

General David L. Goldfein
Chief of Staff, U.S. Air Force

Defense Writers Group
Project for Media and National Security
George Washington School of Media and Public Affairs

22 April 2020

DWG: Gen Goldfein, Thank you so much for joining us in this Defense Writers Group conversation.

General Goldfein: Thank you.

DWG: I'm the moderator and I will recognize people down the list I have here. That's the method we'll use. I'm just going to recognize people in the order in which they accepted the invitations.

Why don't I just start, sir, with a question about the supply chain if I might. Because I see that on the one hand Lockheed Martin has announced that they're running late due to the Coronavirus on the F-35. We also see the announcement that Boeing is trying to restart some of its production lines. Talk to us about the impact of the pandemic on the whole sort of picture for the Air Force in terms of --

General Goldfein: Thanks, David. I've had a number of conversations on this with not only fellow members of the Joint Chiefs because we're all focused on this, but not surprisingly also international Air Chiefs as we talk about how do we together as Joint Chiefs and international Air Chiefs help keep the industrial base alive through the COVID crisis, if you will. So we emerge at the back end able to continue to produce the capabilities that we know we need.

Right now as we continue to look at programs we're not seeing any that are reaching critical stage, i.e. we just can't get the parts we need. What we're really seeing is it's a slowing down of the normal timelines. So if you've been tracking Dr. Will

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

Roper and the work that he's been doing, he's our lead for the Defense Production Act. And how we take authorities that have been given to us by Congress and rapidly put companies on contract to be able to keep this industrial base alive.

So that's been the conversation we've had within the Department. All the Joint Chiefs are focused on it. And interestingly, I just started a conversation with several of the international Air Chiefs looking at perhaps the F-35 as a starting point to say it's not just about the prime contractor, it's actually about the subs. It's about the tier two and tier three suppliers to make sure that we keep that industry base alive. And perhaps by collaborating we can all contribute in a way that keeps things on track.

DWG: Thank you, sir. There are a lot of people on the line so I'm going to go straight now to the first person on my list. John Tirpak of Air Force Magazine.

DWG: Good morning. I wanted to ask you, what kind of opportunities are presented by the pandemic? Maybe something you've always wanted to do or something you can try because there's virtually no commercial traffic in the airspace. Is there anything that gives you an opportunity to do that you've not been able to do for many years or ever?

General Goldfein: I'll give you three, John, just off the bat. First of all, I'd say we are discovering new ways of communicating that don't require large gatherings together. I think the country is learning that, so we are too. For instance yesterday I had a two-hour video-teleconference with all my MAJCOM Commanders and the senior general officer leadership in the Air Force. Two hours, talking about where we are in today, the new normal, and how we posture ourselves for what I call the new abnormal which is living with the virus for what could be a long period of time. And a cyclical virus at that.

In a previous era, pre-COVID, it might take weeks to get that

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

kind of gathering together. Now we do it, quite frankly, we can get 25-30 people together for a gathering on-line rather quickly. That's number one.

Number two, what we just went through at the Academy to complete the class of 2020 and get them graduated a month early, we learned a ton about distance learning and how you present education in a different way. So there are some things that quite frankly, I hope we never go back to the previous era in terms of now how we're delivering content. How we're upping our game in terms of professional military education. And how we're using some of the new tools associated with that.

The third thing is, we've actually been able to advance a lot of the Joint All-Domain Command and Control technologies in this timeframe. And probably the thought leader right now on going forward is General O'Shaughnessy at NORTHCOM. I was out there Saturday after the Academy graduation and he showed me what he's doing real time with command and control tools where he is able to tap into all of the medical centers, all of the key support hubs. He's got Apple, Google, others that are helping him with search engine technology so he has probably the best fidelity of data in a database that he's using today.

So those are three areas where it's been actually quite an opportunity.

DWG: If I could follow up, you recall the sequester, of course, there were some lessons learned at that time like don't cancel weapon schools, things like that. Is there anything you absolutely can't give up or something that you're having a hard time doing but you feel you've got to press on and keep doing it?

General Goldfein: Probably the best example is Basic Military Training and pipeline training, John. That has a direct impact on readiness not only today but in the future. So we've worked really hard to determine okay, how do we keep that pipeline

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

training continuing but yet still adhere to all of the CDC protocols associated with this disease?

You're probably tracking, we're at about 50 percent of the normal flow through young men and women show up at Lackland Air Force Base and now Keesler with a small detachment, and we put them in 14 days of restricted movement, watch them for any symptoms. Once they come out of that back end and they're clean they go into training and so the pipeline continues. I don't believe we can afford to shut that down because we're in a new abnormal. We're going to be living with this virus for some period of time. So making sure we adjust the protocols and adjust the process I think is absolutely critical.

DWG: Thank you.

DWG: Eric Schmidt of the New York Times, do you have a question?

DWG: General, I wanted to follow up on some comments you made a couple of weeks ago when we spoke to you about readiness issues and what you've learned over the last couple of weeks, particularly as the Navy gets close to announcing its report on the TR. What have you all had to do to change and how do you assess readiness issues now?

General Goldfein: Thanks, Eric. So we went through a process now about several weeks ago that I call the reset to the new normal. And the new normal as I defined it was how do we operate with breadth and depth across the key mission areas for which we should expect no relief and that the nation is going to depend on despite a 15-20 percent infection rate? So how do you reset? And the mission areas I'm talking about are the nuclear mission, the space mission, certain elements of the cyber mission. We've still got a hot fight going on so we've got intelligence, surveillance reconnaissance. Air mobility is critical. They're becoming, with our medical professionals, the MVPs of the COVID response.

So we built Blue and Silver Teams and placed these teams somewhat in isolation away from each other and then made sure that we had breadth and depth across those mission sets. That was the first reset.

So today I can tell you that the procedures in place, knock on wood, are working. We have zero COVID positive cases in the nuclear area. We have zero COVID positive cases in our Air Mobility fleet amongst the crews. We're continuing to fly missions where they need to go and we're seeing no degradation. I expect, Eric, and I've talked to the TRANSCOM Commander about this and the Chairman, I'm anticipating the demand signal for Air Mobility to go up over time as the nation and the world continues to hunker down. We're continuing to refine our processes.

What we're looking at now though is a new reset and that reset is a 1 June reset to what I call not the new normal but the new abnormal. The new abnormal I'm defining as living and operating with a cyclical virus until we get a vaccine. All the projections are no vaccine for upwards of a year so that means we've got to refine our ability to survive and operate and do the missions the nation requires, and we've got to bring back those missions that we've slowed down so we can get back to some kind of a sense of new normalcy in an abnormal world.

DWG: Can you give us any specific examples of what that might look like in a few areas?

General Goldfein: Let's just talk Air Mobility. So an Air Mobility crew that's got a critical mission to let's say move supplies, patients, or just equipment, we haven't stopped flying around the world. So even though Italy is recovering from pretty significant COVID, we're still flying missions in Aviano in Northern Italy. If you're flying missions, you've got to have parts, you've got to have all of the supplies you need to keep the flying operation which means you need airlift.

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

So what we've done is we've taken an Air Mobility Command Commander, General Miller, has put in protocols and procedures where we essentially isolate the crew, keep them in a clean environment. Make sure that the cockpit itself is clean. So they're able to fly the mission. But once they land and then have to go into crew rest or whatever, we keep them isolated. We keep them in a bubble. They go to their rooms. Whatever needs to get to them is delivered. And then we keep them that way so they can keep flying all the way through coming home. So that's just one example I'd give you, how we've adjusted operations to keep flying.

DWG: Jared [Serbu], Federal News Network.

DWG: Good morning, sir. Thanks for doing this.

Following up on your comments on the reduced training pipeline, I'm just wondering what the current thinking is on training that accessions pipeline really. What's the current thinking on how to maintain acceptable levels of both overall end strength and within individual AFSCs? I don't think the separations rate has really changed.

General Goldfein: Thanks, Jared. Right now procedures that we have in place, which I described to you, they've been successful. We've had about 6,000 plus young men and women come through accessions into Basic Training and so far we've had five total of 6,000 who have been identified as COVID positive, and we've quickly isolated them, put them through the protocols, went through the testing to make sure that they were in fact negative and then put them into training.

One of the things that's a benefit obviously to us is our population we're talking about here is young and healthy, so not a high risk population for the virus itself.

Right now we're operating about 50 percent. As we go to the new

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

rest, again, sort of looking at it by just set time limits I've identified as 1 June, what the AETC Commander, General Webb, is going to come back to me with is what does he believe is the maximum capacity he can put through while still adhering to CDC protocols?

Right now we're at 50 percent. I'll be interested to see what he thinks he can come back with. We did open a second training center, because you know in the Air Force we do all of our Basic Training at Lackland. We opened a second location at Keesler so that we can spread out. We also put up a tent city at Lackland so we have better isolation capacity that we can access very quickly. So those are all the protocols that we're putting in place to see if we can get back up from 50 percent, we're probably not going to be able to get to 100 percent until the protocols change, but if we can get from 50 to 60, 70, 75 percent that will certainly be helpful.

DWG: Just to follow, I'm assuming here that your overall end strength numbers have got to be coming down somewhat because the pipeline is getting crimped off, the separations rate hasn't really changed. So are there individual AFSCs, career fields that are starting to feel the pinch of that?

General Goldfein: It's a great question. Not yet. We are anticipating we will see that in the future if we're not able to dial the rheostat up on the numbers going through the pipeline. But right now we're not seeing any that are at critical state yet.

What's also helpful is that retention numbers are going up. Not surprisingly, with the economy being in a challenging state companies are not hiring as quickly; airlines are not flying as much for the flyer and maintainer force; so we're actually seeing our retention numbers go up which somewhat mitigates the lack of throughput through Basic Training.

DWG: Jeff [Shogle] of Task and Purpose.

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

DWG: Thank you. General, can you say whether any of the Airmen that were at Al Asad Airbase or elsewhere in Iraq have received Purple Hearts or other valor awards following the January 8th Iranian missile attack? Thank you.

General Goldfein: No. I can't right now, but if I can take that one and follow up with you, I'll make sure Ed or Theresa follows up on that. I've not seen an award package come through. But I'll tell you, I'm glad that CENTCOM released the stories that were written by the Airmen that went through that. It's really telling, the courage -- there was a great article this morning I saw that the commander, a lieutenant colonel, and what she did, the decisions that she had to make. Who would stay and who would go. Expectations that those who stayed would not survive. And what it felt like going through that attack. It's a pretty telling story and I'm really proud of CENTCOM and AFCENT for releasing it.

DWG: Tara [Kopf] of [Flatchi].

DWG: How General Goldfein. It's good to hear your voice out there.

I wanted to follow up again on the cyclical aspect. I think it's the first time we've seen the leadership in one of the services really talk about being long term and possibly being cyclical. Have you talked to the other services? Is there kind of a shared approach on how to maintain readiness?

And secondly, with Coronavirus, before all of this started, you had led or started to lead an effort to have the Air Force look at cancer rates among former aviators. I just wanted to get an update from you on where that's at, if there's been any delays because of COVID. Thank you.

General Goldfein: I'll take the second one first. The analysis continues. Right now I think we're looking at probably fall of

'21 is the timeline. That's sort of the 18-24 months that we had set for the completion of that study. No let-up on the gas on that one because it's important to all of us that we get to ground truth on just what's going on. I appreciate you keeping on that because it's a really important study that we take very seriously.

On the cyclical nature of the virus, yes. We are all talking about it. The task force led by the Deputy Secretary of Defense Dave Norquist, and the Vice Chairman John Hyten, we are all looking at the future, studying the model, studying the science. Some of the best science I've seen is actually at NORTHCOM with General Shaughnessy as at least the department lead as the combatant commander. And until we have a vaccine we're going to be living with this virus. And the potential for it to come back in some cyclical way is likely. So if that's the world we're living in, how do we as an Air Force operate in that environment and do the nation's business? Especially those key tasks that we should not expect any relief.

There's no situation where I see the nation or the leadership giving us relief on having a safe, secure effective nuclear deterrent and connecting the Commander in Chief with forces in the field. That's a no-fail mission. We always have to get it done so we have to figure out how to operate.

The good news is this is actually part of Air Force culture. We've been doing what we call, we've got an acronym for everything, right? We call it ABSO, Ability to Survive and Operate. That's part of our DNA. So we have trained to operate in chemical, biological, radiological environments. This is part of who we are, what we've done.

This in some ways is an opportunity to go somewhat back to our roots on ABSO and really think through how do we operate? How do we look at every base which is unique and different and not apply a one size fits all but rather have that local installation commander look at that base and determine okay,

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

what areas are clean, what areas have to be clean, what areas are not? What is the process and procedures for us to be able to continue to operate in the mission sets that are rather diverse.

In the Department of the Air Force now we have the Space Force with us. We do leaflets to nukes and everything in between and we operate from below the surface to the outer reaches of space, so a hugely diverse mission set that we are responsible for. Now we're working through how do we operate in the new abnormal? How do we keep operations up and running in an area of a cyclical virus that could always be right around the corner? They're doing a lot of thinking on that, and that's our one gen reset target.

DWG: Quickly, one follow-up on the cancer study. Can you tell us if you've finished developing the parameters or how far back you'll go or any initial findings?

General Goldfein: No initial findings yet that I've seen, but how about on that one, I owe you probably a better answer and a better update. Can I get Theresa and Ed to jump in on that one and we'll give you a little bit more fidelity on that one.

DWG: Let's go to Ariana [Public] please, Military.com.

DWG: My question is, I know from the March relief package signed by the President, I know some top generals may be able to serve in their posts beyond their planned retirements and I believe that includes you. So I know the idea is to try to maintain service stability amid all this response.

What's the plan right now? Can you give us an update on that? Is that something you are adjusting for in case General Brown cannot come into his role in succession right away? Or just again, an update would be great.

General Goldfein: You bet. That depends on your and Valerie's

G2 Bingo cards score and how I'm doing on that. No, seriously, right now our focus is on getting General Brown a confirmation hearing and confirmed to be able to make the transition into the job as Chief 22. So it's somewhat dependent on when Congress comes back. We are talking to the Senate Armed Services Committee staff and I'm pretty confident that the confirmation hearing for the next Chief of Staff of the Air Force is a high priority. So that's sort of job one is to get General Brown a hearing and then vote it out of the Senate and hopefully confirmed.

That is really what's driving all of the decision-making right now in terms of any potential delays, but we're not taking our focus at all off of making sure that we have a good transition. And I would just show it to you, that I believe that's my job. My job as the outgoing Chief is to ensure that we run a transition that's the gold standard for continuity, stability and keeping missions of the Air Force going with the least amount of turbulence as we transition from Chief 21 to someone who I believe is going to be an incredible Chief of Staff of the Air Force, General CQ Brown.

DWG: Michael Gordon of the Wall Street Journal.

DWG: Thank you. I have a question for you, General, about fast and future decisions apropos the Air Force's bombers. General Ray told us the other week that the requirement for bombers was north of 200 as I recall in one of these forums.

My question is, given all these advanced technologies the Air Force is pursuing --hypersonics, artificial intelligence, you name it -- why was the decision made to pursue a new manned penetrating bomber made at all instead of just extending the lives of what you have? I realize you're far down the line and you're going to be fielding it.

And my second question is why set a requirement that the Air Force has no chance of meeting in the next I'd say two decades

given your own spending and programmatic decisions and resource constraints?

General Goldfein: Thanks, Michael. Without going into any kind of classified let me just tell you that bombers first and foremost are part of our nuclear triad and the STRATCOM Commander has targets that must be serviced that require all three legs of the triad. And if we don't have all three legs to include the bomber leg that can penetrate, then he has to significantly address his war plans. That's probably about as far as I can go unclassified, but that was in the decision criteria on why to field a penetrating bomber.

In terms of numbers, there's always a difference between the Air Force you can afford and the Air Force you need to be able to accomplish the mission. Two hundred and twenty bombers, we have rather good detail analysis to support that number in terms of the moderate risk force to accomplish all of the combatant commander requirements given the fact that unlike other force elements where allies and partners bring capability and capacity, we don't have a single ally or partner that brings bomber capacity or capability. It's only the United States Air Force that brings bombers. The only other countries that have bombers are our adversaries. So we can't go anywhere else to get bomber capability outside the United States Air Force.

So 220 is the number that we certainly need, and you ask the question why put it on the table. Because I think that's an important number for Congress to have. Whether we can afford it or not is a separate discussion but I think it's really important for Congress to know what our analysis tells us is the moderate risk Air Force we need in each force element to be able to accomplish the National Security Strategy and the National Defense Strategy, and that number is 220. Whether we can afford it or not is a separate discussion. But we have to put the requirement on the table or we are essentially starting the dialogue with what we can afford which, quite frankly, is only half the story.

And I will tell you something that we have been criticized for before, and I heard this loud and clear when I was doing my pre-confirmation meetings, that hey, you don't come over here and tell us what you need, you just tell us what you can afford. We need to have more of a dialogue.

So we are having that dialogue and I think it's an important one to have.

DWG: One quick follow-up. For 15 years the continuous bomber presence in Guam was cited as an important way to assure allies, to improve deterrence and to have a presence in the region instead of bringing assets all the way over from North Dakota or wherever. Now that's come to an end, and this is two years after the NDS was put into effect. Aren't you making a virtue out of a necessity? Isn't it simply a fact that you don't have enough bomber assets to go around given demands in the Middle East and elsewhere? And is that part of what's led you to drop this 15 year old practice? Thank you.

General Goldfein: Thanks, Michael. I think it's a couple of things.

Number one, there is a capacity issue. You see that the B-1 fleet, for instance, is a fleet that we're working hard to get back. There's a proposal in the President's budget to retire some number of the oldest ones that are most cost prohibitive, just based on, quite frankly, we've literally flown the wings off of them in the Middle East over the past 19 years. So there is a capacity issue. But I think as important is, this is about the National Defense Strategy and the focus on dynamic presence that the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman have been leading us on so that we are in some ways more operationally unpredictable to potential adversaries. And rather than being continuous, we deploy at a time and place of our choosing and by not having a continuous presence at one location it allows us to be far more agile in our operations.

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

So you're going to see us using this bomber force in new ways and in new times and hopefully again being a little bit more operationally unpredictable for our adversaries in terms of when we want to get the most return on that investment.

DWG: Bob Burns, Associated Press. Do you have a question?

DWG: Yes, thank you.

General Goldfein, a question about Coronavirus testing of your force. Is there urgency at this point to having greater capacity to test your people? And where is that needed most right now?

General Goldfein: Thanks, Bob. There is an urgency, but I would say that it starts with a national urgency before it becomes a service urgency.

I mentioned before that we have a bit of a luxury here in that our force is generally young and generally very fit and healthy. So we're a bit more resilient than other parts of society. So it's really important that testing and testing capacity is prioritized at a national level before it's prioritized at a service level.

Then within our service we've each contributed to the task force here led by the DepSecDef and the Vice Chairman with our priorities in terms of where we place tier one, tier two, tier three.

So tier one for the Air Force should be no surprise for you, right? It's the nuclear force. Tier one is space force elements that are doing the critical monitoring and flying of our GPS satellites, our early warning satellites, those kinds of things. Those crews that are on Operation Noble Eagle alert, Air National Guardsmen who sit alert and scramble to defend the homeland, as you might imagine, those are our most critical

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

testing area targets. Then we have tiered ourselves along with the other services to make sure that as test kits become available we're able to put them where they're most needed.

DWG: A quick follow-up. Are you currently able to fully test everybody in that tier one level?

General Goldfein: No. But I'd be a little bit surprised if we could at this point because there are higher level national priorities and that's where those test kits need to go. I give the example, I think one of the top priorities right now across the nation is nursing homes. I would not want to take tests away from that top national priority for my younger and healthier force. But as tests come available we've tiered them out and we know where we need to put them.

DWG: Dmitry [Kirson] of TASS.

DWG: Good morning, General. Thank you very much for doing this.

I was hoping you could tell me if the Coronavirus crisis has affected in any way, shape or form the deconfliction lines between the Russians and Americans in Syria?

Secondly, sir, did the pandemic decrease both the scope and the number of your air operations around the world, and especially in Europe and the Middle East?

General Goldfein: Thanks, Dmitry. On the Syria deconfliction line, I have not seen any reports of impacts from COVID on that, but I probably owe you a better answer so if you don't mind I'll ask Theresa and Ed to follow up on that one and we'll see if there's been any impact. I would just tell you through all of my reading, classified and otherwise, I have not seen that to date, but let me follow up on that one.

On the amount of flying, yes, it is having an impact. I'll give

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

you one example. Exercises. We continue to cancel and modify exercises. The guidance that the Chairman gave to the combatant commanders and the SecDef was if you can still accomplish your objectives with forces that you currently have resident within your local area then continue the exercise. That decision authority is the combatant commander's. But depending on where they are, they should not expect forces to come from outside to join them.

So for instance, I might in normal times send a squadron of F-16s from Shaw to exercise in a European exercise. That's not happening during COVID. So we are seeing exercises getting curtailed, modified, and very often canceled. I think PACAF just canceled a Red Flag that's coming up. And these are our high end exercises. This is where we put our folks through the wringer and really test them against a very sophisticated threat which they can't replicate at home station.

So over time it will have an impact and we're going to have to find creative ways of keeping our readiness levels up without being able to travel to those high end exercises at the rate we were before pre-COVID.

DWG: Tony Capaccio, Bloomberg.

DWG: I have a non-COVID, non-readiness question. It considers that tankers. You came up with an agreement with Boeing earlier this month to come up with a new remote vision system for the tanker. It's not going to get fielded until 2023 apparently. What happens to the 50 or so tankers that you're already going to have delivered? You've got 33 now, but what happens to those tankers? Boeing's Vice President earlier this month told reporters they will be enhanced with some software tweaks. I can't get anybody in the Air Force to confirm that. So what happens to those tankers between now and 2023 that you already have?

General Goldfein: Thanks, Tony. Obviously we'll continue to

fly them. Interestingly enough this particular tanker, I think I've told you, we've talked about this. I've flown it now twice. It's got some amazing capabilities over and above tanking. It actually has some lift capacity. Interestingly enough, it's one of the aircraft that air flow actually flows in the optimal direction inside the airplane if you were going to move COVID patients, for instance. So there are other uses we can have for this airplane.

What you're speaking about in terms of an interim not solution because the real solution is what you know about which is the hardware fix. There is some software changes that the company has proposed going forward that may, and I emphasize may, allow us to start some limited tanking operations operationally. We are going to flesh that out. It's software only, no hardware changes. We're calling it 1.5 en-route to 2.0. I'm 100 percent confident it won't solve all the challenges. The only thing that will solve that is 2.0 and we cannot let our foot off the gas for any other interim solution because 2.0 is the fix that we have got to get to.

However, in the interim if we can work some software changes that can allow us to start opening the aperture on some limited amount of operational tanking, I'm very interested in that. That's what the company's proposed and that's what we're going to be fleshing out.

DWG: So that's not a done deal. Because Burgess said that they would start installing this upgrade next basically, in the second half of next year. So that's not a done deal. It's to be determined.

General Goldfein: Yeah, I'd say that's more accurate. As you know, we have testing protocols. That's why we go through operational tests, so we can wring these things out before they get in the field. So any software changes will have to go through the test protocols, but a software change could happen significantly faster than the hardware changes that we now have

agreed to.

Again, let's see. If it allows us to start doing some operational tanking in a limited way, I'm very interested in it. But at the same time there's no way that this software fix is ever going to become the real solution. The real solution is the one that's on the table as a hardware fix.

DWG: Reuters, Phil Stewart. Are you there? Do you have a question? No.

So I will go to Courtney [Albin] of Inside Defense.

DWG: Sir, thanks for taking the time to do this.

I wanted to go back to something you said at the beginning about starting to see some slowed down timelines on programs. Earlier this week Ellen Lord said that OSD is tracking about a three month delay across all major defense acquisition programs due to Coronavirus. Does that line up with the analysis that the Air Force has seen on some of its programs? And what areas, I know you sort of touched on this already, but which programs are you most kind of watching closely those ways?

General Goldfein: Thanks, Courtney. I mentioned earlier too that we've started this robust discussion amongst all of the international Air Chiefs. I was on the phone yesterday with the Chief of Staff of the Italian Air Force, the Chief of Staff of the Canadian Air Force. Tomorrow I've actually got a series of phone calls with industry leaders. One of the opportunities in this challenge we're facing is I'm actually able to increase the number of calls I've been making to folks since I haven't been traveling as much so I'm really using this as an opportunity to water the garden, if you will, and keep the relationships fresh. So I look forward to hearing from the CEOs I'll be talking to tomorrow on how things are going for them.

So the programs I would say that I'm watching the closest,

clearly the F-35. We're watching KC-46, I already talked about that a little bit with Tony. Watching the B-21 program that's going very well. We know we have got to get a new trainer as the T-38 -- I flew the T-38 as a young captain. It's been around for a long time, so we know we have to keep those programs. So all the key programs that you're tracking, we're tracking. And the ones that Chief Raymond is looking at, I look at with him as well because we both have equities as a Department of the Air Force on making sure that space is fully integrated into everything we do and that the industrial base continues to deliver.

Those give you the ones that I'm watching right now. And I'll just repeat what I said before, I'm not hearing anything that tells me that programs are at a critical state or at risk of cancellation. What I'm hearing is that we're going to experience some delays going forward and so of course we have to make sure that we're keeping that dialogue open with industry as we go forward.

DWG: I just wanted to clarify on that too, I understand the analysis changes probably all the time under different type analysis you're doing. But that specific kind of three month approximate delay that was mentioned, is that something that lines up with what you guys are seeing on the programs that you mentioned?

General Goldfein: It is. Three months is not surprising at all given what industry is dealing with on trying to keep their lines open. The production facilities where workers have to gather in rather close proximity to be able to perform their roles are the ones that are having the most challenges. Production facilities where people can actually spread out to do their work are the ones that have been able to keep up and running without as many delays.

So again, this goes back to the international Air Chief discussion on the F-35. How do we collaborate and ensure that

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

we can keep the tier two and tier three suppliers healthy through this COVID period so that we have a healthy industrial base at the back end. That's where we're focused and that's where the Joint Chiefs are focused.

DWG: Steve Trimball of Aviation Week.

DWG: Thanks a lot, General Goldfein, for doing this.

My question actually is following up on that. With this international collaboration you're talking about, first of all, can you describe what the risk, is in the tier two and tier three supply chain for the F-35 that you're hearing about? And how does the U.S. military help prop up the tier two and tier three industrial base in the different [indiscernible].

General Goldfein: Thanks, Steve. By the way, great P-38 picture behind you there, I love it.

The tier two and three, and again this is part of why I'm out there talking to as many CEOs as I can, is that the companies that have got a cash position in a reserve to be able to withstand rough times are going to have the resiliency that we need to get through this. The smaller companies that are producing perhaps critical parts, supplies, computer parts that don't have that cash base and don't have that resiliency are the ones that are at greatest risk.

So under the leadership of Dr. Roper and the authorities Congress gave us, we now can write contracts very quickly. I think most of you have been tracking some of the work that he's done through AFWERX, [HEX], Agile Prime, and some of the things that we're doing to be able to infuse the market with well placed dollars to help these companies get through these rough times. That's where we're focused, in identifying those. And what I'm talking to the international Air Chiefs about is, you know, if we can collaborate on this it might be that we can make better use of our money collectively as opposed to individually

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

trying to do this. So for the Italians, for the UK, for South Korea, for companies that are invested in the F-35, and we all know that there are these tier two and tier three companies that are struggling right now. How do we collaborate to be able to use our resources wisely? That's where we're focused right now.

And there was a second part, Steve. I may have missed it.

DWG: That did address it. But is there any opportunity now to use this as an opportunity to re-insource, like we saw with the Turkish exclusion from the F-35 program, that work coming back into the U.S. Do you see that as an opportunity now?

General Goldfein: Let me make sure I understand. Opportunity in terms of how?

DWG: If there's tier two or tier three contractors in other countries that can't deliver, to give that to a U.S. company.

General Goldfein: I see, expanding the industrial base or [inaudible] the industrial base.

Right now I'll tell you that's not where we're focused. We're not focused on really making this a major shift of any kind. It's more about who do we know we've identified? We know that we have a shrinking industrial base out there so one of the things Dr. Roper's been very effective at is encouraging venture capitalists, encouraging outside money to invest where we can match through other transaction authorities to be able to move the industrial base forward in ways that we couldn't when we were in the not so much pre-COVID but before we had the authorities that Congress has given us to do 804 work and others, the prototyping, the experimenting, those things. So we now have more flexibility to act fast and some of these companies need exactly that. They don't have time. They need to be able to have enough of a foundation to be able to ride through these rough times and we need them to ride through these rough times because we need a diverse and resilient industrial

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

base on the back end.

One of the worst things that could happen would be for us to lose a significant number of tier two and three, not to be replaced, and then have a much weakened industrial base on the back end of this. This is a concern for all of us.

DWG: Valerie, Defense News.

Okay, I'm going to Theresa Hitchens of Breaking Defense.

DWG: Thank you, General, it's nice to see you.

I have two questions that are non-COVID related but are related to challenges to programs. The first is, you mentioned the importance of GPS and your ability to continue the mission. I wondered what you are looking at now in the wake of the Ligado decision about how to [precast] GPS receivers from what this departments expects to see I guess some fairly serious interference. If you could elaborate on that.

Secondly, recently the GAO raised a lot of questions about the ABMS program and I know that often GAO reports have a bit of a lag so I thought maybe I'd give you the opportunity to address the questions they raised as well.

General Goldfein: Great questions.

First on GPS, I'll tell you, I'm very concerned about the Ligado decision and in this one, I'll just tell you that in many ways I'm a supporting Chief to the combatant commander responsible for spectrum management, and that's the U.S. Space Command Commander, General Raymond. So not only is he my teammate and peer as the Chief of Space Operations, he is currently still dual-hatted as the combatant commander. I'll tell you that we are both very concerned about this because we as a nation and I would offer as a globe rely on GPS to do so much that affects far more than military operations. This is our quality of life.

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

This is how we run businesses. This is how we fly airplanes. This is the ATM that requires that timing signal to be able to get money. This is the blue dot on your phone that allows you to get from point A to point B. Right? So we have come to just completely rely on GPS.

The best way I heard it described, as a philosophy major this works for me, so if you're trying to have a quiet conversation and in the next room there's a 500 watt speaker blaring music at you, that gives you sort of a visual of what potentially could be the interference with this GPS signal that we are absolutely, has got to be pristine and the world relies on. So I am very concerned about it, and Chief Raymond and I are looking at different mitigation steps.

On the GAO report, you know, every challenge in life has an opportunity to it so when GAO came out with its report we circled back with them to say all right, look, if we have areas that we're missing on then we certainly want to know about them. What's interesting about the report I think is, you mentioned it, there is a bit of a latency to the reporting. Two things I would offer. One, they were not able to get to our December ABMS demo so they didn't actually have anybody there that was seeing real time what we're connecting. Then when we dug into it and started walking them through hey, there's so much of this that's classified, were you able to have access and did you look into classified? The answer we got back was they had not.

So that makes it challenging because if the technology that you're moving forward, if a lot of it is in the classified realm, a lot of it, quite frankly, in the space realm and the GAO doesn't have access or clearance to be able to look at it, then the report is going to be on just a very small portion of what Advanced Battle Management System really is.

So now what we need to do is use this as an opportunity to educate. So my commitment to the GAO, the lead is listen, I want to walk you through it all because we need our GAO to be

fully knowledgeable of everything we're doing. And this is also going to be an opportunity for the GAO and others to understand how to report when you have a service that's going as fast as we are.

We're demonstrating something every four months. And even though the last big demo that we had in April, this month, was postponed, we haven't slowed down. We just shifted our radar, if you will, and now we're focused on COVID response and we're working Advanced Battle Management System directly in support of the NORTHCOM Commander. And if you had a chance to see what he's doing right now with JADC2 in support of COVID, I mean it will literally water your eyes. So we are not slowing down.

In some ways GAO has got to keep up, and we've got to help them. This is not a poke or a criticism. We've got to help them, we've got to help Congress, we've got to help think tanks, we've got to help others realize that we are moving out and we are developing capability faster than we've ever developed capability before. We're connecting things faster than we've ever connected them before. Every four months we're connecting new capabilities that have never been connected. That's a hard one to deliver a report on, but I'm eager to sit down with the GAO and get them up to speed.

DWG: Can I just ask quickly, with regard to mitigation for GPS, are you going to create a plan? Do you have a time frame? Do you have ideas about what you can do? It seems like it's a fairly large challenge.

General Goldfein: It's a huge challenge, and I'll tell you my role as the Chief of Staff of the Air Force obviously is to organize, train, equip and present ready forces and capability to combatant commanders. So the plan for how to mitigate would likely be more of a combatant commander and CIO plan that I would support as Chief of Staff of a service. But now that I have a peer that's also the Chief of Space Operations, it will be something that he and I will work together very closely with

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs as we provide options to the Secretary of Defense.

DWG: General, I'm conscious that we're on borrowed time here at 9:06. Do you have time for one more question? Do you have any closing comments you want to make?

General Goldfein: I'm definitely up for another question.

DWG: Vivian [Motsy] of Defense Daily.

DWG: Thanks for doing this.

I just wanted to ask real quick, you mentioned previously about the restructuring of [indiscernible] the Air Force is going through due to COVID-19. I was wondering if that has affected or changed the FY21 request for retiring some of the legacy aircraft that were included in that budget? Are you looking at shifting any of those numbers that you were looking at retiring? Whether it be [inaudible]? The Global Hawk, KC-10, [inaudible], things like that? Thank you.

General Goldfein: Thanks, Vivian. Actually no, we're not. Not at all. Again, this sort of goes back to why. Why do we do that? We did that because we have to transition this Air Force and the Joint Force, but specifically as the Chief, we've got to position this Air Force to be able to compete, deter and win in 2030 given where we're watching adversaries advance and where we're seeing them invest. And what industry has learned and what we also understand is that there are two key steps that you have to accomplish if you're going to transition to a digital all domain force. You've got to get your digital engineering right and you've got to get your common data architecture. Data is the currency of future warfare if we're going to win. And as much as we might like to, we can't skip that step.

So if in fact we're going to set the foundation for all domain warfare in the future we have got to do the Advanced Battle

Management, the Joint All Domain Command and Control, get our data architecture right. And the only way I've found that we can pay for that given the fixed budgets is to retire legacy aircraft that don't contribute significantly to that 2030 fight, to free up the resources to first make that remaining -- remember, I'm not retiring any complete fleet. First you retire some portion of the oldest portion of that fleet. You roll those resources back into the remaining fleet to do the modifications, the modernization you need, and then you take the additional resources and you put it towards the digital engineering and the common data architecture. That requirement has not reduced a bit. And I would offer too, if the projection of the futures is budgets coming down, it makes this step even more critical to do now than put off until later.

DWG: Thank you. And if I could just clarify one thing you mentioned earlier in our talk, I just want to make sure I have this clear. I think you said that so far the Air Force has had no COVID positive cases in the nuclear enterprise. I just want to make sure I heard that right. Were you talking deployed ICBM teams or were you talking active duty in the nuclear enterprise writ large? What did you mean by that?

General Goldfein: Thanks for the follow-up. I was talking specifically about the nuclear missile crews that we have isolated for the mission. They used to go out for about three to four days. Now we're keeping them out there 14 days and longer. We're doing Blue and Silver Teams. So we've changed the battle rhythm of our deployed folks to keep them more isolated. So I was focusing on them primarily. Then our actual bomber crews.

There are supporting elements of the nuclear enterprise that have had cases, clearly, and we can get you those numbers. But for the crews that are performing the mission, those are the ones based on the protocols that the Global Strike Command Commander has put in place have been COVID free.

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

DWG: General, I can't thank you enough on behalf of all of those on this call for taking the time to talk with us today under these rather difficult circumstances.

Anything you want to add? Closing remarks, whatever. I don't know if we're going to get a chance as this particular organization to talk to you again while on this job, although who knows? The future cannot be predicted in some ways. Any closing remarks you want to make?

General Goldfein: David, actually just really thanks to you all. We've got an important story to tell. You help us tell that story, and I'm very aware that every dollar we spend is a dollar that some hardworking American earned, and it's absolutely appropriate for us to be held accountable for how we spend that money. It's the press that helps keep us accountable.

I'm also accountable as the Chief for taking care of the greatest treasure in our nation's arsenal, those young men and women who hold up their right hand and commit to defending the nation. These are America's sons and daughters. So I'm conscious as Chief that I owe it to parents to take care of their sons and daughters so they can take care of the mission and the nation. I think you, the press, also hold us to account for that.

So I'd just end here by thanking each of you for continuing in this important business that I have great respect for, so thank you.

DWG: Thank you, sir. Thank you for doing this. It's been really a pleasure working with you. I hope maybe even we might continue in one way or another to do so.

I also want to thank the crackerjack Air Force public affairs team headed by Brigadier General Thomas. A wonderful group who really know what they're doing. And to thank the Carnegie

General David L. Goldfein - 4/22/2020

Corporation of New York for supporting the Defense Writers Group and similar programs. I think communication between the military and the media is real important for our country, so we're delighted to have this opportunity.

Ladies and gentlemen on the call, you'll be getting an invitation shortly for a conversation with Congressman Adam Smith, Democrat, Washington, Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee. That conversation is scheduled for April 29th, so stand by for those invitations.

Thank you, sir, very very much.

General Goldfein: Thanks everybody. Stay well.

#