

TRANSCRIPT | VIRTUAL TOWN HALL WITH SD, CJCS, AND SEAC

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SPEAKERS:

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DEFENSE SECRETARY MARK T. ESPER: Hello, everyone, and welcome to today's virtual town hall. I'm Secretary of Defense Mark Esper, and I'm joined today by Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Milley and by the Senior Enlisted Advisor to the Chairman Colon-Lopez.

Today, we want to talk to you about all the DOD is doing to protect our people, our troops, our families from the coronavirus, and what we're also doing to support the interagency whole-of-government efforts to protect the American people.

First, I want to thank all of you for your patience and your commitment to our nation in this time of great challenge. It is a time of great challenge, as we face this global pandemic that is upon us. But I want to reassure you that the administration, the military are taking all necessary measures to protect our force, to protect our people, to protect our dependents (ph), to protect our contractors and our civilians. I have made protecting our people our top priority.

The second priority that I have outlined for the past couple months has been ensuring our safeguarding -- ensuring the safeguarding of our national mission capabilities. In other words, making sure we can do our mission when called upon to do it. And I'm confident that we can.

Third priority is supporting the whole-of-government effort again, to protect the American people. DOD is all-in on this. We have deployed thousands of National Guardsmen from all 50 states plus four territories. The Army is deploying field hospitals to a couple of our major cities. The Navy will be soon deploying our medical hospital ships to both Los Angeles and to New York City.

At the same time, our world-class researchers at places like Fort Detrick, Maryland are all in with regard to helping with the multi-sector effort to come up with vaccines and therapeutics to help protect the American people from the coronavirus. We're also helping in many other ways as well, whether it's opening up our strategic stockpiles of masks and ventilators and other pieces of equipment to help the American people.

Again, DOD is fully supporting the whole-of-government effort and I'm very proud of what all of the folks here at the Pentagon and across the force are doing to help the American people. Again, this is a great challenge that is before us but I am confident we will get through this and we will be better off at the end of the day.

There are several things that we will discuss this morning with regard to how you can do your part, and do better in terms of helping protect yourselves and your colleagues and your shipmates and -- and other members of your unit, to protect from the coronavirus.

We've talked a good deal about social distancing, about wiping down surfaces and doorknobs and computer keyboards, all those things you could do. We also encourage you to follow -- urge you to follow the CDC guidance with regard to safe distancing, safe practices. And the president's 15-day guidance with regard to standing down, avoiding large gatherings.

At the end of the day, though, given all the different scenarios and factors that each one of you and us face, I trust upon our commanders and our senior enlisted personnel to do the right thing particular to your unit, to your situation, to your mission. We'll talk about this in more detail. But again, it's up to the commanders and senior NCOs to make the right calls relevant to their situation to ensure that we protect our people while at the same time maintaining mission readiness.

I'm going to turn it over now to the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, General Milley. But I want to reinforce, again, this is a difficult time for our nation, it's a great challenge. But like with all other things in the past, I'm confident, fully confident that we'll come through this and that we'll be stronger on the back end. So thank you all very much.

CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF GENERAL MARK A. MILLEY: Thanks (ph), Secretary, for those words.

And we look forward to the questions, Alyssa (ph), from the family members and the troops that are out there. But let me just say a couple things up front.

First of all, this is not the first challenge the United States has ever faced. This is not the first war we've ever been in. The president of the United States clearly said we're at war, this time with an invisible enemy, a war called (ph) a virus.

And we in the United States Military are going to do our part to protect the American people, and we're going to protect our force at the same time and we are going to continue with our other regular missions that we do in order to protect the American people.

The one thing I would say that is critically important here I think, there's a lot of anxiety, there's a lot of uncertainty out there on everything from PCS moves to exactly what do we do in P.T. formations and how far a distance we have to maintain, et cetera. A lot of information's been put out, as the secretary just said, by the CDC. A lot of information through chains of command; the president's put out his 15 days, et cetera.

What we really need to make sure that all of us collectively do is listen closely and rely on the chain of command. We will get through this through solid leadership, care for our troops and keeping focus on the mission. And together, shoulder to shoulder, we'll do that.

MILLEY: So I would encourage everybody to pay close attention to the chains of command, whether you're in Europe or Asia or -- or here in CONUS -- where -- wherever you are in the world, pay close attention to the chain of command and the guidance that they're putting out and adhere to it, and then we'll get through this together. We'll defeat this virus once and for all.

And on that note, I'd like to turn it over to our -- to the senior enlisted advisor -- to the chairman, the senior enlisted soldier, sailor, airman, Marine in the entire U.S. military, Sergeant -- what I call Sergeant Major Ramon Lopez, but he goes by SEAC, and as you all know, he's a master chief in the Air Force. He's an extraordinary airman of the first class, and I'd like to turn it over to CZ.

SENIOR ENLISTED ADVISOR TO THE CHAIRMAN OF THE JOINT CHIEFS OF STAFF CHIEF MASTER SERGEANT RAMON "CZ" COLON-LOPEZ: Thank you, Chairman. Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

First of all, thank you for being here this morning, and I just want to reemphasize what our leaders are saying, and that our primary mission is to restoring peace in time of chaos, and this is so different. Our mission is clearly understood, and it is a no-fail mission, so we need to remain adaptable, versatile and flexible enough to go ahead and deal with this challenge. That's what we're doing right now. But make no mistake that our number one priority is protecting you and your families, and that is why we're conducting this townhall here today.

So at this time, I would like to open up the floor for questions, and we're here to take them.

STAFF: Excellent, thank you, gentlemen.

The first question to the secretary -- but I welcome the chairman and the SEAC assignment (ph), as well: How is the global response to COVID-19 changing our security environment, while we as a military remain prepared to ensure the defense of our nation? What are the impacts to daily operations?

M. ESPER: Well, I'll take your second question first. I'm fully confident that we will remain prepared to conduct all of our missions. I've spoken to our commanders and I've spoken to our service chiefs and service secretaries. They are taking all precautionary measures to make sure that we maintain those mission capabilities. We call this priority number two behind priority number one, which is protecting our -- our force, our people and -- and our dependents. So I'm very confident that we'll maintain mission readiness.

As this grows in scale and scope, this spread of the virus, we're going to have to take -- be very careful and take prudent measures to ensure we maintain that readiness, because it will become more challenging. But I'm confident if we take all the right procedures, we will do that.

Now, with regard to your first question, how does this change the international security environment, clearly, what we see are countries are turning inward right now. They're looking very closely at their own internal affairs, how they treat and deal with the coronavirus, its spread. Some countries have been far more effective than others. We think countries such as Italy, a close ally of ours, which has probably suffered the most so far. But then we've had adversaries like Iran who is also suffering very badly, and I -- important to note that we've reached out to try and offer them aid and support.

So each country deal -- is dealing with this differently. We all face a similar challenge. It's just a matter of time before each gets affected, and we have a good example of another ally of ours, the Republic of Korea, who seems to -- to have taken a -- a lot of smart measures early, and they appear to be on the backside of this coronavirus spread at this point in time.

STAFF: Mr. Chairman, anything to add on the impacts, potential impacts to readiness?

MILLEY: Yeah, in addition to the impacts on readiness, things like exercises, et cetera, I think overall for the U.S. military, I think we will have moderate to low levels of readiness impacts, only because of the numbers -- at least, the numbers so far. This could change. We'll have to assess it, and we are assessing it frequently. There will be an impact to readiness, but I think it'll be on the lower end, as opposed to significant.

With respect to the question about the broader security environment, this is affecting different countries differently, and it depends on the level of rigor and robustness of the medical facilities' capacity in -- inside each country. It could lead -- in some cases, it could lead to social breakdowns. It could lead to political chaos in certain countries. We have to be attuned to that. It could be resource shortages. We -- obviously, we see that with masks and gloves and ventilators and so on and so forth, hospital capacities and so on. These can have severe internal consequences to certain countries that go well beyond the immediate medical issue, I think is -- is worthwhile.

The other key piece here -- and -- and I know that it's front and center in everybody's mind -- is the economic impacts, which will have secondary security impacts. If there's a -- there's a -- there's a global recession or global depression, those sorts of things, I -- I'm not an expert in the economy, but there are second- and third-order effects to all of that.

So it's very, very important, again, that we do what the professionals are telling us to do, which is flatten that curve, take all the appropriate measures for us in the military, but also in the nation, to do our part, so to speak, in order to reduce the probability and to mitigate the impact of this coronavirus globally and nationally.

M. ESPER: So I just want to follow up on something the chairman said. It's very important for us as leaders -- and I'd say this to all the leaders out there -- that as the coronavirus hits different countries differently, and as

they react differently over time, it -- it may present challenges for us. With allies, it may be incumbent upon us to help them with our own supplies, our own doctors, our own assistants.

With potential adversaries or adversaries, it may cause them to act out in different ways, and -- and in ways that impact our security posture, our readiness. So we need to be very conscious and -- and be on the lookout for that as -- as this unfolds. So we've got to deal with the problem right in front of us, which is taking care of our people, maintaining our mission readiness, but we have to be looking beyond that to see how it may play out and how it may affect the -- affect our mission.

MILLEY: And the secretary's in close coordination with the ministers of defense. I'm in close coordination with the (inaudible). So this -- and the combatant commanders, as well. So there's a allied partner effort globally, beyond what you're seeing just in CONUS.

STAFF: And the chairman raised a good point about medical supplies. How prepared is DOD to take care of its -- its people? Does it have enough medical supplies to get us through this crisis?

M. ESPER: Yeah, we do. We have a strategic stockpile of medical supplies. We have -- have enough that we are able to offer to the interagency team a supply of masks and gowns and ventilators and things like that. Our MTFs, our medical treatment facilities and our dental facilities are fully-staffed and have sufficient supplies and medical equipment.

Now, like everybody else, we're going to face shortages with -- with regard to some of the PPE until the private sector industry can pick up the slack, and so we're looking at that very carefully. We will soon be coming out with a policy on elective surgery that will -- that'll limit the elective surgery so that we can both free up doctors and nurses and other medical professionals. But at the same time, it'll increase the supply by reducing the demand on personal protective equipment. And so once the private sector ramps up and we can do that, we'll be able to readjust our policies and get back to normal. But in the meantime, I'm confident we have enough. We want to ensure that we're able to share to help our fellow Americans, and then over time, we'll continue to manage our medical capabilities.

STAFF: Great. And now, turning to the SEAC, a question for you: Why are mass formations still OK? If we are social distancing and can only be in small groups, why are we still having unit formations?

COLON-LOPEZ: Well, on that subject, we have to revert back to the trust in the chain of command, the people closest to the troops out there in the field. And we're trusting local commanders and their medical professionals to go ahead and provide information and take the prudent steps to make sure that they contain or prevent the spread of the disease.

But also, we cannot forget that there's a mission requirement for a lot of these units, and we expect those sergeants, the (inaudible), the first sergeants, the commanders, the captains to be able to make those decisions on the field to be able to maintain our combat effectiveness.

STAFF: Excellent.

M. ESPER: So look, I want to foot-stomp what the SEAC says. We have a -- we have a mission, and -- and -- and that is maintaining that mission, maintaining that mission -- mission readiness, and that includes physical fitness.

M. ESPER: As I said to the media just yesterday, look, we can't -- you can't get social distancing in a submarine, or even in a tank, right? I've been in both. But you take prudent measures as best you can, given the situation you're in, given your mission and whatnot, and that's what we call upon commanders and senior NCOs at all levels to do: Assess their situation, and if you can avoid putting people in -- a -- a large number of people in small rooms, you should do it. Hold your meeting outside, or maybe meet in smaller groups. Get that social distancing as best you can. Follow the CDC guidelines. That is good guidance for us to help protect not just the force, but our fellow Americans as well.

And if you're (ph) -- you know, if you're a young NCO and you see something that doesn't make sense, or if you're a young officer and you see something that doesn't make sense, you know, raise it privately with your chain of command and say, hey, maybe we should do this differently next time. Help remind your leaders, help protect one another, help -- help each other get through this by reminding each other about social distancing, about different ways to perform the mission and accomplish it while still achieving those same -- the same guidelines.

QUESTION: Absolutely. Now, another question, what do you think about how NORTHCOM is working with its interagency partners to counter the COVID pandemic?

M. ESPER: Well, I think NORTHCOM is doing a fine job but I'll turn it over to the chairman because I -- he's been working much more closely with General O'Shaughnessy.

MILLEY: Yeah -- yeah, so let me -- for everyone, as you would imagine, the United States Military is structured and we have a chain of command and -- and I do want to kind of lay that out for everyone, just take a minute or two.

So at the top, you've got the president. The vice president is leading this coronavirus task force. We have two representatives -- we, the Department of Defense -- have two people that routinely interact with that. That is the deputy secretary of defense and the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs.

And then within the building itself, we've got a crisis management team set up. That is led by our two-star general officer on the Joint Staff. And then everyone is matrixed into that thing from the -- all the services, et cetera.

And then NORTHCOM implements the policy guidance and the directives that the secretary of defense has put in place so far. With the first execute order that went out as much as two months ago, beginning planning and preparation.

So General O'Shaughnessy, just like we deal with hurricanes and wildfires and so on and so forth, General O'Shaughnessy has a structure that is standing up, has been set up and is continuing to stand up and expand. They are linked in with FEMA, so the 10 FEMA regions in CONUS. They have command and control cells with each of them, he has a command and control cell with HHS and FEMA. And -- and then he has subordinate organizations.

So he's got a maritime component commander for example, they are in charge of the Mercy and the Comfort, who are going to various cities. You've got a land component commander, who is Lieutenant General Laura Richardson. She'll be in charge of the 10 FEMA regions and the ground force response with the hospitals, et cetera. You've got an air component commander who is going to be responsible for transporting patients around, and so on.

So he's got a ready-made structure, and his basic function is to protect the continental United States against any and all threats. Coronavirus is just this threat. And he will do that, and he's doing a great job at it. And in fact, I think, if I'm not mistaken, he or his team is going to have a press conference later today or tomorrow, to lay some of that out. But O'Shaughnessy is very, very squared away and NORTHCOM's a very capable organization.

QUESTION: Fantastic. And related to this response effort, are you concerned at all about the spread of disinformation and misinformation, specifically with regard to the U.S. Military, but also just more broadly about response efforts?

M. ESPER: Absolutely. Look, we have multiple sources of disinformation out there. Some of it is just people are concerned, and -- and scared and anxious, and we want to do our best to -- to dispel bad rumors and whatnot. And then we probably have external actors, countries who want to sow chaos within the United States, who are injecting some of this into the -- into the ecosystem, if you will.

So, look, let me reassure you. There has been no talk whatsoever of martial law. There has been no talk whatsoever of mass quarantines of the United States or any of that other nonsense that is out there.

So one of the things we're going to do is, we're going to set up, in the next day or so, a -- a page on our DOD website that we'll call "Mythbusters," right now, that will kind of look at what's out there in terms of the rumor mill and we'll be able to answer those and knock them down and keep them posted up there so people can refer to that page as to what's happening. And if you have ideas, we'll try and find a way, on that page, for folks to write in and say, hey, I've heard this, is there any truth to that. So that we can knock these myths down.

They're -- it's -- in a crisis like this, the most important thing you can do -- that we can do, which is why we're here this morning -- is to put information out constantly, to be very transparent. Tell everybody what we're doing it, why we're doing it, how we're doing it, et cetera. But at the same time, the converse of that is knocking down rumors, knocking down myths, knocking down disinformation, all those things that all -- cause further churn and concern.

QUESTION: Now, I understand the novel nature of coronavirus makes it hard to predict, but are you able to give any insight into how long you think that this outbreak may last, and how long the military's prepared to address it? Is it 30 days, is it 60, 90?

M. ESPER: Well, we have to be prepared to address it as long as the country needs us. At this point in time, you know, if you look at some of the reporting we've seen over the weekend, I think one of the president's closest advisors said that -- that we -- looking at how China and Korea have confronted this virus, it looks like it has an eight- to 10-week period from beginning to cresting to end, or at least the backslope.

So you're looking probably at least that long. I think we need to plan for this to be a few months long at least, and we're taking all precautionary measures to do that, to be in it -- be in it for the long haul. But, look, we're going to -- we're going to support the American people, we're going to continue to take actions and take care of our own people with regard to those three priorities I outlined at the beginning, as long as need be.

Chairman, I don't know if you want to add to that?

MILLEY: Yeah, I mean, we -- I mean, scientifically -- and certainly none of us are scientists on coronavirus. But all the reports we've read indicate exactly what the secretary said. You're looking at eight to 10, maybe 12 weeks, something like that. Call it three months. Based on what we know from other countries -- China, Hong Kong, South Korea, et cetera.

That may or may not apply to the United States, it may or may not apply to other different -- different countries, different circumstances. But we'll see. Some of that depends on what we do as a nation to mitigate it, to flatten that curve so to speak.

But we in the United States Military, we're going to do this as long as the mission takes. That's what the president's asked, that's what the secretary's asked, and we in uniform are going to do whatever it takes to protect the American people.

QUESTION: Now, the first line of effort is obviously protecting our people, so we're going to go to a couple of questions, just specific to the force and family. First for the chairman -- but I welcome anyone's input.

Chairman, there's a lot of concern about moves (ph). The question is, "I'm supposed to PCS soon. Will they cancel my orders? Do I still have to sign out with housing or will I get extended TLA? What benefits will be available to help offset costs?"

MILLEY: Actually, there's quite a few questions in there, Alyssa (ph). So let me try to do this from memory.

So first, the secretary's put out guidance, or policy guidance, or the Department of Defense has, to stop move for 60 days. And that takes us up through, I think it was eight or 10 -- the middle of May.

And what does that mean? That means all PCS moves, all unit moves, all moves are stopped unless a waiver is granted, an exception is granted. And it has to fall into one of three categories. One, mission-essential. Second is some humanitarian reason. And third is undue duress or hardship on a particular family or a soldier or a service member.

So who makes that decision? The secretary has delegated that to the combatant commanders, the service secretaries and the -- and the Defense Agency heads. And they are in -- further authorized to delegate that decision to the lowest level, one-star or SCS (ph) equivalent in their chain as they see fit. So that person -- one-star, two-star, three-star, or four-star -- can determine if it's mission-essential, humanitarian or undue duress or hardship.

MILLEY: So in this particular case, PCS. If it's just normal PCS, doesn't fall into one of those three bins, you're going to be on freeze, a hold completely for about 60 days, and then we'll re-evaluate. If in fact this is a 90-day curve and things seem to be getting better and settling out, then we'll prioritize those that are in the queue and we'll get them moving, the orders moving. If in -- if it starts going longer, then the freeze may go long. We'll see. We don't know yet. But that's the -- that's the kind of rule set right now.

As far as his household goods or her household goods and all the rest of it, that would follow normally and (inaudible) once the orders are cut.

COLON-LOPEZ (?): And there's a question there about upsetting the cost, and right now with regards to TLA and PLE specifically, so that entitlement is 10 days. But while were -- we're asking commanders on field is to go ahead and put members on awaiting transportation status and place them on per diem instead of the TLA, the PLE, in order to go ahead and help offset the cost.

So the first call-out or course of action will be for the member to contact their finance office to be able to go ahead and sort out those entitlements.

STAFF: Thank you, that's very helpful.

One to the secretary, specific to the Pentagon Reservation. How long has the Pentagon plan telework options? And how long do you expect that people can continue to telework while carrying on the essential missions of the Pentagon?

M. ESPER: Well, again, it goes back to conditions. We're going to telework as long as necessary to ensure that we're beyond the coronavirus crisis, if you will. Again, going back to priority number one, protecting our people.

So we'll continue that. It's going to be weeks for sure, maybe months. And we're asking every office head, every director, every person in the chain of command to exercise due diligence and great caution and telework as much as possible so we can protect our people while performing our mission. So I think that people should prepare themselves and adjust their routines.

And -- and we're doing what we can, by the way, on the -- on the network side to make sure we have adequate bandwidth to support telework.

Now, I want to put an important caveat in here as well, another ask I have. If you're teleworking, if you're doing anything involves the networks and I.T., be very, very careful of I.T. vulnerabilities.

We are a little bit more exposed when we're doing telework, using a lot more bandwidth, there's more open ports, et cetera.

So I ask people be doubly cautious about getting e-mails that aren't familiar to them, phishing attempts by -- by bad persons, all that. Exercise good I.T. computer hygiene when you're on the system, because we want to make sure that we maintain the protection of our networks, of our system.

So that's my one ask: If you telework, be doubly conscious of -- of good hygiene when it comes to security measures on -- on the computer systems.

STAFF: Excellent.

And there's some concern about just the safety and health of our senior leaders within the Department of Defense. Can you talk me through some of the precautions that have been implemented at the Pentagon to make sure -- whether it's social distancing or hygiene guidelines, to make sure we're keeping our senior leaders and their staff healthy?

M. ESPER: Sure.

Well, a couple of weeks ago we instituted a number of -- all the CDC guidelines and procedures the same way we're asking everybody else to practice those. Social distancing, so stay within six feet -- or outside of six feet of another person. So this is the closest I've been to the chairman probably in two weeks, cause otherwise we...

MILLEY: It won't last long.

(LAUGHTER)

M. ESPER: Otherwise, we do -- we do meetings on VTC. So we're practicing social distancing, our offices get wiped down multiple times a day, we've obviously instituted telework so the Pentagon workforce right now is much smaller than it has been, we've curtailed travel, and we're vetting folks coming into the building now that we're (HPCON) Charlie, and we're limiting people into our front office, a number of folks who were exposed to.

So we're taking a number of procedures and cautions -- precautions. That's what we're asking the rest of the force to do as well, consistent with the mission requirements, right? It's not perfect. So that you, kind of, protect the force as much as possible.

We don't live in a risk-free environment. You're not going to eliminate -- completely eliminate risk, but you can manage it and reduce it. And that's what we ask everybody to do.

STAFF: And a question for the dais (ph) from Rachel (ph) who says: "For servicemembers with retirement dates coming up this summer, June, July, August, is there any kind of stop-loss on the horizon since the (inaudible) before terminal leave starts?"

MILLEY: Yeah, the secretary's policy -- correct me if I'm wrong secretary -- but the secretary's policy clearly stated retirees were -- most of the retired are exempt from the stop move.

So for Rachel (ph), if you so choose to retire, we thank you for your lifetime of service, and you'll be allowed to retire in -- in good standing.

STAFF: Excellent.

We've got one from Camp Lejeune: "What is your message to deployed servicemembers and their families affected by recent quarantine restrictions and stop movement orders?"

M. ESPER: Well, look, if you're deployed, thank you for serving abroad and in a deployed status. It puts additional hardship not only on the servicemember but also the family, right, because you have that separation.

And we ask them to -- you know, again, as you're deployed, practice all these good precautions and procedures that we're asking of folks back home. We'd ask the same of your family and friends back at Camp Lejeune to do the same.

We've put a halt in terms of movements back and forth. What we have to figure out is, in the coming days, our rotation schedule. So if his or her Marine is on a rotation, we're going to have to figure out do we rotate or do we hold in place until we get through this?

What we're trying to do, again, is limit movement. We're trying to make sure we curtail the spread of the virus by folks going aboard or coming back home from overseas, and trying to take all those precautionary measures.

But hang in there. We appreciate it. We've all been deployed. We know what that's like, that separation. And we appreciate the hardship it may be placing on families at this time not having either both parents there or other members of the families. So very conscious of that. We're trying to be very deliberate as we think through next steps and how we might adjust our policy.

STAFF: And it seems sort of -- oh, I'm sorry (ph).

COLON-LOPEZ: Yes. I would like to add on that that's the reason why we have family care plans and other things in place just in case things like this happen. So we continue to go ahead and trust the chain of command to make sure we're exercising those plans to take care of our people.

STAFF: Excellent.

And it seems the Department of Defense is really playing a leadership role in these response efforts. Can you talk me through some of the decisions that have been made? For example, most recently the Mercy deploying to assist relief efforts in Los Angeles. Some of those efforts that have been -- that are -- have taken place and that may be coming.

M. ESPER: Sure. I'll keep going back to the priorities.

So priority number one is to take care of our servicemembers, our civilians, and their families. Number two, safeguard our mission capabilities, so our ability to accomplish our missions wherever they may be. And number three was support the whole-of-government interagency effort that's upon us. So making sure we can do number one and two, that frees up capacity to do number three.

And as I said earlier, we have the National Guard, thousands of Guardsmen out there in 50 states plus four territories and the District of Columbia -- are out there right now on the front lines setting up treatment facilities, conducting testing, providing food in some cases, logistical wrap-around support. All those things that are necessary to support the American people.

We've got our researchers, our scientist support (ph) (inaudible) and elsewhere in the game helping out. The Mercy is deployed to Los Angeles effective last night. The Comfort will be deploying to New York City in less than 14 days. We're deploying Army field hospitals to Seattle and to New York City.

So that's what it looks like right now. There's more going on. We've freed up equipment, medical supplies. I anticipate us deploying more expeditionary medical units in the coming days and weeks to do that. And eventually we'll probably hop them around the country as -- as need arises. That's going to put a demand on both our resources and our doctors and nurses and other medical professionals, but we think we can manage it.

It's very important to help our fellow Americans out. This is something we do all the time, whether it's floods or wildfires, hurricanes, you name it. We're there to support the American people while ensuring that we can still perform our national security mission.

STAFF: And one final question, then I'll turn it to all of you just for brief closing remarks.

The question of testing has arisen. Are all servicemembers who think that they need to be tested -- do they have access to tests? And if you can elaborate on who should get tested, who doesn't need to, what mitigation efforts they can take if they're feeling ill, that would be great.

M. ESPER: Sure. You want to take that one, chairman?

MILLEY: Yeah, so for -- for testing, who has to get tested? People who are, according to CDC guidance right now, people who are symptomatic. If you are experiencing any of the typical (ph) flu-like symptoms -- runny noses, headaches, aches and pains, fever, obviously -- and a fever, by the way, is -- as I have now learned, is a fever is technically defined as being 100 degrees or higher, as opposed to 99 degrees. So -- but -- but it's flu-like symptoms, and -- and if you're feeling like you've got the flu, then you probably should get tested for coronavirus.

Again, we're in flu season. You're in allergy season. You're in cold season, and then there's this coronavirus. So they mimic each other in terms of their symptoms, but if you're symptomatic, by all means, get tested, and we do have the capacity throughout the Department of Defense and the commercial or the civilian world, to -- to get tested. So if you're having those symptoms, you should get tested. If you're not having those symptoms, then you don't need to be tested.

M. ESPER: And on the testing piece, the chairman rightly laid out the guidelines, those -- the guidelines issued by the CDC. Those are the guidelines that we all are following, as well. With regard to testing, we're making sure that we have enough swabs. We're making sure we have enough test kits. We're making sure that we have enough throughput into our labs to do that. It's not perfect right now. We can do better, but we're -- we're reacting as -- as it comes up, needs, based on the services, what the combatant commanders are telling us.

But for the most part, we've been able to -- to test people and get results back in a -- in a timely manner in most cases. In other places, we may be challenged in terms of timeliness, but that's usually a function of distance and isolation and whatnot. So this -- that capability will ramp -- ramp up over time. I think as some have -- have read in the news, we'll -- we'll soon see some self-test kits coming out. We know, because the Army's working on it, new types of machines to process the test kits much more quickly in volume. That's coming on line.

So we see, again, as the system ramps up, the available -- availability will increase dramatically. The turnaround time with regard to results will increase dramatically. But at the same time, if you don't need to be tested, don't get tested. Otherwise, follow all the CDC guidelines with regard to best practices and -- and other guidance that we've issued out, too.

STAFF: Excellent. And just briefly, because I know you all are crunched for time, if you just want to give closing remarks to the force, to family who are listening today, tuned in from all over the world, when are we going to get through this crisis? What do they need to do for the time being? We'd appreciate that.

M. ESPER: Why don't you go first?

COLON-LOPEZ: Well, well first of all, I would like to reiterate the fact that uncertainty's nothing new for us. I mean, that's what the military members and families do on a daily basis. But we need to continue to take care of one -- one another. We need to make sure that we are looking out for our neighbors. For those that are deployed, rest assured that your families will be taken care of, and it's something that we're going to take very seriously throughout this crisis.

M. ESPER: Yeah. Chairman?

MILLEY: So you asked when. Frankly, no one actually knows that. There are a variety of models. There's best case, worst case, something in the middle, based on what we've already said. You're looking at somewhere around 90 days based on some of the other countries that may or may not apply to the United States. We'll see. If it does apply, you're looking at probably late May, June, something in that range, maybe it could be as late as July.

But we will get through it. That -- that's -- so it's -- it's -- it's not a question of when. We will. We will get through it, and we'll pull together as a country, as a military, and we, the United States military, are going to do whatever is required to defend the people of the United States.

One of the keys here is to prevent misinformation. Don't pass along rumors. Make sure you're talking in terms of facts; making sure that you have the right information from the CDC. Check in routinely with your leadership and your chain of command, and we'll -- and together, we're going to get through this, and we'll defeat this virus, and we'll continue to defend the great republic that we are.

M. ESPER: So I've got three messages.

First of all, to commanders and senior noncommissioned officers at -- at -- at all levels, keep in mind our DOD's top priorities. Number one, take care of your people and take care of their family members. Number two, make sure that you're ensuring that we have (inaudible) national mission (ph) capabilities so that we can do our mission if called upon. And then number three, help us support the interagency effort.

That's number one.

What I'd say, number two, to all leaders of all ranks, whether you're in command or not, is follow the CDC guidelines that we put out there. Follow the DOD guidelines that we put out there. Exercise social distancing, exercise not gathering in large groups. Practice all the things that we've put out in order to protect the force, in order to accomplish those -- at least priorities one and two. It's incumbent upon us at all levels to do that.

It's -- and it's also taking care of your -- your shipmates, your troopmates, your airmates on left and right of you. Take care of one another and -- and we will all get through this. And I guess that is my third message as well, we will get through this. This is a challenge, it's a national challenge, it's a global challenge, it's unprecedented in my lifetime, that I can recall.

But the American people, the American military has a great spirit, a great will, a great capability. I'm fully confident that at the end of the day, in a period of months, we will get through this, we'll be back on the old OPTEMPO again, we'll be fully mission-capable and prepared to do our missions, just as we are right now.

It's a matter of time, but we need everybody in the meantime to follow these guidelines, be patient, to listen to the chain of command, to help out the chain of command and I'm fully confident that we'll all be well if not better at the end of the day. Thank you.

STAFF: Thank you.

And thank you to the folks at home tuning in.