

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION

WEBINAR

SECURING GLOBAL MOBILITY:  
A CONVERSATION WITH GENERAL JACQUELINE VAN OVOST,  
14<sup>TH</sup> COMMANDER OF THE US TRANSPORTATION COMMAND

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PANEL DISCUSSION:

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**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** Greetings, everyone, and thank you for joining us today. I'm Michael O'Hanlon with the Strobe Talbott Center on Security, Strategy, and Technology. And today we at Brookings, including my distinguished colleague Colonel Jason Wolff of the U.S. Air Force, have a great privilege and something that is a first-time event for us at Brookings, we're going to be able to interview and discuss with the commanding general of U.S. Transportation Command, General Jacqueline Van Ovost, the challenges faced by that command, its activities, its structure, what it's doing to support U.S. global posture around the world, U.S. military deterrence and operations from Europe to the Middle East to Africa. In just a moment, Jason, Colonel Wolff, is going to give us more proper and full introduction of General Van Ovost, who's a really remarkable American, who's accomplished so much, the first woman ever to lead Transportation Command, the 14th commander in that command's history.

Let me just say a brief word, if I could, about why we see this subject is so important today. Before I hand off to Jason and then we'll have a discussion with the general and then ultimately include some of your questions to wrap up the hour. U.S. Transportation Command was created after the Goldwater-Nichols legislation. It was stood up in 1987, and it's been in effect ever since then. It is a global command that is responsible for moving U.S. military personnel and equipment around the world to the four corners of the planet. And using Air Force, Navy, Army, Marine Corps assets. It's a joint command. It's quite often been led by an Air Force officer, but it is intended to and very much employs the assets of all the military services and is responsible for moving and supplying all of those services. When people think about what makes the U.S. military special, obviously you have to think about its history and winning the world wars. You also think about nuclear deterrence, high technology, all these things are crucial. And certainly the men and women of our armed forces are perhaps the most prized asset of all. But I also think about our transportation capability, our global base network, our mobility, and the capacity of the United States armed forces have to operate around the world to move quickly, to reinforce to do amazing things from this North American island that we live upon, but to really influence events throughout broader Eurasia and the globe more generally. And so Transportation Command to me is one of the two or three most important distinguishing assets and attributes of the American armed forces today. And that's why, again, I'm so thrilled that we're able to have General Van Ovost in conversation. So, Colonel Wolff, if I could pass the baton to you now to introduce her a little more fully and then we'll get the conversation going over.

**JASON WOLFF:** Thank you so much, Michael, Doctor O'Hanlon. I'm Jason Wolff. I'm a Department of Defense federal executive fellow here at Brookings and a logistics officer of over 20 years and I'll be one of your moderators today. It is my distinct pleasure to introduce our honored guest, the 14th commander of U.S. Transportation Command, General Jacqueline Van Ovost. She assumed command of U.S. TRANSCOM back in October 2021, and she is an Air Force Academy grad with a master's degree in mechanical engineering from California State University and a masters of military arts and sciences and strategic studies from Air War College. Not only that, she's a graduate of the U.S. Air Force Test Pilot School, and has a command pilot with over 4200 hours and in 30 airframes. I'll say one more time: in 30 airframes. She has led at every level of leadership, squadron, group command, to include at Wing Command of the Presidential Airlift Wing. She has had multiple staff jobs and joint jobs, including director of staff of headquarters Air Force, vice director of Joint Staff, just to name a few. And prior to this role, she was the commander of the Air Mobility Command. Joining General Van Ovost is my colleague, Dr. Michael O'Hanlon. He's a senior fellow and director of research in Foreign Policy here at the Brookings Institute, where he specializes in U.S. defense strategy, the use of military force, and American national security policy. He directs the Strobe Talbott Center for Security, Strategy, and Technology and is the inaugural holder of the Philip H. Knight Chair in Defense Strategy. He teaches at Columbia, Georgetown, and George Washington universities. Yes, that many universities and still shows up to make these things a memorable, remarkable event. He also serves as a member of the Defense Policy Board at the U.S. Department of Defense. He is the author of over 20 books, and his most recent book is "Military History for the Modern Strategist." It was published earlier this year. Finally, before we begin, we are currently livestreaming with this event and on the record. Please feel free to send your questions in to events at Brookings Dot edu or hashtag USTRANSCOM for the Q&A period. Following our discussion, I'll now hand it over to Mike to start the discussion.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** Jason, thank you very much. And General Van Ovost, if I could please just say welcome and thank you so much for joining us today. It really is a treat.

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** Yeah. Thank you so much. It's a great to be here. Thanks for supporting and thanks for asking TRANSCOM to come on for the first time.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** Well, I know it's an amazing organization, and I wondered if we could begin by asking you just to talk a little bit about it. You're based out in Illinois at Scott Air Force Base, but you have a lot of assets at your beck and call throughout the United States and beyond. So I wondered if you could

explain a little bit about the component commands, about the key bases, some of the key assets and people who work for you place?

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** Thanks. You hit it right on the head. Our most important assets are our people and our relationships. Air Mobility Command. Our air arm is here. It's got Air Force Base. Surface deployment and distribution Command. The soldiers are right here at Scott Air Force Base. And Military Sealift Command is in Norfolk. So those are our three component commands. But I also have a fourth component command, and those are our commercial transportation partners. Right. So we affectionately call them the fourth command because they are fourth. They're a force multiplier for us in competition and in conflict. And along with our access, basing and overflight provided by our deep well of allies and partners all around the globe. Gives us that freedom of maneuver. Let me say this is formidable and we talk about it. We think about our military bases, our airports and seaports, we think and assets. And then we think about our commercial transportation partners, their airports where they operate, out of their seaports and their and their partnerships. We think about ride share that they they partner with other international partners. Their web of capabilities. And then we add allies and partners and their reach, their contacts and contracts makes it a very formidable web of transportation capabilities that we leverage every day, but something a little less well known about what we do. We're also responsible for a global patient movement. Remove Department of Defense Service members and their families if needed, from one location around the globe to an area of higher order we call a higher level of care, whether that's still within the region or all the way back here to the United States, that's a super important mission that we honorably carry out every day. We also are now the the single manager for global bulk fuel management and delivery. That's a new unified command plan mission. We also move our families household goods. We own the defense personal property system. So at any one time we have 1500 household goods shipments underway around the globe for the Department of Defense, military service members, civilians and the Coast Guard. And then finally, we have a joint Enabling Capabilities Command that's in Norfolk. It's a subordinate command to us, and they're responsible for setting up a joint task force. These are high end planners, knowledge management, public affairs and communications at the tactical edge. To stand up, to stand up in case of a crisis. And that's TRANSCOM.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** That's a remarkable litany of capabilities. I wondered if you could just stay on this topic, please, General, for another minute and give us a couple more examples about some of the key assets, some of the key things you mentioned. I'm sure caution about moving people and supplies around. You've got often the private contractors who are helping with that, but you also, I believe, command the operation of things like our large, medium speed roll off and roll on ships, our airlift and tanker fleets, our, as you say, ground mobility capabilities, trucks and other assets might be moved with them. I wonder when you construct a maybe you don't have a short list in your head of how you think about your assets, but if you could sort of give us a feel for what would be six or eight of the most important kinds of capabilities that are on your beck and call and also roughly how many people work for you?

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** Sure. Sure. Let I'll start with the people that they matter most, about 220,000 people, I'm sure 120,000 people, including our military, civilian and contractors that are stationed around the globe. 20,000. And I think about strategic lift. That's our strategic sealift, those beautiful roll on, roll off ships, 44 of them in our in our ready reserve fleet. I think about our strategic airlift, C-17s and sea fives and I think about our air refueling capabilities, KC 135 and KC 46, all required to move strategic forces decisively around the globe. And we also have tactical airlift and agency and C-130. And any day I think about the other assets that we use. So in any given day, every 3 minutes there's a takeoff and landing. That 455 sorties of air a day, about 33 ships are sailing every day. I said about 1500 household goods properties on the move every day, almost 300 train cars on the move every day. So, you know, planes, trains and automobiles, we have about about 1200 trucks a day are on the road for us. So it is it's quite formidable. And when I think about two thirds of our military force are in the Guard or Reserve. So I would require extensive volunteerism to ensure our job gets done every day. And they're such such great partners. And 90% of our passengers move by our commercial partners. And in wartime, 90% of our of the equipment will go on commercial sealift. So we're really a force multiplier.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** Wow. I didn't realize that was the figure, even in wartime for supply. That's quite startling. I guess that really emphasizes the role of things like bulk supplies, oil, etc.. Right. Because presumably Transportation Command is going to move a lot of the military equipment that requires specialized capacity of some type like the LMS are roll on, roll off. But the commercial will pick up a lot of the bulk supplies so that essentially how to think about the allocation of labor.

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** It is in fact a commercial will pick up 40% of our bulk air. And it's what it's made for. And so I balance readiness every day. I want the military airplanes to do only what the military can do, which is sort of the more hazardous, outsized, oversize capability and put into commercials where commercials do best, which is just sort of bulk movement and passengers.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** This is a fantastic overview and I want to just ask one more question in the spirit of this primer that you're providing so helpfully. And then move on to some specific questions about where we go from here. I wondered if you could just give us a thumbnail sketch of maybe a half dozen of the most important overseas bases. Obviously, the U.S. military has hundreds of overseas bases, but a lot of them are for specific purposes in the country where they're located or the region. I know you also think in terms of global hubs, major facilities, major bases that are important not only for the country where they may be located, but for our broader global web and network of movement and and supply logistics. Do you have a short list in your head of eight or ten of the most important bases for that purpose?

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** Yeah, just walk around the world. You know, in Europe, the heart of your process is Ramstein. Germany is a very much a logistics hub, both for and air and sea, where many sea ports there Bremerhaven that we use. And of course, we're using Poland to great effect as well. You probably know the in the in Africa area, Djibouti is one of our main bases that we operate out of to support Africa. All you need is a main base we use in in Central Command. And of course, on the sea side, we have Bahrain and Kuwait for for sea port capability. I think of Diego Garcia. I also think about coming through. We'll use Guam, of course, in the in the Pacific, Okinawa, which is Kadena. Again, they really are paired with sea and air ports and what I call multimodal ports. And of course, on the east and West Coast, I rely on US infrastructure to push out of here. So we have several sea ports in the Gulf. So we'll see ports on the East Coast, one of which is a military ocean terminal. Sonny Pointe, which is where I moved ammunition out of. And then several on the West Coast as well. Right. To push out of the West Coast. So we have strategic seaports. We absolutely do. And these are mostly commercial. We only have two U.S. military ports, mostly commercial. And so I absolutely rely on roads, rail and sea ports right here in America to keep that critical infrastructure, keep our ability to project and sustain the force.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** Thank you. And I want to come back to that in just a minute. But first, I thought I'd give you a chance, if you don't mind helping us understand the role of Transportation Command in the conflict in Ukraine over the last 16 months and even the period before that. And I wondered if there were two or three highlights for you of most important contributions you've been able to make or maybe the lessons that you've been able to learn? Any any concerns you've got right now about your ongoing ability to supply Ukraine with the kind of equipment we've been providing and may provide in the future? Could you just give us for you what sort of a snapshot sketch of the Ukraine conflict to date?

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** Your Thanks. The look, the security assistance that we have provided Ukraine, along with 40 other nations, has been substantial. Over a million rounds of 155 ammunition, like 1500 air defense systems, 330 artillery systems. These are major items plus everything it needs to support. Because just because you have a system doesn't mean you can actually fire anything or do anything without radars and support. And then, of course, the training that's being done in and around Europe for for the Ukrainians, which will also take part in by moving by moving them around. So our support to them has been substantial. We are we are so honored to be able to support them in their fight against the naked aggression of Russia. And they have used the security assistance and the humanitarian assistance to great effect. And so I'm very proud of the work that we have done. It is we have absolutely used something called European Defense Initiative, which is its counterpart specific deterrence initiative or European deterrence initiative. And that's when we we did some preparatory to get some of our heavy equipment there. So when this first started, we were able to deploy over 16,000 troops. And there were the fall in and equipment. We closed it like two weeks faster because we didn't have to carry all that heavy equipment from the United States. So the proposal was paid for by it'll as well as the airfield work we did with EDA in Poland, Romania, and then the exercises to increase our interoperability, especially right along eastern NATO's border, if you will, really. That really paid off. And that's what we're looking for in the Pacific. As I help the endo, PACOM commander and the secretary determine what kind of infrastructure do we need in the Pacific to support our work with the allies and partners out there and, of course, allies and partners. So key you know, Poland has just rolled the red carpet out. They've been very helpful, you know, with their nodes and and our onward movement capability with trains and trucks through their nation and really all throughout NATO has been it's been very helpful that they've come together. And it's great to see, you know, 50 nations come together to support in some way or other directly, whether that's humanitarian support, it's support to the government with funding to keep it open or it's at security support.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** Was the most difficult period for you at Transportation Command, the opening few months of the war when you had to figure out how to do things you hadn't really been doing previously, at least not at that scale, and weren't quite sure how much of the effort might be contested, weren't quite sure how the alliance, the NATO Alliance, would work together. Do you feel like now you're in sort of I mean, knock on wood and recognizing that war is never predictable, but we've sort of achieved a modus operandi

that is now sort of working relatively smoothly. And am I correct that the first two or three months were really the most challenging?

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** You know, Mike, I think that's how it is with any conflict, especially when, you know, you don't expect something to happen. But I tell you, we had some pretty good intelligence and we were pretty forward with that for several months before the full scale invasion by Russia occurred. So we were able to to set the theater. And I have a war framework again, where I look at my posture, my capacity and my ability to command and control and integrate into the joint force game of maneuver. So I was able to set my posture fairly early. What basis do I need to go to? What seaports? And I can move my folks from the surface component that offload the ships. I can move our air personnel right forward, expeditionary operations to open up an airfield. So we were able to pretty much understand sort of what we think would happen. But frankly, we thought first we'd be catching people because we knew there might be an influx of people coming across the border. So how did we set up for that? Right. So where did we think we'd be able to pick them up, move them to shelter or what not? So we knew we planned a plan. So we had plenty of time to do that. And then when we recognized, we kind of came to full scale of, Hey, the name of the game is to support Ukraine in their own defense by them. They just need the equipment. And so when the secretary gave us those orders, we started shifted my posture to delivering in not just our own people, but deliver in security assistance. And now we've been able to normally plan out a regular battle rhythm so I can set my capacity. And indeed, we were able to set our capacity so early on that commercials were able to really help us right from the get go. So 75% of our commercial air flights, almost 1200 flights were done by our commercial partners. And 80% of our ships are 73. 74 vessels worth of stuff came through using our commercial partners to save our military readiness for what only military can do. So it was really very helpful. And that was a lesson we learned in Operation Allies Refuge when we had to quickly scale up to pull people out of Kabul. We got behind a little bit because we didn't realize how many people were coming, and so we had to actually activate a portion of the craft, the civil Reserve air fleet, because commercials couldn't volunteer fast enough. We had to get the capacity immediately to offload our interim staging bases. So we learned that we need to get in early. And we did. In fact, about two weeks prior to the full scale invasion, we called in all of our commercial partners. They were cleared. We gave them a brief on our concept of operations and they made their capacity available. And that is the strength of the relationships. When I talk about people and relationships are the coin of the realm for us.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** On that point about the civil reserve air fleet, commercial carriers basically agreeing to have this relationship with you and be available when called upon and I think make some structural improvements to some of their planes in in advance as well to be ready if I understand the basic deal. My correct in thinking the first time that was really activated on scale was Operation Desert Storm back in 1991. And then perhaps also with the opening months of Operation Iraqi Freedom in 2002 three. But you didn't use it that much over the next 18 years until the Kabul evacuation. Is that correct?

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** That's correct. It was the third time we had to activate. Now, didn't mean we didn't use their capacity. It's just that we we could not anticipate the scale of the operation and it couldn't come fast enough and dump their loads. Right. Because, you know, they have they have their own work to do. Now, think about they what they do every day. They size their businesses for what they think they need to be doing. And and frankly, with COVID, with e-commerce, they were, you know, our freighters, there was a hot commodity, right, because they were moving a lot more e-commerce, you know, just as this thing was evolving. So we really had to manage that flow. And and I think about you were talking about it's there militarily usefulness to us and they're absolutely willing to support us. I think they're their highest tempo. What I call their go to war strategy for UPS and FedEx is Christmas. Every year they spike at Christmas, whether it's passengers or freight cargo, the airliners, they they scale they scale to about five times their normal flights to support their war called Christmas. I have to scale over ten times. In a global conflict. To support the globe. And so to be able to manage conflict and that scale, it really requires data and understanding of the resources, what needs to be moved. What's the most effective way to do it? Military, commercial and allies and partners? And how do I bring all of that together and make sense of it and decide and act so that I can meet national security objectives.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** Great. So I've got three more questions for you before I hand off to Jason. And one is going to be on the Pacific Deterrence Initiative. The second is going to be on sort of your readiness and the condition of your people and equipment where you may have some concerns about strain or inadequate capacity or maintenance backlogs or what have you. And then my final question will be a more generally about vulnerabilities broadly defined, including with cyber, with national infrastructure that you depend on to get assets from the interior of the US out to bases where they can be staged. So those are my final three questions, and I know Jason will pick up on some of those themes himself. But let me start then with the Pacific, if I could. And we know that a lot of the military services are focused on the Pacific, and the Pacific Command obviously is focused on that region. The National Defense Strategy is focused largely on

China, and there are a lot of other initiatives ongoing, like the Air Force's Agile Combat employment concept and General Berger's Marine Corps Force design 2030. And then there's the joint all domain command and control concept, which maybe is more about, more about communication, less about what you do, although I'm sure there are overlaps. I wondered if you could just tell me how you know, obviously, I'm not asking for a comprehensive explanation of everything, but what are some highlights of how you at transportation commands support those various service specific or combatant command specific efforts, especially in the Asia Pacific Theater?

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** Yeah, thanks. I'll just start with a little bit of a why. We've returned to great power competition and the rapidly changing strategic environment means we need new concepts to be able to prevail into the future. Right. And competitors are on a trajectory that will provide really persistent threats across all domains. And that's why the services are changing their service concepts and you're seeing more maneuver in their concepts. Distributed operations aggregate to fight, disaggregate, to increase survival, reload and aggregate again. So when I think about TRANSCOM, you know, we are we traditionally, you know, project sustain, you know, and then bring them back redeploy. That's that was traditionally what we do. But now we have to project maneuver, sustain and redeploy. And as I think about the maneuver concepts, I have to be able to to integrate into Joe Brown's agile common employment or expeditionary Airbus operations. Right. So I have to integrate into the service maneuver concepts. So what we're doing is we're we're in war games with them and collaborating with them on on their maneuver schemes no matter where it is or how they intend to maneuver. And then how do I plug in to sustain them, to get them to a place where they can employ their combat effects, sustain them and then bring them back? And so this new old main threats is what we have to operate under. But we are absolutely participating with them. In fact, this summer we're doing a series of large scale exercises in the Pacific, or we're getting with each of the services and actually practicing what we said in the war game we would do to try to understand if it's going to work or we need to tweak it and when we need to close some gaps in seams and that includes command and control. What I see command and control for me is the coin of the realm. I must absolutely be able to integrate with the Joint Force commanders with maneuver fires, right. Sustainment force protection. You know, we didn't have to force protect much anymore. I mean, know, we didn't have to do that before, but now we do. So that's that's the piece that I'm focused on. But I'm happy to say that we're working very closely with the services on this.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** Excellent. So let me please ask you about where you see problems in your broad portfolio of people, units and equipment. Whether it's because we don't have enough is something you think we need more of. And, of course, General Berger has been trying to work with the Navy to build more smaller amphibious ships, and that's been a slow process, as he told us last month at Brookings. I don't know if you have anything to say on that subject, if you have any particular air fleets that you're most troubled by, either in terms of our ability to maintain them or bring on new capability. Obviously, there's always strains in any kind of large military organization, but I'm wondering if there are a couple of specific concerns you have that rise above the others.

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** Yeah. Thanks. I think about readiness every day. And, you know, we are formidable, you know? And never once in 35 years has strategic transportation been a limiting factor in achieving our national defense objectives. And I don't want it to start now. So as I think about today's readiness and the equipment we have today and the people and how we're training today, I have to project that out into the future. These forces are mainly all assigned to me, so I have to balance both, right? Unlike some others, I own all of it. So I want to make sure that I'm taking care of it and I'm ready. And it can integrate into future concepts with new capabilities that will that will meet those requirements. Today in Sealift, I have two concerns. Our ships, our beautiful 44 roll on, roll off ships or about an average age of 40 years old. In fact, 17 of those 44 are over 50. Now, that's that's way beyond useful life. And so we're we're in a recapitalization program with them. But as we're moving forward, the Navy on that, we are purchasing foreign built, used ships to replenish just for readiness our roll on roll off ships. But our merchant mariners or U.S. Merchant Mariners, we have a shortfall. We are I am concerned about the health of the Mariners. So I'm working closely with the Department Transportation Maritime Administration on the health of the Mariners, and that's about recruiting, retaining quality of life, quality of service so that we can recruit into this career field, because they're really especially after COVID that took huge hit. And there's a lot of frankly, a lot of highly skilled areas in transportation I'm concerned about, like roadway engineers, truck drivers, pilots. But merchant mariners are the ones that I'm the most concerned about, and they are amazing. Those folks are not only on our ships, but day to day they manned the U.S. flagged ships in international trade. They're on the water doing trade internationally right now. And when we need them, those ships that we have in reduced operating status, they're on our ships. So I depend on a healthy maritime industry that supports the U.S. Mariners on U.S. ships so that I can fight them when I have to if I have to have to bring them up. The other one is a refueling. We have a substantial number of 496 air refueling aircraft. But their age, we are currently recapitalizing with a number of KC 46s. But we need to continue to recapitalize out into the future

with capabilities that are going to be able to withstand the contested environment, things they have to have battlespace, awareness, and they have to be connected with secure communications. So that's just some of the areas that I'm concerned about. But we're we're getting after it. We're mitigating the risks and we're doing a lot of exercises and making sure that people are ready.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** Just a quick side note. Those merchant mariners are people who are not necessarily they're not in the Navy, but they are experienced and credentialed sailors who operate generally on commercial ships, some of which may be working for you. Is that correct?

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** That's correct. It is a service. Yours, Merchant Marine is a service. It's not the Coast Guard and not the Navy. But they are in service to our nation. And they sailed in World War Two. Right. And they faced those U-boats right off of our East coast. And so in peace and war is their motto because they're, you know, they're on merchant ships and they're on our ships. And so we need that healthy maritime force.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** And then finally, my last question. Thanks, so illuminating and so appreciated. I wanted to ask you about vulnerabilities that you alluded to yourself a minute ago. For example, in our ability to move forces within the United States, the civilian infrastructure, the train lines, the the air traffic control, the electricity grids, the things that you depend on that we all depend on to get forces from their interior bases to where you can then send them abroad if need be in a time of crisis or conflict. I'm talking about also the cyber vulnerabilities and the kinds of capabilities that we've come to build, because they work beautifully when they work well, but they also create potential Achilles heels. If we're now set up to be hacked or otherwise attacked by foreign power or just some other rogue agent. And of course, many of these capabilities are not protected by the U.S. Department of Defense. In fact, many of them, as I understand, are not even protected by the Department of Homeland Security because they're private assets in many cases rather than government assets. So I wondered if you wanted to tell us anything about your greatest concerns there. And how much progress are we making in mitigating those?

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** Thank you. Uniquely, we depend on a broad variety of interagency partners to ensure our mission every day. And in particular, you're hitting on Department of Transportation. I work constantly with a maritime administration about our strategic ports for which they're responsible for. And our Mariners and Maritime Administration also has custody and maintains our role on role of our ships are ready reserve fleet. They're responsible for it. And when it when I need them this passion to me and I fight them and then they put those merchant mariners on there. So we work all the time on on integrated plans. And we discuss writing this all the time. And then, of course, readiness of our strategic ports, making sure that the berths are there and the manpower is there to offload ships. And I think about that all the time. And then with the Federal Highway Administration, you know, we have these power projection platforms, you know, think, you know, Fort Irwin. Right. You know, the ability to move armor out of there to a port on the Gulf of a Gulf side of Texas. Right. This is trains which are privately operated and trucks that that require highway systems that are that are usable, have the right bridge height and maintain good condition so that we can mobilize to get to the port and then loaded on to a ship. And I work with, again, the Federal Highway Administration on keeping those most important 5000 miles of road, you know, in good condition with the states. And I also work as as we look at the trucks. We bring together a lot of the commercial partners and we meet with them frequently during the event. National Defense Transportation Association. We meet with the truckers, we meet with the railway operators. We meet, you know, stevedores, the maritime industry to understand their health and their concerns, especially, I think about rail, where that's all private except for some very small links that are Department of Defense. So any that they're changing things or they have issues, I'm very, very interested in what's going on and how we can lean in to help them get help for what? For what they need. So that's really important. I also work with NORTHCOM on what is the critical defense infrastructure. It's not just the roads, it's also power. And you mentioned cyber, right? What would happen in a cyber attack? You know, I'm very concerned because cyber hits the whole line. We have to fight to get to the fight. Unlike a World War two, we just had to be concerned about U-boats, which was a significant concern. But we're concerned now with space and cyber vulnerabilities here, here in the United States that we have to be able to protect ourselves from.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** General Van Ovost, thank you so much. Colonel Wolff, over to you for the rest of the conversation.

**JASON WOLFF:** Thank you so much, Mike. In general, it's always a pleasure. One of the things we want to pull for a little bit more on is we talked about infrastructure. A lot of times we talk about once we go outside the U.S. borders, it's the enroute system, very familiar with the air mobility operation Wings and how they have debts in squadrons. And we need airfields for planes to land. We also need seaports for ships to be able to load and unload as we go forward in the future. What is TRANSCOM doing to ensure that its route

infrastructure is more resilient and accessible not only to U.S. forces, but, as you mentioned, the important role of our allies and partners.

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** I think about our in-room infrastructure all the time. We have an infrastructure plan that we work with all of the combatant commanders to ensure that we are meeting their needs and they have an understanding of how we would mobilizing their theaters and do onward movement and where we would have these connectors. And to your point, it's really important for resiliency to have more than one route, right? More than one node, more than one airport, more than one seaport. I like to have multiple ways to come at a problem, and that increases our resiliency. And to do that, you have to exercise, You have to get the reps and sets and they have to be used to you coming into that port using their stevedores to offload, then using their trains and their trucks for onward movement. But when I think about that web of capability, our allies and partners have contacts and contracts that just help us expand that globe. And we're in there and it's say EDI as well as PDI has allowed us to do these exercises, then increases our interoperability with our allies and partners. We have been expanding logistics agreements, especially out in the Pacific, and you've seen some of the revamped Defense Cooperation agreements and enhanced Defense cooperation agreements. You've heard of it all across the quad, the Philippines. And now we're exercising the right and delivering and supporting them in their exercising, which is very helpful, I think, of the Philippines and that the humanitarian assistance disaster relief work means that they they get hit a lot. And so being able to forward deploy some of this stuff into one of their airfields is very helpful so we can quickly deliver it when necessary. And that's how we build that interoperability and the relationships, the deep relationships we need, which makes really, you know, our allies and partners are absolutely an asymmetric advantage that we have that not many do.

**JASON WOLFF:** So. Absolutely. General. Great to hear those words. One of the other things I want to dive into a little bit, as we talked about how we're intertwined with the commercial industry and how you get so much of your lift, availability and cooperation through them. One of the things that we've always been talking about with the National Defense strategy is China. Now, China's Ministry of Transportation has a software system called log ink, which actually allows their movements of transportation for not only their commercial but their military. And this digital platform is out there, and it connects over 70 ports and ten airports right now in the ASEAN Regeant. As you talked about some of the cyber opportunities and vulnerabilities. How do you see TRANSCOM moving forward to protect its network and its development data for logistic transactions?

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** Yeah. I think what you're what you're talking about is, is the competition that's going on around the globe. And so I'll broaden it first and I'll bring it back. You know, China has been investing in critical infrastructure around the globe or, you know, given the majority, say, in infrastructure. Right. Whether that's, you know, electricity, it's. Huawei Critical infrastructure, cyber infrastructure, the digital domain, port managements, ports. And then this this particular software, this logistics management software that's associated with where the port or the sea port, where they can actually see the data, it goes back to China and they can actually begin to understand and map out supply chain vulnerabilities of the nation by understanding what flows in and out of that port. And so we do have to protect ourselves from that. So we're doing a number of things. There's actually a whole of government initiative. 2 to 1 inform and share intelligence with our foreign partners on what could happen and what is happening around the globe with respect to when China buys this up and what they're doing and how they are coercing the nation in the end to give up their rights or their votes so that they can continue to operate. And so exposing that and then protecting ourselves by either not going into the ports, making other arrangements so that we can continue to flow. And that's where our resiliency comes in, right? Where we can go to different ports and offload and use different mechanisms. But it's it is it's how China is aggressively competing, the economic coercion. It's real, and it can really bind up some of our allies and partners. And so as we look for a free and open Indo-Pacific, where you're making your own decisions as a sovereign nation, it goes against that. And that's what we're just trying to highlight and show our our allies and partners what could happen.

**JASON WOLFF:** Well, General, I have a few more questions, but I'm going to give Mike a chance to make any more comments. And we are getting lots of questions for the Q&A session. So I'm actually going to step and give some of my time to the audience on that and give Mike a chance for comment. And I've got a list of questions and we'll get to those that we can and then those we don't answer. We'll see what we can do. Thank you.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** And Jason, please go ahead with audience questions.

**JASON WOLFF:** Outstanding ma'am. So for the first one we have, it comes from Chris Gordon and the Air and Space Forces magazine. It's talking about TRANSCOM has recently been tasked with a new mission and taking on DOD's major fuel management delivery operations previously handled by Defense Logistics



Agency. So how will TRANSCOM work to meet those fuel needs of the U.S. military, in particular the vast expanse of the Pacific, and work towards distribute operations? And are you able to meet those needs with the resources and equipment you now have?

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** Yeah. Thanks for that question. Look, the new strategic environment exposes vulnerabilities to our supply chain management that we just didn't have before. So this new global fuel mission allows us to take the very best of DLA energy and what they're doing, which is managing supply chains, the business end of managing supply chains, and allows us to put our TRANSCOM expertise of command and control and planning and posture to ensure that we can actually deliver that fuel wherever and whenever we need it. So again, where we are, we are tying together the best of both. DLA Energy still are great partners, but we need to make sure we can assuredly move that fuel and get it to where needs to go. We also need to relook where our fuel posture is to meet the requirements and what do we have to have forward? Where are the refineries, etc.? How do we how are we going to move that fuel and how are we going to have the assets to do it? To your point, we we are concerned about fuel tanker vessels. And not having enough U.S. flagged vessels to meet our requirements. And we are absolutely getting out there with the support of Congress. We have stood up the tanker security program where we have we have now ten U.S. flagged US manned merchant mariner tankers, a minimum range tankers that we'll be able to use in that will assuredly have access to in times of of conflict. And we're working on the next ten as well to be able to assuredly move fuel inside the first and second island chain, more shallow draft vessels that we didn't have before. So we're already taking mechanisms to get after some of those risks.

**JASON WOLFF:** Outstanding, ma'am. Speaking about taking risks to get into new frontiers. The next question comes in. She goes, What role do you see U.S. TRANSCOM playing in support of the Space Force and sub orbital requirements?

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** Yeah, space logistics. It's a thing. Actually, so we so we work with the Space Force and the Air Force Research Lab on what we call rocket cargo, which is what is the what is the idea is how would you use rockets for point to point transportation and where would that be a good business case? For what reason would you do that? And so we've entered several non-binding research agreements with about five companies to look at the logistics of space logistics. How would you get it to the launch pad? How would you load it, package it, What would be the deceleration? How would we how would we take it off the rocket and then how would we on remove it? So I have to look end to end, remember. So it's one thing to be able to take it somewhere. Patrick Air Force Base shoot it off. But if it lands on an island somewhere and you can't move it on there, that didn't help you anything with time. And so ideally, could we move like a C-17 is worth halfway around the globe in an hour? And what would that give us? Well, if you had some fast spreading infectious disease, you could get some sort of vaccine there. Right. So we just think what would be the business case is to use it. So that's what the Space Force, right? Because they're the ones that would do that development work.

**JASON WOLFF:** Wonderful ma'am. I'm talking about breaking into some new frontiers. And a lot of times we always look at the military aspects. You brought it up earlier and this question is related to it. Talking about the lift that was required for the Afghan refugees evacuation. It seemed like it was seamless, but we knew it was harder on the ground. Could you give any. Self observations on how big the lift really was.

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** Yeah. What was so big. We used about just every C-17. We had moved into the theater, right. And so it was on a scale, you know, in the 17 days, 124,000 people were moved. It was quite the scale. But here's what we did. We tagged on using C-17s where we needed them, which is in sort of a higher risk area, which is flying back and forth to Kabul into the Central Command AOR or back up into Europe. And then we used the civil reserve air fleet aircraft, our commercial partners, to take them from what I'll call the interim staging bases in the Central Command Air up to Europe and from Europe into the United States and into and into five locations in the United States. So it was quite a dance. It was like seven or eight combatant commands. The whole of government Department of State was leading it and all of those allies and partners. And that's where that work. The reps and sets and the interoperability that we've had with allies and partners comes to play it. Ten, ten nations come in and say, yep, you can be some here. I mean, we had we had to overflight everything we needed, you know, and then aid, right? They supported us as food and water. And it was it was amazing to see how everybody came together. And you get that because of those relationships that you make, the promises made, promises kept both on the security side, you know, with the military and from a Department of State standpoint. So it was a great team effort and I could not be prouder of the men and women who actually executed that. And that included the men and women on the ground there, our Marines, our soldiers and airmen that were managing that airport. It was an amazing thing to see.

**JASON WOLFF:** Absolutely, ma'am. As people ask me about logistics, I sum it up in one word. Was it a miracle? It was great execution. So I think you guys did a fabulous job with U.S. TRANSCOM with that. Our

next comment comes in to the question is, is talking about manning our recruitment intention but using technology for Manning offset. Where do you see in your air, land and sea components drones being utilized in the future for TRANSCOM?

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** I think so. I think it's I think the future for autonomous capabilities in logistics is it's wide open. I think about, you know, in the future, do we need to have a crew in an air refueling airplane or an aircraft that's just carrying cargo? I mean, the future is here with respect to ships. As you see, some are autonomous right now, you know, and autonomous barges that move just, you know, class one or class three around those kind of force multipliers. And then, of course, you have these we're doing some experiments with that. The Navy is with respect to being able to do smaller package movements out to ships so they don't have to come into port because coming into port has a series of threats on its own that we could alleviate by delivering at sea. So when we think about how do we leverage the best, we want to be fast followers with, you know, the likes of FedEx and UPS, but also our our unique ability to do air refueling and support with on Sealift Autonomous Sealift. So we're we are experimenting and we're very excited about the future in that way. And I think that that I think, you know, the manpower would be you sort of man in the loop or over the loop, you know, analyzing the loop and taking care of us so that the manpower could do the higher level work. Well, the easy kind of work, the laborious work is done by by autonomous systems.

**JASON WOLFF:** Our next question gets back into contested environments. It says Ukraine has shown that the U.S. may not always control the airspace. What is TRANSCOM doing to ensure that supplies will be moved even if the airspace is contested in the future?

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** And so this is where we work with the with the combatant commanders, the geographic combatant commander. We have to set the conditions for us to be able to operate in multiple ports and airports and seaports and sea lanes and airplanes. So the first thing we did I talked about was our multiple ways commercial military and partner movement, multiple lanes for resilience in case we lose a port or we lose a plane. We have another other opportunities to to to close the force. And then our ability to integrate, my ability to command and control and integrate into the joint force scheme of maneuver. Right. When you know, a certain airfield is going to has has all of its protections and we get the note we're pushing in and providing sustainment. Right. And what does that mean? You know, it's not a it's not a wall. It's not a brick wall. It's Swiss cheese. There will be moments where we'll have all the main superiority and we'll be able to maneuver at will. And then there are some times where we'll have some threats and we have to have assets that can make it through those threats. Right. And that's what I think about, you know, is as what are the threats and have I trained crews and do I have the assets that can that can get in there? But I also look at all the great work that's going on with respect to defending air bases and sea lines of communication. And CBS's. Now, what are we doing on the sea? We're back to doing convoy operations with our U.S. Merchant Mariners on these ships. We're teaching them how to do zigzag maneuvers and how to be escorted with our fuel tankers. We're teaching them how to do consolidated operations, which is, you know, refueling another another ship on the way, a combat logistics warship, so that they don't have to go to a berth where they might be a greater target at the birth. And then, of course, being on the ground as an airplane, you want to spend a short amount of time on the ground because, again, it's a higher chance of you being targeted if you're on the ground.

**JASON WOLFF:** Outstanding, ma'am. Absolutely. And as we're talking about great logistics campaigns and things, we actually stand on the anniversary of D-Day, which was one of the largest logistics movements. And as we've already covered humanitarian aid, Afghan refugee evacuation, we're looking towards the future. As we've always said in the military, our best job is to deter rather than engage. And with that being said, as we look over the horizon, this question comes up, goes what adjustments in both force posture and strategic transportation asset inventory are needed to support contesting logistics environments, in your opinion, in the future, five years and beyond?

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** Yeah. Yeah. Thanks. I appreciate your calling out to the 79th anniversary of D-Day, where great Americans stormed the beaches of Normandy. Really, their service and sacrifice should not be forgotten. I want to talk about service. Service is key to democracy, right? Whether this community service, public policy or military service. And and on the military service side, this is the 50th year of the all volunteer service. Five decades of people raising their right hand and saying they're going to support and defend the nation, the nation against all enemies, foreign and domestic. Right. And so now is a great time to consider coming into the military, serving full time, part time. There are great opportunities for leadership, for education to boost your career right from the very beginning, being a part of something greater than yourself and seeing the camaraderie. So thanks for that shout out. Now I think about the future. I've talked a little bit about it. On the posture side, it is all about the bases and the defense of the bases and, you know, being able to have domain superiority, to be able to continue to deliver and to working with the combatant commanders on that. Capacity. Our our assets need to be connected to the network. They they need

situational awareness and secure online communications. What we've done is we worked with the Navy to bring carryon, secure kits onto our our ships when we're using our commercial ships. We know we're working to get also same kinds of things on our airplanes to include our air fuel and airplanes and our and our airlift airplanes so that we can be sure to be able to connect with them. And for them to understand the best way to survive is to understand the battlespace. And so we have to get there. And we're working very, very hard on that. And then command and control and integrate command control for me is about that data, right? Using responsible AI and machine learning to be able to pull in data feeds to try to sense the environment. Where are the threats sense, where are the assets are sense, where the needs are, and marry them up very quickly. Because remember earlier I mentioned I have to scale about ten times to what I'm doing right now in a high end conflict. So I've got to I've got to have processes that scale and I have to have people that understand the gravity of the situation with respect to contested logistics, the persistent threats we're up against right here, beginning right here in the United States, all the way out to the end foxhole, that we have to be able to synchronize and get stuff into. And so if I have, you know, trained personnel that know that and they have that grit and that resiliency, that we are unstoppable, we have been a formidable. Logistics deters and it assures our allies and partners and I can give you a thousand examples of how we do that, just today.

**JASON WOLFF:** Absolutely, General. Thank you so much. Mike, I'm looking at the time hack and I've already got the flags popping up from the staff. So I'm going to conclude that with the other list of questions I have. I'll turn it over to you to close this out, sir.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** Colonel and General, thank you for the very illuminating conversation. General Van Ovost, we just want to also salute all the people who work with and for you at Scott Air Base and around the world in making the U.S. military such a global force for good. And, you know, I'm just thrilled that we had the opportunity to learn more about what you do, to share a greater understanding with a broader audience. And then to hear your concerns as well, because we know this is a very challenging strategic moment. And as you say, a lot of a lot of challenges are challenges about equipment and moving people around. But some of them are new about contested logistics in an era of cyber and other kinds of new technologies and vulnerability. So you've taught us so much. And I just want to really salute again what you're doing out there and around the world. And thank you for joining us today.

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** Thank you. Dr. O'Hanlon, Thank you to the Brookings. Thank you, SEZER Appreciate it. There's no better time to be in logistics right now. We have great people doing great, innovative things around the globe, and I couldn't be more proud of them. So thank you. Thank you for letting me share my excitement about what we do.

**MICHAEL E. O'HANLON:** Wonderful. So best wishes to all. And signing off from Brookings and from Illinois.

**JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST:** Thank you, sir.