COMPILATION | CORONAVIRUS

18-19 MAY 2020 AS OF 1630

Overview: Driving coverage was the steps taken by all 50 states towards easing restrictions ahead of Memorial Day, and the ongoing dispute between the U.S. and China playing out at the WHO. Leading defense coverage were reports that the deployments of 40,000 National Guard members assisting in coronavirus response efforts will expire on June 24, one day short of the 90-day threshold for qualifying for early retirement and education benefits under the post-9/11 G.I. Bill.

The news that National Guard members' deployments will be cut one day short of qualifying for early retirement and education benefits was heavily covered in Beltway outlets. *Politico Pro* broke the story and called the end of the deployments a "hard stop" and described the move as a "looming loss of crucial frontline workers," wondering whether the administration is "shortchanging first responders." *The Hill* reported on Rep. Max Rose's (D-NY) reaction to the news, which he characterized as "heartless… unpatriotic [and] economically unsound." The article pointed out that Rep. Rose is a captain in the NY National Guard, and deployed last month to assist in relief efforts.

Also generating significant Beltway coverage, 19 House Democrats from the Congressional Progressive Caucus released a statement calling for defense cuts in the next NDAA, citing the need to face the coronavirus as the "greatest adversary," and the relative size of the U.S. defense budget compared to other countries. The *Washington Post* reported that they signaled they would be less willing to compromise after several of their demands were dropped from last year's bill. *Politico* noted that "the left flank's early opposition to increased defense spending could throw a wrench into House leaders' aims to pass a bipartisan policy bill with fewer headaches than last year."

Also of note, a leaked DOD memo featured prominently in defense outlets, warning that the department may need to operate in a globally persistent coronavirus scenario through the summer of 2021. *Task & Purpose* called it a "grim forecast" that outlines how the military will continue to train and operate in such an environment. *Military Times* headlined its story by arguing that this "contradicts" Sec. Esper's goal to have a vaccine by the end of this year.

Other DoD-related news:

- The USS *Theodore Roosevelt* will return to sea later this week, with Capt. Carlos Sardiello saying that 1,800 crew members who are still in quarantine will be left behind for the time-being. (*AP*)
- *Bloomberg* continued reporting on the plans to reopen the Pentagon, with comments from Lisa Hershman, the chief management officer of the Defense Department. The outlet noted that the department is "still sorting out what that new normal may look like for workers, and that may take weeks or months," while it considers implementing shift work and changes to performance review and office layouts.
- Lockheed Martin announced a "temporary" slowdown of production of the F-35 at its Fort Worth, TX facility. *Bloomberg* quoted program manager Gregory Ulmer characterizing the move as a "'proactive measure' designed for the fastest recovery of the fighter jet's delivery schedule," adding that deliveries will be "adjusted accordingly," and anticipating a return to pre-COVID production levels by "late summer or early fall."
- *The Daily Beast* reported that the virus "ripped through" the USNS *Leroy Grumman* late last month, leaving 52 sailors and contractors sickened. The article noted that "pressure" from Congress on the Military Sealift Command was already rising over concerns that adequate protections were not in place for the merchant marine force.
- *Military.com* reported on the precautions being taken to "create a seal" around the Coast Guard ships conducting SOUTHCOM's counter-drug operations in the Caribbean and eastern Pacific. The article

noted that "no cutter wants to be the Coast Guard's version of the aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt or Diamond Princess cruise ship."

- *Military.com* also reported in two other articles how the Army is reducing its backlog of recruits waiting to ship to basic training and how military installations around the country are taking steps to reopen as the states around them ease restrictions.

Other relevant/global news:

- The U.S. and China's dispute at the WHO continued on Tuesday, with China protesting support shown by the U.S. and other countries in the body (*Reuters)* and pushing back on U.S. claims that they have not been transparent during the crisis. (*WSJ*)
- Russian foreign minister Sergey Lavrov said his country has "scaled back" its military exercises and is not conducting any war games near the borders of NATO countries during the pandemic. (*AP*) Additionally, Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin was discharged today after being hospitalized by the coronavirus.

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1. Anti-microbial, machine washable face masks coming to soldiers to help protect against coronavirus – 5/19

Army Times | Kyle Rempfer

The Army has secured a contract for more than 180,000 face masks, so soldiers won't have to permanently rely on ad-hoc items like neck gaiters and t-shirts, which may or may not effectively filter out coronavirus-sized particles.

Those cloth face coverings are scheduled to be delivered between May 1 and June 19. The masks are contracted through the textile manufacturing firm Milliken at a total purchase cost of $749,000, which breaks out to roughly $4.16 per mask, according to Army spokeswoman Lt. Col. Crystal Boring.

"There will be another purchase in the next week with the delivery date to be determined. This complements the ongoing requisition process via the national level supply chain," said Boring.

The material is made of Milliken's patented anti-microbial "BioSmart" technology and will be black in color. The fabric binds chlorine bleach from each wash cycle to the surface of the fabric, according to Milliken's website. Products with BioSmart fabric must be washed with an EPA-registered chlorine bleach to charge the fabric prior to each use, the website states, with the fabric remaining durable for up to 75 launderings.

The procurement is part of the Army's rapid acquisition process to help prevent the spread of COVID-19 until a vaccine is available and distribution has begun, said Boring. However, some units have already been requesting face coverings through the national supply chain.

“Local commanders will have additional coverings available to issue to other personnel based on their missions and operating environments,” Boring added.

While soldiers wait for issued masks, they’ve been advised to use other issued items, like neck gaiters, following Pentagon guidance requiring face coverings in close quarters amid the pandemic. But how well neck gaiters actually filter out the less-than-one micron in size coronavirus remains unclear.

An Army lab is able to test various clothing items for filter rates, and officials there told Army Times on April 27 that they planned to test the neck gaiters, as well. After several weeks, however, they determined they can’t share any information gathered pertaining to uniform items, citing operational security constraints.

“That information could be exploited by our adversaries,” said Richard M. Arndt, a spokesman for Army Combat Capabilities Development Command, adding that while it may be easy for an adversary to find out on their own, the lab “doesn’t want to do their work for them.”

Army researchers at the command did release filter rates for other materials. They reported that four-ply microfiber cloth, which can be found in the cleaning section of most big box stores, filters out more than 75 percent of particles similar in size to the coronavirus.

By comparison, an N-95 mask, the protective covering in short supply among hospital workers who need it most, is able to filter out 95 percent of 0.3+ micron particles.

Soldiers have also been authorized to wear other cloth items, such as bandanas and scarves, as face coverings. Similar items were tested by Army researchers at the lab, who sprayed a salt aerosol at a piece of the material and measured the density of particles suspended in the air on one side and compared it to the density on the other.

The salt particles used to test the filter were 0.2-0.3 microns in size. Coronavirus is roughly 0.1 microns in size, but the virus floats around in droplets expelled by infected persons that are anywhere from 0.2 to a several microns in size or larger.

Researchers found that layering a polyester bandanna can filter out about 40 percent of suspended particles.

Soldiers have been advised not to fashion face coverings from Army Combat Uniforms or other materials that have been chemically-treated. Additionally, personal protective equipment, such as N95 respirators or surgical masks, must be reserved for use in medical settings.

2. Carrier sidelined by coronavirus heads back to sea this week – 5/19

Associated Press | Lolita C. Baldor

WASHINGTON — The USS Theodore Roosevelt will return to sea later this week, nearly two months after the ship was sidelined in Guam with a rapidly growing coronavirus outbreak, U.S. officials said as the crew finished final preparations to depart.

In an interview from the aircraft carrier, Navy Capt. Carlos Sardiello said Monday the ship will sail with a scaled-back crew of about 3,000, leaving about 1,800 sailors on shore who are still in quarantine. Those include up to 14 sailors who recently tested positive again, just days after getting cleared to return to the carrier. The puzzling COVID-19 reappearance in the sailors adds to the difficulty in getting the ship’s crew healthy again, and fuels questions about the quality of the testing and just how long sailors may remain infected or contagious.

Sardiello would not discuss timelines or planned operations. But other U.S. officials said the ship is expected to leave in the next few days, and if all goes well it will conduct naval operations in the Pacific region for some

period of time before heading home to San Diego. The officials spoke on the condition of anonymity to discuss military operations.

Asked about the possibility the ship will be able to conduct missions after its two-month layoff in Guam, Sardiello expressed confidence. “Do I have a crystal ball? I do not. But I think we have set the conditions for a high probability of success, and we’re going to go to sea and do our mission,” he said.

The Roosevelt has been at the center of a widening controversy that led to the firing of the ship’s previous captain, the resignation of the Navy secretary and an expanded investigation into what triggered the outbreak and how well top naval commanders handled it. More than 1,000 sailors on the ship have tested positive over the past two months, and the entire crew has had to cycle through quarantine on shore before being allowed to reboard.

Preparing to go back to sea has been an intense process, requiring sailors to go through mandated preparations and training to ensure all the systems are working and that troops are ready despite the added requirements of masks, constant cleaning, social distancing and other virus-related restrictions.

Sardiello said they were able to get special black neck gaitors for the flight deck crew, because wearing regular masks wouldn’t be safe. And they’ve set up one-way corridors, spaced out berthing for the crew members, and are keeping mess halls open longer so fewer sailors are there at any one time.

Once at sea, the crew will conduct carrier qualifications for the flight-deck crew, including fighter jet take-offs and landings. After about two weeks, the carrier plans to return to Guam to pick up healthy sailors who have finished quarantine and then return to sea.

The virus resurgence was a surprise wrinkle.

“We’re at the time where expect the unexpected and deal with it. There’s no good news. There’s no bad news. It’s COVID and we don’t understand it completely,” said Sardiello. “We’re executing according to plan to return to sea, and fighting through the virus is a part of that.”

As of Monday, 14 sailors had tested positive for a second time, and 30 others who came in contact with them were sent ashore for quarantine. All 14 had previously tested positive for the virus and had gone through at least two weeks of isolation. Before they were allowed to go back to the ship, all had to test negative twice in a row, with the tests separated by at least a day or two.

The sudden reappearance of the virus reflects a broader puzzle for health and science experts. It may suggest that the test wasn’t given properly or that the virus wasn’t in the nasal passages but was still elsewhere. There also are questions about whether the virus level can sometimes be too low for detection.

Air Traffic Controller 1st Class Daniel Wright said a few sailors who work for him were among those who tested positive again.

“They were obviously discouraged at first,” Wright said in an interview from the Roosevelt, adding that one sailor had just returned to the ship, had unpacked and was eager to get back to work. ”The nice thing is that the majority of them have little to no symptoms at all and are just waiting for that final check in the box with a clean bill of health so they could join the rest of the crew.”

Wright said that while things were difficult in the early days of the outbreak, morale is better now as sailors look forward to getting back to sea, wrapping up their deployment and heading home.

“Half the crew would, I’m sure, be happy to just sail straight home to San Diego once we’re ready,” he said. But he added that this is some sailors’ first deployment and some sailors’ last, so “to be able to finish something that they started back in January — it’s a good milestone for all of us to shoot for.”

After the outbreak was discovered and the ship docked in Guam, more than 4,000 crew members went ashore for testing and quarantine, while about 800 remained on the ship to protect and run the high-tech systems, including the nuclear reactors that run the vessel.

In recent weeks, sailors were methodically brought back on board, while the others who had remained went ashore for quarantine.

Sardiello, a former Roosevelt captain, was abruptly sent back to the ship in early April to take command after Capt. Brett Crozier was fired for urging his commanders to take faster action to stem the virus outbreak onboard.

After a preliminary review last month, Adm. Mike Gilday, the Navy's top officer, recommended that Crozier be reinstated as ship captain. But the Navy decided to conduct the broader investigation.

That review, which effectively delays a decision on Crozier's reinstatement, is supposed to be done by the end of the month.

3. Russia says it scales down war games amid pandemic – 5/19

Associated Press | Not Attributed

MOSCOW — Russia's foreign minister said Tuesday that Moscow has scaled down its military drills amid the coronavirus pandemic.

Sergey Lavrov said that the Russian military also has decided not to conduct any war games near the country's borders with NATO member nations during the outbreak.

Russia-West relations have sunk to post-Cold War lows after the 2014 Russian annexation of Ukraine's Crimean Peninsula and Moscow's support for a separatist insurgency in eastern Ukraine.

Moscow has repeatedly voiced concern over the deployment of NATO forces in the Baltics, describing it as a threat to its security. Russia and the alliance also have blamed one another for conducting destabilizing military exercises near the borders.

4. WHO bows to calls from countries for independent virus probe – 5/19

Associated Press | Jamey Keaten and Maria Cheng

GENEVA — The World Health Organization bowed to calls Monday from most of its member states to launch an independent probe into how it managed the international response to the coronavirus, which has been clouded by finger-pointing between the U.S. and China over a pandemic that has killed over 300,000 people and leveled the global economy.

The "comprehensive evaluation," sought by a coalition of African, European and other countries, is intended to review "lessons learned" from WHO's coordination of the global response to COVID-19, but would stop short of looking into contentious issues such as the origins of the new coronavirus. U.S. President Donald Trump has claimed he has proof suggesting the coronavirus originated in a lab in China while the scientific community has insisted all evidence to date shows the virus likely jumped into humans from animals.

In Washington on Monday, Trump faulted WHO for having done "a very sad job" and said he was considering whether to cut the annual U.S. funding from $450 million a year to $40 million.

"They gave us a lot of bad advice, terrible advice," he said. "They were wrong so much, always on the side of China."

Later Monday, Trump tweeted a letter he had sent WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus. In the letter, Trump said "the only way forward" is if WHO "can actually demonstrate independence from China."

Trump said that unless WHO commits to "substantive improvements over the next 30 days," he will make a temporary suspension of U.S. funding permanent.

WHO's normally bureaucratic annual assembly this week has been overshadowed by mutual recriminations and political sniping between the U.S. and China. Trump has repeatedly attacked WHO, claiming that it helped China conceal the extent of the coronavirus pandemic in its early stages. Several Republican lawmakers have called on Tedros to resign.

U.S. Health and Human Services Secretary Alex Azar said Monday it was time to be frank about why COVID-19 has "spun out of control."

"There was a failure by this organization to obtain the information that the world needed and that failure cost many lives," Azar said. Speaking hours after Chinese President Xi Jinping announced China would provide $2 billion to help respond to the outbreak and its economic fallout, Azar said the U.S. had allocated $9 billion to coronavirus containment efforts around the world.

Tedros said he would launch an independent evaluation of WHO's response "at the earliest appropriate moment" — alluding to findings published Monday in a first report by an oversight advisory body commissioned to look into WHO's response.

The 11-page report raised questions such as whether WHO's warning system for alerting the world to outbreaks is adequate, and suggested member states might need to "reassess" WHO's role in providing travel advice to countries.

In his opening remarks at the WHO meeting, Tedros held firm and sought to focus on the bigger troubles posed by the outbreak, saying "we have been humbled by this very small microbe."

"This contagion exposes the fault lines, inequalities, injustices and contradictions of our modern world," Tedros said. "And geopolitical divisions have been thrown into sharp relief."

China, meanwhile, sought to divert attention to its renewed efforts to slow the coronavirus pandemic, with Xi announcing the $2 billion outlay over two years to fight it. Last year, China donated about $86 million to WHO.

U.S. National Security Council spokesman John Ullyot characterized China's newly announced contribution as "a token to distract from calls from a growing number of nations demanding accountability for the Chinese government's failure to meet its obligations." He said that since China was "the source" of the outbreak, it had "a special responsibility to pay more and give more."

Xi insisted that China had acted with "openness, transparency and responsibility" when the epidemic was detected in Wuhan. He said China had give all relevant outbreak data to WHO and other countries, including the virus's genetic sequence, "in a most timely fashion."

Xi said that in recent weeks, China has dispatched medical supplies to more than 50 African countries and that 46 Chinese medical teams were currently on the continent helping local officials.

Other world leaders including the presidents of France, South Korea and South Africa and Germany's chancellor were also piped in to throw their support to the WHO, which has been put on the defensive from a Trump administration that has blamed it for mishandling the outbreak and showering excessive praise on China's response. The European Union and others staked out a middle ground.

The Trump administration has claimed that WHO criticized a U.S. travel ban that Trump ordered on people arriving from China.

Trump ordered a temporary suspension of funding for WHO from the United States — the health agency's biggest single donor — pending a review of its early response. The advisory body, echoing comments from many countries, said such a review during the "heat of the response" could hurt WHO's ability to respond to it.

Xi said China supports the idea of a comprehensive review of the global response to COVID-19 and that it should be "based on science and professionalism led by WHO, and conducted in an objective and impartial manner."

Tedros emphasized that WHO declared the coronavirus outbreak to be a global health emergency on Jan. 30, its highest level of alert, at a time when there were fewer than 100 cases outside of China. In the following weeks, WHO warned countries there was a narrowing "window of opportunity" to prevent the virus from spreading globally.

During the first few months of the outbreak, WHO officials repeatedly described the virus's spread as "limited" and said it wasn't as transmissible as flu; experts have since said COVID-19 spreads even faster. It declared the outbreak to be a pandemic on March 11, after the virus had killed thousands globally and sparked large epidemics in South Korea, Italy, Iran and elsewhere.

AP Medical Writer Maria Cheng reported from London. Zeke Miller in Washington contributed to this report. And Aamer Madhani contributed to this report from Chicago.

5. The Pandemic's Geopolitical Aftershocks Are Coming – 5/19

The Atlantic | Tom McTague

With most European countries confident that they are past the worst of the coronavirus pandemic, their attention is turning to the chance of its resurgence once society returns to some semblance of normal. But beyond the epidemiological challenges lies a slowly amassing threat that is not pathological in nature, but economic, political, and military. This is the geopolitical second wave, and its power is already starting to concern Western leaders.

Imagine a scenario: Just as Europe and the United States begin to feel as if they have the coronavirus under control, it takes hold in the developing world. Exhausted, indebted, and desperate for their own economies to get back up to speed, richer countries are too slow to help. Panic ensues. Migrants mass in southern Europe, which is still struggling to pull itself out of a coronavirus-induced depression. Somewhere, a state defaults on debt held largely by Western financial institutions. In the chaos, an autocrat eyes an opportunity for a land grab. A United States already unwilling to take the lead leaves China to step into the void.

This is just one (invented) scenario of a number that are raising concerns in Western capitals and that were laid out to me in conversations with more than half a dozen leading security experts, academics, and government advisers in recent weeks. Of those I spoke with, few doubted that a second wave was coming. The real concern was where it would land.

History, as Barack Obama said of American progress, zigs and zags. Great changes set off chain reactions: The Wall Street Crash of 1929 ushered in the New Deal era; Allied victory in 1945 created the conditions for the Cold War. Each event creates political aftershocks and trends that we can see clearly only afterward. The decade that followed the 2008 financial crisis saw the euro zone teeter on the brink of collapse, Britain vote to leave the European Union, and Donald Trump elected president. Today, the global economy has suffered another sudden seizure, shifting geopolitics as U.S.-China tensions have risen, trade has slowed markedly, and structural divisions between northern and southern Europe have widened. The question, then, is what might happen in the decade after this crisis?

“Historians love chapter breaks,” said Robert Kaplan, an American foreign-policy expert and former member of the U.S. Defense Policy Board, who this month briefed officials at 10 Downing Street on the potential second-order effects of the coronavirus crisis. “COVID-19 will come to be seen as a chapter break.”

Among Kaplan’s concerns is how Russia and its leader, Vladimir Putin, will act, a fear echoed by some of the most influential voices in British foreign policy, who worry that the geopolitical second wave of COVID-19 will hit Europe the hardest. Michael Clarke, a defense-studies professor at King’s College London and former special adviser to Britain’s national committee on security strategy, who remains plugged in to the country’s foreign-policy establishment, told me that an economically weakened Russia, hit by the recent collapse in oil prices, poses a greater danger to Western security interests. “Putin’s aggressive opportunism will probably get worse,” Clarke said. “The nature of Putin’s leadership is that he can’t stand still; he has to keep pushing forward. This makes him more volatile.” What happens if the Russian leader, spooked by the country’s collapsing economy, eyes an opportunity to test NATO’s resolve? Others, such as Bruno Maçães, Portugal’s former Europe minister, told me that the crisis might not embolden Russia, but cripple it, leaving it more dependent on China and bringing Beijing’s sphere of influence to the borders of continental Europe. “Crises,” Kaplan noted, “put history on fast-forward.”

The array of possible second-wave consequences is dizzying: the prospect of the disease taking hold in a developing G20 country—think India—which could see the virus quickly doubling back to Europe and the U.S.; the uncertain impact of technological advances in fields such as artificial intelligence as they are used to help combat the disease’s spread; a recession pulling at the ties between the European Union’s poor south and wealthy north. Clarke is particularly concerned about an arc of instability from West Africa through the Middle East to Asia, where conflict and instability have in recent years forced people to flee. Karin von Hippel, the director general of the Royal United Services Institute, an influential British defense and international-affairs think tank, told me that “some kind of reckoning with China” is likely as well. “Some countries will emerge from this trying to cling to China … but most others are likely to try to decouple,” she said. For Britain, Germany, France, and other major European economies reliant on the American security umbrella but wanting to maintain strong economic ties with China, the difficulty of managing the fallout from the Trump administration’s anti-China rhetoric may now only increase.

This is the world in which countries such as Britain are having to think about their strategic vision. Some of the challenges might be entirely new but many others are likely to be ones already at play that have been accelerated by the pandemic, such as worsening relations between Washington and Beijing.

More than anything, though, for Western governments there is a simple underlying reality to the geopolitical second wave: cash, or a lack of it. “You’ve got more problems but less money to deal with them,” one senior adviser to the British government, who asked for anonymity to speak candidly about internal deliberations, told me.

After more than a decade of public-spending cuts, for example, Britain’s military—capable of helping the United States invade both Iraq and Afghanistan less than 20 years ago—has morphed into a “one shot” force that is unable to sustain itself for longer than six months outside Europe, according to Clarke. What will its capacity look like after another set of cuts? Britain and France required American support to intervene in Libya in 2011. Could a joint European force do so again anywhere along its exposed underbelly on the North African shore? Could it even be used in a purely medical capacity, as it was during the Ebola outbreak in 2014?

A major British government review of the country’s foreign-affairs, defense, and intelligence strategy was due to be published this year, but it has since been pushed back indefinitely because of the pandemic.The immediate consequence is that the review, when it happens, will be less strategic and more tactical—driven by financial considerations rather than any grand vision the government wanted to set out for post-Brexit Britain. Officials in London will have to focus more on “What can we afford?” and less on “What do we want to do?,” an approach that is short-term, ad hoc, and defensive.

Inside Downing Street, concern about COVID-19's geopolitical second wave is real, with work under way to understand the potential threats and prepare for them. The British government expects protectionism to increase, supply chains to be brought back under national control, nation-states to be strengthened, and the U.S.-China relationship to become more antagonistic—changes that could be seen as simply the "firming up of some fundamentals," in the words of the government adviser I spoke with.

Whether the pandemic brings about revolutionary change or simply accelerates the currents already working under the surface, the fact is that the epidemiological second wave isn't the only one we need to worry about.

6. Lockheed Slowing F-35 Production Amid Covid-Related Parts Delays – 5/19

Bloomberg Government | Tony Capaccio

Lockheed Martin Corp. said it will temporarily slow production of the F-35, the Pentagon's costliest weapons system, because of subcontractor parts delays stemming from the coronavirus pandemic.

Starting Saturday and possibly continuing through August, Lockheed said it will divide about 2,500 union workers at its plant in Fort Worth, Texas, into three teams, each working shifts of two weeks and one week off to avert layoffs and position the No. 1 defense contractor for a fast recovery.

The temporary shift change is a "proactive measure" designed for the fastest recovery of the fighter jet's delivery schedule, Gregory Ulmer, Lockheed's F-35 program manager, said in an interview. He said the alternating work schedule will protect a highly skilled workforce and "allows them to stay employed."
The workers, members of the International Association of Machinists and Aerospace Workers, will get full pay and benefits for their week off provided that they work 96 or more hours during their two weeks on duty.

Delivery schedules to the U.S. and allied militaries buying the F-35 "will be adjusted accordingly," but Lockheed anticipates a return to pre-Covid-19 "production levels by late summer or early fall," Ulmer said.

It's an example of a projected three-month slowdown in major programs that Ellen Lord, the Pentagon's under secretary for acquisition, warned of last month.

Lockheed has committed to delivering 141 F-35s to the U.S. and allies by year-end, up from 131 last year. About 41 of the next-generation aircraft have been delivered to date. Ulmer said the Bethesda, Maryland-based company estimates that, as of now, between 18-24 jets won't be delivered by year's end, but the company will make up as many is it can once it's back to pre-Covid production levels.

"If we see improvements we are going to quickly step back to normal production," he said. The "tapered" production schedule will be reviewed every three weeks to see if it can be changed, Ulmer said.

Lockheed and the union also have agreed to let employees volunteer to be furloughed for 30 days, maintaining their benefits but forgoing pay for that period.

CUMULATIVE IMPACTS

Ulmer said Lockheed is dealing with the cumulative effect of temporary shutdowns or Covid-19 restrictions from a small number of Lockheed's 1,900 "tier one" U.S. and international suppliers. He said that has resulted in temporary shortages of some subcomponents for larger assemblies.
He cited Leonardo SpA's temporary closing in March for a deep cleaning of its F-35 assembly plant in Cameri, Italy. Leonardo also produces F-35 wing components.

Today "they are greater than 90% manned and coming back," Ulmer said.

Ken Possenriede, Lockheed's chief financial officer, cautioned last week that the F-35 might miss its delivery target this year due to parts shortages and other disruptions from the outbreak. The risk prompted the company

to lower its annual sales guidance by a range of $250 million to $500 million when it released first quarter earnings last month.

“We are likely seeing supplier delays, supplier impact due to COVID, and we are now assessing that and looking at our own production line regarding the viability, the likelihood of delivering 140 aircraft this year,” Possenriede told a Goldman Sachs industrial conference on May 14. “We’re still in the throes of doing that negotiation. But that was the main reason why we took our guidance down for the year in the April call by $375 million. That was all Aeronautics, and it was all F-35.”

--With assistance from Julie Johnsson.

7. Pentagon Weighs Shift Work, Performance Metrics as Virus Eases – 5/19

Bloomberg | Travis J. Tritten

Pentagon workers may see shifts in schedules, the ways performance is measured, and office layouts once they begin returning to work as the pandemic eases.

Top officials are now considering changes that could be worked out and phased in for personnel after the department releases a general plan for resuming operations, said Lisa Hershman, the chief management officer of the Defense Department.

The initial plan to bring employees back to the Pentagon building may be completed this week, laying out conditions and steps required to ease telework. For now about 80% of the department’s 23,000 personnel are working remotely.

“Should we think about shift work where maybe you come in to do some classified work in the morning and then you work the rest of the time from home?” Hershman said in an interview Monday. “Do we need to rethink performance targets and metrics and how do we measure performance?”

A draft of the reopening plan laid out a return to normal after three two-week periods of falling infection rates along with such civilian steps as schools opening or out of session, increased public transportation, and the lifting of stay-at-home orders in Virginia, Maryland, and the District of Columbia.

NEW NORMAL

But the department is still sorting out what that new normal may look like for workers, and that may take weeks or months. Many defense officials, citing high productivity, have said they expect the expansion of telework to remain in the future.

Hershman said a survey by her office found, for example, that Washington Headquarters Services personnel who telework are 30% more productive. That prompted discussions about remote shift work as well as modifying performance reviews, targets, and metrics.

Rearranging office spaces to ensure personnel are safe is also very likely and the department is working with other areas of the federal government on benchmarks and planning, Hershman said.

“We may do this in iterations and we may pilot some things and try them in certain areas and then roll them out,” she said.

The plan for resuming operations in the Pentagon would be a first step toward easing restrictions put in place at the start of the pandemic and is based on the reopening guidelines the White House and the Center for Disease Control and Prevention set out.

8. Australia says it does not want a trade war with China, as relations deteriorate – 5/19

CNN | Not Attributed

Australian Trade Minister Simon Birmingham said Tuesday that his country is not interested in a trade war with China, after China announced crippling tariffs on Australian barley exports – a trade that is worth close to $600 million a year.

The tariffs are the latest development in the deteriorating relationship between Canberra and Beijing, which began when Australia called for an international inquiry into the coronavirus pandemic.

Even though the two sides say barley tariffs and the coronavirus inquiry aren't linked, some are questioning whether Beijing's latest move is economic payback.

"Australia is not interested in a trade war. We don't conduct our trade policy on a tit-for-tat basis. We operate according to the trade rules that we strongly support as a country and we will continue to do that. We acknowledge that China has a right to use anti-dumping laws and rules. We use those laws and rules at times as well. But it is a case where China, we are thinking in this case, has made errors of both facts and law in the application of those rules," Birmingham said.

Australia's Agriculture Minister David Littleproud said Tuesday that Australia reserves its right to go to the World Trade Organization to mediate in the decision.

9. Russia's Prime Minister released from hospital after coronavirus treatment, state media reports – 5/19

CNN | Nathan Hodge

Russian Prime Minister Mikhail Mishustin, who had stepped away from his post after being diagnosed with coronavirus, has been discharged from hospital and resumed his official duties, Russian state news agencies reported Tuesday.

Mishustin had held an online meeting and was preparing for a meeting with Russian President Vladimir Putin, Russian state news agency RIA-Novosti said, citing Mishustin's press secretary.

Putin has been holding video conference meetings with cabinet members and other top officials in his government during the pandemic.

There are 299,941 confirmed cases of the virus in Russia and 2,837 deaths, according to Johns Hopkins University figures.

10. 52 Infected After Navy Fails to Prevent Virus Spread on Ship – 5/19

A Navy policy meant to protect civilian mariners is likely still putting them at risk.

Daily Beast | Jason Paladino

Late last month, barely a week after the Navy's Military Sealift Command assured the public that the coronavirus was not spreading among civilian mariners, the virus ripped through the USNS Leroy Grumman, leaving nearly half the crew and 30 contractors infected, the Project On Government Oversight (POGO) has learned.

One mariner has been hospitalized in critical condition, while a contractor died of what his family says are complications of COVID-19, the disease caused by the novel coronavirus. Mariners tell POGO that the ship's leaders struggled to respond to the outbreak, potentially exacerbating the viral spread.

Pressure on the Military Sealift Command is mounting after the House Armed Services Committee expressed concerns that the measures in place were not protecting the health of the crew or the public.

Two of the highest-profile Navy outbreaks, on an aircraft carrier and a guided missile destroyer, were widely reported and infected at least 1,200 sailors. The Pentagon's internal watchdog recently opened an investigation into the Navy's response to outbreaks on its ships. (The inquiry will not address the Military Sealift Command's response, according to a spokesperson for the inspector general's office.)

The outbreak on the Grumman, docked at a shipyard in Boston, spread through the crew and to contractors in a matter of days. The entire crew has been isolated in a hotel in Boston since May 2, after 22 of the 46 crew members had tested positive for COVID-19, according to mariners who spoke with POGO on condition of anonymity.

POGO recently reported on the difficult situation facing merchant mariners who serve on Navy vessels with the Military Sealift Command. Since late March, they have been under a strict lockdown order, a so-called gangway up order, that alarmed mariners and their unions. Mariners told POGO that even as they were confined to their ships, the order inexplicably allowed contractors and other personnel to move on and off the ships, piercing the ships' quarantine "bubble," as it's known in the maritime industry. A congressional committee tasked with overseeing the Navy seemed to agree.

"While we trust that Military Sealift Command is acting in good faith to protect the workforce, we have concerns about reports that military, civilian, and contractor personnel are freely allowed on and off MSC ships, diminishing the effectiveness of the bubble MSC is trying to create," wrote Monica Matoush, Democratic spokesperson for the House Armed Services Committee, in a statement to POGO.

On top of the inquiry from the committee, Military Sealift Command is now facing an escalating labor dispute. On May 18, all three unions representing the mariners have invoked arbitration after they found the command's response to a grievance they filed last month unsatisfactory, according to emails from the unions to their members and shared with POGO. The formal arbitration kicks off a long process that could end up in federal court. The unions contend that the gangway-up order should apply to everyone on the ships where merchant marines have been ordered to remain, and that if the command won't change the terms of the order, then the mariners deserve additional compensation while under the order.

As part of the gangway-up order, any mariner who was on leave was immediately called back to the fleet's dozens of ships, according to text of the order reviewed by POGO. In some cases, this meant merchant mariners flying from the relative safety of their homes to ports in cities considered hotspots and boarding ships where social distancing was impossible, mariners told POGO.

About a month after issuing the order, as the workforce became increasingly concerned, the admiral in charge of Military Sealift Command told USNI News he thought the command's response to the coronavirus was effective.

"The evidence is we have been doing all the right things," Admiral Michael Wettlaufer told the publication, a day after the first cases emerged on the Grumman. The admiral failed to mention those cases to USNI News, and just days later the true extent of the virus' spread on the ship would become clear.

The mariner now in critical condition was on leave with his family near San Diego when he was recalled to the Grumman after the order. The middle-aged mariner flew to Boston, which was at the time a major hotspot for COVID-19, to work in the ship's cramped engine room.

Weeks went by and the mariners told POGO they grew frustrated with the seemingly relaxed approach the shipyard was taking toward screening the many workers boarding the ship as it was undergoing maintenance.

Nearly a month after the mariner arrived in Boston, he began feeling sick and was feverish, according to one of his colleagues who requested anonymity, citing fears of retribution and a vindictive climate at the Military Sealift Command. On April 23, the mariner tested positive for COVID-19, the same day the shipyard notified the Grumman's leadership that nine of its contractors had also tested positive, mariners told POGO.

The mariner's condition worsened, landing him in the intensive care unit, where he was placed on a ventilator, according to several of his colleagues. Back on the Grumman, workers who came in close contact with him and another ill mariner were placed in quarantine in a nearby hotel.

According to mariners, work then continued on the ship, despite several crewmembers' having raised concerns to the ship's leadership.

After nearly all of those initially placed in quarantine tested positive, the ship's leadership decided to quarantine the entire crew in the hotel on May 2, eight days after the first positive tests.

Since February, the Grumman has been docked at a private shipyard, run by Boston Ship Repair, for maintenance. Military Sealift Command relied on the company to screen workers as they came aboard the Grumman, but according to multiple mariners, this screening was nearly nonexistent, consisting of random infrared temperature checks and a self-reporting questionnaire.

"There was no social distancing being observed, no precautions at the gate until they started to check temperatures, no precautions being made by the shipyard workers as they often worked closely together due to the nature of the jobs being performed," one mariner, who wished to remain anonymous, told POGO.

John Scanlon, a 60-year-old contractor working in the engine room on the Grumman, died a few days after contracting the virus, according to his family and coworkers. According to a contractor who spoke with him shortly before his death, Scanlon was concerned about the relaxed attitude of the shipyard and Military Sealift Command toward preventing the spread of the virus.

Representatives of Boston Ship Repair did not reply to questions from POGO.

As of May 18, the Navy is reporting a total of 2,940 positive cases across its workforce, including civilians.

Mariners POGO spoke with said they felt that there wasn't a plan in place and that Military Sealift Command was being reactive rather than proactive, resulting in a wider spread of the virus among the Grumman's crew. According to audio of a mid-May conference call between Military Sealift Command representatives and the quarantined mariners, the command is conducting a "lessons learned" review of how the Grumman's outbreak was handled and what lessons can be applied to the rest of the fleet.

It took half the ship's civilian crew getting infected, one person in critical condition, and a contractor's death, but it now seems that the Navy is taking some action. According to mariners, the ship was completely vacated on May 8 for seven days, in an attempt to ensure any traces of the virus were dead. New cleaning crews will disinfect high-touch areas throughout the ship, and staggered meal hours will prevent overcrowding in the ship's mess hall. Once each member of the crew has completed the quarantine and had two negative tests, they will return to work on the ship.

The Navy did not respond to requests for comment.

11. How much has the Pentagon spent on PPE over the last few years? – 5/19

Federal News Network | Tom Temin

For months now, health care, food inspection, first responders and the military have been scrambling for personal protective equipment (PPE). From gowns, face masks and face shields to overalls — it's more Tyvek than a new housing development. Analysts at Govini have dissected the trends in PPE spending by the military since 2013. To understand how the Defense Department can support civilian organizations while also covering its own people, Govini CEO Tara Murphy Dougherty joined Federal Drive with Tom Temin.

Interview transcript:

Tom Temin: Ms. Dougherty, good to have you back.

Tara Murphy Dougherty: Thanks so much Tom.

Tom Temin: What were you looking at here? Going back to 2013, is this something that the military normally spends lots of money on?

Tara Murphy Dougherty: It's not typically something that the military spends a lot of money on. We did an analysis, as you mentioned, of DoD spending on personal protective equipment over a seven-year period, in order to get a sense of just how much DoD invests in this area, and the extent to which they're planning for a contingency like a pandemic or responding to it. And what we found is that typically the posture they're in is a responsive one, which frankly probably makes sense given the Defense mission and the range of contingencies they're planning for. But the numbers themselves were really interesting.

Tom Temin: Well, what was interesting? It looks like from your chart that Govini has published that there was a big spike in spending on PPE during the Ebola outbreak.

Tara Murphy Dougherty: Exactly. So this is a relatively recent case, if you recall Ebola took place about 2014 to 2016 – in that timeframe. And in particular, the United States led a humanitarian mission to West Africa to contain the Ebola outbreak in fall of 2014. We saw that over the following fiscal year of 2015, Defense spending on PPE surged to $40 million, which is only interesting if you think about it in the context of the earlier years of spending. It was nearly triple the amount of money that Defense spent on similar products in fiscal year 2014. And it was five times more than that in fiscal year '13.

Tom Temin: So basically, they spend on a reactive basis, as you mentioned, they don't really stockpile this stuff?

Tara Murphy Dougherty: Exactly. You know, what DoD is thinking about when it comes to stockpiling or equipment that – responsive to cases of war or military contingencies. And while they are certainly thinking about protecting the troops under all scenarios, as we saw, one of the data points that I thought was fascinating, and one of the things that I think is so compelling about data analytics in general, is we were able to show that over fiscal years '13 to fiscal year '19 the Defense Department spent over $2 million on hand sanitizer, which is sort of a phenomenal data point itself. I think the interesting aspect of this, Tom, is less whether a reactive posture is right or wrong, but the extent to which the Defense Department wants to plan for contingencies that aren't a core military mission. For sure the Department of Defense provides support to civil authorities. And that is part of its mandate and an important one. But the extent to which it spends money on those types of activities, as opposed to other activities that are prioritized in the national defense strategy, and other defense strategic and policy guidance documents, is I think, the really interesting balance that the department has to grapple with. And what we find in periods of crisis like this are, it's easy to look back and say, well, they should have planned more, they shouldn't be reactive. Although for the past seven years, the Defense Department's probably made the right choices in executing spending on PPE at the level that has.

Tom Temin: We're speaking with Govini CEO Tara Murphy Dougherty. I guess the question then that would come up is who is spending it within DoD? Is it the National Guard, which might be called out by state officials to help in a local pandemic emergency – who is it?

Tara Murphy Dougherty: In the past period that we looked at nearly 90% of the PPE purchases were bought through the Defense Working Capital Fund, which is a revolving fund that increases the department's acquisition flexibility. We saw the vast majority of that spent by the Defense Logistics Agency, which makes sense and now we're seeing similar activities. You've probably seen Undersecretary of Defense Ellen Lord, who leads acquisition and sustainment. She's been very communicative to the industry, to the public about defense activities, and she has, and her office has led the allocation of funds to also contractors. And the top 10 contractors account for nearly 90% of the kind of spending that's happening in this space, which is as we would expect, and they are likely to be well positioned to surge in a contingency like this.

Tom Temin: What types of companies are these? These are not the same people that make weapon systems and uniforms, or are they?

Tara Murphy Dougherty: Some of them are. I think that these are the companies the Defense Department is typically going to for its other equipment. These are companies, the prime contractors the Defense Department has long standing relationships with and what we're seeing is interesting trends around just how capable they are of surging in a situation where the civilian sector is impacted. And it raises interesting questions for the Defense Department around asking industry to surge in another kind of contingency. If you think about munitions for example, the Defense Department does not keep on hand all of the munitions that it would need to execute a protracted war. We know this, this is part of military planning. The expectation is the Defense Department could call on industry, much like it has through the Defense Production Act with COVID, in order to scale up production of those munitions. What we're seeing in COVID is with a shutdown of a number of companies in the defense sector, that surge capacity may not actually be either present or as large as the Defense Department is planning for. So my hope is that this situation will, it certainly will provide lessons. My hope is that defense leaders will take those lessons and feed it into the other core contingencies the department is planning against.

Tom Temin: Is there something that civilian agencies could learn from the way Defense goes about the acquisition of personal protection gear, anything else?

Tara Murphy Dougherty: I think so. I think that, you know, one of the things that's compelling about the Defense Department's response in all of this is, this is essentially what they're built to do. They're built to operate in crisis and they've made some decisive moves and not on long timelines. So for example, one of the decisions that they made was to loosen restrictions on other transaction authorities or OTA contracts. And what that has done is it has pushed decision-making authority down to a lower level so that acquisition officials can move faster in making COVID-related purchases. That kind of nimbleness is hard to do in a large bureaucracy, of course, but it's something that I think the Defense Department does well and the civilian sector can look to – I'm sorry, the civilian government agencies can look to the Defense Department with respect to that kind of decision making and emulate it.

Tom Temin: And for people that really like the details if they look at the visualization of the data that you have provided, it looks like gloves, I guess, rubber gloves or latex gloves, whatever they are, you know those gloves and come a lot like a Kleenex box. Those have been fairly steady throughout the year since 2013. The big spikes was in gowns, aprons and coveralls. And then that sank back down again until 2019. But it's hard to tell what's happening in 2020. Does that mean anything?

Tara Murphy Dougherty: Right, the data is still playing out for 2020. But I think that's a great observation. We did see that spending on gloves over that seven-year period was close to $50 million and stayed fairly steady. I think because of the broad applicability of gloves in so many different settings, whether there are medical settings or scientific settings, as opposed to something like gowns where you saw a significant spike as part of that Ebola response. Gowns are much less relevant to the coronavirus response. And so we're seeing instead huge spending coming out of DoD as well as the stimulus overall, on face masks in particular and in 2020 thus far as part of the COVID response, the Defense Department has spent over $200 million to surge that industrial capacity to produce and N95 facemasks.

Tom Temin: And do you think that the Defense activity has helped or hindered the commercial availability of these products?

Tara Murphy Dougherty: Oh, I think it hasn't taken away from the commercial availability at all. A new fact we've seen the Defense Department knew to provide additional capacity and resources to civilians. And this goes in line with what we were talking about with respect to this report to civilian agencies' mission that the Defense Department does maintain. They've stood up hospital ships, and we've seen calls to do more of that, among other types of responses with the National Guard and even local area responses. So I think it has been a creative to those efforts to be sure.

Tom Temin: Tara Murphy Dougherty is CEO at ovine. Thanks so much for joining me.

Tara Murphy Dougherty: Thank you, Tom.

12. Kayleigh McEnany on Trump's threat to freeze WHO funds: They must prove they don't have a 'China bias' – 5/19

Fox News | Talia Kaplan

White House Press Secretary Kayleigh McEnany told “Fox & Friends” on Tuesday that “at the moment” it is definite that President Trump will withhold funding from the World Health Organization for another 30 days.

“U.S. taxpayer dollars will not go to an organization that slow-walks information, has a China bias and puts American lives at risk,” McEnany said on Tuesday.

McEnany referenced a blistering letter President Trump released the night before to the head of the World Health Organization, stating that his administration conducted an investigation that confirmed the health body’s multiple failures in the early stages of the coronavirus outbreak. In the letter the president also warned that his current funding freeze will become permanent if the organization does not make “substantive” improvements within 30 days.

“The president's letter was very revealing,” McEnany said.

She went on say that “one of the most disturbing things” in the letter constituted “one of many pieces of evidence we have of the WHO and China slow-walking” information related to the novel coronavirus.

“On January 21, you had the Chinese President Xi Jinping telling the WHO, pressuring the WHO to not call this a health emergency and the very next day you had the WHO saying, ‘this [COVID-19] is not a public health emergency of international concern,’” McEnany noted.

The White House has insisted that Beijing downplayed the virus' threat in December, which led to the subsequent outbreak. China has denied the charge and accused Trump of shirking responsibility to the organization, according to the Agence France-Presse, an international news agency.

“The onus is on the WHO here to prove that they don't have a China bias,” McEnany said on Tuesday.

She added, “They need to assure the United States that taxpayer dollars are used well, particularly when you consider the fact that they were all for China's onerous restrictions of travel into their country, but when the president said ‘I'm stopping travel at our border from Wuhan,’ we were told by the WHO that that was a bad decision.”

She went on to note that “interesting facts like that really highlight the problems there.”

In a statement, the WHO said it was "considering the contents" of Trump's letter.

Previously, the agency pointed out that it declared a global health emergency on Jan. 30, when there were fewer than 100 COVID-19 cases outside of China. At the time, the WHO chief said the world owed China gratitude for the way it bought other nations time to plan, with the extraordinary measures it was taking to contain the virus.

In April, Trump first announced that he was cutting off U.S. payments to the WHO during the coronavirus pandemic.

The U.S. is the WHO's biggest donor, giving about $450 million a year.

Host Ainsley Earhardt asked McEnany, “Why is the WHO so supportive of China and not us when we bankroll them?”

“That is the million-dollar question,” McEnany said in response.

“And what do we get for that 400 million-odd dollars we give and China giving a fraction of that? We get the fact that they hide information given to them from Taiwanese officials that this virus had human to human transmission,” McEnany continued.

“The information about this potentially having asymptomatic spread, that also was information not given to us,” she went on to say.

She then added, “We finally have a president who says, ‘That's enough of funding these global organizations where we get very little in return.’”

Fox News’ Edmund DeMarche and The Associated Press contributed to this report.

13. Max Rose slams 'heartless' WH decision to end National Guard deployments one day before they can claim benefits – 5/19

The Hill | Justine Coleman

Rep. Max Rose (D-N.Y.) slammed the White House’s decision to end the National Guard’s deployments the day before they can claim benefits in a Tuesday statement.

Rose criticized President Trump’s administration for deciding to stop deployments on June 24, the day before thousands of National Guard members would qualify for early retirement and education benefits under the Post-9/11 GI bill.

The New York lawmaker called for the decision to be reversed because it is “unpatriotic [and] economically unsound.”

“Intentionally ending orders one day short of a deadline for National Guard soldiers to receive benefits for their heroic sacrifices is the definition of heartless,” he said.

“In peace time we should never balance our budget on the backs of our soldiers," he added, "so why anyone would think this is okay to do in the middle of a wartime effort is beyond human comprehension."

The White House’s approval of the National Guard deployment to assist during the pandemic gave them federal pay and benefits and put them under the command of state governors through May 31. The administration reportedly further extended the National Guard deployment to June 24 – one day short of the 90-day benchmark for benefits to go into effect, Politico reported Tuesday.

A Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) spokesperson told The Hill in a statement that Trump has approved 49 National Guard requests, which the government will fund fully through June 24. As of Tuesday, the National Guard has authorized 39,891 National Guard troops and an additional 891 troops in state active duty status.

The White House and National Guard did not immediately return requests for comment.

Rose, a captain in the National Guard, deployed last month to help set up a COVID-19-only emergency hospital on Staten Island.

14. 'A Seal Around the Ship:' Coast Guard Crews Work to Avoid Catching COVID-19 on Drug Busts – 4/19

Military.com | Patricia Kime

As part of U.S. Southern Command's counter-drug operations surge, the Coast Guard national security cutter James headed to the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific in late March, carrying the usual complement of supplies for a 90-day deployment, plus a boatload of face masks, latex gloves, sanitizer, trash bags and other germ-fighting necessities.

Crews that handle bales of cocaine and marijuana usually take precautions with contraband, wearing gloves and minimizing contact with suspect traffickers. But deployment during the COVID-19 pandemic requires protective measures and a decontamination process few could have imagined during the Charleston, South Carolina-based cutter's pre-deployment workups, said Capt. Jeffrey Randall, the James' commanding officer.

No cutter wants to be the Coast Guard's version of the aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt or Diamond Princess cruise ship.

"We've added an extra decontamination process to protect our people, protect our boats and our equipment -- things external to the ship. You set a seal around the ship," Randall told Military.com during an interview via satellite phone from the Pacific.

Since COVID-19 started spreading across the U.S. earlier this year, the Coast Guard has deployed at least seven cutters to the Caribbean and Eastern Pacific, working with the Navy and Air Force, as well as personnel and assets from 22 allied nations, for counter-narcotics operations.

Coast Guard vessels have logged 47 drug seizures, captured more than 85,000 pounds of cocaine and detained at least 100 suspected drug smugglers since the beginning of the year, according to Coast Guard spokesman Chief Warrant Officer 4 Barry Lane.

Coast Guard crews also have intercepted 3,100 migrants attempting to reach the U.S., according to Lane.

President Donald Trump announced the enhanced counterdrug operations during a White House briefing on the coronavirus response April 1, saying the effort was needed to ensure that drug cartels did not exploit the pandemic.

But the mission also is intended to send a message to Venezuela that drug trafficking supported by Venezuelan President Nicolas Maduro won't be tolerated.

For the crew of the James, the deployment is business as usual, except for the extreme measures they are taking to keep the coronavirus off the cutter.

According to Randall, the COVID-19 prevention measures include no recreational port calls and minimal contact with port workers during resupply. They maintain distance during boarding operations, requiring space between their boarding crews and smuggling suspects. They strip their protective equipment before returning to James, wrapping it all in trash bags and sanitizing the small boat used for boarding. They constantly wipe down the ship and have a plan for keeping detainees sequestered from the crew.

"We would need to put them in a separate area away from the crew in case one of them was COVID positive. Then we're probably going to bring them back and work with the host nation to ensure that they face prosecution," Randall said.

Still, with any encounter, there is risk, he added.

"We minimize it, but we don't eliminate it," Randall said. "You can't let your guard down."

As of May 14, 91 Coast Guard members had been diagnosed with COVID-19, including 19 active cases. No one unit has sustained a "large-scale or highly concentrated outbreak," Lane said.

The Navy has not been as fortunate. It has been the service hardest hit by the pandemic, with 2,296 cases as of May 19, including at least 64 sailors on the guided missile destroyer Kidd and more than 1,100 on the Roosevelt.

The Army has had 1,238 cases of COVID-19; the Air Force, 453 cases; the Marine Corps, 494; and the Army and Air National Guards, 1,162, as of May 14.

U.S. Southern Command has not announced when the surge operations will end. And despite the operation's success, it has its share of critics, especially from drug policy reform advocates who believe the "war on drugs" is a waste of resources -- including, during the pandemic, personal protective gear that could have gone to health care workers.

"Instead of doubling down on the war on drugs that has been a failure in every sense, we should be focused on rebuilding communities and fostering the health and safety of all people. This is true at all times, but especially during a global pandemic," said Kassandra Frederique, managing director of policy advocacy and campaigns for the Drug Policy Alliance, in a statement.

Randall, whose crew had boarded three suspect vessels as of mid-May, said his ship carefully tracks the "burn rate" of its personal protective equipment and is not "taking it away from other priority needs."

Plus, he added, the counterdrug, fisheries enforcement and migrant interdiction missions are all vital to national security.

"Seventy thousand people a year, roughly, die from drug-related overdoses. So, any interdiction that we do out here helps reduce the number of overdose deaths in the U.S. and the violence that goes with it," Randall said.

15. As States Relax Rules, Military Bases Take First Reopening Steps – 5/19

Military.com | Richard Sisk

Marines at Camp Pendleton in California could go surfing again last week. Hill Air Force Base in Utah reopened the Hubbard Golf Course. And the Army has cranked up basic training for incoming recruits.

These are among the first, cautious steps in a lengthy, complicated process to resume normal activities in the military as states and localities increasingly relax the strict guidelines in place to deal with the novel coronavirus pandemic.

The military's overall policy on lifting restrictions, both in the states and overseas, is undergoing review by the Pentagon. But Defense Secretary Mark Esper and Joint Chiefs of Staff Chairman Gen. Mark Milley have stressed that they are taking the long view on how to deal with the virus.

"There will be a new normal that we will have to adapt to for an extended period of time, at least until we have a vaccine that we're confident in," Esper said at a May 4 virtual Brookings Institution event. "The long-term view is: What do we do over the next 6, 12, 18 months?"

The review will take a while and will be "a little bit more complex because we've got to look at individual states, individual localities" and what their restrictions are, Pentagon chief spokesman Jonathan Hoffman said at a briefing May 15. "I think that's part of that review that we're looking at, and it's going to be conditioned on a number of things."

He said the policy review will have to take into account what the state and local governments have directed and decide on how bases coordinate "so that if they have a force condition or a health condition that they've set, how do we interact with them and ensure that we're working closely with them to make sure our people are protected?"

Individual installations have been given some leeway in adapting to local conditions.

Brig. Gen. Dan Conley, commander of Marine Corps Installations West, Marine Corps Base Camp Pendleton, announced a few changes in a May 7 post.

He said indoor gyms were reopening, along with beaches on post for "expanded surfing, swimming, paddle boarding, kayaking -- those types of events. What we're not going to do yet is open it for large unit gatherings."

"As we can, we're going to open more things," but the requirements for wearing face masks, observing social distancing, and other restrictions remain in place, Conley said.

Also on May 7, the Air Force Academy announced the start of a slow and deliberate reopening of some facilities.

Tee times were open for reservation at the Eisenhower Golf Course; surgical and medical specialty clinics opened for personal appointments; and fishing ponds and hiking and biking trails were reopened for DoD beneficiaries, the academy said in a release.

"We continually assess what we can reopen while keeping our community safe," said Col. Brian Hartless, commander of the academy's host unit, the 10th Air Base Wing. "We're moving ahead cautiously just like the state of Colorado, the Colorado Springs community we live in … while bearing in mind that we remain in a public health emergency."

16. With Training Reopened, Army Shipping Recruits to Basic Even Faster Than Before – 5/19

Military.com | Matthew Cox

After a rocky start, U.S. Army basic training officials now say they have significantly reduced the backlog of trainees waiting to move safely through the training pipeline despite pandemic conditions.

It's been two months since the Pentagon issued a forcewide stop-movement order, which halted graduating Basic Combat Training (BCT) classes shipping to advanced individual training (AIT) bases.

Lt. Col. Anthony Forshier, commander of 3rd Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, at Fort Jackson, South Carolina, had to keep trainees on hold while Army Center for Initial Military Training officials figured out how to transport troops in sanitized buses and later planes.

In late March, the Army shipped hundreds of trainees from Jackson to an AIT site at Fort Lee, Virginia, while another group of sterile buses transported new soldiers from Fort Sill, Oklahoma, to AIT at Fort Sam Houston in San Antonio, Texas.

Now, shipping times to AIT have dropped from weeks to days, Forshier said in a recent Army news release.

"It only takes us around four days to go from 'Yes, you're going' to actually flying," he said in the release. "It's a relatively quick turnaround now.

"We started with 1,900 trainees, and today we have around 500."

It's not easy, but Jackson officials have streamlined the process for sanitizing every surface on chartered buses and planes to Centers for Disease Control and Army Preventive Medicine standards, according to the release.

"It's a lot of small details, but there are 10-15 people behind the scenes working those things," said Command Sgt. Maj. Algrish Williams, of 3rd Battalion, 34th Infantry Regiment, in the release. "It's been all hands on deck."

Army officials decided to temporarily halt shipping recruits to BCT in early April to refine the safety procedures and testing efforts at each of the initial-entry training centers at Jackson; Sill; Fort Benning, Georgia; and Fort Leonard Wood, Missouri.

Before the two-week pause, the service cut the number of trainees it ships each week from 1,200 to about 600 to allow them to be spaced farther apart in the barracks. In addition, training centers have started a 14-day "controlled monitoring" phase of BCT, where groups of up to 30 new trainees are kept separate from others, in case any of them develops COVID-19 symptoms in that time period.

17. Pentagon memo contradicts SECDEF's year-end coronavirus vaccine goal, per report – 5/19

Military Times | Meghann Myers

Defense Secretary Mark Esper declared Friday that a government task force charged with developing a COVID-19 vaccine would have a widely available injection by the end of the year. But a leaked Pentagon memo shows that behind the scenes, senior leadership have been planning for the possibility that the services could be contending with coronavirus until well into next year.

The memo, first reported by Task and Purpose, warns of not only a resurgence of the virus, but the "real possibility" that a viable vaccine won't be available until "at least the summer of 2021."

"Therefore, we must now re-focus our attention on resuming critical missions, increasing levels of activity, and making necessary preparations should a significant resurgence of COVID-19 occur later this year," the memo reads, though it doesn't bear Esper's signature.

Kenneth Rapuano, assistant secretary of defense for homeland defense and global security, prepared the memo, Task and Purpose reported.

"We can confirm we continue to develop plans that address operating in the COVID-19 environment," Pentagon spokesman Chris Garver told Military Times on Tuesday, though he could not confirm the specific memo draft. "Senior DoD officials have discussed the development of a plan to reduce Health Protection Conditions around the world and continue the 2020 summer move cycle safely. The plans have not been approved by senior DoD leaders yet, and we're not going to discuss what might be in the final version of those plans."

The memo details requirements for expanded testing, surveillancing and contact tracing procedures, while at the same time preparing for new outbreaks, shortages of personal protection equipment and insufficient immunity to the virus into summer 2021.

"All indications suggest we will be operating in a globally-persistent COVID-19 environment in the months ahead," the memo reads. "This will likely continue until there is wide-scale immunity, through immunization, and some immunity post-recovery from the virus."

Concerns have been rising that re-infection, as well as an evolving definition of recovery, could be part of that threat, as aircraft carrier Theodore Roosevelt sailors previously cleared of COVID-19 have since re-tested positive.

Columbia University research released in late April found that in the viruses responsible for past coronavirus epidemics, including Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome and Middle East Respiratory Syndrome, did not result in full immunity after an infection.

"The evidence from endemic coronaviruses suggests that immunity is short-lived and re-infection is common within one year, with symptom severity possibly more a function of genetics than the presence or absence of

antibodies," environmental health scientist Jeffrey Shaman said in an April 29 release. "Research on endemic coronaviruses, along with findings for SARS and MERS, provide context for understanding protective immunity against repeat SARS-CoV-2 infections."

Operation Warp Speed

The Pentagon's plans have quickly accelerated since the memo was drafted, with rollout of an asymptomatic testing plan, as well as the Friday announcement of Operation Warp Speed, a multi-agency effort to develop a vaccine, headed up by Army Materiel Command boss Gen. Gus Perna.

"We will deliver, by the end of this year a vaccine, at scale, to treat the American people and our partners abroad," Esper said Friday at the White House.

That statement was in stark contrast to briefings earlier this year by top U.S. health officials, explaining that vaccine development is generally anywhere from a 12 to 18-month process.

That includes officials from the Army Medical Research Institute of Infectious Diseases, who told reporters in March that the lab was preparing to begin testing a vaccine base — a delivery formula, but with no live virus — and that it would be the better part of the year before human trials on a vaccine could begin.

On Friday, Pentagon spokesman Jonathan Hoffman clarified to reporters that the end-of-year timeline is a goal, and that Operation Warp Speed will surge government efforts to meet it.

18. Defense Budgets Could Fall Victim to COVID-19 – 5/19

National Defense Magazine | Jon Harper

The coronavirus pandemic, which has already exacted a staggering human and economic toll, may soon take a bite out of Pentagon spending.

The Congressional Budget Office recently estimated that the federal budget deficit will be upwards of $3.7 trillion in the current fiscal year and exceed $2 trillion in fiscal year 2021 as a result of spending on COVID-19 response and recovery.

"This is just off the charts compared to what we have seen in the past," said Todd Harrison, director of defense budget analysis at the Center for Strategic and International Studies. Once the crisis subsides, there will be increasing pressure in Congress to reduce the deficit and government spending, he predicted during a recent webinar.

There is a history of military cuts when deficits get high, including in the 1980s during the later years of the Reagan administration, and in the 2010s during the Obama administration following the 2008-2009 recession, he noted.

"When Congress and fiscal conservatives come out and get serious about reducing the debt and reducing spending, defense is almost always part of what they come up with for a solution," he said. "We could be looking at a deficit-driven defense drawdown coming in the next two to three years."

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Rep. Adam Smith, D-Wash., suggested there may be a push to trim the Pentagon budget.

"Even in the best case scenario, this [pandemic] is going to have a profound economic impact on us, so I think it's going to become even more important that we look for ways to save money within DoD," he told reporters. The nuclear enterprise is an example of a place where savings could be found, he added.

The Pentagon requested $705.4 billion for fiscal year 2021. Defense Secretary Mark Esper said efforts to control the deficit may jeopardize U.S. military modernization efforts.

“I am concerned that the massive infusion into the economy by the Congress and the executive branch — nearly $3 trillion — may throw us off that course,” he said during a recent webinar.

At a press conference he was asked what programs would be in jeopardy if defense spending is constrained.

“We are going to look at those things in due course,” he said. “My inclination is … to go back and pull out more of the legacy programs. We need to move away from the legacy, and we need to invest those dollars into the future [systems]. We have a lot of legacy programs out there right now. I could pick dozens out from all branches of the service. So that is where I would start.”

Esper isn’t the only Pentagon leader concerned about the situation.

“On the other side of COVID-19 in terms of funding, I think everyone will be worried about what will the defense topline move to and what choices will that push upon us,” Assistant Secretary of the Air Force for Acquisition, Technology and Logistics Will Roper told reporters.

Nuclear modernization is the Pentagon’s top priority right now, he noted.

“If the budget comes down there will be more tough choices ahead,” he said. “My worry is less about any individual program in the nuclear triad; it’s more outside of that — where will we find that bill payer?”

Previous concerns about deficits led to the 2011 Budget Control Act, which put in place spending caps and a sequestration mechanism for a 10-year period, although lawmakers repeatedly raised the limits as part of a series of subsequent bipartisan budget agreements. Smith doesn’t anticipate Congress will enact another BCA-type of law to deal with COVID-19-related deficits.

“It didn’t control the budget particularly well, led to several government shutdowns, a number of continuing resolutions, and more threatened government shutdowns than frankly I can even remember,” he said. “There’s going to be considerable skepticism that a Budget Control Act-like approach is the right approach to any sort of [new] fiscal policy. I would think there would be considerable pushback on that.”

19. The Military’s Travel Ban Leaves Some Families in a Financial Crunch – 5/19

In March, the Pentagon announced restrictions on movements for service members and their families because of the coronavirus, upending plans for some in the middle of relocating.

New York Times Magazine | John Ismay

Maureen Elias expected her family’s final move with the military to come as a relief. She and her husband, Dustin, purchased a house in Oakton, Va., where the Army was transferring them from California for Dustin’s final assignment as he neared the end of his 20-year career. They expected to be on the East Coast by April 1, just in time to close on their dream home.

But the novel coronavirus had other plans for the Elias family, as the Defense Department first paused all international travel for service members and their families, and then expanded that order to movements within the United States. The Eliases were now in California indefinitely, stuck paying $3,700 a month for a rental home near Los Angeles and a $4,500 mortgage for a house that stood empty on the other side of the country. The Army did not offer them any financial support. “It’s like, killing me inside,” Maureen Elias, 42, said. “Here I have this big beautiful home I can’t wait to move into and I don’t know when that can even happen.”

The Elias family’s situation is one of thousands resulting from travel freezes ordered by the Department of Defense that have created enormous financial hardship for some families and even split others up. The Pentagon announced the first restrictions in March and extended them through at least the end of June for all service

members and their families scheduled to move to new duty stations, permanent or temporary — upending a system that moves its people to different bases around the world every couple of years. On Friday, a Pentagon spokesman said that Defense Secretary Mark T. Esper was reviewing the freeze order every 15 days and had made no decision to change the current policy.

The military arranges roughly 400,000 personal property shipments a year, with 40 percent of them happening between mid-May and late August, according to a recent Government Accountability Office report. The majority of moves being approved now, as the peak moving season begins, require a waiver signed by a senior commander.

While the restrictions are meant to prevent the spread of the virus, they have also created complications for those who sold homes, ended leases or even had their belongings collected before the freeze was enforced. The Defense Department has left it to one-star admirals and generals to decide whether service members and their families can receive waivers to bypass the stop-movement order, but advocates say that operational commanders have not issued clear guidance on what conditions would permit such a waiver. On May 6, an official from United States Transportation Command, the department overseeing the transfer of service members' personal property from one assignment to the next, said more than 30,000 moves had been approved, with both military family members and movers required to wear personal protective equipment as their household goods were packed up, in strict compliance with Centers for Disease Control and Prevention guidelines.

"The leadership at the Department of Defense and the services have given on-the-ground commanders a lot of latitude," said Kelly Hruska of the National Military Family Association, a nonprofit based in Northern Virginia. "I can see where they think that's helpful, but then you have things applied inconsistently even in the same service."

Hruska said her organization had gotten calls from families who were stuck in place, unable to obtain the necessary waivers to move as planned, even as parts of the country were beginning to open up. Another stumbling block has been the State Department, which largely shut down passport offices — even for the "no fee" passports that military dependents need to travel to new duty stations overseas.

Hruska said one Army spouse who came to her organization recently for help was trying to move from the United States to Europe with her husband and two young children, but her family's passports had not been issued, even though she applied in February. She has been unable to get any answers from the State Department, save for the department's website, which does not offer any specific information on the delay for people waiting for their passports. A State Department official said that they were supporting military families by issuing no-fee passports to Department of Defense dependents "as resources and safety measures allow."

For Elias, the financial burden of paying for two homes led to a breaking point. She decided to move her family herself, using a commercial service, even though she had not obtained a waiver from the Army to do so. She paid $9,000 for a shipping container to carry all of her family's belongings to Virginia, and she hoped the Army would reimburse her for what the service calls a "do it yourself" move — which the armed services normally do — though she didn't obtain permission ahead of time.

Congress recently passed legislation that would allow Elias to defer some payments on her mortgage, which she received through the Department of Veterans Affairs home loan program, but there is no guidance on when and how those would need to be repaid — even though she has researched the question extensively online. "I work in the policy space and even I can't figure it out," said Elias, who works for a veterans service organization in Washington.

"Repaying just one month of mortgage at $4,500 is one thing," Elias said. "But if we ended up needing to defer six months of payments and then pay that back all at once, that's the equivalent of buying a nice new car."

"It's just not really feasible or logical," she added.

20. ‘Hard stop’: States could lose National Guard virus workers – 5/19

Politico Pro | Alice Miranda Ollstein

More than 40,000 National Guard members currently helping states test residents for the coronavirus and trace the spread of infections will face a “hard stop” on their deployments on June 24 — just one day shy of many members becoming eligible for key federal benefits, according to a senior FEMA official.

The official outlined the Trump administration’s plans on an interagency call on May 12, an audio version of which was obtained by POLITICO. The official also acknowledged during the call that the June 24 deadline means that thousands of members who first deployed in late March will find themselves with only 89 days of duty credit, one short of the 90-day threshold for qualifying for early retirement and education benefits under the Post-9/11 GI bill.

The looming loss of crucial frontline workers, along with questions about whether the administration is shortchanging first responders, would require a delicate messaging strategy, the official — representing FEMA’s New England region — told dozens of colleagues on the interagency call.

“We would greatly benefit from unified messaging regarding the conclusion of their services prior to hitting the 90-day mark and the retirement benefit implications associated with it,” the official said.

Top National Guard and other federal officials on the call did not dispute the June 24 cutoff or raise the possibility of an extension. In a statement, FEMA acknowledged that President Donald Trump’s current order for the federal government to fund the troops expires on June 24. But a National Guard spokesperson said a decision to extend the deployments could still be made in the coming weeks.

“We’re not there yet on the determination,” the spokesperson, Wayne Hall, said. “Nobody can say where we’ll need to be more than a month down the road.”

Governors and lawmakers in both parties have been pleading with the White House to extend the federal order for several more months or until the end of the year, warning in a letter to Trump that terminating federal deployments early in the summer just as states are reopening “could contribute to a possible second wave of infection.”

More than 40,000 Guard members are currently serving under federal orders known as Title 32, which grants them federal pay and benefits but puts them under local command, in 44 states, three territories and the District of Columbia — the largest domestic deployment since Hurricane Katrina.

Tens of thousands of them have been working full-time since early March on a wide range of sensitive and dangerous tasks, such as decontaminating nursing homes and setting up field hospitals, along with performing tests for the virus. They’ve provided a crucial backup for understaffed and underfunded state public health agencies trying to contain the pandemic.

The cost of the deployment is as much as $9 million per month for every 1,000 troops, according to the National Council of State Legislatures — an expense that states would have to shoulder should Title 32 expire. In addition, state deployments do not count toward federal education and retirement benefits.

The 45,000-member National Guard Association and some state officials told POLITICO that they suspect the Trump administration timed its orders to limit the deployment to 89 days — one short of the number that would qualify the earliest participants for certain education and retirement benefits.

Guard members must serve for 20 years to qualify for a pension at age 60. But for every 90 days serving during a federal emergency, Guard members can move up that retirement by three months. Ninety days of service also qualifies members for 40 percent off the tuition at a public college or university.

Because the National Guard members have to self-quarantine for two weeks before returning to civilian life to ensure they don't spread the virus after serving on the front lines, states could lose their services in early June.

Trump's original order calling up Guard members to help with the coronavirus crisis had been scheduled to expire on May 31. With the deadline approaching, Colorado's entire congressional delegation — Republicans and Democrats alike — wrote to the president asking for an extension until the end of the year. Senators from New Hampshire, Connecticut, West Virginia and Illinois sought an extension through the fall. And several officials, including Iowa Sen. Chuck Grassleyand Illinois Gov. J.B. Pritzker, have written letters asking for an extension until at least June 30.

Instead, the White House issued an unusual 24-day extension that terminates the deployment mid-week.

"It seemed kind of weird to me," said retired Brig. Gen. J. Roy Robinson, president of the National Guard Association, the advocacy group for Guard members. "It's a Wednesday. And it also coincides with 89 days of deployment for any soldiers who went on federal status at the beginning. I was getting all kind of calls about it and I said, 'It's probably just a coincidence.' But in the back of my mind, I know better. They're screwing the National Guard members out of the status they should have."

The White House did not respond to multiple requests for comment.

The National Guard's Hall countered that the 90-day threshold is cumulative, meaning members can qualify for early retirement benefits on their next federal deployment if it falls within the same fiscal year, which ends on September 30. For the GI Bill education benefits, members can accumulate days across federal deployments without a time limit.

"If someone's new in the Guard, they won't be able to make that 90 days in one shot," Hall acknowledged. "But if two months from now they're called up for a hurricane or flood, they can make it then. The goal here is not to hurt Guardsmen."

Nonetheless, federal deployments are relatively rare, and the practical impact of a June 24 cutoff would be to prevent many Guard members from claiming potentially valuable benefits, the National Guard Association said.

Meanwhile, as the national death count climbs toward 100,000, many states are depending on Guard members to help enact testing programs, deep-clean public facilities and perform the kind of contact tracing of people exposed to the virus that's necessary to help states reopen — and say those needs will not go away anytime soon.

In Washington state, for example, Guard members comprise about a third of the state's contact-tracing force, working to identify coronavirus outbreaks and locate people who have been exposed. More than 500 Guard members are currently performing such duties. According to the governor's office, hundreds more are running community operations that have tested more than 1,600 people, assembled more than 28,000 testing kits and delivered nearly 14 million pounds of food to food banks and struggling families.

Casey Katims, the federal liaison for Gov. Jay Inslee, said that while the state will do what it can to keep Guard members on duty if the federal deployment ends in June, "that footprint will necessarily be smaller without federal support."

"All of the missions are going to continue for months to come," he said. "The need for testing, the need for meals, the need for contact tracing don't disappear on June 25. So if the administration allows [Trump's order] to expire, that will mean fewer personnel to assist Washington in each of these critical missions."

In North Dakota, a state with one of the highest per capita testing rates and the lowest rate of fatalities, more than 100 National Guard members have been running mobile testing sites since April, testing between 350 and

750 residents each day in places like the Fargodome parking lot, Grand Forks' Alerus Center and Standing Rock High School.

"Local public health is somewhat understaffed, so we bring the bodies," Major Waylon Tomac explained in a recent promotional video for the National Guard.

Another 30 or so members have been deep-cleaning long-term care facilities that have recently seen outbreaks — spraying disinfectant and wiping down every surface. Still more have been working the night shift at the state's labs, assembling coronavirus test kits.

Col. Tad Schauer, the director of military response for the North Dakota National Guard, told POLITICO that while his team is currently planning to wrap up its operations by June 24, it stands ready to keep working if the Trump administration extends the deployment or Gov. Doug Burgum asks it to transition to "State Active Duty."

"The people of North Dakota have been exceptional in fighting Covid-19 and we're here to support the state and its citizens regardless of our federal or state status," he said.

The May 12 conference call was one of a series of interagency meetings the Trump administration has convened daily during the pandemic. On those video conference calls, senior officials from HHS, FEMA and other government agencies update participants on the progress made on various fronts — including ongoing efforts to ramp up testing, acquire and distribute protective equipment and monitor hot spots around the country.

During that meeting, the official who raised the June 24 deadline was identified as "Russ" from FEMA's Region 1, which includes Connecticut, Rhode Island, Massachusetts, New Hampshire, Vermont and Maine. Captain Russell "Russ" Webster, the regional administrator whom the White House also tapped in March to be New England's coordinating officer for federal recovery operations, did not confirm or deny that he was the one speaking on the call when contacted by POLITICO.

While some Guard members could continue the same work under State Active Duty after the June deadline, the National Guard Association has warned that without federal orders and funding, most states won't be able to "support significant Guard deployments."

In addition to being unable to accrue time toward federal retirement and tuition benefits, Guard members under State Active Duty are ineligible for the military's health insurance for active duty members — an issue Sens. Joni Ernst (R-Iowa) and Joe Manchin (D-W.V.) are seeking to address in a new bill.

The health coverage question is especially pressing during a pandemic. The National Guard confirmed to POLITICO that as of Monday, 1,158 members have been diagnosed with Covid-19, including 617 active cases.

The National Guard notes that members whose federal active status expires can enroll in a different health insurance program, TRICARE Reserve Select. But that program charges members and their families significant premiums, deductibles and co-pays that regular TRICARE does not, and it doesn't cover any dental care or pharmaceuticals.

Robinson, while pushing for the passage of the Ernst-Manchin bill, said he's disappointed in the Trump administration's treatment of Guard members risking their health during a pandemic.

"They're working side-by-side with doctors, nurses and first responders," he said. "And we're going to cut them off and send them home with no health care coverage while they transition back to their civilian life. Not to mention, some of their jobs may have evaporated since they were deployed."

21. Progressive lawmakers push to slash defense budget during pandemic – 5/19

The left flank's early opposition to increased defense spending could throw a wrench into House leaders' aims to pass a bipartisan policy bill with fewer headaches than last year.

Politico | Connor O'Brien

A bloc of progressive House lawmakers wants to slash the Pentagon's budget in defense policy legislation, arguing extra money that would go toward military hardware would be better spent fighting the coronavirus.

Twenty nine House Democrats insisted in a letter to leaders of the House Armed Services Committee that the National Defense Authorization Act should outline a budget that is "below last year's authorized level."

"Congress must remain focused on responding to the coronavirus pandemic and distributing needed aid domestically," the lawmakers wrote. "In order to do so, appropriators must have access to increased levels of non-defense spending which could be constrained by any increase to defense spending.

"Right now, the coronavirus is our greatest adversary," they argued. "We must remain focused on combating the coronavirus and not on increasing military spending that already outpaces the next 10 closest nations combined."

The left flank's early opposition to increased defense spending could throw a wrench into House leaders' aims to pass a bipartisan policy bill with fewer headaches than last year. House Armed Services Chairman Adam Smith (D-Wash.) and Rep. Mac Thornberry of Texas, the committee's top Republican, have said they want a bipartisan bill.

The letter was organized by Rep. Mark Pocan (D-Wis.), a co-chair of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, and Rep. Barbara Lee (D-Calif.). Both are critics of the defense budget, which has soared to more than $700 billion. The letter was first reported by The Washington Post.

In a statement, the lawmakers implied that they would vote against the legislation if it didn't cut defense spending. They noted that while 29 lawmakers signed the letter, only 19 would need to vote "no" to tank the defense bill, assuming Republicans don't support it.

House Democrats passed their first defense bill in the majority last year without Republican support. Negotiations with Senate Republicans dragged on for months, and progressive lawmakers were largely dissatisfied with the product. A compromise bill dropped Democratic proposals to rein in Trump's war powers, overturn the administration's transgender troop ban and block money for the border wall.

Progressive lawmakers have signaled they will push many of those same issues again, which would drive House Republicans to once again oppose the bill.

Liberal Democrats have also sought to put the brakes on a buildup in military spending that was launched by President Donald Trump and congressional Republicans.

Republican defense hawks would almost certainly cry foul if Democrats attempted to cut the defense budget. Trump and congressional leaders locked in a $741 billion topline for fiscal 2021 as part of two-year deal on spending. GOP lawmakers have argued that level still doesn't adequately address the needs of the military as it pivots from the Middle East toward competition with China and Russia.

The pandemic has added fuel to the Democrats' fire. Some lawmakers argue the spread of coronavirus shows the futility of traditional spending on military hardware as it didn't shield the U.S. from the virus.

But the defense budget has continued to grow amid the pandemic. Lawmakers approved an extra $10.5 billion for the Pentagon's coronavirus response — including National Guard deployments, purchases of equipment under the Defense Production Act and vaccine research.

Pentagon leaders have indicated they will ask Congress for more money as weapons programs slow down and costs increase.

But progressive and anti-war groups have pushed to hold the line on defense spending during the pandemic. Smith said he doesn't support more money for the Pentagon in a new round of economic stimulus.

A $3 trillion economic relief package backed by House Democrats last week doesn't include any new money for the Pentagon.

The House Armed Services Committee scratched a planned April 30 markup of the defense authorization bill due to the pandemic. The committee has not yet said when the bill will be considered, but House leaders are calling it a top priority as lawmakers return to legislative business in the coming weeks.

22. China protests support of U.S., others for Taiwan support at WHO – 5/19

Reuters | Emma Farge

GENEVA - The Chinese envoy to the World Health Organization (WHO) on Tuesday denounced support shown by the United States and other members to Taiwan during its annual ministerial assembly.

“There are still a few countries determined to plea for Taiwan authorities...,” Chen Xu, the Chinese ambassador told the virtual assembly, saying this was “undermining global anti-epidemic efforts”.

“This conduct is not acceptable,” Chen added in response specifically to U.S. support for Taiwan following remarks by a senior U.S. diplomat which he dismissed as “political hype”.

Taiwan is not a member of the U.N. agency although a proposal was submitted to allow it to participate in the assembly as an observer. However, no invitation was issued due to a lack of consensus.

Editing by Stephanie Nebehay

23. U.S. rejects WHO coronavirus resolution's language on abortion, IP – 5/19

Reuters | Stephanie Nebehay

GENEVA - The United States rejected language about reproductive healthcare and intellectual property rights in a World Health Organization resolution on the coronavirus pandemic on Tuesday, hours after President Donald Trump threatened to quit the body.

Washington did not block the consensus adoption of the text, which calls for a review into the global response to the crisis and which diplomats had striven to pass without a vote.

But in a statement it said it “dissociates” from paragraphs guaranteeing the rights of poor countries to waive intellectual property rules to obtain medicines in an emergency, and guaranteeing reproductive and sexual healthcare in the pandemic.

“The United States believes in legal protections for the unborn, and rejects any interpretation of international human rights ... to require any State Party to provide access to abortion,” it said in an “explanation of position”.

The language on intellectual property, designed to ensure poor countries can have access to medicine, sends “the wrong message to innovators who will be essential to the solutions the whole world needs”, it added.

The resolution was passed after Trump, who has accused the WHO of backing China, tweeted overnight a letter threatening to quit the world health body and permanently halt funding unless it commits within 30 days to improvement.

The Geneva-based body declined to comment on Trump’s threat to quit, saying only that it had received a letter from Trump and was considering its contents.

Diplomats said ultimately Washington had decided not to block the resolution outright, despite its objections.

“There is a strong desire on their part to join consensus,” a Western diplomat said ahead of adoption. Referring to the intellectual property issue in particular, the diplomat added: “If they don’t join, they are isolated, unfortunately. There is really a global consensus on the importance of this.”

The EU resolution calls for a review into how the novel coronavirus spread after making the jump from animals to humans, believed to have happened at a market in the Chinese city of Wuhan late last year.

On Monday, the WHO said an independent review of the global coronavirus response would begin as soon as possible. Even as Trump has proposed quitting, the body received backing and a two-year pledge of $2 billion in funds from China’s President Xi Jinping.

The EU text calls on WHO director-general Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus to initiate an “impartial, independent and comprehensive evaluation” of the international health response to COVID-19 “at the earliest appropriate moment.”

During his three years in office, Trump has criticised many international organisations and quit some. Still, European diplomats said they were taken aback by Washington’s decision to stand aside at the WHO while China is boosting its role.

“It was so striking to see Xi Jinping seizing the opportunity to open up, with broad (cooperation), and make a proposal for $2 billion, and say if ever there is a vaccine they will share it with everyone,” a European diplomat said.

“It’s exactly what we feared: the space liberated by Washington will be taken up by China.”

Additional reporting by Emma Farge; Editing by Peter Graff

24. Leaked Pentagon memo warns of 'real possibility' of COVID-19 resurgence, vaccine not coming until summer 2021 – 5/19

Task & Purpose | Haley Britzky

The Defense Department should prepare to operate in a "globally-persistent" novel coronavirus (COVID-19) environment without an effective vaccine until "at least the summer of 2021," according to a draft Pentagon memo obtained by Task & Purpose.

"We have a long path ahead, with the real possibility of a resurgence of COVID-19," reads the memo, authored for Secretary of Defense Mark Esper but not yet bearing his signature.

"Therefore, we must now re-focus our attention on resuming critical missions, increasing levels of activity, and making necessary preparations should a significant resurgence of COVID-19 occur later this year."

Despite its grim forecast, the draft document lays out a framework for the U.S. military's proverbial reopening, which includes the resumption of training exercises, increased operational tempo, and the repositioning of forces and supplies to fight the global pandemic.

A Pentagon spokeswoman said the document was outdated but declined to provide more specifics.

The memo was prepared by Kenneth Rapuano, assistant secretary of defense for homeland defense and global security, and is intended to update previous guidance issued by Esper on April 1, 2020. It's unclear if Esper has seen the memo.

The document has not been officially released, and could see changes since being circulated among the military services at the beginning of May for feedback, a defense official said on condition of anonymity.

“All indications suggest we will be operating in a globally-persistent COVID-19 environment in the months ahead,” the memo reads. “This will likely continue until there is wide-scale immunity, through immunization, and some immunity post-recovery from the virus.”

The Pentagon framework for operations in a "persistent COVID-19 environment" relies on a number of assumptions, including the chance of successive waves of infection, continued shortages of personal protective equipment, and a lack of a viable treatment or vaccine for COVID-19 until at least next summer.

More waves of infection will occur “in clusters” that will coincide with the seasonal flu season, the memo suggests, while testing “will not provide 100% assurance of the absence” of the virus.

The planning framework detailed in the draft memo also calls for an increase in testing and surveillance, expanded contract tracing capabilities, and the use of a registry “to track and closely monitor outcomes of those infected with COVID-19.”

The memo stands in contrast to more optimistic assessments given by Trump administration officials, including Esper, who said Friday the Pentagon would "deliver by the end of this year a vaccine at scale to treat the American people and our partners abroad."

"We'd love to see if we can do it prior to the end of the year," President Donald Trump said Friday. "We think we're going to have some very good results coming out very quickly."

The top Pentagon spokesman later clarified the end of year timeline was merely "a goal."

Meanwhile, Dr. Anthony Fauci, the director of the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases, recently stated that it's "doable" to have a vaccine ready in January "if things fall in the right place."

"Remember, go back in time, I was saying in January and February that it would be a year to 18 months, so January is a year, so it isn't that much from what I had originally said," Fauci said on NBC's Today Show, adding that the goal is "aspirational."

Army researchers also pointed to the 12-18 month timeframe for when a vaccine would be deemed safe to use in early March. But some experts say that even 12-18 months might not be enough time.

Dr. Amesh Adalja, a senior scholar and infectious disease physician at the Johns Hopkins University Center for Health Security, recently told the New York Times that "everything would have to go perfect" in order to have a vaccine by January 2021.

“Vaccine development doesn’t always go as predicted,” Adalja told the Times. “There are a lot of hiccups in the production process. We’re going faster than we ever have with a vaccine, but we have to be prepared for things to slow down once we get further along.”

25. China's 'Wolf Warrior' Diplomats Are Ready to Fight – 5/19

The Chinese Foreign Ministry has adopted an aggressive new stance, spurred by Beijing's push to increase its global influence

Wall Street Journal | Chun Han Wong, Chao Deng

Beijing's envoy in Paris promised a fight with France should China's interests be threatened, then engaged in a public spat with his host country over the coronavirus pandemic. The Chinese Embassy in Sri Lanka boasted of China's handling of the pandemic to an activist on Twitter who had fewer than 30 followers. Beijing canceled a nationwide tour by the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra after a tussle with the city's mayor over Taiwan.

As China asserts itself globally, its diplomats around the world are taking on foes big and small.

The brash new attitude, playing out on social media, in newsprint and across negotiating tables, marks a turn for China's once low-key diplomats. It's part of a deliberate shift within the Foreign Ministry, spurred on by Chinese leaders seeking to claim what they see as their nation's rightful place in the world, in the face of an increasingly inward-looking U.S.

China's state media describe it as a "Wolf Warrior" ethos—named for a nationalistic Chinese film franchise about a Rambo-like soldier-turned-security contractor who battles American-led mercenary groups.

The feuding has escalated as the Foreign Ministry seeks to enforce China's narratives on the coronavirus pandemic, bickering with Western powers and even some friendly countries.

In Venezuela, a major recipient of Beijing's aid, the Chinese embassy lashed out at local legislators who described the pathogen that causes Covid-19 as the "China coronavirus." Those legislators, the embassy said in a March statement on its website, were suffering from a "political virus."

"Since you are already very sick from this, hurry up to ask for proper treatment," the statement said. "The first step might be to wear the masks and shut up." China's Foreign Ministry and the embassy didn't respond to requests for comment.

One of Beijing's most aggressive diplomats is its envoy in Paris, Lu Shaye.

"Every time the Americans make an allegation, the French media always report them a day or two later," Mr. Lu told French newspaper L'Opinion last month about coverage of China's handling of the coronavirus. "They howl with the wolves, to make a big fuss about lies and rumors about China."

Mr. Lu and the embassy didn't respond to requests for comment.

For decades, Chinese diplomats had largely heeded the words of Deng Xiaoping, the reformist leader who exhorted his countrymen to "hide our light and bide our time"—keeping a low profile while accumulating China's strengths.

Beijing became more outspoken as its economic power grew. This trend accelerated under Chinese leader Xi Jinping, who has staked his legitimacy on a "China Dream" of restoring national glory and pursued an increasingly uncompromising posture in international affairs.

Much of the growing assertiveness is aimed at stoking national pride back home—a key tool in the ruling Communist Party's political playbook—and rebalancing the international order in ways that promote the party's interests. Under Mr. Xi, China has cast itself as a responsible world power, offering leadership in global governance and pouring loans and aid into developing countries.

"Chinese citizens increasingly expect the Chinese government to stand tall and be proud in the world," said Jessica Chen Weiss, a Cornell University associate professor who has studied the role of nationalism in China's foreign relations. "What China really wants under Xi Jinping is a world that is safe for his continued leadership."

In pursuing a more pugnacious style, the Communist Party is pushing to capitalize on a U.S. retreat from global institutions under President Trump's "America First" approach. China has worked to increase its influence in international organizations, such as the United Nations, that the Trump administration has disparaged.

Mr. Xi has ramped up the Communist Party's control over the Foreign Ministry, whose officials had been suspected by some within the party to be less ideologically committed due to their interactions with foreign cultures and counterparts.

Last year, Qi Yu, a specialist in ideological training with no prior diplomatic experience, became the Foreign Ministry's Communist Party secretary—an unusual appointment for a post traditionally held by a vice foreign minister. A former deputy chief of the party's powerful personnel department, Mr. Qi has often stressed loyalty to Mr. Xi's agenda and reiterated his demands for a more combative posture in foreign affairs.

Chinese diplomats must "firmly counterattack against words and deeds in the international arena that assault the leadership of China's Communist Party and our country's socialist system," Mr. Qi wrote in an essay published December.

Chinese diplomats have displayed flashes of truculence in the past, chiefly on core interests like disputed territorial claims, foreign visits by the Dalai Lama and perceived pro-independence activism by other figures Beijing sees as separatist threats. They have pushed Beijing's narratives on a much wider range of issues lately, from its treatment of Muslim minorities to Chinese aid and loans to developing countries.

In Prague, Chinese diplomats have tussled with Mayor Zdeněk Hřib, a 38-year-old from the Pirate Party, who flies the Tibetan flag at city hall. At a New Year's gathering in the mayor's official residence last year, Mr. Hřib refused a demand from the Chinese ambassador to kick out a Taiwanese representative mingling with other diplomats, according to diplomats present and Czech media reports.

Mr. Hřib had also insisted on removing a "one China" clause, which refers to China's territorial claims over Taiwan, from Prague's sister-city pact with Beijing.

Beijing responded by calling off a 14-city China tour by the Prague Philharmonic Orchestra. After Mr. Hřib moved to scrap the sister cities agreement, the Chinese embassy issued a Facebook post warning Prague to "change its approach as soon as possible.... Otherwise, the city's own interests will suffer." Plans for China tours by other Czech music ensembles have since unraveled.

"They didn't see us as a partner," Mr. Hřib said in an interview, referring to the Chinese government. "They saw us as their subordinates." The embassy didn't respond to requests for comment.

The pandemic has provided the biggest test of China's Wolf Warrior diplomacy. As other governments struggled to contain the coronavirus, Beijing trumpeted its iron-fisted response and won praise for providing critical medical gear to countries in need. It also pushed back at critics who questioned its early handling of the contagion.

In February, the Chinese Embassy in Nepal said it lodged complaints with Nepal's Kathmandu Post and "reserves the right of further action" after the English-language newspaper, with a circulation of less than 100,000, ran a syndicated opinion piece criticizing China's coronavirus response that featured an image of a Chinese yuan note with Mao Zedong wearing a face mask.

Diplomats and state media have denounced U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo for claiming that the coronavirus may have spread from a Chinese lab. After Beijing's envoy to Australia hinted at economic repercussions for Canberra's push for a coronavirus inquiry, China this month suspended imports from four Australian meat-processing companies, citing regulatory violations. It also imposed anti-dumping and antisubsidy tariffs totaling 80.5% on Australian barley. Australia described the meat-related infractions as "minor technical breaches" and denied dumping or subsidizing its barley exports to China.

Twitter has emerged as a key battleground for Chinese diplomats, especially after the Foreign Ministry promoted Zhao Lijian, a prolific Twitter user previously assigned to the Chinese Embassy in Pakistan, as one of its spokesmen in August. Mr. Zhao recently added fuel to a U.S.-China spat over the coronavirus's origins by pushing a theory to his more than 600,000 followers that the pathogen was brought to China by the U.S. military—an allegation that Washington has denied.

Chinese diplomatic accounts now total at least 137, up from 38 a year ago, according to the Alliance for Securing Democracy, a Washington-based bipartisan advocacy group. The most active send out hundreds of tweets each month, on par with the most active diplomatic accounts of Russia.

"Total death in #China #pandemic is 3344 till today, much smaller than your western 'high class' governments," the Chinese Embassy in Sri Lanka wrote on Twitter last month in response to a Sri Lankan activist who had criticized Chinese censorship as "low class."

The activist, Chirantha Amerasinghe, who had fewer than 30 followers at the time and now has just over 40, said he was surprised the embassy responded by seemingly mocking other countries with higher death tolls. The embassy didn't respond to queries.

China's ambassador to France, Mr. Lu, has risen through the Foreign Ministry's ranks over the years as he advocated for tougher diplomacy. In a 2016 paper, published when he was policy-research director for the Communist Party's top foreign-policy committee, Mr. Lu said Chinese diplomats must battle with the West and convince more countries to "accept China, as a major Eastern power, standing at the top of the world."

As ambassador to Canada, Mr. Lu accused Ottawa of "Western egotism and white supremacy" over its late 2018 arrest, at Washington's request, of a top executive at Chinese tech giant Huawei Technologies Co.

In Paris, where Mr. Lu arrived last summer, he and the Chinese Embassy have racked up more than 50 media engagements in less than a year, including interviews, briefings and newspaper op-eds—nearly three times as many as his predecessor had logged over five years in the job.

"I hope I don't have to fight against France. The best is for us to work together," Mr. Lu said in August at his first media briefing as envoy in Paris, when asked how he would help China speak up internationally. "But if anything that harms our fundamental interests happens, then I would have to fight."

In April, the Chinese Embassy sparked outrage throughout France after it published an essay, attributed to a "Chinese diplomat stationed in Paris," that claimed nursing-home caregivers had abandoned residents to die. The essay also accused Taiwanese authorities, whom some French lawmakers supported, of using a racist slur against the World Health Organization's director-general—allegations that Taipei denied.

The embassy later published a clarification, saying the essay wasn't referring to French nursing homes and didn't allege that French lawmakers used the racist slur.

On Twitter, the embassy has argued with and blocked at least one critic. It also "liked" a number of posts criticizing the West, including one saying democracies fail to treat sick patients.

In his April interview with L'Opinion, Mr. Lu dismissed claims that Chinese diplomacy has become aggressive. "Rather, it's a form of proactive diplomacy," he said.

The U.S. and some other Western governments have pushed back against Beijing, accusing China of bungling its initial coronavirus response and calling for an international probe into the pathogen's origins. Some analysts say the squabbling has cost China a chance to earn global goodwill, exposing the limits of Beijing's reliance on abrasive rhetoric and material assistance to dissuade critics and win favor.

China is "making a lot of headway because they have a lot of resources," but its approach hasn't won it many friends, said Oriana Skylar Mastro, a Georgetown University assistant professor who studies Chinese security policy.

Signs of dissatisfaction with the Wolf Warrior approach have begun to surface among China's diplomatic old guard.

Fu Ying, a vice foreign minister from 2009 to 2013, wrote a newspaper commentary in April stressing that China must pay attention to how its messages are received by international audiences.

"A country's power in international discourse relates not just to its right to speak up on the global stage, but more to the effectiveness and influence of its discourse," Ms. Fu wrote in the party's flagship People's Daily.

In a recent interview widely shared on Chinese social media, Yuan Nansheng, a retired Chinese diplomat whose posts included ambassador to Zimbabwe and consul-general in San Francisco, said China's diplomacy "should get 'stronger' and not simply 'harder.' "

"History proves that when foreign policy gets hijacked by public opinion, it inevitably brings disastrous results," he said.

Drew Hinshaw contributed to this article.

26. More States Move to Reopen as Trump, China Spar Over WHO – 5/19

Chinese health official pushes back against idea promoted by Trump administration that Beijing hasn't been fully transparent

Wall Street Journal | Jennifer Calfas and Ruth Bender

U.S. states took further steps to ease restrictions imposed to slow the spread of the new coronavirus as confirmed cases in America topped 1.5 million and tensions heightened in some places over government responses to the pandemic.

More than two dozen states have lifted many curbs on businesses that have helped to slow the virus but damaged their economies. Governors in hard-hit states such as Massachusetts, Michigan and New York, who have taken gradual approaches to easing the measures, have detailed more steps to do so.

Connecticut will begin to loosen restrictions Wednesday, allowing restaurants to resume outdoor dining and malls, zoos and retailers to open. Gyms were reopening in Georgia, Oklahoma and Tennessee, with a patchwork of safety protocols. Nonurgent dental and medical procedures could resume in Washington state.

As more businesses reopened this week in Texas, restaurants there will be able to allow 50% capacity in dining rooms starting Friday, and bars can reopen at 25% capacity. The Lone Star State will also allow youth overnight and day camps to reopen by the end of the month, before the start of the summer.

The region near New York's capital city of Albany could enter its first phase of economic reopening Wednesday as the number of new reported cases and deaths in the state continued to fall. The state will begin a pilot program to allow visitors to return to hospitals, said Gov. Andrew Cuomo. Ceremonies with up to 10 people, as well as vehicle parades, will be allowed over Memorial Day.

Beaches around the U.S. will have social-distancing restrictions over the holiday weekend. Virginia Beach plans to reopen with 50% capacity Friday, and two Rhode Island beaches will be open on Memorial Day with reduced parking. New York City, meanwhile, won't permit swimmers at its beachesover Memorial Day weekend.

Public-health experts say that to reopen safely, communities need widespread testing and contact-tracing systems to find people who have come into contact with positive cases.

The U.S. and Canada agreed to extend a ban on nonessential travel across their shared border by another 30 days, Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau said Tuesday. The restrictions, which don't affect the billions in trade and commerce that cross the border daily, were set to expire on Thursday.

Some 4.8 million people world-wide have confirmed infections of the new coronavirus, according to data compiled by Johns Hopkins University, and more than 319,000 have died from Covid-19, the disease caused by the virus. The U.S. has reported more than 1.5 million cases and over 90,000 deaths, according to the data.

Experts caution that official numbers probably understate the extent of the pandemic, in part because of limited and differing testing capabilities as the virus spread.

India on Tuesday became the 11th country to surpass 100,000 confirmed cases of coronavirus. The coronavirus is also spreading rapidly in Brazil, where at least 116 nurses have diedfrom Covid-19, according to the country's Federal Nursing Council.

In the world's poorest countries, the pandemic is causing a humanitarian emergency that won't likely end until rich nations are able to safely reopentheir economies, World Bank President David Malpass said in an interview.

"The human toll in the developing world—in the poorest countries, in particular—from the shutdown is devastating," Mr. Malpass said. The World Bank estimates that 60 million people world-wide are likely to fall into extreme poverty this year, while hundreds of millions more could lose their jobs.

The economic fallout has heightened tensions around the globe.

U.S.-China relations over the pandemic strained further Tuesday as a Chinese health official pushed back against an idea promoted by the Trump administration that Beijing hadn't been fully transparent—a day after President Trump threatened to permanently cut off funding to the World Health Organization.

A resolution drafted by the European Union calling for an independent evaluation of the WHO's performance appeared to have the backing of a majority of the organization's 194 member states, and was set to pass Tuesday. Chinese President Xi Jinping said he supported investigating the handling of the pandemic—once the virus had been contained.

In the U.S., Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell and Treasury Secretary Steven Mnuchin were testifying Tuesday before the Senate Banking Committee, where they were pressed on the need for additional spendingto limit the economic damage from the current downturn.

Congress made $500 billion available to the Treasury through the $2 trillion economic-relief packagethat Mr. Trump signed into law in March.

The Republican-controlled Senate is considering a new $3 trillion coronavirus relief package passed last week by the Democratic-controlled House. The the bill is unlikely to become law as a whole, and its fate is tied to the partisan debate over how quickly the economy should reopen.

Reflecting the stresses leaders in many countries face as they try to balance the need to revive economies against the risk of a new wave of infection, court challenges have been multiplying in jurisdictions where coronavirus measures remain in place.

Washington state filed lawsuits against two gyms that were open despite the governor's orders. Washington Attorney General Bob Ferguson, who detailed the suits Tuesday, said both business owners had received more than one warning and "were endangering public health."

In Oregon, the state Supreme Court late Monday temporarily halted a county judge's ruling that nullified the Democratic governor's coronavirus-related restrictions. The lawsuit was brought by a number of churches in the state.

France's highest administrative court ordered the government to lift its ban on gatherings at places of worship, saying the measure was "disproportionate in nature" and pointing out that up to 10 people are now allowed to gather in public places.

Pakistan's Supreme Court ruled that all stores and shopping malls could open immediately, despite recent increases in identified coronavirus cases by about 2,000 a day.

Health officials warn that easing restrictions without extensive coronavirus testing is risky because new outbreaks could go unnoticed for too long.

In South Korea, a leader in widespread testing, health officials found that a group of patients who tested positive a second time for the coronavirus hadn't passed the disease on to others, lending credence to the possibility that the suspected relapses were a fluke of testingrather than the re-emergence of an active infection.

A recent flare-up in infections linked to nightclubs in the Seoul neighborhood of Itaewon appears to have slowed recently, with new infections staying below 20 for four consecutive days.

In Europe, two months of travel restrictions, business closings and stay-at-home orders that helped curb the contagion have been loosening, even as the virus lingers.

27. The Pentagon doesn't need more cash in a pandemic – 5/19

Washington Examiner | Daniel DePetris

The federal government is undergoing its tightest economic pinch since the Great Depression in the 1930s. Despite $2 trillion in emergency spending signed into law by President Trump, Federal Reserve Chairman Jerome Powell believes a full economic recovery is likely to stretch well into 2021. The budget deficit this year is already projected to reach $3.7 trillion, a number likely to rise as Congress debates another coronavirus-related spending bill.

As deficits increase and the mountain of national debt gets steeper, Pentagon officials and defense analysts in Washington are increasingly nervous about what the fiscal environment could mean for the U.S. defense budget. Defense Secretary Mark Esper has warned of a “reckoning” for his department, with many fearing a reversal of the Pentagon’s modernization projects.

The doom and gloom, however, is misplaced and grossly exaggerated.

The Pentagon will not only survive cost-cutting — if tailored properly, the U.S. military could actually come out of the exercise in a far healthier position. Defense policy in general could use a comprehensive review of what missions are truly important to our national security, which are second- and third-tier priorities, and which are total distractions.

Over the last two decades, policymakers in Washington have asked the military to execute tasks that have hobbled the joint force, diverted the attention of Pentagon strategists from more strategically important priorities, and driven out-of-control spending habits that will balloon the national debt to the same size as the U.S. economy. Nation-building projects in Iraq and Afghanistan have cost taxpayers more than $6 trillion, borrowed money that would have been better allocated toward filling the Strategic National Stockpile, rebuilding the nation's highways and bridges, and defending infrastructure from the cyberattacks that Washington’s adversaries are increasingly relying on. Wars of choice rather than necessity have essentially entrapped U.S. service members into no-win situations they should never have been involved with from the beginning. And rather than acknowledging and correcting the mistakes of the past, multiple administrations have doubled down under the dangerous assumption that the U.S. military can solve the unsolvable.

U.S. troops have been ill-served by their policymakers, many of whom strongly (but naively) believe that every problem in the world can be resolved at the hands of the U.S. military.

Ultimately, the Pentagon doesn't need more money. With a $762 billion budget in fiscal year 2020 (nearly 40% of the world's total military spending), the United States has more than enough funding to defend the country. What the Pentagon needs is a defense strategy guided by realism and restraint, which would eliminate peripheral missions that have only exacerbated the debt problem.

In sum, the Pentagon must do what real-world families do every day: prioritize and make difficult financial decisions.

Some of those decisions aren't even difficult. Withdrawing U.S. troops from the war in Afghanistan (a war that costs Washington $30 billion-$40 billion a year to sustain) would have the support of 73% of military veterans, many of whom fought on the front lines across multiple deployments. Ending U.S. involvement in the war would also be a late corrective to a counterterrorism mission that was frankly achieved in the first four or five months of the conflict.

The U.S. can also pare back in Europe — and in the process provide Washington's European allies and partners with an incentive to take their own military modernization seriously. European governments continue to make short shrift of their own defense budgets, confident in the notion that the continent can depend on the U.S. military as its first line of defense. Pentagon programs like the European Deterrence Initiative, which largely duplicate NATO's core deterrence function against Russia, makes the defense burden more difficult to implement and should be downsized or, ideally, eliminated.

The Pentagon should also stop pouring money into weapons systems and platforms that are outdated or losing their relevance in the 21st century. Defense Secretary Mark Esper acknowledged as much, arguing that his department needs "to move away from legacy [programs], and we need to invest those dollars into the future." This is logical. In fact, the more resources spent on legacy systems, the less that can be devoted to modernizing the military for an era of competition between great powers.

There are two major lessons to take from the monthslong coronavirus crisis: Resources are finite, and U.S. priorities have been skewed for far too long. The U.S. cannot afford business as usual — particularly in the domain of foreign policy.

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28. Citing financial cost of pandemic, House liberals demand cut in military spending – 5/19
Washington Post | Mike DeBonis

Twenty-nine of the House's most liberal Democratic members called Tuesday for a cut in military spending in the yearly national defense authorization bill — a declaration, they said, that is meant to focus federal resources on the coronavirus pandemic.

The demand, however, stands to greatly complicate the Democratic-controlled House's ability to advance the National Defense Authorization Act, one of the most consequential must-pass measures that Congress assembles each year. It is likely to generate objections from Republicans and more moderate Democrats alike — and create headaches for Speaker Nancy Pelosi (D-Calif.) and her leadership team.

The signers are almost all members of the Congressional Progressive Caucus, including lead sponsors Barbara Lee (Calif.) and Mark Pocan (Wis.), who have long called for lower levels of Pentagon spending to free more resources for domestic spending. But the pandemic, they argue, presents a new imperative for defense cuts.

"Right now, the coronavirus is our greatest adversary," said a draft of the letter circulated to House offices and obtained by The Washington Post. "We must remain focused on combating the coronavirus and not on

increasing military spending that already outpaces the next 10 closest nations combined. . . . At some point, spending more than every other nation on earth must be enough."

The letter is addressed to House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith (D-Wash.) and Rep. Mac Thornberry (Tex.), the panel's ranking Republican, and it comes as the panel begins the annual process of writing the defense bill and forwarding it to the House floor.

A committee spokeswoman did not immediately respond to a request for comment.

The liberal demands come less than six months after the last National Defense Authorization Act passed following an unusually partisan and contentious process in which several Democratic priorities championed by Congressional Progressive Caucus members were dropped from the final bill.

Pocan said in an interview that the left wing of the Democratic caucus is probably now less willing to tolerate a higher level of Pentagon spending in return for policy sweeteners knowing they were likely to be bargained away in negotiations with Senate Republicans and the White House.

"Now we've been through that. We know that probably a promise like that is not going to happen again," he said, arguing that the pandemic makes the liberal argument against rising defense spending more salient than ever.

"It's the most valid contrast I think you could ever have to defend," Pocan added. "What really defends our country right now is spending money with the [Centers for Disease Control and Prevention], with state and local governments, for providing the testing, the personal protection equipment, for all the things that people know really protect their family, and I think it's a good, sharp contrast to make."

With 29 signatures, the letter carries an implicit ultimatum: Should Democratic leaders move forward with an outsize defense bill, they will need to do so with Republican votes. The signers could together block the bill from passage if the GOP unites against Democrats, as it did last year.

Meanwhile, negotiating with Republican lawmakers — who have made increasing defense spending a top priority under President Trump — stands to alienate the mainstream members of the Democratic caucus, who are likely to insist on measures that restrict the Trump administration even if they are willing to stomach a higher spending level.

Among the signers are the four members of the House's hard-left "squad" — Reps. Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez (N.Y.), Ilhan Omar (Minn.), Ayanna Pressley (Mass.) and Rashida Tlaib (Mich.). But they also include senior House members such as Rules Committee Chairman Jim McGovern (Mass.), Transportation and Infrastructure Committee Chairman Peter A. DeFazio (Ore.), Small Business Committee Chairwoman Nydia M. Velázquez (N.Y.) and Natural Resources Committee Chairman Raul Grijalva (Ariz.). One, Rep. Ro Khanna (Calif.), is a member of the Armed Services Committee.

The letter comes at a time when there are eminent questions about how willing the hard left is to use its leverage in the House to force the broader Democratic caucus in its direction — much as the hard-right House Freedom Caucus used its sway when Republicans held the majority.

Just last week, liberals fumed as Pelosi kept favored Progressive Caucus priorities out of a $3 trillion coronavirus relief bill. But only one member on the caucus's left — CPC co-chair Pramila Jayapal (D-Wash.) — voted against it.

Under the Trump administration the military budget has risen roughly 20 percent as Democrats have traded Pentagon spending increases to secure matching hikes in domestic spending.

Last year's House-passed bill garnered broad liberal support due to the inclusion of several policy provisions favored by the party's left, such as ending U.S. military support for Saudi involvement in Yemen, requiring a

congressional authorization for any military action targeting Iran, reversing Trump's ban on transgender military service, and restricting the Trump administration's ability to transfer funds to border wall construction.

The final bill negotiated with the Senate dropped all of those provisions, and while it ultimately included paid parental leave for all federal workers, it left many liberals fuming.

The bill ultimately authorized $738 billion in spending — less than the $750 billion the Trump administration wanted but much more than the $644 billion the Progressive Caucus had initially floated.

Smith at the time said it remained the "most progressive defense bill we have passed in decades" and touted wins elsewhere in the bill, including measures dealing with military housing and restrictions on the use of certain toxic chemicals.

Now, the left sees a completely different political landscape. Lee said in a statement that the pandemic "has laid bare how America has failed to make its budgets reflect the real needs of our everyday families."

"It's long past time that we address our bloated military budget and retarget resources towards policies and programs that matter the most for keeping us safe, healthy, and secure," she said.

Pocan said Progressive Caucus members know that cutting defense spending, which flows into virtually every House district, will be an uphill battle. But he argued the present circumstances should make the public more receptive to the argument for a lower Pentagon budget.

"Right now, people really desperately need money in their district, and we don't get calls asking us to build more F-35s," he said. "We're getting calls to make sure that we've got more masks and gowns and personal protection equipment for people who are in hospitals and police and fire and other front-line personnel. So I do think this is a unique moment to really show that contrast."

29. Xi's Taiwan problem isn't going away – 5/19

Washington Post | Ishaan Tharoor

Chinese President Xi Jinping took center stage Monday. Over a video feed, he delivered the opening speech at an annual meeting held by the World Health Organization, casting his nation as an exemplar of "transparency" during the pandemic and a champion of the developing world. Xi announced a $2 billion commitment to the international fight against the novel coronavirus, including funding to help reinforce health infrastructure in Africa.

That move drew an immediate contrast to President Trump, whose administration has frozen funding to the WHO amid its ongoing squabbles with the U.N. agency over its initial handling of the outbreak and supposed acquiescence to China.

Xi had other reasons to pat himself on the back. Ahead of the meeting, there were mounting calls from various countries, including the United States, for an investigation into the origins of the outbreak, centered on the Chinese city of Wuhan. But as global support for an inquiry grew, its focus shifted in Xi's favor. "Drafts of the proposed resolution showed a focus on international collaboration to manage the pandemic, with relatively limited emphasis on questioning its source," my colleagues Gerry Shih, Emily Rauhala and Josh Dawsey reported.

The Chinese president placed himself at the forefront of global efforts to produce a vaccine, extolled the necessity of "information-sharing" and the virtues of "openness," and sidestepped the many grievances over China's conduct during the pandemic.

Then, there was Taiwan. Ahead of the meeting, the United States and 28 other countries called for Taiwan to be admitted to the meeting as an observer, given its success in recognizing the coronavirus threat early and warding it off at home. Beijing, though, views the island as a part of China and has spent decades trying to make its

government an international pariah. Ultimately, the WHO did not extend an invitation to Taiwan, which withdrew its bid for observer status.

Secretary of State Mike Pompeo used the occasion to castigate WHO Director General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus, who critics say has been too conciliatory to Beijing. "The Director-General's lack of independence deprives the Assembly of Taiwan's renowned scientific expertise on pandemic disease, and further damages the WHO's credibility and effectiveness at a time when the world needs it the most," Pompeo said in a statement.

He has hinted at the prospect of the United States forging an alternate body to supplant the WHO. But for now, the Trump administration's histrionics have seen its influence in multilateral organizations wane — not least in the failed standoff over Taiwan's observer status.

But even if it's not present in this week's major meetings, Taiwan is having a global moment. Its deft management of the crisis — with only seven reported coronavirus-related deaths — was a mark of efficient, transparent governance and a society with recent experience handling deadly outbreaks. Like China, Taiwan launched its own soft-power initiative to send medical aid and relief around the world, efforts that won widespread plaudits, especially in countries where public attitudes are souring on Beijing.

"Taiwan has provided supplies and health assistance not only to friendly states, but also to countries in Asia, Africa and South America that have close ties with China," my colleagues reported. "It has routed face-mask donations to China-friendly African countries through the Vatican, one of Taipei's few diplomatic allies, and held an online medical seminar with doctors from countries that have recently switched ties from Taipei to Beijing, including the Dominican Republic and El Salvador. A recent Twitter campaign for Taiwan's participation in the assembly gained a push from Twitter users in India, Thailand and Hong Kong."

"The 23 million people of Taiwan want greater international participation, and the government will take full advantage of the growing momentum in world support to get it," Jaushieh Joseph Wu, Taiwan's foreign affairs minister, said in a statement Monday.

Despite not being officially recognized by the United States, Taiwan has also stepped up cooperation with Washington, including a flurry of Cabinet-level meetings. "In a way this relationship makes a lot of sense," Matthew Kroenig, deputy director of the Atlantic Council's Scowcroft Center for Strategy and Security, said during a webinar on Monday. "Taiwan does have shared interests. It's an example of a successful, open-market democracy in Asia."

There's a limit to what this soft power can achieve. Unable to compete with China's economic and political clout, Taiwan has seen its already small list of diplomatic backers diminish. Like its predecessors, the Trump administration maintains the delicate status quo of not officially recognizing Taiwan's de facto sovereignty, while warning against any potential unilateral Chinese efforts to reclaim the island.

Rising anti-Taiwan jingoism in China has also been accompanied by more aggressive military posturing, with Beijing sailing a battle group, including an aircraft carrier, twice around the island in April. In Taiwan, meanwhile, attitudes toward China are hardening. A number of recent polls have found that considerable majorities of Taiwanese view the United States more favorably than China and see their national identity as "Taiwanese" — not "Chinese," as would be hoped for adherents of a "one-China policy."

That's troubling for Xi, who earlier in his tenure staked a degree of his political legitimacy on plans to "reunite" the island with the mainland. With many of China's neighbors growing increasingly wary of Beijing, and a liberal, pro-independence government firmly in command in Taipei, Xi's vision of peaceful reunification looks all the more improbable.