported on workers at weapons manufacturing plants in the U.S. who have been “forced to show up to work” after being deemed essential. The article highlighted several foreign military sales that have been approved by the State Department since the pandemic took hold in the U.S., while citing workers’ complaints that safety measures have been inadequate at the facilities.
- Military Times reported on the death of a DoD contractor, which they noted was the first DoD-related virus fatality in nearly a month “even as overall cases exploded past 8,000.”
- Army Times reported on Friday’s White House news conference, where Gen. Perna was named COO of the task force, described by the outlet as a Manhattan Project-style, to develop and distribute a vaccine for the coronavirus.

Other relevant/global news:
- CNN covered a study by the Korean Centre for Disease Control (KCDC), finding that patients who re-tested positive for coronavirus after being discharged are not contagious. Health officials tested 790 close contacts of the 285 cases who re-tested positive for the virus after recovering, but found no infections linked to the recovered patients.
- The WHO announced that it is launching an independent review of the worldwide response to the pandemic, including the origins, once the pandemic is under control. Outlets reported that China agreed to the review, as President Xi announced his country is giving $2 billion to support developing countries’ responses to the virus (AP). Meanwhile, the U.S. responded by criticizing the China for attempting to conceal the outbreak in its early stages (Reuters).
- Fox News reported that three House Republicans are calling on Pres. Trump to use the Magnitsky Act to sanction 10 officials with the Chinese Communist Party, claiming these officials bear responsibility for the global spread of the virus.

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1. 13 sailors test positive again after returning to virus-hit USS Theodore Roosevelt – 5/18
ABC News | Not Attributed

At least 13 U.S. Navy sailors who were previously asymptomatic with COVID-19 have tested positive again after returning to the USS Theodore Roosevelt, a defense official told ABC News.

Navy officials aren't sure what's going on as the sailors had all cleared the protocols to reboard the coronavirus-stricken ship -- completing a 14-day quarantine and testing negative for the virus twice over the following four days. The sailors weren't working together so it appears they didn't infect each other aboard the ship, according to the defense official.

It's possible the tests are picking up remnants of the novel coronavirus in the sailors. But after being asymptomatic for almost three weeks, all 13 sailors are experiencing mild body aches and headaches. Those symptoms led to tests that showed they were all positive for COVID-19 a second time, the defense official said.

When the first sailor described having the body aches and headaches, Navy medical teams urged previously positive and asymptomatic sailors to step forward if they were experiencing the same symptoms. Those who said they had the symptoms all tested positive for the virus again, according to the defense official.

The mystery comes as more than 2,900 sailors have returned to the USS Theodore Roosevelt to prepare for its eventual departure from Guam. The 97,000-ton aircraft carrier was forced to dock at the strategic naval base on the U.S. island territory on March 27 due to a COVID-19 outbreak among the roughly 5,000 crew members.

At least 940 sailors had tested positive and were immediately placed in isolation while the more than 4,000 who tested negative were quarantined in hotels and other facilities ashore. Some 700 sailors remained on board to deep clean the ship and run essential services before beginning their isolation period as crew members who were deemed virus-free took over, according to a press release in late April from the U.S. 7th Fleet.

The Navy announced on Sunday night that the USS Theodore Roosevelt will now begin a "fast cruise" pier-side in Guam to simulate the ship's operations at sea ahead of its departure, which appears to be imminent.

Another defense official had told ABC News last week that one plan under consideration is to set sail without the full crew on board while still having the right number for all of the essential tasks.

"After safely completing fast cruise, Theodore Roosevelt and its crew will be one step closer to going to sea to conduct carrier qualification flights for Carrier Air Wing 11," the 7th Fleet said in a press release on Sunday. "The remainder of the crew will return to the ship following the air wing integration."

2. COVID-driven boot camp test at Keesler graduates first class – 5/18
Air Force Times | Stephen Losey

The first class of new airmen to attend basic military training at an alternative location — which the Air Force is testing as a way to keep operating during the coronavirus pandemic — graduated on Friday.

Almost 60 airmen from the 37th Training Wing, Detachment 5, attended their six-week BMT course at Keesler Air Force Base in Mississippi due to COVID-19 safety concerns. It was part of a proof of concept test by Air Education and Training Command, to see if the Air Force could create new airmen at multiple locations during unusual situations.

It marks the first time any airmen have graduated from BMT at a site other than Texas’ Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland since 1968.

"These changes are part of our operational mindset to fight through COVID-19 and mitigate force health risks," Maj. Gen. Andrea Tullos, commander of the Second Air Force, said in late March, when the Air Force announced
the new location and other coronavirus-driven changes to BMT. “We continue to carefully balance the need to deliver mission ready forces to our operational commanders with the force health protection measures we must responsibly take to preserve the welfare of our families and the extensive network of communities across our nation we call home.”

Tullos said that the Air Force is also trying to spread out where it provides BMT, or boot camp training, to allow it to be flexible, ease the strain on its infrastructure, and be able to surge its training capacity when necessary.

AETC spokeswoman Marilyn Holliday said in an email Monday that officials this week will study the results from the Keesler test, and decide how to move forward. This is the only class of BMT trainees that has so far trained elsewhere, Holliday said.

Military training instructors and graduating airmen wore masks as they marched across the drill pad at Keesler’s Levitow Training Support Facility. Another photograph showed the airmen standing in formation with several feet between one another.

A photograph of a coining ceremony showed an MTI and airman both wearing masks. But as the MTI placed the coin in the airman’s hand, to recognize the airman’s achievement, neither were wearing gloves during the handoff.

Speakers at the ceremony — including AETC commander Lt. Gen. Brad Webb, who administered the oath of enlistment — also were not wearing masks in photographs, though they appeared to deliver their remarks from a distance.

AETC has also taken several steps to adjust the standard BMT courses in response to the coronavirus crisis over the last two months. That included shortening the course length from eight and a half weeks to seven weeks, cutting the number of airmen who report to each class from up to 800 to about 460, putting into place strict movement guidelines for trainees and dedicating time to deep-clean facilities between rotations.

The Air Force has so far recorded 449 positive cases of COVID-19 among uniformed airmen, as well as another 572 cases among civilians, dependents and contractors. One contractor is so far the only COVID-related death in the Air Force population.

3. Army 4-star will co-lead Manhattan Project-style effort to create and distribute COVID-19 vaccine – 5/18

Army Times | Kyle Rempfer

The general helming Army Materiel Command will co-lead the president’s effort to find a vaccine for the novel coronavirus by January 2021, President Donald Trump announced Friday.

Gen. Gustave Perna and Moncef Slaoui, a former chairman at GlaxoSmithKline Vaccines, will co-lead the project called “Operation Warp Speed,” the president said in the Rose Garden of the White House.

During the announcement, Slaoui was called one of the world’s most experienced vaccine developers, whose portfolio includes a vaccine to prevent cervical cancer and one to prevent infantile gastroenteritis.

Perna, who will serve as Chief Operating Officer, oversees 190,000 service members, civilians and contractors in his role leading Army Materiel Command. He was described Friday as leading one of the largest logistics and supply-chain operations in the world.

Together, they’re being charged with not just finding a vaccine, but also producing 300 million doses of it by early next year and distributing it across the United States. The president likened the initiative to the Manhattan Project to build an atomic bomb during World War II.
“We’re looking to get it by the end of the year, if we can,” Trump said Friday. “That means big and it means fast. A massive scientific, industrial, and logistical endeavor unlike anything our country has seen since the Manhattan Project.”

Experts have said the vaccine could take roughly 12 to 18 months to develop, or potentially longer. But the president was more optimistic, saying that the National Health Institute already started looking to develop a vaccine candidate in January of this year.

Slaoui called the president’s timeline “credible,” while adding that it will be “challenging.”

“I have very recently seen early data from a clinical trial with a coronavirus vaccine. And this data made me feel even more confident that we will be able to deliver a few hundred million doses of vaccine by the end of 2020,” Slaoui added.

Before taking the new position, Slaoui was on the board of a biotechnology company called Moderna, which is also developing a COVID-19 vaccine currently in early human trials. Government experts have evaluated roughly 100 vaccine candidates from all over the world, and have so far identified 14 that they believe are the most promising, according to the president.

Defense Secretary Mark Esper promised a vaccine by the end of the year.

“Winning matters, and we will deliver, by the end of this year, a vaccine, at scale, to treat the American people and our partners abroad,” he said May 15 at a White House press conference.

The Pentagon has played a large role in the coronavirus response since the onset of the pandemic. More than “60,000 service members from all branches of the service are still out there,” said Esper, to include medical personnel staffing hospitals and engineers building ad-hoc treatment facilities.

“We will deliver on time, bringing the full weight to bear — the full weight of the Department of Defense, all of our first-class, world-class researchers and scientists, our ability to manage logistics at scale, and our great distributional capabilities,” Esper said.

Operation Warp Speed will include the NIH, Center for Disease Control and Prevention, the Food and Drug administration and the American Society for Psychical Research, as well as private sector partners, officials said Friday.

“It is going to be a Herculean task, but the combination of the two main partners — between Health and Human Services and the Department of Defense — their combined strengths, partnered with the other teammates, will ensure our success," Perna said.

“One of the great advantages that we have as a military is our ability to do logistical and sustainment operations afar," Perna added. "We’re just going to apply those capabilities to this mission.”

4. Europe reopens widely; China gives $2 billion to virus fight – 5/18
Associated Press | Geir Moulson and Derek Gatopoulos

ATHENS, Greece — Europe reopened more widely on Monday, allowing people into the Acropolis in Athens, high-fashion boutiques in Italy, museums in Belgium, golf courses in Ireland and beer gardens in Bavaria. China announced it will give $2 billion to the fight against the coronavirus.

As nations carved out a new normal amid the pandemic, Chinese President Xi Jinping told the World Health Organization’s annual meeting that the money will be paid out over two years to help respond to COVID-19, which has killed hundreds of thousands and devastated national economies. He said the funds will especially support efforts in developing countries.
Xi’s address came amid sharp tensions between Beijing and President Donald Trump, who has suspended U.S. funding to WHO and accused it of failing to stop the virus from spreading when it first surfaced in China. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar represented the U.S. at the meeting, held online this year.

WHO announced it will evaluate the response to the outbreak “at the earliest appropriate moment,” after a watchdog body found possible shortcomings in the U.N. agency’s handling of the crisis.

New infections and deaths have slowed considerably in Europe, where some countries started easing lockdowns a month ago. Many nations are preparing to open their borders next month, trying to sketch out the rules for a highly unusual summer tourist season.

Germany’s foreign minister was discussing the options with colleagues from 10 largely southern European countries.

“This vacation this year won’t be like the ones we know from the past,” Heiko Maas told ZDF television. “The pandemic is still there, and we must at least have safety precautions for the worst case that the figures get worse again.”

More than 4.7 million people worldwide have tested positive for the coronavirus and over 315,000 deaths have been reported, according to a tally by Johns Hopkins University. Those figures are believed to understate the true dimensions of the outbreak because of limited testing, differences in counting the dead and concealment by some governments.

The U.S. has reported almost 90,000 deaths, and Europe has seen over 160,000 dead.

Greece reopened the Acropolis and other ancient sites, along with high schools, shopping malls and mainland travel. Paving stickers were used to keep visitors apart. Tourists were local, for the country still has a 14-day quarantine for arrivals, and travel to Greek islands remains broadly restricted.

Authorities are keen to reopen Greece’s vital tourism sector, following a warning that the country is likely to suffer the worst recession in the 27-nation European Union this year.

Greece’s beaches reopened over the weekend during a heat wave with strict social distancing, but buses from Athens to the coast were crowded.

In Belgium, more students returned to school, hairdressers began clipping locks again, and museums and zoos reopened, all with strict reservation systems to avoid overcrowding. Hoping to make the most of the sunny weather, open-air markets started selling spring fruit and vegetables.

Golf courses and garden stores reopened in Ireland, but Health Minister Simon Harris said he is nervous because the virus hasn’t gone away.

If Ireland can get the next three weeks right, “we as a country will find a way to live safely alongside the virus,” Harris told RTE radio.

Churches in Italy and at the Vatican resumed public Masses. Guards in hazmat suits took the temperatures of the faithful entering St. Peter’s Basilica, where Pope Francis celebrated an early morning Mass in a side chapel to commemorate the 100th anniversary of the birth of St. John Paul II.

Across town, the Rev. Jose Maria Galvan snapped on latex gloves and a face mask before distributing Communion to a dozen parishioners at his Sant'Eugenio parish.

“Before I became a priest I was a surgeon, so for me gloves are normal,” he joked.
In Milan, the Montenapoleone district of luxury boutiques reopened, but few if any shoppers were in sight. The area is home to such fashion houses as Armani, Versace, Ferragamo, Fendi and Bottega Veneta, but its customers are mostly foreigners, and travel to Italy remains severely restricted.

At Milan’s City Hall, hundreds of open-air vendors protested the failure of the city to come up with rules for non-food stands to reopen.

"They haven't worked for three months. What are they going to do if they can't reopen — steal, go ask charity?" said Nicola Zarrella, vice president of Euroimprese, which represents 22,000 market vendors in the Lombardy region. "They want to work, not get handouts."

Portuguese Prime Minister Antonio Costa took his morning coffee at a Lisbon cafe and was having lunch at a restaurant with the speaker of parliament as officials encouraged people to support local businesses. Costa told reporters “we can’t return to our old life as long as the virus is around” but said the economy must come back to life.

In France, authorities were concerned after about 70 infections popped up in the country’s schools since they started reopening last week. France reopened about 40,000 preschools and primary schools last week, with classes capped at 15 students.

The WHO has been drawn into a blame game between the U.S. and China over the spread of the virus. Trump claims China mishandled the outbreak early on, but China has defended its record. The EU and other countries have called for an independent evaluation of the WHO’s response to the pandemic “to review experience gained and lessons learned.”

Xi said that China had provided all relevant outbreak data to WHO and other countries, including the virus’s genetic sequence, “in a most timely fashion.”

“We have shared control and treatment experience with the world without reservation,” Xi said. “We have done everything in our power to support and assist countries in need.”

Xi said he also supports the idea of a comprehensive review of the global response to COVID-19, which “should be based on science and professionalism, led by WHO and conducted in objective and impartial manner.”

The 11-page review of the WHO’s response by an independent oversight body raised questions of whether its warning system for alerting the world to outbreaks was adequate, and it suggested member states might need to “reassess” WHO’s role in providing travel advice to countries.

China reported just seven new cases on Monday but kept tighter social-distancing rules in parts of the northeastern province of Jilin after a cluster of cases of unknown origin turned up.

Moscow health officials said 77 people died of the virus in the Russian capital in the past 24 hours, the highest daily total so far. With over 290,000 infections, Russia is second only to the U.S. in the number of cases, but international health officials question Russia’s low official death toll of about 2,700.

In India, people trickled outdoors after the government extended a nationwide lockdown to May 31 but eased many restrictions. Small shops and other businesses reopened in places, including the capital, New Delhi. At the same time, India recorded its biggest single-day coronavirus surge with over 5,200 new cases, along with 157 deaths.

In Brazil, President Jair Bolsonaro greeted hundreds of supporters — and joined some in performing push-ups — who gathered to back his open-the-economy drive. Bolsonaro has played down the virus even as it has swept through Latin America’s most populous country, leaving over 16,000 dead.
WASHINGTON -- Army Sgt. Antonio Gozikowski was planning to leave the military next month and head to college.

After serving for six years, the dental assistant's goal was to become a dentist, and then return to the Army in a few years with his expanded medical skills. But now, with the coronavirus forcing universities to consider virtual or reduced schooling this fall, he decided to take advantage of a new Army program and extend his military service for six more months.

Across the military, uncertainty about future jobs or college opportunities is driving more service members to re-enlist or at least postpone their scheduled departures. As unemployment, layoffs and a historic economic downturn grip the nation, the military — with its job security, steady paycheck and benefits — is looking much more appealing.

"Everything from elementary schools to universities is closing down and there's no saying how it's going to go when the fall semester opens," said Gozikowski, adding that he's hoping schools start opening up for spring semester. "This is like a safety net. I have a source of income and I'll be able to continue working."

Gozikowski, who is from Cherry Hill, New Jersey, and is serving at Fort Hood, Texas, is one of hundreds of service members who are taking advantage of newly developed, short-term extensions being offered by the military.

As of last week, the Army had already exceeded its retention goal of 50,000 soldiers for the fiscal year ending in September, re-enlisting more than 52,000 so far. And the other services have also met or are closer than planned to their target numbers. The influx of people re-enlisting will offset any shortfalls in recruiting, which has been hampered by the outbreak. And that will help the services meet their total required troop levels for the end of the year.

"We're hiring," said Army Secretary Ryan McCarthy. "Like anything, market dynamics come into effect and people will see where the opportunities lie."

Sgt. Maj. Stuart Morgan, the senior Army career counselor, said Gozikowski was able to take advantage of a new program designed to help soldiers who were planning to leave this year but are now worried and reconsidering their options. The program allows them to delay their departure for up to 11 months to get them past the peak coronavirus period. By early last week, he said, 745 soldiers had signed up.

"What we're seeing this year, which is directly related to COVID, is we do have a population of soldiers that what they were expecting at the end of transition has suddenly disappeared," Morgan said. "And now you have a soldier that is trying to go through a transition period that is now facing uncertainty on the outside."

The Air Force is already expecting to fall short of its recruiting goal by as much as 5,800 as a result of the virus. And that gap, the Air Force said, could be filled by service members who decide to re-enlist or extend their service.

So far, the number of Air Force personnel who have withdrawn their requests to leave the service or have asked to extend their enlistment is 700 more than last year at this time, including 230 pilots and medical staff.

For one pilot, the opportunity to make that sudden change of course was a relief. In discussing his plans, he asked that his name not be used to preserve any future employment options.
Nearly two months ago, he was in Miami taking an airline certification course and getting ready for his next career. For months, he and his fellow pilots at Scott Air Force Base in Illinois had been talking about which airlines were hiring.

“Everybody was getting out,” the 10-year transport aircraft pilot said in an interview from the air base.

“The conversations were like, oh, who got picked up by Southwest, who got picked up by American, who got picked up by Delta. And then the whole coronavirus thing started to play its course.”

Suddenly, he said, “the discussions are more like, what are we gonna do now?”

The pilot said he was worried about the uncertainty. Even if he got a job, it might only be temporary, if the economic downturn continued.

“I need stability in my life. There’s no steady income on the outside, or guaranteed income either,” said the pilot, adding that in the military, he’s guaranteed a job. “While other people are getting laid off and not working, we’re still collecting a paycheck and going to work.”

Retention is also on the rise in the Marine Corps.

Currently there are about 183,000 Marines, and the goal for the end of the fiscal year is about 184,600.

The Corps has nearly reached its retention goal of about 12,600 for the fiscal year, with only about 100 or so to get by the end of September. The Navy was not able to provide retention numbers.

In addition, Marines who were planning to leave the service are being allowed to extend their enlistments by a few months, to get past the initial COVID crisis, or by a year or two.

Maj. Craig Thomas, a Marine Corps spokesman, said virus-related restrictions on recruiting and shipping new Marines to initial training will likely mean the service won’t meet its goal for total force size this year. He added, however, that while it is too early to tell if the bad economy will further boost retention, the enlistment extensions could make up for the recruiting shortfalls.

6. Pentagon Weighs Metro and Schools in Plan to Bring Back Workers – 5/18
Bloomberg Government | Travis J. Tritten

The Pentagon is weighing mass transit, schools, day care, and parking as part of a plan to begin reopening the federal government’s largest office building in the coming weeks, according to a draft of the plan and the department’s top spokesman.

All those factors as well as decisions by Virginia, Maryland, and Washington, D.C., will help determine when 23,000 department personnel could begin returning to work as usual amid the pandemic, said Jonathan Hoffman, chief Pentagon spokesman. The finalized plan is expected to be released as early as this week but a draft version lays out a six-week, conditions-based process.

About 80% of Pentagon personnel are now working remotely, gatherings are restricted, and amenities such as food services are curbed or closed as the department continues to report new cases of Covid-19 among troops and civilians on a daily basis.

“We will begin to ramp up the number of individuals and the number of offices that are here. That is going to take place over a number of weeks,” Hoffman told reporters during a briefing Friday.

The Defense Department will likely release a plan this week for bringing workers back to the Pentagon.
The draft plan obtained by Bloomberg Government proposes that each step toward a return to normal would first require a two-week decrease in Covid-19 cases, flu-like illnesses, and the widespread availability of testing. That mirrors the Opening Up America Again guidelines published by the White House and Centers for Disease Control and Prevention.

After three periods of decreasing cases—or at least six weeks—the Pentagon plan envisions a “return to normal” with new telework arrangements and goals that have not yet been settled, no restrictions on gatherings, and open food courts and gyms.

First Phase Challenges

But reaching even the first phase of reopening poses significant challenges.

Under the plan, the first step of bringing a total of 40% of the workforce back to the office would coincide with state and District of Columbia governments lifting stay-at-home orders; public schools reopening or being out of session; available day care; and businesses beginning to reopen.

“We still have to rely on what is the governor of Virginia saying? What is the mayor of D.C. saying? What is the governor of Maryland saying?” Hoffman said.

State and local governments extended stay-at-home orders or business closures for the region this week, despite easing of restrictions elsewhere in Maryland and Virginia. D.C. Mayor Muriel Bowser (D) extended that stay-at-home order through June 8 and Virginia Gov. Ralph Northam (D) allowed northern Virginia to delay reopening until May 28.

Meanwhile, Montgomery and Prince George’s counties in Maryland announced their stay-at-home orders will remain in place even as Gov. Larry Hogan (R) reopens the rest of the state.

Metro Increase a Consideration

The Pentagon’s planned second phase could mean 80% of workers back in the office, but it also anticipates an increase in Metrorail and bus service, an important factor in commutes to the building from across the region.

Metro would have to increase service with trains every 12 to 15 minutes and buses every 20 to 30 minutes. But the system’s leadership will continue to ask customers to only use service for essential trips this summer as stay-at-home orders are lifted, the Washington Metropolitan Area Transit Authority said this week.

Its own plan for resuming service doesn’t anticipate reopening of all Metro and bus routes and significant increases in rides until an August-October time frame, according to its newly released recovery plan.

“These are all things we want to make sure are in place,” Hoffman said.

7. Secretary of Defense Mark Esper to give recorded commencement speech at Naval Academy commissioning – 5/18
   Capital Gazette | Selene San Felice

Secretary of Defense Mark Esper will give the recorded keynote address to the Naval Academy’s Class of 2020, academy officials announced Monday.

Friday’s graduation and commissioning video will begin at 2:30 p.m. with a tribute to the Class of 2020 before the streamed ceremony at 3 p.m. This is the first pre-recorded graduation for the academy, as coronavirus precautions shut down the Yard in March.
The video will include recorded segments from five private swearing-in events held at the academy over the last week. Groups of seniors returned to the academy last week for the first time since they left for spring break to move out of the dorms in Bancroft Hall and take part in private ceremonies.

Esper graduated from the Military Academy at West Point and later retired from the Army in 2007 after 10 years on active duty and 11 years in the National Guard and Army Reserve. He was sworn in as the 27th secretary of defense on July 23.

The longer we stay at home, the more we want to be in open spaces. Here’s how you can experience off-roading virtually.

Along with Esper, Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Mike M. Gilday and Vice Chief of Naval Operations Adm. Robert P. Burke; Commandant of the Marine Corps Gen. David H. Berger; Naval Academy Superintendent Vice Adm. Sean Buck; Class of 2020 President Midshipman Mike Smith and Gov. Larry Hogan will also give remarks.

The late Midshipman David Forney will be honored in the ceremony. A seat in the first swearing-in event was occupied by a football helmet from the 2019 Army-Navy Game, placed in the Walkersville resident’s memory. He would have commissioned as an ensign and cryptologic warfare officer.

The 22-year-old football player was found unresponsive in his dorm room Feb. 20 and later pronounced dead. His cause of death is still pending with the Office of the Chief Medical Examiner.

The ceremony will be streamed at watchstadium.com/live/us-naval-academy-graduation. An archived video will be available after the broadcast.

To mark commissioning, a Naval Academy Class of 2020 flag will fly atop the Maryland State House. The flags have been waving around downtown Annapolis since April.

The academy has been criticized for separating midshipman for swearing-in and turning commissioning into a live stream event after two of the other military academies decided to keep their cadets together.

The Air Force Academy in Colorado held a scaled-down commissioning ceremony in April. Vice President Mike Pence spoke to the class, but with no crowd at its stadium and cadets staying 6-feet apart.

President Donald Trump announced last month that he plans to give the commencement speech during an in-person ceremony at the Military Academy at West Point on June 13.

The Coast Guard Academy will hold a recorded ceremony on May 20.

8. South Korea says patients who re-tested positive for coronavirus are not contagious – 5/18
CNN | Yoonjung Seo

Patients who re-tested positive for coronavirus after being discharged are not contagious, South Korean health officials said Monday.

The Korean Centre for Disease Control (KCDC) made the announcement after conducting a lab analysis of 108 cases and epidemiology investigations on 285 cases to determine whether coronavirus patients should be quarantined for two weeks after being released from hospital. Health officials tested 790 close contacts of the 285 cases who re-tested positive for the virus after recovering, but found no infections linked to the recovered patients.

What this means: Following the announcement, the country's health officials removed the guideline recommending recovered patients to undergo a further two weeks of quarantine after being released from hospitals and other healthcare facilities.
The Director of the KCDC, Jung Eun-kyeong, said health authorities could not say why some patients were re-testing positive for the virus, but added that experts believed the PCR (polymerase chain reaction) test was detecting pieces of dead virus.

When a positive specimen was isolated and cultivated, coronavirus was not detected in PCR tests, so the experts concluded the virus was not infectious, Jung added.

**9. Our nation’s defense supply chain imperative – 5/18**

*Defense News | Bill Brown*

The Department of Defense and defense industry have a long history of responding quickly and forcefully to crisis, and the COVID-19 pandemic is no exception. Today, hundreds of thousands of dedicated defense workers remain at their posts – delivering mission-critical products and services to support our troops around the world, while also providing personal protective equipment and other supplies to first responders and health care workers here at home.

However, this most recent crisis has re-exposed weaknesses in our defense industrial base – highlighting the need to significantly bolster the nation’s vital supply chain. This serves as a call to action to develop a strategic, long-term approach across government and industry.

We witnessed the fallout from the 2008-09 financial crisis. Thousands of suppliers shuttered or permanently shifted precious capacity to other verticals when defense budgets were indiscriminately cut following the Budget Control Act of 2011 and sequester of 2013.

When budgets began to recover several years later, the damage was clear – longer lead times that in some cases doubled or more, and increased reliance on single-source and international suppliers for critical components, such as microelectronics.

In 2017, President Trump signed an executive order and established a multi-agency task force to study supply chain resiliency. The task force identified five macro forces that create risk to the supply chain and national security preparedness including sequestration and the uncertainty of government spending, the overall decline of U.S. manufacturing capabilities and capacity, harmful government business and procurement practices, industrial policies of competitor nations, and diminishing U.S. STEM and trade skills.

Task force members proposed a comprehensive set of risk-reduction actions – ranging from establishing sustained and predictable multi-year budgets and developing an adaptive acquisition framework, to directing investment to small businesses and diversifying the supplier base.

Over the past two years, the government has made initial strides on a number of these fronts, including working to reduce U.S. reliance on foreign sources for critical rare earth minerals and decreasing the country’s dependence on China and other international suppliers for semiconductors and related components.

Unfortunately, the COVID-19 pandemic emerged before these and other task force initiatives gained serious traction and forced the DoD to refocus its near-term priorities. And the urgency escalated when we began to see the brutal impact the pandemic was causing in the commercial aerospace sector, an important vertical market for many defense suppliers.

The department quickly designated defense suppliers as essential and increased progress payments, spurring larger defense contractors to accelerate payments to thousands of small business suppliers.

These actions helped companies to continue operating, maintain their employment and hiring goals, and sustain critical spending on internal research and development (IRAD) to keep the innovation engine humming. At L3Harris, for example, we recommitted to investing nearly 4 percent of revenues in IRAD, hiring 6,000 new
employees and maintaining our apprenticeship and internship programs to provide opportunities for the workforce of the future.

The combined DoD and industry efforts demonstrate the power of a focused, collaborative approach to mitigate and address the damaging effects of the pandemic and to support the broader defense industrial base.

Today, we are at a critical juncture. We have an opportunity to make the necessary strategic investments that could significantly strengthen our supply base for generations to come, including:

- Ensure sustained/predictable budgets – stable, long-term funding helps companies better plan and encourages them to invest in staffing, technology and facilities needed for the country to maintain its technical superiority. Now is not the time to pull back the reins on defense spending.
- Accelerate contract awards – shorter decision and acquisition cycles enable suppliers to invest in and deliver technologies faster than with traditional methods, and in the near term could help offset the impact of the commercial aerospace downturn.
- Expand domestic supplier base – increasing domestic capabilities reduces vulnerabilities and increases access to critical components, such as rare earths and microelectronics, and over time can help reduce the proportion of sole/single-source supply.
- Increase workforce investment – providing advanced STEM education opportunities drives innovation and productivity by enhancing critical skillsets for existing employees, while attracting, training and growing the workforce of the future.
- Institutionalize process improvements – the COVID-19 pandemic forced government and industry to find new and more efficient ways to work. The challenge now – to make these advances permanent.

These are not quick fixes. However, they provide a strong platform for a more resilient national defense supplier base, which is vital at a time when near-peer adversaries continue to invest heavily in new technologies that threaten our nation’s security.

The imperative is clear – and the opportunity is now.

*Bill Brown is chairman and CEO at L3Harris Technologies.*

10. GOP reps urge Magnitsky Act sanctions against Chinese officials over coronavirus response – 5/18
*Fox News | Ronn Blitzer*

Three Republican members of Congress are pushing the Trump administration to sanction individual Chinese government officials over what they call their "duplicitous, ineffective, and cruel response" to the coronavirus outbreak.

In a letter to Secretary of State Mike Pompeo and Treasury Secretary Steve Mnuchin obtained by Fox News, Reps. Jim Banks, R-Ind., Dan Crenshaw, R-Texas, and Lance Gooden, R-Texas, called for the use of the Global Magnitsky Act – which lets the U.S. sanction human rights abusers – to target specific Chinese officials without punishing the country as a whole. The letter singles out 10 officials with the Chinese Communist Party.

“We believe their actions violated the 2005 International Health Regulations, the human rights of their citizens, and basic principles of fairness and responsibility in international relations,” the letter said.

The congressmen detail a variety of allegations including the detention, interrogation, and reprimand of eight doctors for “spreading rumors” of a virus; detaining journalists; spreading false or misleading information about the virus; accusing the U.S. military of creating and spreading it; and sending 30,000 Uyghur Muslims to factories and crowded “re-education camps” where they were at risk of infection.

“All of these baffling and damaging decisions harmed Chinese citizens and the rest of the world, encouraged the spread of COVID-19, and hindered governments around the world from crafting an effective pandemic response,” the letter said.
"response," the letter said, blaming these acts for thousands of "unnecessary American deaths and substantial economic damage.

The officials named in the letter are Wuhan Deputy Mayor Chen Yongxin; Wuhan Public Security Bureau director Li Yilong and former deputy director Xia Jianzhong; National Health Commission minister Ma Xiaowei and vice-minister Wang Hesheng; Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijiang; former ambassador to South Africa Lin Songtian; Hotan District Industry and Information Bureau deputy director Zhang Wei; Politburo member Chen Quango; and Hikvision chairman Chen Zongnian.

"I know Secretary Pompeo shares my dim view of the Communist Party, and I look forward to working with him, and Reps. Crenshaw and Gooden to hold Party officials accountable," Banks said in a statement. "Starting with the seven on that list, who have significantly harmed the global economy and contributed to the deaths of countless American and Chinese citizens."

In April, Rep. Chris Smith, R-N.J., also reached out to Pompeo regarding the use of Global Magnitsky sanctions on Chinese officials. He urged the secretary to launch a task force “to identify and investigate” Chinese government officials for their role in allegedly silencing doctors and journalists who have spoken out about China's response to the coronavirus outbreak.

Last month, Magnitsky Act proponent Bill Browder said he agrees with Smith’s call to use the global version of the law to punish Chinese government bad actors. The original version of the law is named after his friend and colleague Sergei Magnitsky, who had alleged corruption involving Russian officials and later died after being beaten by Russian guards in 2009.

Last week, China’s state-run media targeted congressional Republicans including Banks, Crenshaw, Gooden, and Smith for their outspoken stance against the nation's government. An article in the Global Times said that "at least four US Congress members" would be placed on China’s sanctions list.

Banks said China was "desperate to avoid responsibility" and that he was "neither surprised nor intimidated" by China's message.

“Sanctions will not silence me or anyone who demands genuine accountability for this horrific pandemic," Smith said in a statement. "In my state of New Jersey alone, more than ten thousand people have died from COVID-19. Beijing cannot continue to hide, lie and now threaten to stop us from demanding the truth."

Fox News’ Nick Givas contributed to this report.

The Intercept | Akela Lacy

With most of the United States on lockdown in late April, the State Department approved billions of dollars in possible weapons sales. Workers at the manufacturing plants that would supply those sales, deemed “essential workers” toward the end of March thanks to the defense industry’s sprawling lobbying apparatus, have been forced to show up to work — even as a number of workers at those factories have tested positive for coronavirus.

The transactions approved by the State Department include $2.2 billion in possible weapons sales to India, Morocco, and the Philippines, and $150 million in blanket funds to the United Arab Emirates for order requisitions to repair and support aircraft fleets and do other related work.

The facilities in question belong to some of the world’s largest defense contractors, like Lockheed Martin and Boeing. At Lockheed Martin’s plant in Forth Worth, Texas, workers have protested the reopening of their facility, saying they were concerned about exposing family members to the virus, and that the company wasn’t properly cleaning facilities. Other workers have said that steps being taken to mitigate risk don’t go far enough. Asked
about the spread or potential spread of Covid-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus, at their plants, the contractors generally demurred and declined to answer questions, instead referring The Intercept to company websites, many of which have stopped publicly reporting Covid-19 cases.

It’s important to keep in mind, said Mandy Smithberger at the Government Oversight Project, that workers are being put at risk because trade groups lobbied for an overly broad designation for essential workers.

“I think it is worth asking them why that guidance shouldn’t be targeted,” said Smithberger. “I think the answer for why it’s so broad is because the companies want it to be broad. They want it to be up to them. But how do you appropriately target that so that you’re not unnecessarily jeopardizing workers?”

Many weapons factories ceased in-person operations at certain facilities at the onset of the pandemic, but have since resumed in some large cities. Several big contractors, like Boeing, in early April closed plants in major cities like Seattle and Philadelphia, while others, like Lockheed’s in Fort Worth, stayed open.

The prime contractor for the proposed missile sales to Morocco and India is a Boeing plant in St. Louis that had confirmed 15 coronavirus cases in late April. Another Boeing plant in Mesa, Arizona, is a prime contractor on one of two recent sales of Apache helicopters to the Philippines. Boeing last month resumed some operations in Philadelphia; Puget Sound, Washington; and Charleston, South Carolina. Communications Director Todd Blecher referred questions on specific Covid-19 cases at Boeing plants to their website, which does not list that information, and then to another Boeing official tracking the status of company facilities. The company did not provide information on positive cases or remaining facility closures by the time of publication.

Lockheed Martin, the world’s largest weapons manufacturer, is the biggest tech company in Florida, with 8,000 workers across two major facilities in Orlando. The Orlando plant is a principal contractor on one of the Philippines Apache sales, along with Boeing’s Mesa plant. Just last year, the company had to back pay more than $320,000 to its employees for labor violations, including misclassifying workers and robbing them of pay for hours of overtime worked. Now, Lockheed executives are part of Republican Gov. Ron DeSantis’s task force to reopen the state economy.

While the company is not publicly reporting updated numbers on confirmed or potential cases among workers, some details have emerged. Several Lockheed workers have been diagnosed with coronavirus, and at least one worker in Fort Worth, Texas, died on April 11 after being exposed to Covid-19 outside of work. A fundraising page for the family of the employee who died, run by military veteran Jennifer Escobar, whose husband works at Lockheed, blames the company for the worker’s death. “Due to the companies [sic] negligence Mr. Daniels is no longer with us. Both this gentleman and his wife have worked for Lockheed Martin for many years,” the page reads. Escobar has also begun a petition to shut down the company’s F-35 factory in Fort Worth. Lockheed last month said people who had been exposed to Daniels were directed to quarantine, and that his workspace was sanitized.

Lockheed spokesperson Dana Casey referred questions on how the facility was addressing concerns about the coronavirus to their website and a list of FAQs, which list their priorities as protecting workers, and performing and delivering for customers. The company started a $6.5 million disaster relief fund for impacted employees and retirees, implemented new cleaning procedures, and restricted travel and facility access.

Paul Black, president of the machinists union that represents workers at Lockheed’s Fort Worth plant, blamed the federal government for putting workers at risk in a March interview with the Washington Post.

Workers at the General Electric plant in Lynn, Massachusetts, which is a prime contractor on the second Apache sale to the Philippines, have been fighting for additional protections and support since the pandemic started. They’ve held numerous demonstrations, including a strike on April 8, and have a standing petition demanding that GE “fix appalling safety conditions at the facility and allow workers to manufacture the life-saving ventilators the whole country so desperately needs.” GE did not respond to requests for comment.
After a demonstration on March 30, the Nation reported, GE made some major changes to improve safety at the Lynn plant. The IUE-CWA Local 201, which represents workers at the plant, wrote in a March 28 statement that they had informed GE of their position that the company had “failed so far to ensure that work buildings are thoroughly cleaned and disinfected, and that such failure has created an identifiable, presently existing threat to the safety of the employees who are assigned to work there.”

The Bell Textron plant in Forth Worth is also a prime contractor on the sale of attack helicopters to the Philippines. Two workers at the Bell plant tested positive for Covid-19 in mid-April, as did two workers at other locations, one nearby in Grand Prairie, and the other in Canada. A spokesperson for the company said they have had four confirmed cases at facilities in North Texas and that those people have fully recovered and returned to work. Lindsey Hughes, Bell’s manager of global communications, said the company was “taking significant steps” to keep workers safe, including arrangements for remote work, staggered schedules where possible, temperature screenings, no-touch trash cans, and regular disinfections.

“We will continue to adhere to the guidance of the CDC, WHO and local governing health authorities to implement any required changes to our business,” Hughes said.

The War Industry

The weapons industry has so far spent millions of dollars on lobbying Congress and the Department of Defense in the wake of the coronavirus pandemic, on issues like getting exemptions from stay-at-home orders and relief under the CARES Act. The push to get 2.5 million defense workers classified as essential came as the United States’s undeclared wars continue, with airstrikes reaching an all-time high in Somalia as the coronavirus spread, and the U.S.-backed, Saudi-led coalition continuing to drop bombs on Yemen.

“As states across the country issued orders requiring businesses to close in a drastic attempt to prevent the spread of the virus, the federal government issued instructions to defense contractors that directly contradicted those local efforts,” the Washington Post wrote in late March, just two weeks after the coronavirus outbreak was deemed a pandemic.

After the first major coronavirus stimulus, a $2 trillion relief package, was passed, major defense contractors were largely disappointed with what they were allocated. Congress gave Boeing, which lobbied on the measure, $17 million in the form of support for its commercial flight business. Boeing had originally requested $60 million, and is refusing to accept the funds. The company’s push to get more federal aid comes while facing significant financial trouble even before the pandemic. Other defense industry contractors have had similar financial woes. Before it became Remington Arms, Remington, one of the country’s oldest gunmakers, filed for bankruptcy in 2018.

In arguments to keep facilities operating, industry groups have cited preserving their own competition, as well as national security. In a letter to Defense Secretary Mark Esper on March 20, after several states had already started limiting large gatherings and initiating shelter-in-place orders, the Aerospace Industries Association urged the federal government to let them stay open, and to provide additional funds. They asked the Pentagon to legally establish national security programs and their workforces as essential. The same day, the Defense Department’s top acquisitions official, Undersecretary Ellen Lord — the former CEO of Textron — issued a memo saying industry companies would be expected to maintain normal work schedules.

“Our industry is inextricably linked to our nation’s continued success and global competitiveness,” AIA wrote. “Our people, products, and common supply chain help to power our economy and provide our warfighters capabilities and tools they need to defend our nation’s security.”

Boeing said it would support any U.S. decision that would keep essential businesses and supply chains open. Trade groups representing the defense industry were given daily phone calls with undersecretary Lord, beginning in March. The calls included the Chamber of Commerce, the Aerospace Industries Association, the National Defense Industrial Association, the Professional Services Council, and the National Association of
Manufacturers. According to DOD, the calls were intended to ensure continuity and reliability of the defense-industrial base, and to provide agency officials with information on the pandemic’s impact on the industry, Defense News reported.

Domestic Arms Production

Plants focused on domestic arms production also remained active amid the pandemic, even as workers became sick from coronavirus. After gun manufacturers were declared an essential business at the end of March, some employees returned to work at the Remington Arms plant in Ilion, New York, which had been closed in accordance with Gov. Andrew Cuomo’s March order that workers at nonessential businesses stay home. Less than two weeks later, one employee was diagnosed with coronavirus.

Phil Smith, who directs governmental affairs for the labor union United Mine Workers, which represents workers at the Ilion plant, acknowledged that the Ilion plant had not “been difficult with respect to implementing” additional protections, including social distancing. But he said his union was still concerned about many of their 10,000 members across the country who have also been deemed essential, including many coal miners. Asked if he would prefer that they hadn’t reopened the facility, Smith said, “What we prefer is that they be as safe as they can possibly be at work,” he said.

An employee at a SIG Sauer gun manufacturing plant in New Hampshire tested positive for the virus last month. SIG Sauer operates two manufacturing plants and a training facility in New Hampshire, the site of its U.S. headquarters. A memo from SIG Sauer’s CEO reporting the employee case did not specify which facility they worked at.

Workers in the Machinists Local S6 union at the General Dynamics Bath Iron Works facility in Maine called on their president to shut down the facility in March, slamming the company for putting them at risk. BIW was willing to use them as “sacrificial lambs to meet the needs of our customer,” they wrote to President Dirk Lesko. Workers asked that the facility temporarily shut down until it was safe to return in large groups. BIW kept the factory open, and two workers eventually tested positive for coronavirus.

One worker posted to Facebook in April, writing that he was possibly positive for Covid-19. “I’m an essential worker, who works at a company that is a part of America’s Defense Critical Infrastructure,” he wrote. “Said company has had two (2) employees with CONFIRMED cases of Covid-19. ?? there’s roughly 6800 employees between the 4 locations and training facility.” (He declined an interview, citing the rules of his employment.)

General Dynamics said in a statement to The Intercept that no other BIW employees had reported positive tested results since April 2, the date the second case was reported. The company referred questions on health and safety precautions to their website, and said attendance at BIW, “which had been down 25-30 percent from normal levels because of COVID-19, is at pre-COVID levels today, Monday, May 11.”

Maine Democratic State Rep. Seth Berry, who led a large state delegation in writing two letters to BIW raising concerns for worker safety, suggested that the company’s primary motivation for continuing in-person work at the Maine plant was to maintain profits at the expense of workers. “BIW has spoken often about its need to be competitive with the Navy’s other principal shipbuilder, Huntington Ingalls,” Berry said, adding that BIW “used this argument recently to convince legislators to provide them with a $45 million tax break specifically for their operation and for no other Maine business.”

Smithberger at the Government Oversight Project said companies were leveraging “dread inflation around China to try and stabilize and increase” defense budgets. “You’re seeing some pretty ludicrous op-eds saying that the department can’t afford to lose a single dollar.”

12. First coronavirus death in three weeks, DoD reports – 5/18
Military Times | Meghann Myers
After the better part of a month where no Defense Department-affiliated personnel died of coronavirus complications, even as overall cases exploded past 8,000, a department contractor died over the weekend.

The death, the eighth for a contractor, brings DoD’s death toll to 28, according to Pentagon data.

Contractors have been hit the hardest throughout the pandemic, with a 1.5-percent death rate and 9-percent hospitalization rate in 530 total COVID-19 cases so far, 6 percent of the department’s overall diagnoses.

As of Monday, 8,636 troops, dependents, civilians and contractors have been diagnosed, for a total of 341 hospitalizations and a 0.3-percent mortality rate. Nationwide, the mortality rate is 6 percent of known cases.

Though numbers have continued to climb, the past two weeks have seen a slowdown — particularly in non-military cases — even as the services have begun testing some asymptomatic troops.

The military’s 5,727 cases make up a full two-thirds of the department’s 8,636, for an infection rate among troops of just under 0.3 percent. Nationwide, the known infection rate is about 0.4 percent.

As an outbreak aboard the aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt, which was first sidelined in late March, resurges, 89 new sailors tested positive for COVID-19 over the weekend, bringing the service’s total to 2,294.

Comparatively, the Army — a service with roughly 150,000 more active personnel than the Navy — diagnosed 45 over the weekend, for a Monday total of 1,217. The Marine Corps now stands at 491, followed by the Air Force at 449, with the National Guard at 1,158.

Of those, 123 have been hospitalized — just over 2 percent — 2,821 have recovered and two have died, for a 0.0003 percent rate.

13. Navy ‘cautiously optimistic’ it will reach recruiting goals this year, despite COVID-19 challenges – 5/18
Navy Times | Diana Stancy Correll

The Navy is still shooting to reach its recruiting goals this year — despite a three-week pause this spring in sending recruits to the Recruit Training Command at Naval Station Great Lakes in Illinois due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

That’s in part because the safety precautions in place have been successful, allowing the recruit classes to expand from just over 500 recruits to 750 each week, according to Chief of Naval Personnel Vice Adm. John Nowell Jr.

"We are controlling this well enough that I am very comfortable in telling the team to increase to 750 shippers beginning next week," Nowell told reporters Friday.

For Fiscal Year 2020, the Navy’s accession goal is 40,800 personnel, and Nowell is holding out hope that the Navy can meet that target if things continue in the right direction.

“I am cautiously optimistic, but this is conditions-based,” Nowell said.

The Navy started implementing risk mitigation measures when a recruit at Great Lakes tested positive for COVID-19 in March, prompting the service to ultimately take a three-week pause sending new recruits to Recruit Training Command.

Now, the Navy is requesting recruits to isolate as part of a voluntary 14-day restriction of movement, or ROM, at home before their departure for boot camp. Recruits then undergo another 14-day ROM at the Great Wolf Lodge
Water Park to prevent COVID-19 from spreading among recruits. That will continue during the summer months too. However, the water park’s amenities are off limits for the recruits.

Risk mitigation efforts are also in place for the officer pipeline. Cmdr. Lara Bollinger, a spokesperson for Navy Recruiting Command, confirmed to Navy Times that all officer candidates must complete a 14-day ROM at home before they arrive at Officer Training Command in Newport, Rhode Island.

Likewise, Lt. Cmdr. Frederick Martin, a spokesperson for Naval Service Training Command told Navy Times that officer candidates are also conducting a separate 14-day ROM on base upon their arrival at Officer Training Command, and remain on base for the duration of their training.

The COVID-19 pandemic also forced the Navy to move to 100 percent virtual recruiting efforts, but Nowell said the Navy started to permit some recruiting stations to reopen last week. At this point, he expects no more than roughly a third of recruiters will resume working from offices at recruiting stations.

Even so, that doesn’t mean doors are wide open for potential recruits.

“It would be more like what we’re doing delivering some other essential services, where it’s ‘Hey we’re here and if you’d like to come in, let’s schedule an appointment so that we know we won’t have too many people in there at the same time, we can social distance, we’ll wear face masks, we’ll have hand sanitizer at the door,” Nowell said.

As of Friday, the Navy has reported 2,205 cases of COVID-19, however the Pentagon’s policy bars the release of COVID-19 case numbers from specific installations.

The Marine Corps is also aiming to reach its recruiting goals this year. Gunnery Sgt. Justin Kronenberg, a spokesperson for Marine Corps Recruiting Command, similarly said the Marines were “cautiously optimistic” the service would hit its target, but acknowledged that the pandemic has “posed historic challenges and they are not over yet.”

Kronenberg said recruiters are also starting to conduct in-person recruiting in areas of the U.S. where conditions are improving, and are evaluating scenarios to increase throughput those conditions become safer.

But not all services are feeling as optimistic though. For example, Air Force Chief of Staff Gen. David Goldfein voiced concerns about the decrease in recruits the Air Force is sending to Basic Military Training at Joint Base San Antonio-Lackland in Texas.

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

Although Goldfein isn't anticipating recruiting numbers will ramp back up to pre-coronavirus levels in the near future, he said the next milestone is reaching 75 percent of normal capacity at Basic Military Training in the coming months.

The Pentagon has recorded more than 5,500 cases of COVID-19 among service members.

*Military Times reporter Shawn Snow contributed to this report.*


*New York Times | Not Attributed*
As the World Health Organization’s decision-making body holds a virtual meeting starting on Monday with all 194 member states, a key question is whether the United States and others will call for the W.H.O. to investigate China’s response to the coronavirus.

But China’s leader, Xi Jinping, defended his country’s actions in a video address to the assembly on Monday. He also pledged $2 billion to help fund the global public health body, one month after President Trump halted U.S. funding for the agency.

“After making painstaking efforts and sacrifices, we have turned the tide on the virus and protected lives,” Mr. Xi said. “All along, we have acted with openness, transparency and responsibility.”

He also said that China had been quick to release the coronavirus’s genome sequence and had taken strong steps to support other countries in their responses to the pandemic. Mr. Xi said that China would support a W.H.O. review of the outbreak once the virus is under control, as opposed to an independent investigation that many are calling for.

Mr. Trump and other world leaders have accused China of allowing the global spread of the virus by suppressing or withholding information about it after it emerged in Wuhan in December. In recent weeks, European and Australian officials have joined Mr. Trump in calling for an investigation.

The United States has by far the world’s worst known outbreak, and Mr. Trump’s response to the pandemic has been criticized as slow and ineffective.

But he has sought to deflect some of that criticism by stirring anger at China and the W.H.O. Last month, he ordered his administration to halt funding for the organization — a loss of hundreds of millions of dollars, although his administration has raised the possibility of partly restoring it.

Dr. Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, the head of the W.H.O., on Monday emphasized the need for unity in working to stop the pandemic. “The only way is together,” he wrote on Twitter.

In the meeting, which is the annual gathering of the organization’s World Health Assembly, he said the W.H.O. welcomed the calls for an “impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation” that takes into account the “entirety of the response by all actors” responding to the pandemic.

The meeting had been slated to include a vote on another contentious topic: whether Taiwan, a self-governing island that China claims as its territory, should be allowed to participate as an observer. But on Monday, Taiwan’s foreign ministry said it was pausing its bid.

Pressed for an inquiry into the virus’s origin, China floats its own theories.

Fighting foreign pressure to account for the initial spread of the coronavirus, the Chinese Communist Party deflected blame in one of its leading journals, saying in effect that the virus could have come from anywhere.

The article, published in the party’s magazine Qiushi over the weekend, is China’s latest effort to push back against demands on multiple fronts for a fuller accounting of where the virus came from and especially how it spread from Wuhan.

Last week, Xinhua, China’s main state-run news agency, issued a long question-and-answer article disputing that the virus had leaked from a lab in that city and that China had failed to act quickly to stop its spread.

The Trump administration has pressed the lab theory, which is viewed skeptically by many scientists in China and abroad. Before the World Health Assembly’s meeting on Monday to discuss the crisis, Australia, the European Union and other governments have called for an international inquiry into the pandemic while keeping distant from the lab theory.
Such calls are discomfiting for the Chinese government, which has been eager to set aside evidence that officials played down the outbreak and restricted reporting, delaying a response from the central government.

The Qiushi article argues that questions of the coronavirus’s origins are best left to scientists free of political interference. But it uses highly tendentious descriptions of the research to suggest that the coronavirus may not have first spread from China.

15. Moderna Coronavirus Vaccine Trial Shows Promising Early Results – 5/18

*The company said its preliminary test in 8 healthy volunteers was safe. It is on an accelerated timetable to begin a larger human trial soon.*

*New York Times | Denise Grady*

The first coronavirus vaccine to be tested in people appears to be safe and able to stimulate an immune response against the virus, its manufacturer, Moderna, announced on Monday.

The findings are based on results from the first eight people who each received two doses of the experimental vaccine, starting in March.

Those people, healthy volunteers ages 18 to 55, made antibodies that were then tested in infected cells in the lab, and were able to stop the virus from replicating — the key requirement for an effective vaccine. The levels of those so-called neutralizing antibodies matched or exceeded the levels found in patients who had recovered after contracting the virus in the community.

Though encouraging, the findings do not prove that the vaccine works. Only larger, longer studies can determine whether it can actually prevent people in the real world from getting sick. Moderna’s technology, involving genetic material from the virus called mRNA, is relatively new and has yet to produce any approved vaccine.

Early results from a handful of test subjects may not seem like much to go on, but the world is desperate for good news. With the highly contagious virus defying most efforts to control its spread, vaccines are seen as the best and perhaps only hope of stopping or even slowing a pandemic that has sickened nearly 5 million people worldwide, killed 315,000 and locked down entire countries, paralyzing their economies.

Moderna produced the vaccine in collaboration with the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, the institute led by Dr. Anthony Fauci, which has been leading the clinical trials. That institute, a part of the federal National Institutes of Health, is also involved in research on other experimental coronavirus vaccines.

The news helped buoy Wall Street, rallying the markets. In recent months, Moderna’s stock has soared as it pursued a vaccine, and it was up more than 25 percent by mid-afternoon on Monday.

Dozens of other companies and universities are also rushing to create coronavirus vaccines, and several have also begun to test their candidates in human subjects, including Pfizer and its German partner BioNTech, the Chinese company CanSino, and the University of Oxford, working with AstraZeneca.

Experts agree that it is essential to develop multiple vaccines, because the urgent global need for billions of doses will far outstrip the production capacity of any one manufacturer.

At the same time, there is widespread concern that haste could compromise safety, resulting in a vaccine that does not work or even harms patients. Vaccines have generally taken years, sometimes a decade or more, to reach the market. A significant part of that time is taken up by large trials in thousands of subjects, waiting to see if the vaccine prevents infection and making sure that it does not make the illness worse — a known, though uncommon effect called disease enhancement.
Moderna’s early stage of testing, phase 1, is continuing. Two more age groups, 55 to 70, and 71 and over, are now being enrolled to test the vaccine.

The actual data from these preliminary tests has not been published or shared publicly, but has been submitted to the Food and Drug Administration, which does not comment on trials still in progress. The company said it hoped to make data publicly available this summer, when its final stage of testing is due to begin.

Moderna has said that it is proceeding on an accelerated timetable, with the second phase involving 600 people to begin soon, and a third phase to begin in July involving thousands of healthy people. The Food and Drug Administration gave Moderna the go-ahead for the second phase earlier this month.

If those trials go well, a vaccine could become available for widespread use by the end of this year or early 2021, Dr. Tal Zaks, Moderna’s chief medical officer, said in an interview. How many doses might be ready is not clear, but Dr. Zaks said, “We’re doing our best to make it as many millions as possible.”

Two shots, four weeks apart, are likely to be needed, meaning that however many doses are produced, only half that number of people can be vaccinated.

There is no proven treatment or vaccine against the coronavirus at this time. Dozens of companies in the United States, Europe and China are racing to produce vaccines, using different methods. Some use the same technology as Moderna, which involves a segment of genetic material from the virus called messenger RNA, or mRNA.

Moderna said that additional tests in mice that were vaccinated and then infected found that the vaccine could prevent the virus from replicating in their lungs, and that the animals had levels of neutralizing antibodies comparable to those in the people who had received the vaccine.

Three doses of the vaccine were tested: low, medium and high. These initial results are based on tests of the low and medium doses. The only adverse effect at those doses was redness and soreness in one patient’s arm where the shot was given.

But at the highest dose, three patients had fever, muscle pains and headaches, Dr. Zaks said, adding that the symptoms went away after a day.

But the high dose is being eliminated from future studies, not so much because of the side effects, but because the lower doses appeared to work so well that the high dose is not needed.

“The lower the dose, the more vaccine we’ll be able to make,” Dr. Zaks said.

Moderna uses genetic material — messenger RNA — to make vaccines, and the company has nine others in various stages of development, including several for viruses that cause respiratory illnesses. But no vaccine made with this technology has yet reached the market.

Work on the new coronavirus started in January, as soon as Chinese scientists posted its genetic sequence on the internet. Researchers at Moderna and the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases identified part of the sequence that codes for a spikelike protein on the surface of the virus that attaches to human cells, helping the virus to invade them.

The idea behind Moderna’s vaccine is to inject the mRNA for part of the spike protein and have it slip into the cells of a healthy person, which then follow its instruction and crank out the viral protein. That protein should act as a red flag for the immune system, stimulating it to produce antibodies that will prevent infection by blocking the action of the spike if the person is exposed to the virus.
BEIJING - China, facing what it sees as increasing military pressure from the United States, is likely to shrug off the pall hanging over its economy from the novel coronavirus and increase its defence budget again this year.

China’s military spending, due to be announced at the opening of the annual meeting of parliament on Friday, is closely watched as a barometer of how aggressively it will beef up its military capabilities.

China set a 7.5% rise for the defence budget in 2019, outpacing what ended up as full-year gross domestic product (GDP) growth of 6.1% in the world’s second-largest economy.

Its economy shrunk 6.8% in the first quarter of 2020 from a year earlier, as the novel coronavirus spread from the central city of Wuhan where it emerged late last year, and the government has said economic conditions remain challenging.

Despite the coronavirus outbreak, the armed forces of China and the United States have remained active in both the disputed South China Sea and around Chinese-claimed Taiwan.

Xie Yue, a professor of political science at Shanghai’s Jiao Tong University and a security expert, said that while it is hard to predict if the defence budget would grow at a higher or lower rate than last year, it would definitely rise.

“From the national security point of view, China needs to appear strong to the West, especially the United States, which has been putting more pressure on China on all fronts, including militarily,” he said.

The coronavirus has worsened already poor ties between Beijing and Washington, with accusations from the Trump administration of a Chinese cover-up and delayed release of information about the outbreak.

The Ministry of State Security warned in a recent internal report that China faced a rising wave of hostility in the wake of the coronavirus outbreak that could tip relations with the United States into armed confrontation.

“Even if the government cuts everything else, it won’t cut defence,” said Tang Renwu, dean of Beijing Normal University’s school of public administration.

The Defence Ministry did not respond to a request for comment. China routinely says spending is for defensive purposes only, is a comparatively low percentage of its GDP, and that critics just want to keep the country down.

‘UNBEARABLE COSTS’

China reports only a raw figure for military expenditure, with no breakdown. It is widely believed by diplomats and foreign experts to under-report the real number.

Taking the reported figure at face value, China’s defence budget in 2019 - 1.19 trillion yuan ($167.52 billion) - is about a quarter of the U.S. defence budget last year, which stood at $686 billion.

China has long argued that it needs much more investment to close the gap with the United States. China, for example, has only two aircraft carriers, compared with 12 for the United States.

Hu Xijin, editor of the ruling Communist Party-backed Global Times newspaper, wrote in a WeChat post on Monday that he anticipated the defence budget would rise.

“China needs more military power as a deterrent, to ensure the U.S. will not act on its impulses because of unbearable costs,” Hu said.
Hu had previously argued that China should expand its stock of nuclear warheads to 1,000, including "at least 100 DF-41 strategic missiles", an intercontinental missile capable of striking the continental United States.

Experts point out that the benefit of increasing defence spending when the economy is weak is that it can give the economy a much-needed shot in the arm, with manufacturing struggling and domestic consumption slack over worries about job security.

China’s 2019 defence spending represented slightly over 5% of total government expenditure and about 1.2% of GDP for the year.

Xie said investing in home-grown military technology research and development would be money well-spent, as tightening sanctions meant it was increasingly hard for China to buy technology on the global market.

"With nationalist sentiment running high, not only will the increase in military expenditure not be criticised too much, it may even lead to citizens feeling more pride in the country," he said.

Reporting by Yew Lun Tian; Additional reporting by Ben Blanchard in Taipei; Editing by Robert Birsel

17. U.S. savages WHO as it promises pandemic review, but China pledges $2 billion – 5/18

Reuters | Stephanie Nebehay and Emma Farge

GENEVA - The World Health Organization said on Monday an independent review of the global coronavirus response would begin as soon as possible and it received backing and a hefty pledge of funds from China, in the spotlight as the origin of the pandemic.

But the WHO’s chief critic, the U.S. administration of President Donald Trump, decried an “apparent attempt to conceal this outbreak by at least one member state”.

Trump has already suspended U.S. funding for the WHO after accusing it of being too China-centric, and at the same time led international criticism of Beijing’s perceived lack of transparency in the early stages of the crisis.

Health Secretary Alex Azar did not mention China by name, but made clear Washington considered the WHO jointly responsible.

“We must be frank about one of the primary reasons this outbreak spun out of control,” he said. “There was a failure by this organization to obtain the information that the world needed, and that failure cost many lives.”

Speaking after Azar, Chinese Health Minister Ma Xiaowei said Beijing had been timely and open in announcing the outbreak and sharing the virus’s full gene sequence, and urged countries to “oppose rumours, stigmatisation and discrimination”.

China pledged $2 billion over the next two years to help deal with COVID-19, especially in developing countries.

The amount almost matches the WHO’s entire annual programme budget for last year, and more than compensates for Trump’s freeze of U.S. payments worth about $400 million a year.

‘LEARN FROM EXPERIENCE’

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said the U.N. body had “sounded the alarm early, and we sounded it often”.

When it declared a global emergency on Jan. 30, there were fewer than 100 cases outside China, and no deaths, he said.
He was addressing a virtual meeting of the WHO’s decision-making body, the World Health Assembly, at which President Xi Jinping said China had acted with “openness and transparency and responsibility”.

Tedros, who has always promised a review, told the forum it would come “at the earliest appropriate moment” and make recommendations for the future. He received robust backing from the WHO’s independent oversight panel.

“Every country and every organisation must examine its response and learn from its experience,” he said, adding that the review must cover “all actors in good faith”.

In its first report on the handling of the pandemic, the seven-member oversight committee said the WHO had “demonstrated leadership and made important progress in its COVID-19 response”.

The panel endorsed a review but said conducting it now could hamper the WHO’s response to the pandemic.

It also said “an imperfect and evolving understanding” was not unusual when a new disease emerged and, in an apparent rejoinder to Trump, said a “rising politicization of pandemic response” was hindering the effort to defeat the virus.

Azar said the United States supported “an independent review of every aspect of WHO’s response” and that China’s conduct should be “on the table” too.

A resolution drafted by the European Union calling for an independent evaluation of the WHO’s performance appeared to have won consensus backing among the WHO’s 194 states. It was expected to be debated and adopted on Tuesday.

German Health Minister Jens Spahn said the WHO must become “more independent from external interference” and that its role in “leading and coordination” must be strengthened.

‘OPPOSE RUMOURS AND STIGMATISATION’

China has previously opposed calls for a review of the origin and spread of the coronavirus, but Xi signalled that Beijing would accept an impartial evaluation of the global response, once the pandemic is brought under control.

“This work needs a scientific and professional attitude, and needs to be led by the WHO,” he told the meeting via video.

The WHO and most experts say the virus is likely to have emerged in a market selling wildlife in the central city of Wuhan late last year. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said this month there was “significant” evidence that it had come from a laboratory in Wuhan, a charge China rejects.

Australian health minister Gregory Hunt said the planned review could look at strengthening the WHO’s mandate and powers of inspection, and also how to protect against “the global threat posed by wildlife and wet markets”.

The oversight panel said that, for the next phase of the pandemic, the WHO would need some $1.7 billion by the end of the year, leaving a funding shortfall of $1.3 billion. This did not take account of China’s pledge.

China will also make any COVID-19 vaccines that it develops freely available, Xi said.

Reporting by Stephanie Nebehay and Emma Farge; Additional reporting by Cate Cadell, Gabriel Crossley and Se Young Lee in Beijing and Kirsty Needham in Sydney; Writing by Timothy Heritage and Kevin Liffey; Editing by Andrew Cawthorne, Mark Heinrich and Lisa Shumaker

-25-   OSD Public Affairs
WHO chief promises review of coronavirus response, China pledges $2 billion – 5/18

Reuters | Stephanie Nebehay, Emma Farge

GENEVA - The World Health Organization said on Monday an independent review of the global coronavirus response would begin as soon as possible, and received backing and a hefty pledge of funds from China, in the spotlight as the origin of the pandemic.

WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus made his promise during a virtual meeting of the WHO’s decision-making body, the World Health Assembly, at which Chinese President Xi Jinping defended his country’s own handling of the crisis.

U.S. President Donald Trump has fiercely questioned the WHO’s performance during the pandemic, withdrawing U.S. funding after accusing it of being too China-centric, and at the same time leading international criticism of China’s lack of transparency in the early stages of the crisis.

Tedros, who has always promised a post-pandemic review, said it would come “at the earliest appropriate moment” and provide recommendations for future preparedness. He received robust backing from the WHO’s independent oversight panel.

“Every country and every organisation must examine its response and learn from its experience,” Tedros said, adding that the review must cover “all actors in good faith”.

A resolution drafted by the European Union calling for an independent evaluation of the WHO’s performance appeared to have won consensus backing among the WHO’s 194 states.

In its first report on the WHO’s handling of the pandemic, the seven-member oversight committee said the U.N. agency had “demonstrated leadership and made important progress in its COVID-19 response”.

‘IMPERFECT UNDERSTANDING NOT UNUSUAL’

It backed a review of the response to the pandemic, but said conducting it during the heat of the response “could disrupt WHO's ability to respond effectively”.

It also said “an imperfect and evolving understanding” is not unusual during the early phase of a novel disease emergence and, in an apparent rejoinder to Trump, said “rising politicization of pandemic response” was hindering the effort to defeat the virus.

China has previously opposed calls for a review of the origin and spread of the coronavirus, but Xi signalled that Beijing would be amenable to an impartial evaluation of the global response once the pandemic is brought under control.

“This work needs a scientific and professional attitude, and needs to be led by the WHO. And the principles of objectivity and fairness need to be upheld,” he told the meeting via video.

Calling the pandemic the most serious global public health emergency since the end of World War Two, Xi said: “All along we have acted with openness and transparency and responsibility.”

He pledged $2 billion over the next two years to help deal with COVID-19, especially to help developing countries.

The amount is roughly equivalent to the WHO’s entire annual programme budget for last year, and more than compensates for Trump’s freeze in U.S. payments that had been worth about $400 million a year.
The oversight panel said that, for the next phase of the pandemic, the WHO would need an estimated $1.7 billion by the end of the year, leaving a funding gap of $1.3 billion. This did not appear to take account of China’s pledge.

VACCINES TO BE AVAILABLE TO ALL

China will also make any COVID-19 vaccines that it develops a public good to help to curb the pandemic, Xi said.

The WHO and most experts say the virus is likely to have emerged in a market selling wildlife in the central city of Wuhan late last year. U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo said this month there was “significant” evidence that it had come from a laboratory in Wuhan, a charge China rejects.

Diplomats said the United States was unlikely to block a consensus backing the resolution.

But it could “dissociate” itself from sections referring to intellectual property rights for drugs and vaccines, and to continued provision of services for sexual and reproductive health during the pandemic, they said.

Additional reporting by Cate Cadell in Beijing and Kirsty Needham in Sydney; Writing by Timothy Heritage and Kevin Liffey; Editing by Alison Williams and Andrew Cawthorne

19. Army holds back as Italy loosens coronavirus restrictions – 5/18
Stars and Stripes | Nancy Montgomery

VICENZA, Italy — Italians resumed visiting hair salons and having drinks out with friends Monday.

But soldiers with U.S. Army Garrison Italy still aren’t allowed to do those things, following updated orders meant to prevent the spread of the coronavirus.

Army officials are moving cautiously as Italy lifts restrictions ordered months ago, when it became the European epicenter of the virus.

“We're going to be very, very careful and deliberate,” Maj. Gen. Roger Cloutier said Friday at the garrison's virtual town hall, its 12th in as many weeks since the viral pandemic began. “We are cautiously optimistic but we have to maintain our discipline as we move forward.”

The Italian government Monday also announced that self-declaration travel forms are no longer required for regional travel and is expected June 3 to allow travel throughout the country.

Finally in Vicenza celebrated the end of coronavirus-related restrictions on cafes and visiting with friends on May 18, 2020. U.S. Army Garrison Italy continues to maintain more stringent restrictions on troops.

Cloutier, commander of U.S. Army Africa, has repeatedly said that he might apply more stringent measures than the Italians, whose lockdown was among Europe’s most severe, in order to protect the force, slow the spread of the virus and maintain readiness. He issued a general order late last week that does that.

Troops who live in the barracks and have been restricted to post since early March are still generally restricted to post under the order.

During the duty week, they can leave only to travel to another post, get gas or for medical reasons. On weekends, they can leave to exercise or get takeout food. But they're prohibited from riding in personally owned cars or taking public transit, and they must be back at their posts by 8 p.m.
Service members living off-post are allowed to use personal vehicles within 15 kilometers of their homes for food, banking and medical needs, and go anywhere within the Veneto region to hike or for other exercise.

Socializing is restricted to one visitor at a time in a barracks room and only mission-essential visitors are allowed on post.

“Parties or other social gatherings are strictly prohibited,” according to the order. “Regardless of any changes to host-nation laws, these activities will remain prohibited.”

Service members living on- or off-post must be in their residences from 10 p.m. to 5 a.m., the order said.

Family members and civilians are not subject to punitive actions for violating the order, but are “highly encouraged to follow my additional restrictions and are strongly discouraged from participating in activities that may jeopardize the health and safety of our community,” the order said.

Cloutier said at the town hall meeting that he’ll reduce restrictions only when the data, which he said would include more expansive testing, indicates that it can be done without risking a new infection spike. History shows pandemics often have second and third waves of infection, he said.

Rules and restrictions vary between regions and services in Italy, which also hosts Aviano Air Base in the northeast and a large U.S. Navy base in Naples.

20. US Forces Korea to lift most anti-coronavirus restrictions for bases except for Seoul area – 5/18
Stars and Stripes | Kim Gamel

SEOUH, South Korea – The U.S. military said Monday it will lower its health risk level to moderate and lift most anti-coronavirus restrictions for bases except for the Seoul area beginning Wednesday, citing “favorable” conditions in South Korea.

However, U.S. Forces Korea said bars, clubs and other adults-only establishments remain off-limits on the peninsula, and troops and employees stationed in the capital and surrounding areas remain under Health Protection Condition Charlie following a recent outbreak in the popular Itaewon district.

USFK implemented the higher alert level, known as HPCON-Charlie, in late February as the coronavirus began to ravage South Korea, which for weeks had the highest number of cases outside China, where the virus first appeared late last year.

South Korea reported 15 new coronavirus cases on Monday and the Itaewon outbreak appeared to ebb following a massive testing and tracing campaign. USFK has reported 28 cases of the virus, including four active-duty service members, but most have recovered.

“Based on South Korea’s current COVID-19 conditions remaining favorable to their newly implemented social distancing and preventive measures, USFK decided to lower its current health protection condition from ‘Charlie’ to ‘Bravo’ effective Wednesday, May 20 at 6 a.m. for areas except Area II,” USFK said in a press release.

The Army’s Yongsan Garrison in Seoul and small bases in surrounding areas southward to Suwon are considered Area II.

The decision will allow people in approved areas to dine out at restaurants, shop and conduct outdoor activities in local communities “while maintaining social awareness and wearing a mask when 1-2 meters (3-7 feet) separation cannot be achieved,” USFK said.

It added that “all bars, clubs and establishments that restrict entrance to adults only are off-limits pen-wide to all USFK-affiliated personnel until further notice.”
USFK said that despite the recent outbreak it had assessed that South Korea’s current conditions favorable enough to lower its HPCON status to “moderate.”

South Korean officials “have done an exceptional job in effectively suppressing the spread of COVID-19,” said USFK commander Gen. Robert Abrams. “I have complete confidence that the recent outbreak will be quickly contained and suppressed due to their proactive and aggressive measures taken so far. Our combined efforts to effectively combat this virus have been outstanding and the time is right to lower our HPCON level.”

The command, which oversees some 28,500 service members on the divided peninsula, warned “it will immediately snap back to a heightened HPCON posture without hesitation if a resurgence of the threat appears outside our installation or within our formations.”

**21. Xi Pledges to Support Virus Investigation as China Casts Doubt on its Origin – 5/18**

The commitment comes even as Chinese state media says COVID-19 may have begun in the U.S.

U.S. News & World Report | Paul D. Shinkman

Chinese President Xi Jinping on Monday told the World Health Organization he supports an international investigation into the origins of the coronavirus, even as China’s state media advanced a conspiracy theory that the virus came from the United States.

Speaking to a virtual gathering Monday morning of the World Health Assembly, WHO’s decision-making body, Xi also pledged to make a vaccine a global public good once one is developed. He said his country has "turned the tide on the virus" following "painstaking efforts and enormous sacrifice." Though public health experts consider China the source of the virus, it has publicly acknowledged only 84,000 cases – a fraction of the almost 5 million cases globally – and 4,600 deaths.

Xi stressed the need for international information-sharing to develop more accurate tests and an internationally available and affordable vaccine to help stem the virus.

"We also need to continue supporting global research by scientists on the source and transmission routes of the virus," Xi said.

"China supports the idea of a comprehensive review of the global response to COVID-19 after it is brought under control to sum up experience and address deficiencies," he said. "This work should be based on science and professionalism, led by WHO and conducted in an objective and impartial manner."

Xi said China would provide $2 billion to developing countries to help with their responses to the spread of the coronavirus and will partner with 30 African countries to help strengthen their public health infrastructures.

China has come under widespread international criticism for not reporting the virus’ spread earlier and for silencing public health officials who first responded to the outbreak in Wuhan and attempted to draw greater attention to it.

Beijing has since imposed punitive measures against countries that have openly criticized its handling of the virus, including considering sanctions against individual U.S. politicians pushing legal action against China – an unprecedented move – and boycotting Australian goods after it called for an international investigation into the virus' origin. Xi did not address Australia's proposal on Monday.

The country has also attempted to shift the international narrative away from conclusions that the virus originated in Wuhan. As Xi spoke, Chinese state media promoted a theory that the virus actually originated in the U.S., not in China.
"Earlier confirmed cases than the previously known first infected case have continuously been found in the U.S.," the editorial board for The Global Post wrote in an op-ed Monday morning. "Among those diagnosed as having flu last winter, how many were coronavirus infections? All these clues shouldn't be missed."

The news outlet, while not a direct mouthpiece for the Chinese Communist Party, is considered to be aligned with its views.

The Trump administration has been particularly vocal in its criticism of China as it struggles to contain the fallout from the coronavirus at home, both economically and as a matter of public health, with President Donald Trump threatening last week to "cut off the whole relationship." Last month, Trump announced his intention to cease financial support for WHO, saying the U.N. agency had been too deferential to China's claims about the virus' origin. On Sunday, he indicated he may reverse that decision.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo, among the president's closest advisers, has criticized China in recent weeks, saying earlier this month at a press conference that Beijing "is still refusing to share the information we need to keep people safe" and blasted it for a lack of transparency for reportedly silencing whistleblowers.

"Our truth-telling and calls for transparency aren't about politics. It's not about bullying. It's not about blame. It's about the ongoing need to save American lives. This is an ongoing threat today," Pompeo said.

The State Department last week accused China of successfully manipulating Twitter to strengthen a propaganda campaign aimed at deferring blame for the virus' spread. The social media giant has denied some of the charges. The FBI and Department of Homeland Security also said last week that China hacked into U.S. vaccine research efforts.

22. China Has a Whole New Conspiracy Theory About the Origins of Coronavirus – 5/18

And Beijing is signaling it will block a global investigation into how the pandemic began.

Vice News | David Gilbert

As the official coronavirus infection rate closes in on 5 million and the death toll ticks past 315,000, world leaders are calling for an investigation into the origins of the virus in order to better understand how the pandemic began and how the disease spread. But China has other ideas.

Over 100 nations are set to call on the World Health Assembly on Monday to greenlight an independent investigation into the origins of the coronavirus. Beijing has already signaled it would block such a move, and instead, has floated the conspiracy theory that the U.S. coronavirus outbreak came from a leak at a U.S. military lab.

In an article published over the weekend in the China Communist Party magazine Quishi, the Chinese government said that "clarifying the source and transmission route of the new coronavirus is essential" to fight the coronavirus.

But the article then goes on to cite partial information or already debunked reports to bolster its claim that the coronavirus did not originate in the city of Wuhan.

The author of the article specifically highlights the situation in the U.S. — where almost 90,000 people have so far died from coronavirus.

The article cites a paper published in April on variations in the coronavirus — findings already disputed by other scientists — to assert that the virus that exploded in the United States in March “did not come from abroad.”

The author then points out that many people have been questioning why Fort Detrick Biological Laboratory was closed and whether it conducted research into coronaviruses and whether there was a leak from the lab.
Fort Detrick, in Maryland, was the location of the U.S. Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases. It was shut down last August after the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention (CDC) found biosafety lapses there. The New York Times reported at the time that the shutdown order came because the lab did not have “sufficient systems in place to decontaminate wastewater” from its highest-security labs. There was no indication that disease-causing materials leaked from the labs.

This is a variation on the conspiracy theory Chinese government officials have already pushed, that U.S. military personnel from Fort Detrick imported the virus to Wuhan in October during the World Military Games.

The theory is also a direct rebuke of a conspiracy theory being boosted by President Donald Trump and his administration that the coronavirus leaked from the Wuhan Institute of Virology — a theory that has been debunked by most scientists.

However, over the weekend, Secretary of State Mike Pompeo walked back some of his earlier claims that the coronavirus originated at the Wuhan lab, telling Breitbart that “we know it began in Wuhan, but we don't know from where or from whom, and those are important things.”

As part of the argument that China was not the origin of the outbreak, the magazine also cites a confirmed case of coronavirus in France on December 27, claiming the man had no links to China and no travel history before being infected.

What the magazine failed to mention, however, is that the patient's wife worked at a supermarket near Charles de Gaulle airport in Paris and could have come into contact with people who had recently arrived from China.

Both Washington and Beijing have attempted to deflect criticism of their respective handling of the outbreaks in the U.S. and China by placing the blame elsewhere.

These competing narratives and a broader push to establish how, exactly, the coronavirus did spread will dominate the annual two-day meeting of the WHA, the governing body of the World Health Organization.

The meeting, taking place virtually this year, was opened by Chinese President Xi Jinping, who denied any cover-up, saying that “all along we have acted with openness, transparency and responsibility.”

Already, more than 120 countries have backed a draft resolution from the European Union and Australia calling for an investigation into the origins of COVID-19. The resolution is likely to be put forward on Tuesday if it can secure support from two-thirds of the WHA’s 194 member states.

However, hours before the WHA meeting is scheduled to begin China’s Foreign Ministry spokesperson Zhao Lijian said Beijing would be unlikely to allow an immediate investigation to begin, labeling it “premature.”

Those comments were reiterated by Xi during his speech to the WHA on Monday, in which he called for “a comprehensive review of the global response to COVID-19,” but only after the pandemic “has been brought under control.”

23. As pandemic raises tensions, more signs point toward U.S.-China Cold War – 5/18
Washington Post | Ishaan Tharoor

How does a Cold War begin? In Washington, an accumulation of anti-Beijing animus hangs like a dark cloud over the capital. Before the pandemic, there was no shortage of experts warning of emergent fault lines between the United States and China. That sense of a looming clash between the 21st century's heavyweights has only accelerated since the novel coronavirus paralyzed much of the world.

In an interview aired Thursday morning by the right-wing Fox Business Network, President Trump floated the idea that the United States "could cut off the whole relationship" with China in the aftermath of the pandemic, in
reference to discussions over the lingering trade differences between both countries. He also argued that the economic toll of the pandemic offered further proof that the United States needed to do more to disconnect itself from global supply chains that thread through China.

Trump is not alone in this tough talk - and some of his lieutenants and allies are even harsher. Republican senators are pushing sanctions and new legislation aimed at punishing China for its alleged role in covering up the initial stages of the outbreak. The State Department curtailed visas for Chinese journalists operating in the United States, as part of an ongoing tit-for-tat with Beijing that uses work permits for foreign correspondents as diplomatic game pieces.

Anonymous White House officials went so far as to leak to the media threats to skip U.S. debt obligations to China, a move experts say would be deeply damaging to U.S. credibility on the world stage. According to a Pew Research Center survey conducted last month, Americans view China more negatively than they ever have since the organization started surveying anti-Chinese sentiment in this manner in 2005. Some of the anger in Washington reflects election-year posturing, with Trump and the Republicans understandably eager to shift attention away from the administration's mismanagement of the coronavirus crisis.

But many Democrats, including presidential candidate and former vice president Joe Biden, are also keen on taking a more strident anti-Chinese line. And countries elsewhere, including other regional powers in Asia, are also starting to adopt an approach aimed more at directly countering China - which further fuels Chinese nationalism, anchored, as it is, in a long history of foreign encirclement and mistreatment.

Officials in Washington and Beijing periodically insist they don't want a new Cold War, but the geopolitical head winds appear to be blowing in that direction. "When Chinese government officials criticize what they explicitly call a 'Cold War mentality' in the U.S.," wrote Bethany Allen-Ebrahimian of Axios, "they aren't calling for an end to ideological competition or great power rivalry, but rather to U.S. attempts to stymie Beijing's plans."

According to Reuters, an internal report presented by China's Ministry of State Security to the country's top leaders warned that the rising global hostility toward Beijing, engendered in part by U.S. rhetoric, was at its worst levels since the events at Tiananmen Square in 1989. The report allegedly concluded that the United States was bent on undermining the ruling Communist Party of China and viewed the country as an economic and security threat.

"One of those with knowledge of the report said it was regarded by some in the Chinese intelligence community as China's version of the 'Novikov Telegram,' a 1946 dispatch by the Soviet ambassador to Washington, Nikolai Novikov, that stressed the dangers of U.S. economic and military ambition in the wake of World War II," Reuters reported.

That document, along with U.S. diplomat George Kennan's parallel "Long Telegram" from Moscow, are the founding texts of the Soviet-U.S. rivalry that would come to dominate the rest of the 20th century.

Something similar, if not quite the same, seems to be afoot now, according to experts. "I know people get uncomfortable with the terminology, but I do think we have to be honest and call this what it is, and this is the start of a new Cold War," Clete Willems, a former White House trade official, told CNBC. "And if we're not careful, things could get much, much worse."

"We're essentially in the beginnings of a Cold War," Orville Schell, the director of the Center on U.S.-China Relations at the Asia Society, told Business Insider. "We are on a downward slide into something increasingly adversarial with China."

In Washington, a cadre of policymakers fret about the United States' waning (or vanished) military primacy over China. In Beijing, retired generals and organs of its vast military have mused more openly about the prospects and risks of launching a military invasion to reclaim Taiwan.
Conflict of that sort is not in the cards - at least not yet. But the common wisdom that the two countries and their intertwined economies would inevitably get along is also fading.

China's entry into the World Trade Organization nearly two decades ago - which turned the country into an exports-driven economic superpower - was once seen as a towering achievement of globalization. Trump and his allies have cast that moment as a kind of original sin that they seek to redeem, not least in their steady campaign to undermine the WTO and doom it to irrelevance.

"It will be extremely hard to anchor the deteriorating relationship again in this maelstrom," Mikko Huotari, executive director at the Mercator Institute for Chinese Studies, a Berlin-based think tank focused on China, told the Financial Times. "Strategic competition will remain the dominant paradigm. The question is whether it tilts toward permanent and all-out hostility."

Neither side is set to gain from this tense state of play. "Despite the best efforts of ideological warriors in Beijing and Washington," former Australian prime minister Kevin Rudd wrote in Foreign Affairs last week, "the uncomfortable truth is that China and the United States are both likely to emerge from this crisis significantly diminished."