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THE NATIONAL GUARD IN THE ERA OF COVID-19

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PARTICIPANTS:

Conversation:

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. O'HANLON: Good afternoon, everyone, or good day, wherever you may be on this planet, or in this country. I'm Mike O'Hanlon with the Foreign Policy program at Brookings. And I have the distinct honor and privilege of welcoming General Joseph Lengyel to join with us today in conversation.

He is the chief of the National Guard Bureau, which means he is a member of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, and the nation's top officer for overseeing the Army and the Air Force National Guard, combined, a total strength of nearly half-a-million airmen and soldiers under his supervision and command.

And he is a distinguished airman himself, a fighter pilot, a Texan, formerly of the Active Duty Air Force but then in the early-1990s switched to the National Guard and did a number of stints in various positions in the United States and around the world, sometimes in more of a Guard capacity, or part-time capacity, sometimes full-time, and for the last eight years has been at the leadership of the National Guard Bureau here in Washington, first as its vice chief and now as its top officer.

We're really privileged to have him today as he prepares for fairly imminent retirement, very richly deserved and well earned, dating back to his ROTC Degree and entry into the Air Force, the graduation from that ROTC program at the University of North Texas was 1981, so he's been serving his country long, and very well. Despite his youthful appearance he's been at it for quite a while, and we wish him well certainly in retirement.

But before we do that we look forward to a rich conversation today. At the end of which we'll be able to handle some of your questions if you wish to email to events@Brookings.edu, and I will ultimately transmit some of those questions to the general.

But first we're going to hear from him with some opening thoughts on the state of the Guard, and also of course on its admirable and much-appreciated help in responding to the COVID crisis in the United States. But that will not be our only topic. This will also be an opportunity to think a little bit more broadly about the Guard and its role in the Nation's Total Force at this very difficult moment in our history with the return of Great Power Competition and other challenges around the globe.

So, General, thank you again for joining us. And without further ado, over to you my friend.

GENERAL LENGYEL: Michael, thank you. Thank you to Brookings for having me on today to talk about the National Guard. You know, I've been in it for a very long time, I've learned a lot, and I have experienced the complete transformation of what the National Guard brings in terms of combat capability from a readiness model, from an operation --from a strategic reserve to an Operational Force, to the roles we play across all of society every day.

If you go back to the beginning of the year, January 2020, I don't know that we could have predicted what would happen in the next six months. As you all recall, I remember early in January that the topic was potential kinetic operations with Iran, post-attack on Soleimani. Everybody remembers that, tensions were running high, we were considered, you know, whether we were going to ramp up and need National Guard mobilizations in support further operations in CENTCOM.

Two months later we had the California National Guard drop coronavirus test kits onto a cruise ship that was anchored off the coast of San Francisco, and that was even before the coronavirus became a national pandemic and a national emergency.

And two months later, yet again, Mr. George Floyd was killed and that sparked widespread, nationwide unrest, the likes of which we have not seen.

In the midst of all these headline-grabbing events the National Guard has also responded to national disasters, as you know we're prone to do, whether it's, you know, floods in Michigan, wildfires in Kansas, tornadoes in Tennessee, just to name a few, and it has been a crazy year, and it's just now early July.

You know, and I think in the past six months if you look at the totality of the effort from the National Guard, including our Federal missions, more than 120,000 members of the National Guard were mobilized wearing the uniform doing either operations for a combatant commander, 45,000 more doing COVID operations in every state, territory in the District of Columbia, and again 45,000 more were doing operations in support of civil disturbance operations in 33 states.

All across the country the National Guard was aiding the American people. They were delivering personal protective equipment, in some cases they were manufacturing personal protective equipment, staffing food banks and test centers, protecting protester's First Amendment Rights to protest peacefully. Sharing best practices as we learn, frankly, how to do some of these things, and in this

difficult time, but it's also a time of great flexibility, and great innovation and showcasing the capabilities of the National Guard.

We're doing all these while we sustained our Federal commitments to combat commands around the world as part of the Army in the Air Force. None of our Title 10 or Federal missions were interrupted or disturbed. Thankfully, the civil disturbance operations seem to be receding, but COVID-19 appears to be maybe even on the rise in some cases, and there's no sign of operational tempo, reduction in our future as we look to the relatively near-term six months or a year.

And if the events of the past six months have taught us anything, it's that the role of the Reserve Component, and in my case, and I'll speak to the National Guard as you mentioned, which is about 20 percent -- more than 20 percent of all of the uniforms in the Department of Defense, the National Guard has proven an indispensable Force that America needs.

So, my thoughts on some things that I would like to share with the group is, we've learned a lot about what this operational force is, and how to use it, and I'm going to make four main points. One is that we have become an operational force with continuous and sustained rotations, a part of the Army and the Air Force, and that's a good thing.

And from the full-spectrum operations to full land component, air component full spectrum war, and everything in between, we have become an indispensable part of the toolkit of the Army and the Air Force to do their Title 10 and Federal missions, and that needs to continue. That has led to some other things but I'll get to those in a bit, maybe in some questions.

The second thing is, I think that what we have learned is, you know, that the strength of our Force its experience, its cost, its cost structure when we are not being used is less than Active Component structure. So the ability to posture Reserve Component Force structure in the future against known requirements I think is something that we should continue to do, and we should continue to leverage.

Known deployments for the National Guard are a good thing, it builds readiness for us, and when you do that it allows us to be predictable for our business model which must fit into people who have other careers and other employers, so that we can let them know and train to the appropriate level of readiness as we do that. So that's number two is leverage us more against known requirements. And

in some cases we do that today but I think there's opportunity to do more of that.

The third thing is, in the old model, strategic reserve model, when we could take new equipment and put it in the Active Component, shake out all the old -- all of the older stuff and cascade that into the -- into the Reserve Components if that model does not work. You must be deployable, sustainable and interoperable, or you're irrelevant in any battle -- in any battle scenario. And so the concurrent and balanced recapitalization and modernization of our Force is something that I worked hard to stand (phonetic) for, as we move forward with this operational reserve model.

And finally, the last thing that I'll say is, we're, you know, in historic times here as we stand up another service, another branch of service of the Space Force, and I do believe that there is advantages to taking the model of the National Guard, and leveraging that, and creating a Space National Guard component of the Space Force.

We've been in the space mission for 25 years, and I want to make sure that one of the most important things we do is we are mirrors of our parent (phonetic) service, the culture, the training, the professional development of our Army officers are identical in the Air National Guard and the Army National Guard as our parent services, and that has got to remain the same as part of the Space Force.

So adopting these considerations could actually free up Active Component Force structures such that we may get ready, and it is our most flexible piece of the Force. It can go anywhere, it can be anywhere, it can do things that we simply aren't built to do in the Reserve Component. And so by doing that, by using known deployments to put requirements against the Reserve Components, if they're available, with force elements and training, I think that frees up, you know, maybe a more efficient Active Component to be used.

So the operational model we talk about, I would share that, you know, “Always Ready & Always There,” is kind of our motto, and people seem to think of us as, you know, a slower version of the Army and a slower version of the Air Force. I think that in the Air Force we've proven time and again, we train to the same levels of readiness as our Active Components, and while we're not as fast we're pretty darn close to as fast as an Air Force Squadron if you want to move it someplace.

I would say that on the Army side it is -- it is slower, we have less readiness built, intentionally, we don't build readiness until we're going to use it, and I think that's a good thing, because

readiness is expensive to build, and as you build it, if you were to -- that's why you don't buy tomatoes, you know, in bushels because you can't eat them fast enough and they will -- they will rot.

So you want to build it just-in-time, using us as the Force that allows us to determine assigned mission readiness I think is something that we should leverage more frequently. That you may not want to send the 82nd Airborne to deal with some issue in Ebola in Africa, when you could train up some Reserve Component Squadron to a lesser rotational requirement and do that. So I think that's important.

And as I mentioned, the Operational Force, we provide strategic depth to the Army, and to the Air Force, and some day to the Space Force, I believe that that will happen eventually. But prima (phonetic) combat capability at a lower cost is a good investment, and it allows us to sustain combat capability, in capacity terms, for the potential of a major war, and allows us to save money -- and maybe an Active Component -- Active Component is responsive, it's fast, it's ready but it's expensive. And to allow us to save money to modernize that Force and have the new and needed weapons that we need in the future.

So I think that, you know, using us for readiness capabilities in the future, you know, as you look at potential rotational models in Europe, or potential rotational models in Korea, it's a good thing when you consider, you know, using the Reserve Components to do that.

Modernization, again, I want to hit one more time that I think the ability to modernize the Force is important and I think, you know, I've been in, you know, the second base to get to KC-46 was Pease, the New Hampshire National Guard Unit. Vermont was the second unit in the Air Force to get the F-35 and they've announced more of those.

So the Air Force has seized that, and recognizes that, and I believe that on the Army side the same thing will be true, whether it's new helicopters, vertical lift, or other capabilities that the Army has. Because what we have learned over time is when the Active Component no longer has a piece of equipment it begins to die, it begins to become less sustained.

They don't intend to cut back on the money, they don't intend to not sustain it, they don't intend on not to maintain it, but they will make hard, financial decisions over time that will force them to not sustain that equipment. And when you can't then it becomes in-deployable -- non-deployable, not

sustainable in a combat environment, and becomes a burden on the system.

The Space National Guard is, if I've been too subtle in my support of that component here I want to make sure that -- you know, that we've been in the space mission as part of the Air Force for 25 years, and one of the things that the National Guard brings is it brings unit-equipped force structure to our parent services.

If you need to grow the capacity of the Army, or the capacity of the Air Force, or the capacity of a Space Force in time of war you can't do that with individual augmentees, and single people, you have to have unit structure that can be mobilized and increase the size and the capacity of the Force. And that that is what we bring.

We bring the obvious attributes that have been on display for the last six months, while we are in dwell from our Title 10 responsibilities, we can also be tasked by our governors to do any number of things. And as you have seen, we've had infantry officers running food banks, and that certainly was not anything that they were trained to do. We've had them running test sites for people who get COVID, they can be task organized with leadership at every level, and they can do any task that our nation needs them to do. And we've done a myriad of different tasks throughout the COVID operations here, that we can get into more if you want.

So I think in conclusion, I think the past six months have shown, and if you really want to get into it, I think if you go back to 9/11, the sustained, continuous deployment, more than a million members of the National Guard have been deployed into the combat zone, in every combatant command, many of them multiple times. Our formations have gone, you know, as since I have been chief we have sustained about, continuously, 30,000 men and women of the National Guard deployed at any one time doing Title 10 things.

And continuously, on top of that, about another 10,000 have been deployed doing things here in the homeland, Southwest Border operations, continuous things that you've seen up in New York, if you've been in the Grand Central and you see the Empire Shield folks sitting in there. Keeping, you know, counter-terrorism opportunities from happening.

Our ability to do things in the homeland have been enormous, and on display, lately, have been the COVID operations which, as I'm talking to you now, we still have some 32,000 men and

women doing that. And thankfully the civilian disturbance operations are beginning to recede, although we are postured right now, as we speak, to respond in support of our governors and in support of law enforcement should events turn sideways and our system needs it.

So, you know, with that I think the Guard has proven that We're Always Ready & Always There, and I'm very proud of this. I think we were called in a recent article, I think "the Swiss Army knife of the United States Military" but we can be tasked out to do a myriad of things, from pandemics, to full-spectrum war. And it's been the joy of my life to be the Chief of National Guard Bureau here at the end of it.

So, with that I'll just pause, and stop my remarks. And say thanks, and turn it over to you, Michael, for some questions.

MR. O'HANLON: General, fantastic. Thank you for that framing. And I want to ask a couple of different questions about the Guard going forward. But to set that up I want to build on -- or ask you to build on some of what you touched on, sort of looking back on the Guard, and the ways we thought about it, and how it's evolved over your career, partly because you are soon to retire, and you've seen so much, but also I think it helps dramatize the choices for the nation going forward.

I think we all know we're getting into, potentially, a difficult fiscal environment, to say the least, after COVID and this is not a particularly partisan issue people on both sides of the aisle understand that there may be severe pressure on the Defense budget in the years ahead, you know, even if it doesn't transpire in the next four months of the political campaigns this year.

And by the way, I should have noted, Brookings has people who work on various campaigns and that's all on our website. But this is not a partisan question this is an awareness that the country may be looking for ways to build a more economical military in the years ahead. So I want to ask you in a minute about ways in which the Guard could contribute to that, perhaps becoming a larger overall fraction of the nation's armed forces.

But I think to set that up, we should spend a little more time on the history that you've lived, because we know that coming out of Vietnam, before you and I were old enough to be in the Military ourselves, but there was the concept of the Total Force, which basically was a decision that the Guard and Reserve should be integral to any kind of major American Military deployment. So we would

never again have this division between an Active Force that was sort of not known, not understood, not integrated with communities back home, and the rest of society.

So, we have that concept of a Total Force with the Reserve, maybe more than the Guard, but both, the Reserve and the Guard playing a role and providing capabilities the Active Force simply doesn't have, so that it would need to be mobilized going into a major conflict. That's one concept.

Then you alluded to a second concept, which is sort of the old idea of a strategic reserve, the Guard sort of being the backup, especially in the Cold War, if we had a long, protracted fight with the Soviet Union and Warsaw Pact. And, you know, in those days -- again as you alluded to -- the Guard had old equipment, it wasn't necessarily anywhere near as good as the Active Force, it wasn't really thought of as the initial part of the response, or even the second wave, it was more like your third or fourth wave if you fought a multi-year conflict.

And then we saw, as you say, especially after 9/11 I think, the Guard become actually an operational part of the Military that you used Guard units because they had nearly the same capabilities, or as good capabilities as the Active Force and they could help give a break to the Active Force, they could spell it, they could do things sometimes more economically.

So that's the overall lay of the land. With that in mind, I wanted to ask you if you wanted to comment any further, but also specifically, how good has the Guard become in being almost as capable, or as capable as the Active Force? You mentioned Desert Storm as the time, sort of the transition in your career going from the Active to the National Guard.

There's still a debate, especially in the Army, about just how well the National Guard Brigades could have performed in Desert Storm, the Army had a big internal fight about whether they should have used the National Guard more in that conflict. There are still debates about whether National Guard Brigades in Iraq and Afghanistan performed as well in the tougher sectors.

What do we know, especially about the Army side? Where, as you say, it's harder to maintain unit readiness for these are big formations? What do we know about the ability of a National Guard Army Brigade to be just as good as an Active Army Brigade; and, again, looking at it with this historical perspective?

I'm sorry for the long question, but I wanted to sort of frame this, and pick up on your

points about how the Guard has evolved over your career, ask you to reflect a little more on that, and then speak to how good the Guard has become today. Over to you, please.

GENERAL LENGYEL: So we are a completely different Force than the one I joined, you know, almost 30 years ago. We're more ready, we're more disciplined, we have become -- and again my experience predominantly -- until the last eight years or so has been predominantly Air Force.

But we have become exactly what the Air Force demanded that we become, part of that was, you know, a great reduction in the size of the Air Force, coupled with continuous deployment cycles to the middle east since the early-'90s and the mid'90s following the Gulf War. They needed the National Guard to become part of the deployable cadre, if you will, that could go. And when we deployed we had to deploy with our own kits, with our own commanders, they had to work.

So, the Air Force really, you know, and it could that -- you know, I like to think that coupled with 1991 that changed the Air Force, they're getting smaller of -- many of the Active Component folks, of which I was one, migrated into the National Guard. And we brought with us this sense of sort of more disciplined Air Force, if you will, and I think that a more tactically oriented Air Force, more connected to the Active Components maybe than we were before when we had separate components,

And I'd like to think that sometimes I think that it was just the National Guard got better. But as I look, as I looked out here on Fort McNair, and there used to be a golf course on this -- on this particular base. There's no golf course anymore, there's no time for golf courses at National Defense University, people are focused on strategy, and developing officers, and professional officers, and there's less time, for those kinds of things.

But I can just tell you, when left Ramstein I had, out of the Active Component, to join the Texas Guard I said I'm going to make the best fighter squadron in the world. I was the weapons officer who would not have that goal, and I got to my place, and I said, hey, there's a bunch of really great fighter pilots here, but I had six full-time people in the unit, the rest were all part-time, the maintainers were very experienced but, you know, they had been stationed there in San Antonio for a very long time.

And I said, hey, we're not going to -- we're not going to do this. I had doctors, and bankers, and farmers, people that came and flew with the fighters part-time. And flying fighters part-time is -- I mean it is full-time work to get to a point where you can employ those weapons systems to the

degree that the Air Force needs them.

So we now have that, there's many more full-time people in the Air National Guard than there used to be, and it is a better equipped, newer equipped, has more equipment in it that's better, and it's just a better, more disciplined, more combat-capable Force than when I joined.

I would say the Army side of this thing, and again I talk with somewhat less credibility, but I will tell you, to train an Army Brigade Combat Team it is a -- it is a monster undertaking, of logistics, of training, of operations collectively to maneuver through 3,500 people into NTC and get it all integrated together to work and to practice it. You know, the Air Force is a platform-based system, you get the F-16, you get six of them you can go fly anywhere, do your wartime mission from your home base.

The Army, not so much, you can do little pieces of it, but to do the collective training required for the big Army formations it's hard to do, and it's expensive, and it takes time. And, you know, time is one of the biggest limitations we have as members of the Guard Reserve, and I watch some of these folks in the brigades here that go to national training centers. And as they work up to go to a national training center rotation the commanders, the company commanders, the battalion commanders, they will have entire lives as accountants, or salesmen, or doctors, or whatever they do in their civilian lives.

But then they will have to dedicate 90 or 100 days to get to that culminating readiness event, to make that Brigade Combat Team ready to go to war or to go on a deployment. And it's just, it's hard, it is hard work, I've watched it -- I've gone out there, there's no similar mechanism in the Air side to watch how a Brigade Combat Team trains.

That said, all the same things apply though, the Army demanded same standards, same fitness, same rigorous application of training resources towards, you know, individual training statuses and collective training statuses, and we're a better, more disciplined Force. And we may not be able to get out the door as fast as, you know, an Active Duty Army Brigade can, or maybe we take 90 days or 100 days, which sounds like a long time, but when you talk about that the movement to a war zone of equipment and brigades that have to ship that whole process takes a long time.

And one of the things that I like most about this rotational, operational Force that we've become, on both the Army and the Air side is, mobilization of the Force it is a national, strategic capability

that we need to exercise and use. If you can't pick up your Force and move it someplace, train it, and move it, and if you don't practice those kinds of things when you need to do it, to go fight a China or go fight a Russia, it will be impossible to do.

So those things need to be practiced, and that's yet another reason to continue to do it. But you are right, I mean, you know, as we watched, you know, late last year we saw that some of the folks who were pulling forces out of Syria, moving into the eastern part of Syria, and the National Guard, the North Carolina National Guard had just got into Kuwait and they were the first ones up into Syria with the 30th Brigade Combat Team.

And there were comments all over the place about, the world has flipped upside down, and we have the National Guard in Syria, and we have the Active Army on the Southwest Border. And what really came to defend that was, all the other comments from, hey, the Guard is ready, they're trained, they're a different force than people think of them back in Vietnam, in pre-era of our existence. And they're ready to do it, and they are, and they're still there, and they're still doing a great job.

So, we are, without a doubt, a different Force altogether. We still have some limitations on, you know, I think when -- when I read the reports too of deployed capability in the war zone, and most of the ones I've read said that the National Guard formations performed great, they did a great job. There was no difference really between what they were doing. And others will tell you, well, that's not an apples-to-apples comparison, they had a different role, a different mission, a different area.

But still I think, you know, we have proven ourselves as viable combat capability that can -- again I believe this to be true -- enable investment in the National Defense Strategy such that you can use us as credible combat forces, and such that you can invest money in buying new things which is very expensive to do as we've seen. So I hope that answers your question.

MR. O'HANLON: That's very helpful. I wanted to follow up on the money and resources question. Sort of, I have two main questions or curiosities here. One is just if you have a simple rule of thumb in your own mind for how much a National Guard formation costs relative to an Active formation. Obviously, it's going to vary depending on the equipment, but I think what you basically told us today is that, and this is a good thing, there's no longer any real savings in the money you spend to equip a Guard formation because it's designed to be just as good, and therefore it has to have just as good stuff, and it

has to be interoperable with the Active Force.

So out of that, roughly one-third of the Pentagon budget that is devoted to acquisition, and weaponry there's basically very little savings when -- whether you're National Guard or Reserve. But it's the two-thirds of the money that goes to people, where you can leverage savings of anywhere from, you know, certainly more than half, probably as much as two-thirds to three-fourths of the people side, and the operating and maintenance side.

So I'm guessing that a Guard unit should be thought of as roughly half as expensive. When you put all this stuff together into the same picture, and you average across different kinds of units a National Guard unit should be probably about half as expensive when it's not being deployed as an active unit. Is that sort of a rough figure that you use as well?

GENERAL LENGYEL: Yeah. I mean, and to be fair, you know, I'm always trying to be careful and fair when I start talking about numbers. Do you know what I mean? But it is the people that cost less and, you know, the Air National Guard is, you know, it's about 100,000 -- 110,000 people, and we have, 35,000 of them are full-time.

So, obviously, you know, the savings comes from all of the part-time folks, which cost about a third of what it costs to have a full-time employee. On the Army side of that coin, you know, just under 340,000 actively in there, and of that about 16 percent of that Force is full-time, a very small percentage of the time.

So that's where we save the money, you know. And I can show you numbers where it says, hey, a Brigade and, the Guard, an Army Infantry Brigade that is not deployed, we're just doing our yearly training cycle, costs about a-third of an Infantry Brigade that is full-time, and it's not deployed, but everybody there is full-time.

So the savings is isn't people, it isn't money and, you know, that that is where I think, long-term, you know, as much as I think a 3 percent pay raise would be great for the folks next year, that is a lot of money that the Department of Defense cannot spend on other things, like buying new technology and new equipment.

MR. O'HANLON: Excellent. I wanted to also ask about the internal decision-making about resourcing the Guard, because it's now been, well how long, eight or ten years that a Guard Officer

has been part of the Joint Chiefs?

GENERAL LENGYEL: That's right. It's nine years ago, yeah, it happened, so nine years.

MR. O'HANLON: So, has that helped? Has that, or do you think that the Air Force -- and I'm not trying to revisit this issue or this question -- but what based on your experience, as the Vice Chief, and now the Chief of the National Guard Bureau, is having a seat at that table important for making sure that the Guard is resourced correctly?

Or do you also think that the services themselves have started to get it, and get (inaudible) on this question? And they themselves have figured out that, you know, while your voice is still helpful, they also are major proponents of properly sourcing and resourcing the National Guard.

GENERAL LENGYEL: So I think number two is the truth. I think that, you know, both Chiefs of the Army and Air Force that I work with; General Goldfein who I've known for a long time, and General Milley (phonetic) and then General Campbell. And it all seemed that the Reserve Components, and in particular the National Guard, an integral part of the Air Force. They want to keep it ready and operational because they use it.

Again, back to the Operational Force, is when they use you, when they deploy you, they see value in investing in you. And they then free up money that gives you training, they then free up money that buys you new equipment and gives you dollars to keep it ready, because they see operational utility from your Force. And that's just fundamentally changed in the Department of Defense, particularly since 9/11.

And, you know, I told you that story about showing up in Texas, you know, and I said, I'm going to make this the best fighter squadron in the world. I would say we could have gone to war and supported the effort, and we could have, you know, credibly done what the Air Force asked us to, but you might not have wanted us to be out front, and the lead unit in a package to Downtown Baghdad, or anywhere else.

But I would tell you that tonight, today, if you had a National Guard Unit over there doing something like that, General Goldfein, I'd say with some certainty, would be comfortable with any role that that -- if that unit were to be a player. It could be the quarterback of the biggest package going anywhere,

anytime, in any platform. And that's because they've invested in us, they have used us, and they really have stepped up to the plate.

MR. O'HANLON: I think you've begun to explain and answered my next question, but let me put it before you as well. Sort of the state of people inside the National Guard, obviously, you've been talking -- extolling their virtues and their accomplishments, they're obviously very good. And you've also been saying that they're doing a lot, you like that, and maybe they could even do more. But I know of course they also have lives back home for the 70 percent of the Air National Guard, and the 90 percent of the Army National Guard that's not working full-time for those organizations.

And so there's got to be some limit on just how hard you can push them, and also there probably are some limits on your ability to recruit and retain. So, in terms of OPTEMPO, and recruiting, and retention, how you're doing? Do you see any particular problems, any particular concerns?

GENERAL LENGYEL: So, I think I think we're doing -- we're doing well. You know, before the coronavirus and before the economic turndown and the economy where it began to contract, I think I would have said that, you know, it's getting a little more difficult for us to retain some of our airline pilots who used to say, I'm going to go into the Air Guard, and do that.

And while I'm an airline pilot a lot of -- a lot of folks were choosing not to do that, so we're starting to see a little bit harder time to keep our Forces in the aviation business. You know, that 90 to 100 days that I told you for the Brigade Commander the problem with our forces, you know, high-speed National Guardsmen happen to be high-speed civilians too, you know, it translates.

So as we go up to the top of the tier, and you get to the command level somebody that's at that 15, 18, 20-year point, and you want them to stay to be division commanders or, you know, longer, bigger. They're having to make a choice now with, hey, I've been fabulously successful in both careers, and now they want me to be a Vice President, and I can't do all of this at once. So we are seeing that competition continues to happen because we promote the best people to do our hardest jobs, and those people are usually, you know, lighting it up in their civilian careers.

So, you know, I think that will continue to be a challenge, the way we manage talent, the way we recruit talent, the way we treat that talent when it's with us, and I think it's hugely important that the discussion that we're having now with diversity in our Force, and treating people, and giving

everybody equal opportunities to command and lead, and be there. We have got to do better on that.

And, you know, find opportunities such that across our Force, and I sense right now, we're kind of in a little different spot, we are going to make some fundamental shifts, and changes that allow us to grow, and get the best talent that all of them don't look like me, as White men, you know, I think is a is something that I think is a good thing.

And so recruiting is always difficult, you know, when you look at what the Military does, all the services every year, there's a population of about 350,000 people that we all try to get. They're all the same age, they're all morally and fit -- and they're fit, and they're high school graduates. So we all compete for that, and I have to get 45 of them in the Army National Guard, and 10,000, 10- to 15,000 of them in the Air National Guard. And the Army tries to get 70,000, and the Air Force tries to get 50- you start going through that that competition for talent pretty quick.

So, you know, that's the key is, we will offer somebody -- you know, I tell the story about, I was at an Ohio food bank being run by a Lieutenant who was an Infantry Officer, who, in his civilian life was an accountant for Deloitte. And so, you know, here he is doing an accounting job as an Infantry Officer that is that day charged with running a food bank. And so you get those people, and this guy was high speed, I'm telling you, he was super high speed.

So the ability to find and keep those people has never been more important than it is now. And we continue to ask them, and their families, and their employers, we have to incentivize, you know, the ability of employers to let their people go, and I'll use mine. I've been an (inaudible) an employer for a major airline, and I've been a Military lead for 17 consecutive years, 17 years.

They're proud of me. I'm the only four-star airline pilot in the business, and there's a -- you know, they thought about me, but to treat them right, and make sure that it's in their interest to support the Military members who want to serve is very important to us.

MR. O'HANLON: So, that leads me to my last question. And then we've got a number already that have come in from the audience which I'll get to next. But I wanted to ask you about the future, and I know this is a little bit -- I'm not asking you to advocate for a certain policy, because I think we're too early to do that in any new presidential term, whether it's re-elected President Trump, or President Biden, or whatever kind of new Defense Team is assembled by either one, and whatever the

fiscal and other priorities of the country are, as we come out of COVID next year, God willing.

You know, and there is the possibility of a defense debate, at least where people are asking fundamental questions. You know, is there a way to maintain more or less the National Defense Strategy to cope with the rising China and Russia? As well as, you know, the ongoing concerns in North Korea, and Iran, and the Broader Middle East with terrorism, is there a way to do that less expensively? You know, in the context of a broader government effort to reduce the deficit and put a cap on the debt?

I think that question is going to be raised next year. And, again, without asking you to advocate for a specific answer, I guess the simple question I have on my mind, as we brainstorm about the future Active Reserve mix in the U.S. Military, let's just imagine we keep the size of the overall Total Force roughly constant at around 2.1 million total personnel, about 1.3 million Active Duty, about 800,000 in the Reserve Component of which 450,000 are yours, 350,000 of which are for the services.

Just to review the basic facts and figures, and if we imagine the kinds of changes we might make, is it plausible that the Reserve Component could be half as big as the -- I'm sorry -- could be half of the Total Force, could be as much as, let's say, you know, a million, or even a little over, out of that Total Force of 2.1 million. As we just brainstorm, just options that we should be considering, not ones we're going to advocate or implement. Could we even go as high as to make half of our Military the Reserve Component, either Guard or Reserve?

GENERAL LENGYEL: Yeah. Michael, I'll tell you, I would that, you know, it always depends. Right, I mean it's -- I think the National Guard and the Reserves have proven themselves a credible combat Force. Properly trained, properly equipped, we can go anywhere and we can do the missions the nation has asked us to do. We've proven it, we're doing it right now.

Could the National Guard be bigger? I would say it could. You know, it's all a risk equation. You know, on the air side I see very little risk in larger structure in the National Guard. You know, but what the Pentagon sees when I look through their lens is: Are we fast enough? Are we responsive enough? They talk about access to the Reserve Component. That's a concept that I have to talk about routinely inside the Pentagon.

You know, the way that you can get the Reserve Component to go and be part of your Force is, we have to have -- we have to be mobilized, and those mobilization, authorizations are in law,

and they come from Congress.

And so is there friction sometimes; or perceived risk in that I won't be able to get access to them fast enough or soon enough? And I think that's a fair concern, and I think that I would say that that friction, though, I think is intentionally built into the system. You know, Congress never intended for the DoD to be able to (inaudible) across the Pacific and go to war without mobilizing the Reserve Component.

It's some of the levers that we have that keep civilian control over what our Military does, and America kind of gets to vote. I think that using the Reserve Component, we're in many states and counties, where the only uniforms they ever see are men and women of the National Guard. That the folks that pack up, and deploy to war, to Afghanistan, they go do assurance missions in Europe, they prepare and go to do whatever the nation needs it to do, and keeps America connected to what they're doing now.

So we are absolutely a tool that the Department of Defense said in the event we would go to war with a China or a Russia we need the Force to be this big, you can keep capacity in the Reserve Component at a lower cost. And then you have to ask the rest of the subject the questions of, well, what else are you going to do? I mean if you're going to have Military Force Structure forward postured in Africa, and Europe, and Asia, and the rest, you know, we can help there on a rotational basis, but we can't go live there. That's not the way that that works for us.

So without a doubt I think that when they go to look at decisions, and how we only have so much money to spend, if you decide you need X-number of brigades or combat teams you should look closely and go: Can this Force be in the Reserve Component? And if the answer to that question is, we think that, you know, timelines being what they are we can only move X-number of brigades this fast anyway, and by the time you get to these other brigades we can have the national Air Forces trained and ready.

Then if you're in that business of trying to find resources to buy new things, whether they be space, or nukes, or hypersonic weapons, or whatever they may be, you may choose to take risk in that portfolio of: I've got a slightly less responsive force that I'll have to train up and deploy, but I now have money to buy new weapons and technology for it.

So it's a risk-balancing equation that the Department of Defense wrestles with every day. But we clearly, in my view, in my personal view, there are places that we could be bigger and mitigate that risk and save money. I certainly wouldn't advocate shrinking the Reserve Component and buying a bigger Active Component only because I just watch what we do. And I think we are supremely experts at helping the Army and the Air Force do what they need.

MR. O'HANLON: By the way, let me just say something that, of course, is obvious to you, but just for any part of the audience that may not be as familiar with these terms or organizations. So there are six different organizations that are part of the Reserve Component of the U.S. Military, because each service has its reserve, and then General Lengyel, is in charge of the National Guard for the Army and the Air Force. So there are a total of six. And those six encompass 800,000 uniformed personnel.

My question is, if we have a total force of 2.1 million, right now we have 800,000 Reserve Component of which 450,000 or so are our National Guard, 350,000 our Reserve. Out of that 800,000, could that number grow even up to a million, and so we had basically close to half of the Military in the Reserve Component, close to half in the Active Force. I'll be intrigued to see if that kind of question gets asked next year?

But now we have some questions, General, from the audience. And one's starting from a very specific but important vantage point about COVID-19, wondering if social distancing and also absentee and attrition from the disease have had bad effects on your maintenance, on your ability to keep aviation units in good shape? Or are you able, so far, to maintain readiness despite the restrictions from the COVID-19, you know, partial shutdown, if you will?

GENERAL LENGYEL: Yeah, great question. So we've not had a large reduction in our readiness as a result of COVID-19. And strangely enough I would offer that, you know, we made some changes to how we did business to prevent, you know, a full up infection of any given unit. We started breaking like, say, maintainers into smaller groups, that some would come in and work in a day, some would come in at night, minimize the interaction between the groups, and such that you wouldn't get everybody sick if you did.

And strangely enough, in some cases we found that we're more efficient and getting

more maintenance done because we have started doing business slightly differently. We we've had, you know, I think just under 2,000 total cases in the National Guard of COVID-19 infections, one death, thankfully only one. A soldier in the New Jersey National Guard had died early on in this.

But overall I think we've made all the same changes that the Active Components has, you know, all the impacts it's had with Sessions it had on us. All the impacts to some of our collective training events, and we didn't have drill weekends for a couple of months, but we found ways to do things on telework, and distancing, and the like that have helped.

I think, broadly speaking, COVID has changed some of the things inside the Department and inside of our operations. We always said we could telework, but until we actually really had to do it we found we didn't have enough bandwidth. The software wasn't good enough. We couldn't do things like we're doing right now, simply, and easily without technical difficulties. We can now. And I suspect going forward we're going to save money on conferences, and things before that we have just learned how to do it differently.

And so COVID has had an impact. We do, very closely, we follow all the CDC guidelines, it's had impacts on moving people, impacts on deployments in and out, impacts on going into host nations, who want us to quarantine, and we're doing all those things. But like many of you I'm ready for that vaccine to come from Project Warp Speed here pretty soon. Let's get that thing going, made, and out there.

I don't know that I want to do what the Chinese have done and use their Military as a test bed for it, but I think we should -- we should get that out there, and get it done as quickly as we can.

MR. O'HANLON: Thank you. You have a question from one of your incoming congressional fellows to Capitol Hill from the National Guard who wonders if there is a specific set of priorities for the upcoming, you know, or ongoing budget season, but especially next year. Now, obviously, as you and I were just discussing there's going to be a potential big budget debate next year, but beyond that he wondered if there were specific priorities on your mind.

GENERAL LENGYEL: So, you know, our considerations have always been readiness. Has been, how do we make us be able to get ready faster? And that that's been my entire tenure: build a more lethal force, and do that stuff. We believe that we have asked for, you know, some additional full-

time support, and I'm very cautious when I do that because it's money, it changes our business model.

Every time we talk about it, you know, and I tell the Force that, you know, basically we look at our business model, and it comes down to are we of value to the Department of Defense? A and I make the assessment that the value is determined by: Hey, how good are you? And then, how big are you, and how easy is it to use you? And you divide that by the cost. And there's a number that comes out of that.

How good are we? That's our training, that's the way we practice, we train, and we make ourselves ready. How big we are? Congress gets to decide that. And how easy can they access us? That's sort of our streamline process of using the mobilization authorities that we have, divide that by the cost, the biggest number in that cost that changes is people. And so the every time we ask, it says I need more people, more full-time people to do this. I have to think very hard and tell commanders, hey, go look at that, and say is that really what you do. Because you change that value equation every time we go out we do that.

So readiness, people training, making sure that they're the right things that have been out there, and innovation, not necessarily a legislative priority for us, but it's been a priority for us to look at new things, like 3D printing, and 3D manufacturing of the ways we do business. Can we take that stuff and deploy with it?

Operate in new and different ways? Leverage these IT things that we've learned through by going to -- going through this COVID operation here have all been amazingly important. So those are the kinds of things that we're looking for on The Hill as we as we do that.

I've tried to get on one Space Force in this thing, and I wasn't successful, I don't think, in making that happen. There's still a lot of concern, for some reason on the creation of a Space National Guard Component. We'll keep doing that. Eventually The Hill will decide what they want that to look like. General Raymond, Air Force; and Secretary Barrett will decide, you know, what that looks like. But maintaining our forces, our facilities, those are all standard priorities that we've always had. Thanks for that question.

MR. O'HANLON: There's another question about: how do you balance the need for protecting the civilian, you know, jobs and lives of your Guardsmen with the desire to be operationally

relevant and involved? And maybe one way to phrase it, I remember a few years ago the basic rule of thumb that the military was trying to establish, after the surges in Iraq and Afghanistan, trying to get back to an Active Duty Force where there would be a dwell time of, you know, two years at home for every one year deployed, at a minimum.

And for the Guard it was more like five to one, Guard and Reserves as I recall. Is that maybe one of the ways you try to establish this balance? Is there sort of a rule of thumb that you try to avoid over deploying people, and use that rule of thumb as a quantitative metric?

GENERAL LENGYEL: Yeah. No, those are the standard numbers that we use for (inaudible) the deploy rates, and we still use those. And, you know, I think that our job, as becoming this operational force has been, to kind of push the limits of those. I mean, and I wanted to, if we don't feel any pain in the system then we're not probably training enough, and we're not being used enough. Feeling some pain is a good thing, in my view, and if we were, you know, never being used, and employers were never having to deal with us being gone, then I would say, then you'd have to question the investment in the National Guard, and why are you doing it if you're never using it?

You're building this Force, and those deployments, again, make us a better more usable Force, the whole idea being occasional, routine, regular deployments of our Force make us be able to integrate, plug in, stay modernized, such that when you need it, you know, if you go to the full mobilization scenario that we haven't used since World War II. And everybody is now in the Army till the end of the war plus six months. Now, you have a Force that can integrate, and can be used.

If you never use it, then I think that's kind of a fallacy, that full mobilization saying, it's so hard to do that that it just sucks up too much of your resources to make it work. So, I think civilian jobs, in some of our higher demands we have to be careful. You know, a lot of police officers came on duty for us when the civil unrest happened, that drains police officers from the civilian force where they serve and live.

And what if, you know, when you deploy a unit of MPs from some place in Vermont, you take a lot of the police officers out of that town in Vermont, we deploy from towns and they go. So they have to watch that, and we have to watch that, and that's why predictability is so key for us. If we have known deployments, whether they be to the Sinai or, you know, the Multinational Force and Observer

Mission, or whether they're in the Kosovo, or even Kuwait, or Europe, wherever they may be, we don't really care where they are, but we have to know about them so our employers can plan for them, and I think that's key.

And, you know, it kind of comes down to, the tricky thing now is, employers understood and fully supported going to war, to combat in Afghanistan, or in Iraq, or in Syria, what they understand -- don't understand less are these international strategic engagements that build alliances and partnerships that might be in Thailand.

And people are deployed to Thailand, and they're on Facebook with a picture of them on Pattaya Beach, and employers are like: you're gone, and you're doing this, and what's the good? We have to make them understand that it's a communication leadership problem, to make them understand the strategic engagement value of our presence in these places. It builds partnerships, it builds presence, it builds our ability to engage when we need it.

So it's a new leadership challenge for the men and women in these towns to convey why we are doing it, and I think, in large measure, once you explain to them the need to engage, and have allies and partners, they understand and they get on.

MR. O'HANLON: We've got one question on the sensitive matter of the June 3rd Washington, D.C., protest and response from Nicholas Schifrin of the *PBS NewsHour*. And he's asking about the status of the investigation and whether there are any preliminary lessons learned. So I know it's a tough topic, but just wondered if you had any thoughts to share today, General.

GENERAL LENGYEL: Is that the RC-26 investigation that's ongoing? Is that the one that he wants to know about? I ordered the helicopter investigation, there were two investigations.

MR. O'HANLON: He doesn't mention he doesn't mention that specifically, so I'm not sure.

GENERAL LENGYEL: I think all of those investigations are still ongoing, and we definitely want to get to the bottom of all of them, and then when we do, you know, we'll make sure that -- you know, that the dynamics of the civil unrest issue that started in Minneapolis, and spread to Georgia, and then around the nation to 33 other states, broadly speaking, so many bad things could have happened during that entire engagement, that I'm very proud of the men and women of the Guard that did

it.

I mean it's, I think I can say this, I think in D.C., as we did there in the District of Columbia, I don't think a National Guard member touched a protester. I mean I don't think. There were cases when we were on the Lincoln Memorial, and the rest, and the like but, you know, in general, I think that we provided a presence that supported law enforcement, and that was there to make sure people could peacefully protest, and people wouldn't commit crimes, if they were, we could assist law enforcement to intervene. But those ongoing investigations are still happening, and when they're done we'll make sure everybody knows what they say.

MR. O'HANLON: -- combine a couple of questions into what will be the last one. We're running up on 3:00 pretty quickly, but there are two pandemic-related questions, and one of them is sort of asking what you've learned in the last six months that you might have decided you want to, you know, learn lessons from, either the response to COVID, or the way COVID has affected the country, that's led you to need to change something specifically about the National Guard.

Whether it's how you train people, or whether it's, as you say, how you monitor, you don't pull the whole police department out of Northern Vermont when you go deploy a unit. So picking up on that, are there any particularly concrete insights that you've gained?

And the other one is a little more speculative, and talks about a potentially different kind of pandemic, a new pandemic that could be even worse, and whether you've sort of tried to already learn lessons from this response that could help you if the next one is even further out of control, and may be even more dangerous than COVID-19 has been? So those two; over to you, General.

GENERAL LENGYEL: So I think, you know, we do after-action reviews every time we're engaged in anything. You know, and I think we've got some lessons learned on how we train. You know, I can tell you that nobody I think ever anticipated that we would have to do simultaneous civil unrest activities in 33 states in the same three -- five-day period like we did most recently, you know, in D.C. and around the country.

So I think we will put some more effort on our training, and other ways to deescalate situations, should we get some soldier, or some airmen in a situation, again, where they feel more ready, as ready as you can be for that situation. And I've said many times in our domestic portfolio what we do

here in the homeland civil unrest is our most difficult mission.

We don't like doing it. It it's hard to do. Frequently there are members of one family on one side of the line, and other members dressed in civil and riot gear on the other side. And it is a difficult, difficult situation for our men and women to be in.

So we'll train better, we'll be ready, and we will do what we can to make sure that we're as prepared as we can possibly be. In my opinion uniforms, I don't care what flavor they are, in Title 10, Active Duty, National Guard Reserve, uniforms of being out there in law enforcement situations is not optimum. We should do as little of it as we can, and it should be predominantly a law enforcement-police operation. And when they need us we can, and we will come, but we should do what we can to avoid that.

We've looked at what the pandemic means for us, and across our -- across our deployment portfolio here. How do we do hurricanes? We've had conferences already on, you know, what does this pandemic hot zone thing mean for us as we go to evacuate nursing homes where you have high-risk people? And how do we do things such that create shelters where social distancing is not possible?

But this pandemic it could happen again. There's no question, you know, and I think -- you know, as important to the nation as having a hypersonic weapon, or a new satellite, as our nation needs to be able to develop and use vaccines, and create these things at more fast -- faster speeds so that we can find them, test them and deploy them in a faster -- in a faster sense.

So, you know, to the degree that we can help our nation do that, have other investments by being a less expensive Force that contributes to the national defense of the country, I think that's a good thing. And, you know, I've been very, very proud.

What have I learned? You know, I thought my last six months would be go visit a few state partnership programs, go to Cairo and sign a new state partnership between Texas and Egypt, which I'm very proud of. I think it's going to be a great partnership. But all of that was put on hold, because our nation was paralyzed. You know, basically we were put in a headlock -- as the world is -- to deal with the impacts of COVID. And we're not done yet, and we won't be done until there's a vaccine out there that changes things.

So very proud of the Guard and their contribution to what they have done, not just in the COVID place, but also civil unrest, and what we're doing. Title 10 is part of the -- part of the Department of Defense in every combatant command around the world.

So, that's really all I've got, Michael. Thanks for having me.

MR. O'HANLON: General, there's no better way to end than what you just said. So let me just join you in thanking the guardsmen and women across the Force, and around the world, and across the country, who've done so much to help us through this crisis, and continue to do so.

And thank you for your service, your friendship, your collegiality with us at Brookings, but also what you've done for the country, and very best wishes going forward. Thank you, sir.

GENERAL LENGYEL: Thank you very much, honored to do it. Thanks for having me.

MR. O'HANLON: We'll see you.

GENERAL LENGYEL: Okay.

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