Overview: Driving coverage of the pandemic was the Department of Labor’s release of the May jobs report which indicated an increase of 2.5 million jobs in the past month, which Pres. Trump hailed as “the greatest comeback in American history.” Leading defense-related coverage were U.S. Navy plans to prevent coronavirus exposure for sailors at sea and an 11 percent increase in infections this week among DoD personnel.

Other DoD-related News:
- ABC reported on the Navy’s plan to limit ports of call to designated “safe havens” in order to maintain a “COVID-free bubble.” The article noted that the plan draws upon lessons learned from the “mass outbreaks” aboard the USS Theodore Roosevelt and the USS Kidd and also detailed how crew will be quarantined and tested before a deployment. Additionally, the Navy and CDC’s investigation into the USS Roosevelt outbreak will be released “next week,” Vice Adm. Phillip Sawyer told reporters (Military.com).
- Military Times reported that coronavirus cases “spiked” this week, with an 11-percent jump marking the biggest increase in cases since mid-April. The article also noted that the increase comes as DoD is working to ease restrictions around the world and said “the latest numbers show the services are not on a downward trend, and neither are other DoD-affiliated groups.”
- Lt. Gen Kevin Schneider, commander of U.S. Forces Japan, told Reuters that China is using the coronavirus as a cover to push territorial claims in the South China Sea through a surge in naval activity meant to intimidate other countries that claim the waters.
- AFP reported on the start of Exercise Allied Spirit between U.S. and Polish troops. The outlet noted it was “one of the first big European military exercises” since the pandemic began and highlighted the safety precautions being taken to prevent the spread of the virus.

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1. Because of COVID-19 pandemic Navy to start 'safe haven' ports of call for its ships – 6/5

The goal is to keep ships at sea as "Covid-free bubbles."

ABC News | Luis Martinez

As the USS Theodore Roosevelt left Guam on Thursday to resume a deployment interrupted for more than two months by an outbreak of the novel coronavirus, it headed out to sea enforcing health and safety practices that will now become standard for the foreseeable future on U.S. Navy ships. And in an effort to keep a "COVID-free bubble" for its sailors at sea during the pandemic, the Navy will only allow ports of call at a select number of Navy bases around the world that will serve as "safe havens."

"We remain focused on protecting our total workforce, it remains our top priority," Vice Admiral Phillip Sawyer, Deputy Chief of Naval Operations for Operations, Plans, and Strategy, who is in charge of the Navy's COVID-19 response, told reporters earlier this week. "We will continue to operate in what we call the new normal COVID environment."

Many of the Navy's health and safety practices to prevent the spread of the coronavirus were lessons learned from the mass outbreaks of the virus aboard the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt and the USS Kidd, a guided-missile destroyer. Including regular testing, the wearing of masks and social distancing are practiced in all Navy units, but a main focus is on ships at sea where close quarters can facilitate a quick spread of the virus among the crew.

Now, before Navy ships head out on a deployment, crews are tested and quarantined so that no one will bring the virus aboard a ship. To ensure that the ships remain a "COVID-free bubble," the Navy is now developing new rules for where its ships can make ports of call.

"Anytime that you're going to allow a threat vector into your bubble, you have to be concerned," Sawyer said. "Whether that's logistics coming over from a tanker, a COD flight coming in, or a ship, going into a port. And so, we are developing those procedures in our ports, as we speak." COD flights are the fixed wing aircraft that transport supplies and personnel aboard aircraft carriers.

The initial suspicion was that the crew of the Roosevelt became infected with the virus during a port of call in Vietnam in March, but Navy officials now believe the virus came aboard the ship via flight crews that arrived on the vessel.

Sawyer said that for now, the Naval base at Guam will be a "COVID-free bubble" for ships in the Pacific region so they can make a port of call and plans are in the works for the same at a base in the Middle East and another in the Mediterranean.

"We've got a couple of locations that we've identified that we're doing the same on, so that we can pull in and get R&R for the crew, a chance to relax a little bit, get some burgers, swim in the water."

While setting up the bubbles at U.S. Naval facilities is a challenge, Sawyer said an even bigger challenge would be enabling a port of call at a non-U.S. facility overseas.

"Areas under our control, the ability to create safe havens, certainly is the first step," said Rear Adm. Bruce Gillingham, the Navy's Surgeon General. "How we do that in cooperation with our host and partner nations I think, will then follow."

Beyond the setup in Guam, a Navy spokesperson noted that the USS Blue Ridge, the command ship for the Navy's Seventh Fleet, conducted a "safe haven" port of call at Okinawa two weeks ago.
Sawyer said the testing and social distancing requirements are not intended to be long-term changes, but they will remain in place until a vaccine is developed. However, he acknowledged that it is a prospect that may not be possible for a year to 18 months from now at the earliest.

For the rest of its deployment in the western Pacific, the crew of the Roosevelt will be required to wear masks at all times, maintain social distancing and constantly disinfect the ship.

The coronavirus outbreak on the carrier ultimately infected nearly a quarter of the 4,865 sailors on the ship, including one who died.

As the carrier left Guam on Thursday, 350 sailors remained behind, most of them still in isolation to recover from their illness and some of whom were left behind to provide them support and care.

Sailors who recover from the virus will be flown back to the carrier while it is in the area, but those who will need more time will be flown to their next assignment.

2. Virus tests, troop distancing at US-Polish wargames – 6/5
   Agence France-Presse | Not Attributed

Thousands of US and Polish troops launched Friday one of the first big European military exercises since the coronavirus pandemic began, with testing, quarantines and social distancing present and accounted for.

US authorities were forced to suspend the Defender-Europe 20 manoeuvres, originally planned for May, as the pandemic forced lockdowns in the US and Poland, where the scaled-back wargames are now underway.

More than 6,000 soldiers from the two countries, including 4,000 US troops, will participate in the exercises until June 19 at the northern Drawsko Pomorskie military training range.

"All personnel will undergo testing for COVID-19 upon arrival" and have had to undergo quarantine before or after arrival, US Army spokeswoman Beth Clemons said in a statement sent to AFP.

"Cloth face coverings, additional sanitation and other protective measures are strictly enforced" in areas where soldiers cannot abide by social distancing, she added.

"The number of participants was also reduced to allow for increased physical distance," Clemons explained.

Originally planned to be the largest joint US-Europe war games in 25 years, the drills were to have drawn about 37,000 soldiers from 18 NATO countries.

Plans had called for the US-run manoeuvres to be held in Germany, Poland and the Baltic States.

The Pentagon had wanted to send more than 20,000 soldiers to the exercises but the pandemic prompted it to freeze military movement around the world.

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

Poland has long regarded the United States as the primary guarantor of its security within the NATO Western defence alliance.

US President Donald Trump upped his country's troop rotations in Poland to 5,500 personnel as part of a wider NATO response to concerns in the region triggered by Russia's 2014 annexation of territory from neighbouring Ukraine.
Hundreds of thousands of Yemenis face what experts fear could be one of the world's worst coronavirus outbreaks, raising concerns of a staggering death toll after the United Nations began cutting aid to the war-torn nation.

The cuts came after UN appeals for $2.42 billion in funding fell short by about 50% this week.

"In the countdown to closure there will have to be much wider cuts to Yemen at a time when the country is now facing the growing impact of the virus pandemic on people who are already badly malnourished and ill equipped to cope with it," Lise Grande, the head of the UN's humanitarian operations in Yemen told CNN, in a phone call from Sana'a on Wednesday, the capital of the divided nation.

"General health services in 189 of the country's 369 hospitals start to close in three weeks. Water and sanitation services for 8.5 million people, including 3 million children, close in three weeks. Nutrition support for 2.5 million malnourished starving children will start to close in eight to 10 weeks," she warned.

On Tuesday this week donors pledged $1.35 billion of the $2.42 billion the UN said Yemen needed in a virtual conference. "The worst-case scenario -- which is the one we're facing now -- means that the death toll from the virus could exceed the combined toll of war, disease and hunger over the last five years [in Yemen]," Grande told CNN.

According to Armed Conflict Location and Event Data Project, just over 112,000 people have been killed in Yemen's civil war over five years -- among the dead are 12,690 civilians.

Estimates for the numbers of people who have died from disease and malnutrition in the country have varied widely. But the UN and other aid organizations are delivering humanitarian assistance to 10 million Yemenis. A cholera epidemic has, the UN believes, already infected 110,000 people this year.

Four out of five Yemenis need "lifesaving aid," UN Secretary-General Antonio Guterres said at the conference on Tuesday, adding that Yemen faced one of the highest death tolls in the world from Covid-19. The country has a negligible capacity to test for coronavirus but medical aid agencies also believe the scale of infections could be vast.

This week health services for women giving birth in 150 hospitals supported by the UN were closed in the first wave of the cuts after the funding conference.

Yemen's five-year civil war has pitted Houthi rebels against the internationally recognized government, which has been backed by the UAE and Saudi Arabia.

Earlier this year the Emiratis pulled their military out of the conflict but continues to back the government, which is in exile in Saudi Arabia. Riyadh, meanwhile, has continued to back and fund tribal militias and its air force has had a punishing effect on the ground.

Much of the shortfall in new funding is being blamed on the apparent failure of Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates and Kuwait to come forward with a combined pledge which, in previous years, has been for about $1.5 billion. This year the UAE and Kuwait did not offer any funds to the UN effort and Saudi Arabia offered $500 million of which $300 million was to be earmarked specifically for the UN.

Saudi Arabia has been keen to get out of the quicksand since late last year. The war has undermined support for Saudi Arabia in Washington, where renewed arms supplies to the Kingdom from the US have only been possible as a result of the Trump administration's use of emergency powers to get around a block on arms exports to Saudi Arabia imposed by Congress.
Some diplomats believe that the cut in funding to the UN by Gulf countries may be, in part, an attempt to force the Houthis to peace talks.

Aid to areas under Houthi control has frequently been diverted and manipulated by the rebel administration in Sanaa. The UN's World Food Programme has frequently complained about the Houthis' diversion of food -- and the US cut funding to the program to force improvement.

The US support, $225 million, to the WFP was only returned recently after the Houthis agreed to stop aid workers from being harassed and a wide range of "taxes" on aid coming into the area under their control.

Saudi Arabia and the UAE say they want to continue to help Yemen with aid -- but insist it should not be diverted to the Houthi war effort. In the Emirates it is understood that the government is trying to find ways to continue to fund aid operations.

"The UAE has spared no effort in providing medical assistance to support countries affected by Covid-19 by cooperating with international organizations, wherein UAE assistance amounted to $135 million from the beginning of March until the end of May," Reem al Hashimy, the Emirati minister for international cooperation said in a statement to CNN.

"Moreover, the UAE Red Crescent continues to work in Yemen to provide a helping hand to our Yemeni brothers, and we deeply regret the loss of two of its staff killed by terrorists in March. However, this will not deter us from delivering upon our mission and humanitarian duty," al Hashimy added.

But it is not clear to UN officials how that "duty" can be fulfilled while, as one senior UN official put it, "our operations go into near collapse."

4. WHO shifts guidance on masks and urges governments to encourage people to wear them – 6/5

CNN Health | Jacqueline Howard

The World Health Organization (WHO) is now calling for nations to encourage the general public to wear fabric masks in areas where there continues to be intense spread of the novel coronavirus. All health workers and caregivers are also encouraged to wear masks during their shifts.

"WHO advises that governments should encourage the general public to wear masks where there is widespread transmission and physical distancing is difficult, such as on public transport, in shops or in other confined or crowded environments," WHO Director-General Tedros Adhanom Ghebreyesus said during a media briefing in Geneva on Friday.

Here's what the WHO's new recommendations say:

- "In areas with community transmission, we advise that people aged 60 years or over, or those with underlying conditions, should wear a medical mask in situations where physical distancing is not possible," Tedros said.
- "In areas with widespread transmission, WHO advises medical masks for all people working in clinical areas of a health facility, not only workers dealing with patients with Covid-19," WHO's Director-General added.
- WHO recommends that where there is widespread transmission, limited capacity to contain Covid-19 outbreaks and physical distancing of at least a meter can not be achieved, then governments should encourage their public to wear a fabric mask, Maria Van Kerkhove, WHO's technical lead for coronavirus response and head of the emerging diseases and zoonoses unit, told CNN.

The new guidance recommends for these fabric masks — which can be homemade — to be at least three layers: an inner layer of an absorbent material such as cotton; a middle layer that acts like a filter or barrier, such as non-woven material polypropylene; and an outer layer of a non-absorbent material, such as polyester or polyester blend.
Van Kerkhove also said to avoid materials that may be silk, stretchy or porous.

Remember: These updated recommendations announced on Friday, are a shift from what WHO previously advised on masks, which was to not wear them if you are not sick or not caring for someone who is sick, in an effort to keep masks available for health workers.

Tedros added that the new guidance was updated based on evolving evidence.

5. Defense Department coronavirus cases spiked this week, passing 10,000 – 6/5

Military Times | Meghann Myers

The Pentagon is reporting 10,462 COVID-19 diagnoses as of Friday, meaning this week saw the biggest increase in cases since mid-April, the height of the Defense Department’s curve.

After weeks of lowering or stabilizing numbers, 1,013 service members, civilians, dependents and contractors tested positive in the last seven days, an 11-percent jump. The spike comes as DoD is moving toward relaxing travel and base access restrictions, while shifting its strategy for delivering COVID-19 information, discontinuing a daily press release and moving the information online.

The defense secretary’s office “anticipates providing updated numbers until August where we will evaluate if there is a need to continue,” Cmndr. Sean Robertson wrote in a release Friday.

This week’s new case load is the highest since April 24, which saw 1,364 new cases in the preceding seven days. The last week of May saw 499.

The biggest jump came from the contractor community, where cases increased by 17 percent, or 107, to 613 overall. They had gone up 11 percent the previous week.

The next jump came from service members, with 7,029 cases overall, 751 new this week, for a 12-percent jump. Despite that increase troops still have a 0.3-percent infection rate, compared to more than 0.5 percent nationwide.

With 2,546 cases, the Navy is still the most affected service — they saw 130 new cases this week, or a 6-percent increase, for 36 percent of troop cases overall.

But the Army’s numbers took a huge jump over the past seven days, by more than 30 percent, for 1,815 total now.

As the largest service, with rotational forward-deployments on four continents and a consistent presence in Iraq, Afghanistan and Syria, the Army has the most personnel who fit into one of the mandatory 100-percent testing categories — which include counter-terror units and any personnel preparing to deploy or redeploy.

During the same period, the Air Force increased 13 percent, to 571 cases, while the Marine Corps crept up 7 percent, to 589 cases.

Finally, the National Guard, which has mobilized more than 80,000 troops in support of COVID-19 pandemic relief and protest response, saw a 5-percent increase in coronavirus cases, up to 1,373.

“Re-opening”

The spike in COVID-19 cases comes as DoD is rolling out plans to ease travel and base access restrictions around the world.
One of the main criteria for both instances includes a 14-day downward trend in new cases in communities surrounding installations. While that might be true for some locations, the latest numbers show the services are not on a downward trend, and neither are other DoD-affiliated groups.

Civilians and dependents also saw increased cases this week — 101 and 87, respectively — after bumped of 64 and 54 the previous week.

6. Military exchange, MWR operations hit hard by effects of pandemic – 6/5

Military Times | Karen Jowers

The military exchanges and services’ morale, welfare and recreation programs have taken a big financial hit that is straining their entire operations because of the effects of the pandemic.

The Department of Defense comptroller has agreed to pump in nearly $308 million to the services’ MWR programs out of the $10.5 billion in DoD COVID-19 funding provided by Congress, according to a document obtained by Military Times. The funding will ensure no MWR employees will be furloughed. Information was not available about whether any COVID money is going to the exchanges.

Without enough revenue coming in to cover mandatory expenses such as salaries and utilities, “the cash available for recovery will quickly be depleted and may cause insolvency across NAF operations,” stated the comptroller document, signed by acting comptroller Elaine McCusker. Non-appropriated funds, or NAF, come from fees, sales and other revenue that is not taxpayer funding.

Over 55,500 employees in the services’ MWR programs “are facing immediate risk of furlough resulting from COVID-19 closures of morale, welfare and recreation facilities,” according to the document. The funding will primarily cover two months of salaries of these workers in the Category C non-appropriated fund, or NAF, activities that rely on income generated by programs and services. That includes about 12,000 employees in each of the Category C MWR programs in the Army, Navy, and Marine Corps, and an additional 19,000 employees in the Air Force programs that are at risk of furlough.

Any additional projected salary costs and other operating expenses beyond those two months’ worth will require more funding, according to the comptroller. The pandemic closures and effects started in mid-March; many MWR programs are still closed.

Among those who could be affected are the employees in many of the services’ child development centers who are paid by NAF — parent fees and other money, such as part of the profits from the military exchanges. It also includes NAF employees working at food operations, fitness centers, golf courses, outdoor recreation, libraries, youth centers, bowling alleys, lodging facilities and other MWR activities.

Throughout the pandemic, DoD has required that all MWR employees be paid, even as many MWR activities that generate income have been shut down.

The document provides a detailed accounting of DoD’s plan to spend each dollar of the $10.5 billion in supplemental funding from the Coronavirus Aid, Relief, and Economic Security Act, or CARES Act. The overall CARES Act was a package with more than $2 trillion in economic relief.

These Category C NAF programs — such as military exchanges, golf courses, most bowling alleys, lodging facilities and others — generally don’t get taxpayer dollars and are required to be self-sustaining. But aside from the CARES Act funding, defense officials recently issued a memo giving temporary authority for these Category C NAF programs to receive taxpayer funding for COVID-specific expenses. Although officials provided the authority, no dollars had been provided as of this writing.

Information was not immediately available from defense officials about whether the military exchanges will receive any of the COVID money, although the exchanges, like other retailers, have seen decreases in sales
and increases in costs related to additional requirements for cleaning, disinfecting, and personal protective equipment for employees.

The comptroller is also providing more than $28 million in additional COVID funding to the Defense Commissary Agency to pay for increasing hours of part-time store employees to help in extra store cleaning and disinfecting, and shelf stocking. It also helps pay for additional air shipments to Europe and the Pacific to meet the surge demand for products at overseas commissaries.

Here’s the breakdown of what the MWR programs are receiving.

Marine Corps MWR: Receiving $47.5 million in COVID money

Marine Corps MWR net losses in its fiscal year to date are significant compared to the same time last year — a 165 percent decrease in net profit, said Bryan Driver, spokesman for Marine Corps Business & Support Services. The time period is Feb. 2 to May 2. Officials are still working on projections for future losses related to the pandemic as installations develop their plans to reopen.

While impacts vary by command, in general the MWR programs that have suffered the greatest losses are Information Tickets and Tours, golf, bowling, and food and beverage operations, Driver said.

Army MWR: Receiving $57.2 million in COVID money

Information was not available about the economic impact, said Scott Malcom, spokesman for Army Installation Management Command, as the command is still working to gain a “full accounting” of the economic impact of pandemic-related service reductions and temporary program closures. It’s too early to tell what the consequences of any lost revenue will be, he said.

MWR activities that most rely on customers going to their facility and spending money — such as golf courses, bowling alleys and restaurants — are seeing the most impact, Malcom said.

Navy MWR: Receiving $99.2 million in COVID money

Between January and April, revenue was $18.7 million less than planned, and assuming most programs are able to reopen by some extent by July, the shortfall could grow to as much as $65 million by September, said Coleen San Nicolas-Perez, spokeswoman for Commander, Navy Installations Command. In addition, Navy MWR has continued to incur operating costs “in the face of significant revenue reductions resulting from closed or greatly reduced operations because of the pandemic,” she said. Like other DoD NAF programs, the Navy MWR continues to pay NAF employees during the pandemic.

The additional money in the form of more revenue or taxpayer funding is needed, San Nicolas-Perez said, to avoid having to reduce operations, defer the purchase of new equipment, or delay planned facility repairs.

Air Force MWR: Receiving $104 million in COVID money.

No information was available from Air Force officials about the effects on Air Force MWR to date.

Military exchanges

The exchanges have felt the impact, and this will likely greatly diminish the amount of dividends paid to support MWR programs, which further hurts the financial stability of MWR programs. The dividends come from profits the exchanges make through their sales.
For example, the Army and Air Force Exchange Service contributed $217 million to MWR programs in the services, coming from profits, in 2019. About 59 percent of AAFES profits goes to MWR programs; the remaining 41 percent goes for improvements to stores and the online ShopMyExchange.com shopping site.

The exchanges are considered Category C non-appropriated fund operations, and they rely on revenue from sales.

Exchange online sales have increased, reflecting trends across retail. But the bulk of their sales have traditionally come from the brick-and-mortar stores, and there have been decreases in foot traffic in all the services’ exchanges. There’s been a significant shift in the types of purchases, toward consumables and essential items, as opposed to items with higher profit margins such as electronics. There have been additional COVID-19 related personnel costs such as liberal use of administrative and sick leave. The exchanges have also had extra expenses related to getting personal protective gear for exchange employees, and for additional prescribed cleaning and disinfecting procedures.

Many of the exchanges’ profit-making services have been forced to shut down, depending on the installation. In some areas, barber and beauty shops, optical stores, flower shops, tailoring have shut down, and many food courts have had limited operations.

AAFES

“Without significant cost cutting and cash conservation efforts, [AAFES] projects operational losses of $300 million through September,” said AAFES spokesman Chris Ward. Officials have started mitigation efforts that will reduce that to a $150 million shortfall, he said — such as delays in store improvements, reducing inventory, and other measures.

Sales in AAFES brick-and-mortar stores were $407 million in April, a decrease of 20 percent compared to April, 2019. Online sales at ShopMyExchange.com were $58.3 million in April, up by 158 percent over April, 2019.

“AFFES will take all necessary steps to maintain solvency and protect the long-term viability of the benefit it provides, with or without [taxpayer dollar support],” he said.

Navy Exchange

Given the uncertainty of the pace of reopening of stores and service outlets, officials can’t predict the overall losses, said Courtney Williams, spokeswoman for the Navy Exchange Service Command. “However, we can expect significant negative impact to operating profit to continue for the foreseeable future,” said

From February through April, NEXCOM saw an operating loss of $20.4 million compared to the same period last year, instead of the $2.4 million increase in profits they had forecast.

Sales in Navy exchange brick-and-mortar stores were $259 million combined for March and April, down by nearly 6 percent compared to the same months last year. Online sales at MyNavyExchange.com of $6.6 million for March and April were up by 13 percent over the same months last year.

Marine Corps Exchange

Given the volatility of sales in today’s environment and the uncertainty about shoppers’ behaviors, officials are working on projections about any losses over the next few months, said spokesman Bryan Driver. But profits were down by 4.5 percent in March and 24.4 percent in April, compared to the previous year.
Sales for March were $75.1 million, down 6.3 percent from the previous March.

Sales for April, were $55.1 million, down 21.7 percent from the previous April.

7. **Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group Heads Home After COVID-Extended Deployment – 6/5**

*Military.com | Gina Harkins*

The Harry S. Truman Carrier Strike Group is wrapping up a lengthy deployment that left some ships at sea for nine months as they were called on to respond to everything from Iranian aggression in the Middle East to the novel coronavirus pandemic.

The guided-missile cruiser Normandy and guided-missile destroyer Forrest Sherman returned to the East Coast on Friday, along with aviators from nine Carrier Air Wing One squadrons. The Normandy and Forrest Sherman had been underway since September, when they deployed without the aircraft carrier Harry S. Truman as it underwent repairs.

The Truman, which deployed in November, will return to Virginia in mid-June, Vice Adm. Andrew Lewis, commander of Second Fleet, told reporters Friday. The destroyers Lassen and Farragut, which broke off from the strike group to support missions in U.S. Southern Command, are headed back to Florida, he said.

"For nearly three years, Truman Strike Group has ... [remained] operationally unpredictable to adversaries through multiple surface-action groups, Arctic operations, dual-carrier operations, and sustainment underway periods," Lewis said. "Time and again, this strike group has answered our nation's call."

The strike group has spent 16 of the last 32 months deployed. It was set to return in the spring, but the crews were notified their deployment would be extended so they could respond to crises as another carrier was sidelined in the Pacific due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

News of the extension came after the Truman had operated for months in the Middle East, alongside the Dwight D. Eisenhower Strike Group, amid high tensions with Iran. It marked the first time in years leaders had staged two strike groups in the region.

Navy Secretary Kenneth Braithwaite visited the Truman and Normandy this week, where he told the crews they'd be awarded the Meritorious Unit Commendation Ribbon for their deployment.

"This entire strike group deserves to be recognized," Braithwaite said. "For the rest of your service and the rest of your lives, you can look down at your service ribbons and remember this deployment for its distinct contribution to our national security."

Lewis said morale remained strong during the lengthy deployment because leaders were transparent and honest about the extensions. Lewis said Braithwaite spoke directly to crew members during his stops this week about how they coped with the setbacks.

"Most of the answers were, 'We'd like to have more port visits' or 'We'd like to have known exactly what was going to happen over the next horizon,'" Lewis said. "But they understood why those things couldn't happen. They couldn't pull into port for a long time because [of] the environment that we're operating in."

After spending half of the last 32 months underway, Lewis said the Truman is approaching its maintenance phase. The strike group was able to make some major fixes to ships while underway, though, something from which he said the entire Navy can learn.

That includes fixing a steam catapult for aircraft aboard the Truman that typically wouldn't be fixed until the carrier was in the shipyard.
"They took all the pictures and went back and forth with the engineers and basically got the engineering approval to do those fixes," he said. "They did it themselves, and the catapult's up and running."

The strike group is returning to a different world than it left, as Americans not only grapple with the ongoing pandemic, but unrest across the country following the May death of George Floyd -- a black man who died in police custody in Minnesota.

Lewis said he'll be going out on a listening campaign to hear what's on the minds of those in his command, as the country continues to see protesters in the streets demanding change. Division is unhealthy for the force, he said, adding that he'll also be encouraging subordinate commands to launch listening campaigns.

"We are a force that values and celebrates the differences that we have in appearance and background," he said.

  Military.com | Gina Harkins

The Navy is preparing to publicly release the findings of an investigation it conducted with the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention after the novel coronavirus swept through the crew of a deployed aircraft carrier, infecting more than 1,100 and killing one.

The findings of the Navy and CDC's investigation into the outbreak of COVID-19, the illness caused by the coronavirus, on the carrier Theodore Roosevelt, are expected to be released next week, Vice Adm. Phillip Sawyer, the operations chief in charge of the service's coronavirus response, said in a phone call with reporters.

Lessons learned from the study, first announced in April, will be incorporated into the guidance the entire Navy has been ordered to follow during the global pandemic, which Sawyer called an unprecedented environment.

The investigation results are expected to reveal how many of the Roosevelt crew members who volunteered to participate in the study developed neutralizing antibodies, Sawyer said. Researchers in China found most people in a cluster of COVID-19 patients produced high levels of neutralizing antibodies, which stop the virus from infecting new cells, according to Science News.

Sailors who participated in the investigation agreed to health questionnaires, blood tests and nasal swabs, Sawyer said.

"I'm looking forward to seeing their analysis ... in terms of what percentage of that group developed antibodies," he said.

The Roosevelt has been at the center of the Navy's COVID-19 struggle. The service has had the highest number of cases in the Defense Department ranks, and the health crisis on the carrier has made headlines. The decision of former acting Navy Secretary Thomas Modly to fire the commanding officer who warned that the virus was spreading rapidly on the ship prompted the service to order a separate investigation.

That investigation is complete, but remains under review by the Navy's top admiral.

Sawyer said Navy leaders hope to learn more about the way COVID-19 spreads from people who are asymptomatic, which has proven one of the biggest challenges with this coronavirus strain. Officials said in April that more than half of the nearly 300 Roosevelt crew members who tested positive at the time didn't show any COVID-19 symptoms.

"I think we'll have a little bit better idea of what that incidence of true asymptomatic infection is," he added.
Sawyer and Navy Surgeon General Rear Adm. Bruce Gillingham developed new guidance all Navy units must follow during the pandemic. Measures include 14-day sequesters and medical screenings before deployments, and face masks and social distancing whenever possible.

The Navy, Sawyer said, continues to learn from the COVID-19 outbreaks on the Theodore Roosevelt and destroyer Kidd, which had to return to port in April due to its number of positive cases.

"We believe in rapid-cycle feedback from the deck plates, from our folks who are out there doing the work, to provide the best possible practices -- combined that with the best medical evidence -- to protect our sailors and allow them to keep operating," he said.


Reuters | Alexandra Alper and Andy Sullivan

WASHINGTON -- President Donald Trump on Friday celebrated a stunning U.S. employment report that showed more than 2.5 million jobs were added last month during the thick of the coronavirus pandemic, and predicted the battered economy will recover all of its lost jobs by next year.

"Today is probably, if you think of it, the greatest comeback in American history," Trump said at the White House.

"We're going to be stronger than we were when we were riding high," he added.

Trump, who had counted on a strong economy to bolster his chances of re-election in November, said the recovery could be hampered by higher taxes and implementation of a Green New Deal climate change plan if Democrats win the White House.

He spoke after the Labor Department released its jobs report for May, which showed the jobless rate dropped to 13.3% from 14.7% in April, a surprise after economists predicted it would rise to close to 20%. Nonfarm payrolls rose by just over 2.5 million jobs after a record plunge of slightly under 20.7 million in April.

However, many economists warn it could take years for the U.S. economy to regain all of those lost jobs. The nonpartisan Congressional Budget Office predicted in May that there will still be 10 million fewer people employed at the end of 2021 than there were at the beginning of this year.

Despite the overall drop in joblessness, the unemployment rate for African Americans rose to 16.8% from 16.7% in April.

The news comes amid mass protests across the country spurred by the death of George Floyd, an African-American man, in police custody in Minneapolis last week.

Trump said Floyd might be pleased by the jobs report.

"Hopefully, George is looking down right now, and saying, 'This is a great thing that's happening for our country,'" he said.

That drew a rebuke from former Vice President Joe Biden, the presumptive Democratic presidential nominee, who noted that Floyd's last words were "I can't breathe" as a police officer kneeled on his neck.

"For the president to try to put any other words in the mouth of George Floyd, I frankly, think is despicable," Biden said at an event in Delaware.

A raft of recent public polls showed Trump trailing Biden nationally and in some of the battleground states where the Nov. 3 election will be decided.
PUSH FOR RE-OPENING

Trump has struggled to respond to the novel coronavirus, which led to nationwide lockdowns that put the economy into a virtual standstill. More than 1.88 million Americans have been infected and more than 108,000 have been killed https://graphics.reuters.com/HEALTH-CORONAVIRUS-USA/0100B5K8423/index.html by the virus since February.

Trump, who was criticized for initially downplaying the threat of the virus to the United States, said authorities should focus on protecting the elderly, who are more likely to die from the virus, and allow younger people to return to work and school. He said states like California that still have restrictions in place should follow the example of Florida and other states that have lifted them.

The U.S. Congress has signed off on trillions of dollars in economic aid but is now deadlocked over whether additional stimulus is needed.

Democrats said Washington needed to do more to head off public-sector layoffs. "Now is not the time to be complacent or take a victory lap," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer said.

Trump said he would support further relief and Vice President Mike Pence, in an interview with CNBC, said that could include aid to states that have warned they may have to lay off teachers, police and other public employees. Republicans in Congress have resisted that idea.

--Reporting by Daphne Psaledakis, Alexandra Alper, David Brunnstrom, Lisa Lambert, Makini Brice and Andy Sullivan in Washington and James Oliphant in Dover, Delaware

10. U.S. military commander says China pushing territorial claims under cover of coronavirus – 6/5
Reuters | Tim Kelly

TOKYO - China is using the coronavirus as a cover to push territorial claims in the South China Sea through a surge in naval activity meant to intimidate other countries that claim the waters, the commander of U.S. Forces in Japan said on Friday.

There has been a surge of activity by China in the South China Sea with navy ships, coast guard vessels and a naval militia of fishing boats in harassing vessels in waters claimed by Beijing, said Lieutenant General Kevin Schneider.

"Through the course of the COVID crisis we saw a surge of maritime activity," he told Reuters in a phone interview. He said Beijing had also increased its activity in the East China Sea, where it has a territorial dispute with Japan.

Beijing's increased level of activity would likely continue, predicted Schneider: "I don't see troughs, I see plateaus," he said.

China says its maritime activities in the area are peaceful. The press office at the Chinese embassy in Tokyo was not immediately available to comment outside of normal business hours.

Japan hosts the biggest concentration of U.S. forces in Asia, including an aircraft carrier strike group, an amphibious expeditionary force and fighter squadrons. In addition to defending Japan, they are deployed to deter China from expanding its influence in the region, including in the South China Sea.

The latest U.S. criticism of China comes as relations have frayed amid accusations by Washington that Beijing failed to warn it quickly enough about the coronavirus. China has dismissed that criticism as an attempt by President Donald Trump's administration to cover up its own mistakes.
Beijing has built military island bases on reefs in the energy-rich South China Sea, in or near waters claimed by other countries, including the Philippines, Vietnam and Malaysia. It imposed a unilateral fishing ban until Aug 16.

--Editing by Peter Graff