

Stenographic Transcript
Before the

COMMITTEE ON
ARMED SERVICES

UNITED STATES SENATE

HEARING TO CONSIDER THE NOMINATION OF:
GENERAL JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST, USAF FOR
REAPPOINTMENT TO THE GRADE OF GENERAL AND TO BE
COMMANDER, UNITED STATES TRANSPORTATION
COMMAND

Thursday, September 23, 2021

Washington, D.C.

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7
8 U.S. Senate

9 Committee on Armed Services

10 Washington, D.C.

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12 The committee met, pursuant to notice, at 9:32 a.m. in
13 Room SD-G50, Dirksen Senate Office Building, Hon. Jack Reed,
14 chairman of the committee, presiding.

15 Committee members present: Senators Reed [presiding],
16 Shaheen, Gillibrand, Blumenthal, Kaine, King, Warren,
17 Peters, Manchin, Duckworth, Rosen, Kelly, Inhofe, Fischer,
18 Cotton, Ernst, Tillis, Scott, and Hawley.

1 OPENING STATEMENT OF HON. JACK REED, U.S. SENATOR FROM
2 RHODE ISLAND

3 Chairman Reed: Excuse me. Let me call the hearing to
4 order.

5 A few administrative announcements. A ten o'clock
6 there will be two votes for the benefit of my colleagues and
7 to the general.

8 And, also, this will be a hybrid hearing. Some of our
9 colleagues will be joining virtually; as a result, we will
10 use the seniority rule to identify speakers, as we have in
11 the past at hybrid hearings.

12 Good morning. The committee meets today to consider
13 the nomination of General Jacqueline Van Ovost to be the
14 next Commander of the United States Transportation Command.

15 If confirmed, General Van Ovost will be the first
16 female genera to take on this critical role and will also be
17 the first time we have had two female combatant commanders
18 serving concurrently.

19 General, I want to welcome you to the committee and I
20 thank you for your many years of service to our Nation and
21 for your willingness to continue to serve in positions of
22 great responsibility.

23 We also thank your family for their support and
24 sacrifice and welcome your husband, Alan.

25 The men and women of TRANSCOM perform duties that

1 sustain the whole Department of Defense effort in protecting
2 our nation's security. We saw that very clearly with the
3 extraordinary efforts of TRANSCOM to support the withdrawal
4 from Afghanistan. Our ability to conduct and support
5 operations around the globe remains a clear, competitive
6 advantage for the United States forces.

7 With its competitive edge in deploying and sustaining
8 America's Armed Forces, TRANSCOM provides the Defense
9 Department with unique capabilities that some may have come
10 to take for granted. TRANSCOM is busy supporting all the
11 combatant commanders every day and without these forces, the
12 United States would be at a significant disadvantage almost
13 everywhere in the world.

14 TRANSCOM faces a number of daunting tasks. General,
15 given that you have served previously as Commander of Air
16 Mobility Command, I believe that these are not new issues
17 for you. One primary concern is addressing a new set of
18 cyberthreats. TRANSCOM works extensively with private
19 sector entities in the transportation and shipping
20 industries to support Defense Department deployment
21 operations, which creates increased exposure to the
22 commercial, internet, and challenges of operating our
23 strategic transportation system.

24 General, I look forward to your views on how to ensure
25 that TRANSCOM's network is secure and that sensitive

1 information remains protected.

2 TRANSCOM has just completed a new Mobility Capability
3 Requirements Study, an MCRS, and a Sealift Tanker Study.
4 These studies indicate, among other things, a need to keep
5 more C-130 airlift aircraft that are in the Air Force's
6 plans, and a need for a program of subsidies for U.S.-
7 flagged fuel tankers, to keep more tankers in the domestic
8 fleet. I am interested in how you plan to address these
9 critical shortfalls.

10 There is also the issue of modernizing the Ready
11 Reserve Force, the RRF; a group of cargo ships held in
12 readiness by the Maritime Administration. The RRF is aging
13 and will need to be modernized over the next decade.

14 General Van Ovost, I look forward to hearing what
15 criteria you think we should consider as we undertake this
16 large modernization program.

17 The Defense Department also needs to ensure that the
18 Civil Reserve Air Fleet, or CRAF program, which provides as
19 much as 40 percent of wartime airlift needs, remains viable
20 after operations in Iraq and Afghanistan and will be able to
21 provide needed search capacity in the future. Notably, we
22 saw some of that capacity used by the Defense Department in
23 activating stage one of the CRAF program during the
24 Afghanistan withdrawal.

25 General, I am interested in your views on the state of

1 this fleet and whether anything needs to be done to ensure
2 its readiness.

3 Now, finally, I would ask that you share your views on
4 how TRANSCOM should contract out the management of the
5 Personnel Property Program, or DP3. DP3 is the program that
6 handles the movement of household goods for DOD personnel.
7 In this plan, a contractor team would be responsible for
8 issuing contracts to individual movers and carriers, rather
9 than the U.S. Government. Last year, after a bidding
10 competition, TRANSCOM awarded a contract to a contractor
11 team; however, the losing bidders protested the award and
12 GAO upheld the protest. We need to have a clearer picture
13 of how TRANSCOM will proceed with the DP3 outsourcing
14 effort.

15 Thank you, again, for your decades of service. We all
16 look forward to your testimony.

17 Let me now recognize the ranking member, Senator
18 Inhofe.

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1 STATEMENT OF HON. JAMES INHOFE, U.S. SENATOR FROM
2 OKLAHOMA

3 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 I appreciate having this and, of course, seeing General
5 Van Ovost.

6 I have to say this about you, General, I know you never
7 were privileged to getting your training in Oklahoma, but
8 they don't know that in Oklahoma. They think that you are
9 one of us. You have come to our Coyle breakfast and all of
10 that, so you are a star there.

11 And I enjoyed meeting Alan for the first time and I
12 look forward to your testimony, as I always do, and, again,
13 I thank you for all that you have done for America.

14 If we learned anything in the last 8 weeks, it is that
15 we can't shoot from the hip when it comes to military
16 operations and geopolitical affairs. I am, of course,
17 referring to this administration's botched evacuation of
18 American citizens and allies in the waning hours of the
19 Afghanistan withdrawal and paving the way for the Taliban
20 takeover.

21 While this hearing is not about your current role, it
22 is about what you will bring to the TRANSCOM, which oversaw
23 a vital portion of the Afghan evacuation. As the current
24 commander of Air Mobility Command, you had firsthand
25 knowledge of how evacuations were unfolding; you oversaw

1 more than 250 military aircraft, supporting complex
2 aircraft.

3 I look forward to hearing your thoughts on the success
4 of the military portion of the operation and what the
5 limiting factors were for the withdrawal, since thousands
6 were left stranded to face Taliban retribution.

7 Additionally, TRANSCOM has had issues meeting its
8 requirements. And this is, I think I didn't check that. I
9 think this is about the first time a major operation was
10 done and not carried out as we normally do with the National
11 Defense Strategy Commission, and we were not able to do that
12 for some obvious reasons. For one thing, last year's
13 budget, Congress had to reverse divestments of thousands of
14 air-refueling tankers because the Air Force made cuts that
15 would directly hinder TRANSCOM's ability to refuel aircraft.

16 I am curious what you think is the right path for
17 combatant command's input in the budget process and,
18 finally, I would like to get your thoughts on the ongoing
19 transition of this issue that keeps coming up. And I will
20 be glad, I think everyone up here will be glad when it is
21 over, if we bring it to a successful conclusion; that is,
22 the Global Household Goods Contract.

23 So, thank you, Mr. Chairman. I look forward to the
24 meeting.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Inhofe.

1 General, your statement, please.

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1 STATEMENT OF GENERAL JACQUELINE D. VAN OVOST, USAF,
2 NOMINEE TO BE COMMANDER, U.S. TRANSPORTATION COMMAND.

3 General Van Ovost: Thank you. Good morning, Chairman
4 Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, and distinguished members of
5 this committee. It is my great honor to appear before you
6 today as the President's nominee to command the men and
7 women of the United States Transportation Command.

8 I first want to thank President Biden for his
9 nomination, as well as Secretary Austin and Chairman Milley
10 for the special trust and confidence that they have placed
11 in me.

12 I also want to acknowledge General Stephen Lyons for
13 his steadfast leadership of the United States Transportation
14 Command and thank him for his staunch support of Air
15 Mobility Command.

16 Here with me today is my husband Alan, who, for the
17 past 30 years, has been an incredible source of strength and
18 inspiration. He has always kept me grounded in my faith,
19 and like most military spouses, has exemplified the true
20 meaning of flexibility and resiliency. Most notable,
21 however, has been his support and commitment to our military
22 families.

23 The strength of our servicemen and women starts at home
24 and the impact Alan has had on service family resiliency and
25 quality of life is immeasurable. I can unquestionably say

1 that without his love and support, I would not be here
2 today.

3 I also want to take a moment to acknowledge the
4 remarkable men and women I have had the privilege of leading
5 at Air Mobility Command. Projecting decisive strength and
6 delivering hope 24 hours a day, 365 days a year, this team
7 tackles some of our nation's hardest missions.

8 Just last month, AMC played a significant role in the
9 national and coalition effort to airlift more than 120,000
10 people out of Afghanistan. It was a difficult and dynamic
11 mission, where some of our airmen had to make decisions when
12 lives were on the line. I am so very proud of the work they
13 did there and that they continue to do every day.

14 Mr. Chairman, today we face a dynamic and increasingly
15 contested global strategic environment. Determined and
16 emboldened strategic competitors, like China and Russia,
17 continue rapid and deliberate development of advanced
18 capabilities and they challenge international norms with
19 their coercive behavior.

20 As the National Security Strategic Guidance emphasizes,
21 we must maintain our military competitive edge by continuing
22 to field and train the best force, adopt new technologies,
23 and build and maintain key partnerships. As all components
24 within the Department of Defense compete daily across the
25 global to strengthen our strategic network of allies and

1 partners, advance our national security interests, and
2 remain poised to defeat our adversaries, the unique mission
3 of the United States Transportation Command has never been
4 more important.

5 If confirmed, I will ensure United States
6 Transportation Command continues to provide our nation with
7 one of its most important, strategic, and asymmetric
8 advantages over our adversaries: the ability to rapidly
9 project and sustain joint combat power at strategically
10 relevant speeds, distances, and scale at the time and place
11 of our nation's choosing.

12 If confirmed, I look forward to working with this
13 committee, our like-minded allies and partners, our
14 commercial industry partners, the services and combatant
15 commanders to ensure United States Transportation Command
16 delivers for the nation, meeting the demands of logistics
17 required by the evolving character of war.

18 I would like for acknowledge and thank the members of
19 this committee for your continued support of the men and
20 women who so selflessly serve to defend our great nation.
21 Their honor, courage, and sacrifice is humbling, and their
22 passion for service, inspiring. They are the foundation to
23 our success and we owe them the very best our nation has to
24 offer.

25 Mr. Chairman, thank you, again, for this opportunity.

1 It is my honor to appear before the committee today and I
2 look forward to your questions.

3 [The prepared statement of General Van Ovost follows:]

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General.

2 I have a series of questions which are required for all
3 sitting nominees and you can simply respond, as
4 appropriately.

5 Have you adhered to applicable laws and regulations
6 governing conflicts of interest?

7 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

8 Chairman Reed: Have you assumed any duties or taken
9 any actions that would appear to presume the outcome of the
10 confirmation process?

11 General Van Ovost: No, Senator.

12 Chairman Reed: Exercising our legislative and
13 oversight responsibilities makes it important that this
14 committee, its subcommittees, and other appropriate
15 committees of Congress receive testimony, briefings,
16 reports, records, and other information from the Executive
17 Branch on a timely basis.

18 Do you agree, if confirmed, to appear and testify
19 before this committee when requested?

20 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

21 Chairman Reed: Do you agree, when asked before this
22 committee, to give your personal views, even if your views
23 differ from the administration?

24 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

25 Chairman Reed: Do you agree to provide records,

1 documents, and electronic communications in a timely manner
2 when requested by this committee, its subcommittees, or
3 other appropriate committees of Congress, and to consult
4 with the requestor regarding the basis for any good faith
5 delay or denial in providing such records?

6 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

7 Chairman Reed: Will you ensure that your staff
8 complies deadlines established by this committee for the
9 production of reports, records, and other information,
10 including timely responding to hearing questions for the
11 record?

12 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

13 Chairman Reed: Will you cooperate and provide any
14 witnesses and briefers in response to congressional request?

15 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

16 Chairman Reed: Will those witnesses and briefers be
17 protected from reprisal for their testimony or briefings?

18 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

19 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General.

20 Again, let me commend you on your extraordinary career
21 and your knowledge and experience as you enter this very
22 demanding, but as you point out, significant component of
23 our national security, one of our advantages.

24 The one issue I wanted to touch upon, I suggested in my
25 opening comments, is cybersecurity. I was struck once and

1 talked to you or asking questions of one of your
2 predecessors, who indicated that his dealing with the
3 commercial airlines, there is some interest, but the person
4 in charge has no contact with the board of directors or the
5 senior management, so that it is a complicating challenge.

6 What can you do to help improve and protect the cyber
7 connections between yourself and commercial entities?

8 General Van Ovost: Senator, cyber operations pose
9 significant threats to logistics. They target vulnerable
10 supply chain elements and can interrupt the flow of goods
11 and supplies around the world.

12 Senator, there has been a lot of work that the United
13 States Transportation Command has done to develop
14 relationships with our commercial service providers; one of
15 which, of course, is to ensure secure command and control of
16 the assets and ensure secure data management and IT.

17 And if confirmed, I will continue to thicken the
18 relationships with the commercial providers to ensure that
19 they understand the threats and we can remain agile enough
20 to combat these threats as they come up.

21 Chairman Reed: Thank you, General.

22 I would like, in the future after you have got your
23 feet on the ground in this particular job, to inform us
24 either directly or informally about whether you are getting
25 the kind of cooperation from the civilian sector that you

1 need. This is a two-way street, so the commercial entities
2 have to take it as seriously as we do. So, please let us
3 know as that develops.

4 Let me shift gears for a moment and talk about the C-
5 130 Force Structure. The fiscal year 2022 budget would
6 reduce the inventory of C-130s to a level of 255 total
7 aircraft from our current level of 287 and the new C-130 Air
8 Force fleet size would be inconsistent with the study that
9 has just been published about capabilities.

10 So, does this give you a concern?

11 General Van Ovost: Senator, the Mobility Capability
12 Requirements Study that was just released did provide a more
13 comprehensive assessment of the viability of the Joint
14 Deployment and Distribution Enterprise, given the new
15 threats that we face. And one of the recommendations of
16 this study was to follow on with a specific intra-theater
17 lift study, looking at the lift capabilities, not merely in
18 air, but also in land and surface and preposition, in order
19 to meet tomorrow's threats.

20 So, Senator, while the current C-130 discussion on
21 total aircraft inventory was your question, the bottom line
22 is I think we need to take a holistic look on the
23 survivability of these various assets, given the new threat.

24 Chairman Reed: Well, thank you, General.

25 So, you are already planning to look at different

1 alternatives to the number of C-130s that are available and
2 also look at the capabilities of C-130s in a given
3 environment.

4 Is that fair?

5 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator; in fact, it is very
6 important that we explore the new technologies as we are
7 looking at the joint warfighting concept and the new ways
8 that the services are going to fight, it is becoming
9 apparent that potentially runway, independent operations
10 might be a keep capability. In that case, we have to
11 discover how it is that we are going to support and sustain
12 our runway, independent operations.

13 Chairman Reed: Thank you, General.

14 A final question. The Ready Reserve Force
15 recapitalization, the committee has authorized the
16 Department to start a program to recapitalize the Ready
17 Reserve fleet by purchasing a number of foreign-built
18 vessels and purchasing these vessels to modernize the RRF
19 has been held up by problems with the contracting effort at
20 the Maritime Administration.

21 Can you give us an update on this process, are we
22 making progress, and do we have to do more here?

23 General Van Ovost: Senator, thank you.

24 This is a critical capacity concern of mine, with
25 respect to U.S. Transportation Command. We must continue to

1 move forward on recapitalizing this aging fleet. As you are
2 aware, over 50 percent of our roll-on/roll-off capability
3 will be aging out in a decade. So, the time is now to do
4 that recapitalization.

5 And I fully support the Navy's buy-used strategy. I
6 understand that a vessel-acquisition manager is in place and
7 is working the contract and we do expect that there will be
8 a buy in calendar year 2022 of used ships to begin this
9 recapitalization progress.

10 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, General.

11 Now, let me recognize the ranking member, Senator
12 Inhofe.

13 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

14 The Biden administration's horrific attempt at a
15 successful withdrawal from Afghanistan will go down, in my
16 opinion, and the opinion of many others, as one of the
17 biggest blunders in American military history; however, it
18 has given us a great opportunity, and through your efforts,
19 I would say, in training in lessons that we have learned.

20 As Commander of the Air Mobility Command and the Air
21 Component Commander for TRANSCOM, you oversaw operations
22 with over 250 military aircraft; in fact, my staff told me
23 that they had, the number of sorties were at 2627. I had
24 them go back and check the accuracy of that. That is just a
25 huge undertaking of what went on that included C-17s, C-

1 130s, refuelers, KC-135s, KC-10s, maybe even the 46, but it
2 was huge.

3 General, in AMC's planning for the withdrawal, and
4 specifically for the airlift, what were the limiting factors
5 in wind and what advice did you give to your senior leaders
6 on how the withdrawal would be conducted?

7 General Van Ovost: Senator, I am proud of how the
8 airmen of Air Mobility Command executed this campaign in
9 such a dynamic situation.

10 Senator Inhofe: And I think they are probably still
11 riding high on this. You all did such a great, great
12 effort.

13 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

14 And while my advice was limited to the mission I was
15 tasked with, which was airlift out of Kabul International
16 Airfield, my goal was to ensure that airlift and our
17 supporting ground operations were never a constraint for the
18 Central Command Commander. And due to the heroic efforts of
19 our airmen, we achieved that goal.

20 Senator Inhofe: Well, that is great and it is really a
21 job well done.

22 I mentioned in my opening statement where we are right
23 now with this Global Household Goods Contract and the fact
24 that I am hoping we are in a position now to get this behind
25 us. It is my understanding it is now being competed again

1 with an award date of this month.

2 So, what was your feeling about it and do you believe a
3 new system is needed? Do you believe that TRANSCOM's
4 approach is the best path forward? How do you feel about it
5 now?

6 General Van Ovost: Senator, you have hit upon a key
7 "quality of life" issue for our servicemembers and their
8 families. And it is clear that the current program is
9 really incapable of consistently providing that quality
10 capacity, accountability, and transparency that our members
11 and family members deserve.

12 So, if confirmed, I will ensure, as I assess the
13 contract as we move forward in letting that contract that
14 all the mechanisms are in place for the single move manager
15 to be able to effectively execute and meet the standards
16 that our members and families deserve.

17 Senator Inhofe: And we will get it behind us.

18 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

19 Senator Inhofe: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Inhofe.

21 Now, let me recognize Senator Shaheen, please.

22 Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

23 And congratulations, General, we are delighted to have
24 you before us and to have you as the person nominated to
25 head up TRANSCOM. I very much appreciated the opportunity

1 to see you in action in New Hampshire when you came to visit
2 the New Hampshire Air National Guard, and I know that people
3 were very impressed with your presentation.

4 And, of course, there, one of the areas of focus of
5 that presentation was the KC-46. It is the first Guard base
6 to get those planes. People are very anxious for when they
7 can do the fully operational missions that they are
8 anticipating. And that was, obviously, one of the questions
9 that people had for you.

10 So, as you are thinking about what we still need to do
11 to make sure that those are fully operational, how will you
12 continue to push on that once confirmed?

13 General Van Ovost: Thank you, Senator.

14 Let me commend the men and women of the 157th for being
15 the first Guard base to help us field the KC-46. They have
16 done some amazing work within operations and maintenance,
17 and we are able to take those new tactics, techniques, and
18 procedures, and export them across the fleet; indeed, even
19 in this Operation Allies Refuge, they all leaned forward to
20 support us and the KC-46 was in the fight for this
21 operation.

22 Now, while I desire to get full operational capability
23 as soon as possible in the KC-46, as you know, we have moved
24 to an interim-capability release, where we are providing the
25 U.S. Transportation Command taskable capacity and we are

1 flying this aircraft around the world doing drogue refueling
2 and probe-and-drogue, and probe refueling, I'm sorry, boom
3 refueling with certain aircraft. And so I appreciate the
4 fact that Pease leans forward and volunteers to continue to
5 do this work.

6 Senator Shaheen: So, as you are thinking about the
7 challenges ahead to make sure those planes become fully
8 operational, are you comfortable with Boeing's commitment to
9 address the challenges that we have with the planes and do
10 you have a sense of what the timeline is going to be?

11 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

12 Again, while I like to move as quickly as possible, and
13 we want to hold contractors responsible to meet all
14 requirements in different contracts, I am seeing positive
15 movements on resolving the deficiencies of the KC-46 so that
16 we can achieve FOC as soon as possible.

17 With respect to, in particular, the Remote Vision
18 System 2.0, we are looking for the timeline of 2024 for
19 cutting into production and retrofitting those aircraft.
20 So, I am hopeful we have achieved agreement on a design that
21 we know will be effective. Our boom operators have been
22 very engaged, as have yours, and so I look forward to
23 continuing to push this progress forward as quickly as
24 possible.

25 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

1 One of the things that was discussed when you were in
2 New Hampshire was the partnership that the 157th has with
3 Delta Airlines to try and address the real maintenance
4 challenges that reduce the aircraft flying time.

5 So, can you talk about how TRANSCOM can address the
6 overlapping FAA and DOD maintenance requirements, which are
7 really requiring, I think, a challenge as we look at the
8 future of, really, not just the KC-46, but aviation?

9 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

10 You hit on a key thing, again, that the Wing has been
11 very focused on, is to how to ensure the maximum
12 effectiveness of our maintenance operations both, in the
13 field and in depot. And it is the United States Air Force's
14 responsibility with respect to that, so as a TRANSCOM
15 perspective, I will ensure that the Air Force continues
16 forward to try to streamline and reduce the maintenance
17 times on these aircraft, which really turns out to be
18 readiness.

19 So, as the TRANSCOM Commander, I would be focused on
20 more fighter readiness and I will absolutely be watching the
21 readiness of the KC-46.

22 Senator Shaheen: And is that an area where we need to
23 better engage the FAA? Are you comfortable that what the
24 FAA is requiring is necessary?

25 General Van Ovost: Senator, I am comfortable with

1 their procedures. We work with them on a number of issues.
2 We have other commercial platforms that we work with them,
3 and so I am comfortable with the process that we are going
4 to go through to ensure we have the most effective,
5 technical orders to operate off of.

6 Senator Shaheen: Thank you.

7 One of the other things we discussed while you were in
8 New Hampshire was the deterioration of the ramp, the parking
9 ramp at Pease, and I am out of time, so I will send you a
10 question for the record, with respect to this, but, again,
11 another critical issue if we are going to ensure that the
12 157th continues to complete its missions and that we can
13 have other aircraft going through, be able to land at Pease.
14 Thank you.

15 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

16 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Shaheen.

17 Let me recognize via Webex, Senator Fischer.

18 Senator Fischer: Thank you Senator Reed.

19 And thank you, General, for being here with us this
20 morning. I enjoyed the visit that we had yesterday in my
21 office. Thank you for taking the time to [inaudible]
22 yesterday.

23 One of the battlefield conditions that the National
24 Defense Strategy presupposes is the increasing prevalence of
25 contested domains, but I think it is unclear to what extent

1 TRANSCOM has acted on this guidance.

2 General, what do you view as the key challenges that
3 TRANSCOM and the Department of Defense must address, with
4 respect to planning for a potential conflict in a contested
5 logistics environment and how can we build a more
6 distributed and resilient [inaudible]?

7 General Van Ovost: Senator, thank you for the
8 conversation.

9 And as I emphasized earlier, the character of war is
10 changing. We face direct challenges across all domains,
11 particularly in previously unmatched areas of superiority,
12 like global logistics. So, as I think about the challenges
13 that we face, we have to be able to project and sustain the
14 Joint Force along a very long, contested line of
15 communication, particularly when we think about the
16 distances associated in the Indo-Pacific area.

17 And one of the key areas for the all-domain threats
18 that we must overcome is cyber operations because they pose
19 significant threats, as I previously mentioned. We need
20 secure command and control and modernized digital
21 infrastructure.

22 And as the AMC Commander, responsible for global
23 command and control, I prioritized our investments in cyber
24 mission assurance, secure and resilient communications, and
25 data utilization and management so that we could achieve

1 decision advantage at the speed of war. And those are the
2 kinds of things that I would focus on as the Transportation
3 Command Commander, if confirmed.

4 And, indeed, I understand that USTRANSCOM has a number
5 of digital modernization initiatives to include some pilot
6 programs with U.S. Cyber Commands that are very promising,
7 including Zero Trust.

8 Senator Fischer: You know, as we look to a possible
9 conflict, I know that TRANSCOM may be heavily reliant on
10 commercial partners to participate, for example, the Civil
11 Reserve Air Fleet and the Ready Reserve Force.

12 How do you view the potential role of these partners if
13 we are in a contested, operating environment?

14 General Van Ovost: Senator, our ability to project and
15 sustain the Joint Forces are inextricably linked to
16 commercial industry and those emergency programs that you
17 talked about: Civil Reserve Air Fleet and Voluntary
18 Intermodal Service Agreement.

19 And as we go forward, at this time, U.S. Transportation
20 Command is writing into the contracts to ensure some basic
21 cyber hygiene standards by the National Institute of
22 Standards and Technology. And as we go forward, as you
23 probably know, they are required to do a self-assessment
24 every year on their cyber vulnerabilities. And my
25 understanding is TRANSCOM is entering into a pilot program

1 where they are going to have a third party do that
2 assessment; take a different look at those companies.

3 So, I think, if confirmed, I would want to deepen those
4 relationships with our commercial partners. I would like to
5 share more so that we understand each other, we understand
6 where the threat vectors are, and where that attack surface
7 is, and we have an understanding of where the risks are
8 across the whole global logistics complex.

9 Senator Fischer: Thank you.

10 In September of 2019, TRANSCOM conducted the largest
11 no-notice sealift exercise of the wartime sealift fleet in
12 the Command's history, and at the end of the exercise,
13 TRANSCOM concluded that the readiness rate could delay the
14 buildup on combat power in the theater of operations.

15 What has the Command done to address these problems and
16 what, in your opinion, needs to happen? What more needs to
17 be done in order to correct that?

18 General Van Ovost: Senator, warfighting readiness is a
19 key priority for this command, so as you stated, during the
20 exercise, the readiness levels were not where we wanted them
21 to be, where TRANSCOM wanted them to be. Frankly, we have
22 older ships and some of the Reserve ships are up to 46 years
23 old, and as you know, older equipment takes longer to
24 maintain and, perhaps, takes longer to actually bring to the
25 ready for us.

1 So, the single-most-important thing is I would support
2 the Navy in their recapitalization effort to buy used.

3 Senator Fischer: Thank you very much.

4 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

5 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Fischer.

6 Let me recognize Senator Kaine and also ask if Senator
7 Shaheen could preside while I go and vote. The vote is on,
8 the first vote is on. Thank you.

9 Senator Kaine: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and Ranking
10 Member Inhofe.

11 And, General Van Ovost, I also really appreciated the
12 conversation we had yesterday. Two topics I just want to
13 raise. One, the controversy and challenges around the
14 retirement of the old tankers suggest that maybe we waited
15 too long to begin the process of figuring out what the new
16 refueling aircraft should be.

17 And so, trying to learn that lesson and taking it over
18 into the airlift fleet, our C-17 airframes are pretty old;
19 anywhere from 10 to 25 years old. And the C-5s are over 30
20 years old. So, talk to me about what the Air Force is
21 thinking about doing to start the planning of the next
22 generation of cargo aircraft so we can avoid any time crunch
23 that we have felt in the tanker.

24 General Van Ovost: Senator, as the AMC Commander, I
25 have two responsibilities. One, as the Component Commander

1 to the United States Transportation Command to provide ready
2 capacity for tasking around the world to project and sustain
3 the force on a day-to-day capacity; on the other hand, I
4 have an "organize, train, and equip" responsibility, where I
5 need to look out into the future to see how our capacity can
6 remain credible in order to defeat the threats in the
7 future, so I can continue to project to sustain the force
8 with credible capacity.

9 So, as I think about aging infrastructure, I have to
10 balance both sides; I have to have capacity today and I must
11 be able to respond to tomorrow. So, it is a risk between
12 the both. There is not quite a balance, but there is a risk
13 between the both.

14 And as I look to the strategic airlift fleet, you are
15 exactly correct. We are looking into the timelines for the
16 C-5 and when it has to retire, as well as the C-17. They
17 have performed magnificently, both, frankly, during
18 Operation Allies Refuge. So, what we are doing now is we
19 are looking through the joint warfighting concept at the new
20 threats and the new employment concepts, which we will have
21 to deliver airlift to, and as we think about that, we think
22 about the capability. We think about survivability, you
23 know, full spectrum of survivability and, frankly, kinetic
24 survivability, and being connected on to the battlefield so
25 that we have the situational awareness to be able to make

1 decisions.

2 So, we are gathering these requirements and then we
3 will move to an analysis of alternatives, a formal process
4 where we will then finalize those requirements and run them
5 through the Joint Staff for approval. So, we are moving
6 forward with that, but, basically, as we look at our
7 warfighting concepts and we are doing these war games, that
8 is giving us that insight to be able to create those
9 requirements that we can then codify for the next strategic
10 airlifter.

11 Senator Kaine: Thank you for that answer, General Van
12 Ovost.

13 And the second topic I wanted to ask you about was
14 raised by Ranking Member Inhofe and that was the household
15 moves. You know, being a senator from Virginia with an
16 awful lot of military members, the moving situation is one
17 that often comes up, people have concerns about.

18 I was interested when we talked yesterday, tell the
19 committee how many times you and your family have had to
20 move during your career.

21 General Van Ovost: Senator, we have had to endure 13
22 moves.

23 Senator Kaine: So, you have a consumer's view of this
24 situation and you know how important it is that it be right.
25 We also talked a little bit about some of the challenges of

1 managing moves in the status quo, or the status quo ante
2 environment.

3 Isn't it the case that you were dealing with more than
4 900 different moving contractors? That has kind of been
5 what we have had to manage, which is pretty difficult.

6 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator. U.S. Transportation
7 Command has had to reach out, frankly, during COVID and
8 coordinate and provide information to all of these service
9 providers to keep them up to date on the different policies
10 and enforce health-protection measures that we were trying
11 to take, and to ensure that the capacity delivered during
12 this incredible time.

13 And, frankly, what we learned in COVID was it really
14 exasperated the flaws that are in the current contract. And
15 having a single move manager that would be, with a multi-
16 year contract, they would be more confident to invest in
17 quality suppliers and digital IT and will be pressed with
18 the accountability that our family members deserve.

19 Senator Kaine: Well, I think the committee knows from
20 earlier iterations of contracts, like in the housing space,
21 the contract is only as good as the military's willingness
22 to exercise deep and intense oversight of the contract.

23 I appreciate the challenges of the need to make these
24 moves right to meet families' needs, and because of your own
25 experience and having had to endure 13 moves with your

1 family over the course of your military career, it seems to
2 me like you are the right person to get this right. So, I
3 encourage you in that.

4 And with that, I yield back.

5 Senator Shaheen: [Presiding.] Thank you, Senator
6 Kaine.

7 Senator Cotton?

8 Senator Cotton: General, thank you for your service to
9 our country and congratulations on your nomination.

10 We have spoken on several occasions this morning about
11 reports and studies. A GAO report released earlier this
12 year says that in the 5 years and across about a dozen
13 classified or sensitive studies, quote, the Department of
14 Defense has studied contested mobility, but has not
15 systematically addressed recommendations, end quote.

16 What, in your opinion, is preventing TRANSCOM from
17 systematically addressing the study recommendations and how
18 can you improve on this assessment?

19 General Van Ovost: Senator, facing these, you know,
20 really threats from China and Russia and strategic
21 competition, we have learned that we really need to ensure
22 that logistics planning is integrated with all joint
23 warfighting functions. Logistics planning is not an add-on
24 and it needs to be part of the deliberate process as we go
25 forward.

1 So, if confirmed, Senator, I will work with the other
2 combatant commanders to ensure that logistics concerns are
3 being addressed early and we provide options to them for the
4 best use of these scarce resources.

5 Senator Cotton: Thank you.

6 Following on that line, I, too, want to commend our
7 airmen who performed excellently, a job in Afghanistan that
8 they should never have had to be perform. They were brave.
9 They were skillful. They saved many lives.

10 That is the rare occasion in which we have seen
11 contested logistics play out in the real world in recent
12 years; however, the contest we faced in Afghanistan would
13 look like child's play if we had a conflict with China in
14 the Western Pacific, and it would have us fighting on all
15 fronts to include, very much, as you say, on logistics.

16 What have studies, such as the Mobility Capability
17 Requirements Study, as well as others, demonstrated
18 regarding the survivability, efficiency, and reliability of
19 our logistics systems during a large and contested conflict
20 with China?

21 General Van Ovost: Senator, the Mobility Capability
22 Requirements Study did provide a very comprehensive
23 assessment on what the new employment concepts would do to
24 logistics and that information was given to the combatant
25 commanders to, overall, assess the risk to their plans for

1 us having to, essentially, project and sustain along a long,
2 contested line of communication.

3 And you are correct, in Afghanistan, early on, the
4 ground line of communication became non-usable and we had to
5 move to air lines of communication to execute the
6 retrograde.

7 So, as we move forward, we take the results from the
8 Mobility Capability Requirements Study and we would like to
9 exercise those in our upcoming war games and TTXs so that we
10 can better tease out the insights required to build a
11 stronger Joint Deployment and Distribution Enterprise so
12 that we can project and sustain throughout strategic
13 competition.

14 Senator Cotton: Thank you.

15 China's Belt and Road Initiative has invested
16 substantially throughout Asia and Africa, increasingly in
17 Europe, in logistics and transportation hubs, in particular,
18 in international ports. I would like your assessment on
19 whether that initiative, and especially its investment in
20 ports, has created any new access problems for TRANSCOM or
21 do you foresee it creating access problems, as ports might
22 be potentially closed to the United States and our partner
23 forces during a time of crisis.

24 General Van Ovost: Senator, you have hit on a key
25 concern. China has been challenging a stable and open

1 international order, trying to impose their authoritarian
2 model beyond their borders. They have been coercing our
3 allies and partners to make different economic, diplomatic,
4 and even security decisions. And their investments around
5 the world in ports are something that we are absolutely
6 watching, with respect to how it would change any access,
7 basing, and overflight that we critically need.

8 The good news is we have a deep bench of allies and
9 partners and we can provide multiple options through
10 multiple routes and nodes, not just from our organic
11 capability, but by relying on our commercial partners, who
12 have a very extensive network throughout the world, and in
13 some cases, that we might not have access to.

14 So, going forward, Senator, if confirmed, I will
15 continue to assess our global posture with respect to China,
16 to ensure that we can meet all the combatant commanders'
17 requirements.

18 Senator Cotton: Thank you, I am glad to hear that.
19 TRANSCOM has a lot of very important responsibilities. I
20 think the number one priority for TRANSCOM, as all of our
21 combatant command, needs to be the preparation for, and
22 therefore, hopefully, the deterrence of a conflict with
23 China.

24 Senator Shaheen: Thank you, Senator Cotton.

25 Next, we have Senator King, via Webex.

1 Senator King: Thank you, Madam Chair.

2 First, General, welcome to the committee, and thank you
3 for your willingness to take on this incredibly important
4 assignment.

5 In light of Senator Kaine's questions, I have to
6 mention that many years ago, I worked in this area for a
7 moving and storage company that did a huge amount of work
8 for the military and I will never forget a military spouse
9 telling me that she considered seven moves to be equal to a
10 fire in terms of her household goods. So, I know how
11 serious that problem could be, absolutely, from, literally,
12 from the ground up.

13 Let me talk a moment about the time of conflict and
14 cyber. If we are engaged in a conflict, the very first
15 target will be nuclear command and control by an all-out
16 cyber attack. The second will be command and control,
17 generally. The third will be you, will be TRANSCOM.

18 And in your pre-filed remarks, you said something to
19 the effect, well, you said, the posture of TRANSCOM and the
20 Department is likely insufficient to deal with a well-
21 resourced, capable, and determined nation-state adversary.

22 You just defined China and Russia: well-resourced,
23 capable, and determined nation-state adversary.

24 In other words, we are not prepared. And I want to
25 hear your views on what has to be done. This is a "hair on

1 fire" issue. Your whole infrastructure is not going to be
2 functional if you don't have command and control and the
3 ability to allocate your resources.

4 I want to hear your sense of urgency on this issue.

5 General Van Ovost: Senator, you are exactly correct,
6 the ability to command and control this enterprise is
7 central to making an executing logistics decisions around
8 the world. And we must take advantage of the significant
9 advances in commercial technology and integrate that into
10 military technologies, especially when it comes to exposing
11 and using data to make better decisions.

12 So, if confirmed, I will focus, I will first assess the
13 digital initiatives that U.S. Transportation Command is
14 currently executing and I will work to accelerate these
15 technologies so that we can always retain decision
16 advantage.

17 But to your point, these are determined enemies and
18 technology is only going to increase; it will never be one-
19 and-done. This is about risk management, and so I will
20 apply the focus to the areas that are the most risk first.

21 Senator King: Well, in that light, I would urge you to
22 engage, either in the private sector or within the
23 Department, your own hackers to determine where your
24 vulnerabilities are. Every CIO says, we are okay, boss.
25 And they don't know whether that is true until you test it,

1 so I urge you to test it. Because I can assure you at this
2 very moment, our adversaries are figuring out how to hack
3 your systems and compromise your ability to move our
4 resources around the world.

5 Let me change the subject for a minute to tankers.
6 General Lyons testified a few years ago that he was
7 concerned that there could be a gap between the deployment
8 of the KC-46s and the retirement of the C-135s, a gap in
9 terms of refueling capability.

10 Do you feel that that gap has been adequately addressed
11 today?

12 General Van Ovost: Senator, a few years ago, that is
13 exactly where we were headed, but since then, now that we
14 have brought the KC-46 interim capability release to bear
15 for USTRANSCOM's taskings, and in addition, we have amazing
16 support from our total force volunteerism to increase a
17 taskings of the Guard and Reserve refueling assets. We have
18 been able to meet, and I foresee that we will absolutely be
19 able to meet the day-to-day requirements and any wartime
20 requirements made.

21 Senator King: Have the problems with the boom-
22 management system in the KC-46 been resolved and, if so,
23 what is the time frame for restarting the significant
24 deployment of those airplanes?

25 General Van Ovost: Senator, the boom deficiencies are

1 still in work and we are satisfied with the design, and we
2 are pushing the contractor to continue to integrate and
3 test. We are looking forward to a 2024 cut into the line to
4 ensure that in the future, this aircraft can meet all of the
5 requirements.

6 But until that point, what we are doing with interim
7 capability release is we are providing a capability to the
8 U.S. Transportation Command for select missions for that
9 aircraft; for example, we are refueling now, B-52s, the C-
10 17s, and I expect we are going to be refueling F-16s and F-
11 15s in the very near future.

12 Senator King: Well, I would be remiss if I didn't
13 mention when it comes time to start the reallocation of the
14 KC-46s, don't forget the Maineiacs in Bangor who provide
15 incredible refueling support over the North Atlantic, and we
16 would very much like to have the KC-46 capability, because
17 most of the airplanes we are flying up there now are way
18 older than their pilots.

19 Thank you very much, General, for your testimony. I
20 look forward to working with you.

21 Chairman Reed: [Presiding.] Thank you very much,
22 Senator King.

23 I am told that Senator Hawley is on his way, and that
24 would allow me to ask a question in the interim.

25 General, with respect to the Civil Reserve Air Fleet,

1 did we learn in lessons, and I presume we are doing an
2 after-action review, from the operations in Afghanistan, and
3 can you share any of those lessons with us.

4 General Van Ovost: Senator, the Civil Reserve Air
5 Fleet, as you mentioned, this is the third time ever that we
6 actually activated the Civil Reserve Air Fleet, and we did
7 it in the run-up to Operation Allies Refuge.

8 We start with commercial augmentation; in other words,
9 they voluntarily contract and meet our commitments, which
10 is, frankly, how we meet 90 percent of our passenger
11 movement. And when volunteerism wasn't there or we didn't
12 have enough, that is when the U.S. Transportation Command
13 Commander requested to the Secretary to activate stage one
14 of the Civil Reserve Air Fleet, which is 18 long-haul,
15 international, passenger aircraft.

16 And because we have deepened our relationships with our
17 Civil Reserve, especially over COVID, where we had numerous
18 conversations with them because, essentially, we were both
19 relying on each other for our networks, because
20 international rules were changing during COVID, and so it
21 was a mutual, beneficial relationship that we had and we
22 kept each other informed of what was going on around the
23 world, such that in the run-up to this activation, we kept
24 them informed that we might have to activate and they were
25 prepared when the decision was made.

1 Now, nothing goes perfectly, and I look forward to
2 learning, gathering the lessons learned, and worked with the
3 CRAF to make it a better activation both, from our position
4 and from their position, but I am so thankful for their
5 partnership.

6 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much.

7 Let me suspend my questioning and recognize Senator
8 Hawley.

9 Senator Hawley: Thank you very much, Mr. Chairman. I
10 really appreciate your willingness to wait for me.

11 General, thank you so much for being here. Thank you
12 for your years of service to our nation and congratulations
13 on your nomination.

14 I want to ask you a question that I have asked all the
15 senior leaders who have come before this committee. I will
16 preface this by saying that Secretary Austin has reaffirmed
17 several times now that China is the pacing threat, emphasis
18 on "the," for the Department.

19 Do you agree with that, that China is the pacing
20 threat?

21 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

22 Senator Hawley: Very good.

23 I have also asked the Secretary, Deputy Secretary
24 Hicks, and just about every other Defense leader if the
25 United States should maintain its ability to defeat a

1 Chinese fait accompli with regard to Taiwan. They have all
2 responded yes.

3 I want to ask you, I have been, myself, a real pest on
4 this issue and I don't want to let my reputation slide, so I
5 want to ask you, General, if we agree that we need to
6 maintain the ability to defeat a potential Chinese fait
7 accompli against Taiwan?

8 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

9 Senator Hawley: Very good.

10 Given the importance of this, do you agree that
11 TRANSCOM needs to prioritize that scenario, the fait
12 accompli scenario, as it develops plans, concepts, and
13 capabilities?

14 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

15 Senator Hawley: Very good.

16 Now, General, Admirals Davidson and Aquilino have both
17 warned us that China might attempt a fait accompli against
18 Taiwan sooner than previously anticipated. This, I think,
19 was eye-opening testimony that this committee heard earlier
20 this year.

21 Do you agree that the threat of a fait accompli against
22 Taiwan is something we need to be worried about in this
23 decade and not just in the 2030s and beyond, but potentially
24 sooner than that?

25 General Van Ovost: Senator, I am not privy to all the

1 intelligence that the geographic combatant commander would
2 have with respect to the driving threats, but I would say
3 that the rapid, technological advances that China makes are
4 very disturbing.

5 Senator Hawley: And would you agree that we need to be
6 able to, we need to be prepared to blunt and also deny that
7 offensive, any potential offensive from the beginning, from
8 the start, if China should attempt it?

9 General Van Ovost: Senator, I believe from the U.S.
10 Transportation Command position that we need to ensure that
11 we have the favorable, global posture, credible capacity,
12 and ability to securely command and control so that we can
13 be agile enough to respond to the INDOPACOM requirements of
14 the [inaudible] plan.

15 Senator Hawley: Let me ask you about some of the
16 logistics requirements for blunting a Chinese fait accompli.

17 How might those differ from the logistics requirements
18 for fighting and winning a protracted war in INDOPACOM? So,
19 help us understand the difference, logistically, between
20 denying on the front end and fighting a lengthy war, by
21 contrast.

22 General Van Ovost: Senator, U.S. Transportation
23 Command is responsible to deliver an immediate force tonight
24 and a decisive force, when necessary, as you pointed out,
25 the blunt versus the continuation.

1 And as we go forward and look into the plans, our
2 Mobility Capability Requirements Study of 2020 recently
3 looked at this contested environment and validated the
4 requirements for sealift, airlift, and air refueling to
5 defeat this kind of war. So, where there is a balance, the
6 other piece that we will be looking into, with respect to
7 the study, is the posture, you know, where do we need to be
8 postured; where do our logistics need to be; where does the
9 fuel need to be.

10 And if confirmed, I will work with INDOPACOM with the
11 services and DLA to best posture to meet the INDOPACOM
12 Command requirements.

13 Senator Hawley: Very good.

14 Let me ask you this, the Joint Force has limited lift
15 capacity and this past August, we used over half of our
16 available C-17s, if I am not incorrect, in our inventory to
17 support the evacuation operations in Afghanistan. Those
18 capacity limits have significant implications for the
19 force's ability to manage multiple conflicts at once.

20 Are you concerned by the threat of simultaneous
21 conflicts, potential simultaneous conflicts, for instance,
22 in Asia and in Europe, and TRANSCOM's ability to satisfy any
23 operational requirements, should we have kinetic operations
24 in multiple theaters at one time?

25 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator. First, I would say

1 that the surge for Afghanistan, I want to just say how proud
2 I am of the airmen, of maintenance, and crew operators, who
3 were able to surge the fleet and safely and effectively
4 accomplish this operation.

5 When I look to the Mobility Capability Requirements
6 Study 2020, this is exactly what it looked at: What is the
7 integrated scenario we might be up against should we go
8 against a peer conflict, and what are the requirements for
9 each of the capabilities, in my case, that Air Mobility
10 Command brings: the airlift, air refueling, air medical
11 evacuation, and global mobility support.

12 And it did recognize that we would be stressed to meet
13 the globally integrated requirement for air refueling and
14 for intra-theater airlift.

15 Senator Hawley: Let me ask you how you would approach
16 and prepare for the possibility of simultaneous conflicts in
17 multiple theaters.

18 General Van Ovost: Senator, I believe that using the
19 warfighting construct of our favorable posture, our credible
20 capacity, and secure command and control, we need to
21 constantly re-look at, given the threat, and we would have
22 to change our posture based on how the threat changes. And
23 I would work with the Secretary of Defense and with the
24 combatant commanders, again, to meet the requirements.

25 Senator Hawley: Thank you for being here. I may have

1 a few more questions for you for the record. Thanks, again,
2 for your service.

3 Mr. Chairman, I thank you again. I appreciate you
4 waiting for me.

5 [The information follows:]

6 [COMMITTEE INSERT]

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1 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Hawley.

2 Now, let me recognize, via Webex, Senator Gillibrand.

3 Senator Gillibrand: Thank you, Mr. Chairman, and I am
4 sorry I am off the floor, so it is not as quiet as it should
5 be.

6 General, one of the issues that I have heard a lot in
7 my office that I wanted to check with you about was the fact
8 that a lot of servicemembers is how COVID delays have
9 negatively affected their PCSing, including being told to
10 handle their own move, since there are not enough TRANSCOM
11 contractors and services available to assist them.

12 So, if confirmed, can I have your commitment that you
13 will work to improve the PCSing experience for our
14 personnel?

15 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

16 Senator Gillibrand: The second issue is the vaccine
17 gap on the last mile. I understand TRANSCOM has done a lot
18 to facilitate the distribution of vaccines worldwide;
19 however, there is still inequity between developing nations
20 and developed nations. Less than 4 percent of the African
21 population is fully vaccinated, whereas 70 percent of the
22 European population is vaccinated, for instance.

23 Experts in both, the public and private sectors, have
24 blamed the last mile problem as the bottleneck. This
25 includes getting the frozen vaccines from logistics hubs.

1 Can you tell me how you will respond to this, if
2 confirmed?

3 General Van Ovost: Senator, U.S. Transportation
4 Command, if requested, by the Department of State, does
5 contract or deliver COVID vaccines and personal protective
6 equipment around the world, and we have done so on various
7 occasions.

8 And if confirmed, I will work with the Department of
9 State and Department of Defense as they give us the tasks,
10 but as you are probably aware, the Department of Defense
11 does not make the decisions on where the vaccines go.

12 Senator Gillibrand: Yes. Well, thank you, again.

13 And, thank you, Mr. Chairman, for letting me have time
14 for a few questions.

15 I appreciate you both. God bless.

16 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Gillibrand.

17 Now, I may resume my second round, but, General, there
18 is -- well, I see Senator Kelly arriving and if -- oh,
19 excuse me, we have Senator Duckworth now on the Webex.

20 So, Senator Duckworth, you are recognized.

21 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

22 I just wanted to welcome General Van Ovost to this and
23 I want to commend the General's leadership and recognize the
24 servicemembers of Air Mobility Command for conducting the
25 historic, largest, non-combatant rescue, evacuation airlift

1 in history. I am so proud of TRANSCOM's monumental efforts
2 in August, as well as the continued work of servicemembers
3 across the United States military in providing ongoing
4 airlift support of our Afghan allies, including volunteers
5 from the 182nd Airlift Wing in Peoria, Illinois.

6 I think we are all witnessing real time example of why
7 it is so important that we plan for and resource our
8 logistics and sustainment capabilities as much as we plan
9 for and resource our combat capabilities. Our logistics
10 enterprise is absolutely vital for responding to
11 emergencies, while preparing for future conflicts.

12 General Van Ovost, welcome. Based on the finding from
13 the most recent Mobility Capability Requirements Study, if
14 you are confirmed, how will you ensure TRANSCOM is balancing
15 steady state requirements, emergency response missions, and
16 preparation for future operations in a contested
17 environment?

18 General Van Ovost: Senator, thank you for the earlier
19 discussion and thank you for your support of logistics
20 around the world.

21 We are simply a strategic capability, really, unmatched
22 by any other nation to be able to project and sustain our
23 force around the world, and it is very helpful that you
24 bring forward the thoughts about the critical role that
25 logistics plays, and not simply within an old plan, but,

1 frankly, from a deterrent value. Our logistics formations
2 can absolutely deter when we have these deep relationships
3 with our allies and partners and we become more
4 interoperable with them and we use their logistics chains,
5 as well as very, very powerful, when our enemies see that.

6 And speaking to the Mobility Capability Requirements
7 Study and the need to project decisive force along a long,
8 contested line of communication, if confirmed, I will not
9 only assess these results with the services, but I will work
10 with the combatant commanders on their operational plans to
11 ensure that we can provide them multiple options to meet
12 their needs both, for an immediate force tonight and a
13 decisive force, when needed.

14 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, General.

15 And following up on that, as the services are looking
16 to divest from older platforms, like the C-130, for example,
17 what future capabilities are required to meet future
18 challenges, especially in the Indo-Pacific Region, as far as
19 TRANSCOM is concerned?

20 General Van Ovost: Senator, as we look to the joint
21 warfighting concept and the embedding concepts, in
22 particular, the joint concept for contested logistics, we
23 recognize that we have gaps in our capabilities in strategic
24 competition. So, I think about ensuring that we participate
25 from a logistics standpoint in the joint warfighting, in the

1 games, in the exercises, and tabletop to tease out those
2 insights where we can then increase the credibility of
3 logistics around the world.

4 So, not only from there, the warfighting concepts from
5 the different services, but we, indeed, need to think about
6 doing new things, with respect to logistics. I think about
7 having and utilizing data to make better logistics decisions
8 more effective to use our critical resources better,
9 especially, in a very dynamic situation, and then ensuring
10 that we can actually execute those orders with a secure and
11 resilient command and control.

12 Senator Duckworth: Well, as you are doing that, do you
13 think that TRANSCOM is adequately represented in the
14 formulation of the upcoming NDS?

15 General Van Ovost: Senator, I understand that U.S.
16 Transportation Command has provided advice for the new
17 National Defense Strategy, which is in formulation inside
18 the Department. And if confirmed, I will continue to
19 provide that advice to the Secretary of Defense concerning
20 logistics and, again, how logistics formations can increase
21 deterrence and how logistics needs to be integrated with all
22 the joint warfighting functions to be most effective for the
23 warfighter.

24 Senator Duckworth: I couldn't agree with you more. I
25 have been unwavering in my insistence that we cannot build a

1 combat-credible deterrence if we do not have the logistics
2 capability and capacity to realistically support the complex
3 military operational plans that we are likely to be
4 executing.

5 You touched on training a little bit. Can you touch a
6 little, can you expand a little bit more on any training
7 exercises or strategic planning that TRANSCOM must
8 participate in over the next few years to get a clear
9 picture of the state of our strategic capabilities, like the
10 Ready Reserve Force, as well as to ensure that our
11 operational plans adequately factor in logistics and
12 sustainment concerns.

13 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator. And you are probably
14 aware of the several Capstone exercises by INDOPACOM and
15 EUCOM, Defender series, and various service games that we
16 want to ensure that we are a part of so that we can, again,
17 tease those insights out for how we are going to operate
18 better together into the future and how we are going to
19 increase our interoperability, not just with the services,
20 but with our allies and partners, who can be of great
21 benefit to us to ensure that we can capitalize on their
22 capabilities.

23 Senator Duckworth: Thank you, General.

24 I am over time, Mr. Chairman.

25 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Duckworth.

1 Now, let me recognize Senator Blumenthal. Senator
2 Blumenthal, please.

3 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

4 Thank you for your service, General, and thanks for
5 being here today.

6 I have been very personally involved in assisting
7 individuals with efforts to evacuate from Afghanistan both,
8 in Kabul and in Mazar-i-Sharif. After the United States'
9 withdrawal was completed, as you know, thousands of Afghan
10 allies, along with Americans, fled to Mazar-i-Sharif or
11 sought to leave Kabul, despite the absence of the American
12 airlift or the end of it. A lot of them are currently in
13 hiding. They are desperate. Their situation is urgent.

14 Yesterday, Simcom canceled further flights to Al Udeid
15 because of flight manifest discrepancies and I know that the
16 air evacuation has been impeded by the cancellation of those
17 flights. The flight manifests that I have seen have been
18 fully vetted numerous times, far more than the manifests
19 made on flights from Kabul before the American withdrawal.
20 So the lives of Americans and hundreds of Afghan allies hang
21 in the balance. I don't doubt our commitment to evacuate
22 U.S. citizens and vulnerable allies, but we keep erecting
23 unnecessary bureaucratic hurdles, when time is of the
24 essence.

25 My question to you as a logistics expert, and I

1 believe, future combatant commander, can we depend on you to
2 provide any and all assistance to get the air bridge from
3 Kabul and Mazar-i-Sharif to Al Udeid back open and to keep
4 it open for a sufficient number of days?

5 General Van Ovost: Senator, while I cannot comment on
6 the Department of State or the immigration or flight
7 manifest vetting, what I can say is that if the refugees do
8 make it to one of our lily pads, so, for example, Al Udeid,
9 then U.S. Transportation Command would then be subsequently
10 tasked to provide their airlift movement to the final
11 destination and we would absolutely support that effort.

12 Senator Blumenthal: Well, as you know, even before the
13 withdrawal in late August, I and other members of the
14 Senate, veterans groups, NGOs, private citizens have been
15 working tirelessly, along with the administration, to
16 evacuate as many citizens, legal permanent residents, SIB
17 holders, and other Afghan allies with their families, as
18 quickly as possible. And I hope that you will be committed
19 to participate and to support that effort, despite our
20 absence; that is American military absence.

21 Do we have your commitment on that point?

22 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator.

23 Senator Blumenthal: Let me ask you, assuming you are
24 confirmed, do you have specific steps in mind that United
25 States Transportation Command can play in addressing climate

1 change, which has been judged to be a national security
2 threat?

3 General Van Ovost: Now, Senator, climate change is a
4 threat to infrastructure and operations, and it absolutely
5 drives instability around the world. I have seen that
6 firsthand as the Air Mobility Command Commander, who had
7 been asked to respond to disasters and provide humanitarian
8 relief. So, it absolutely is a critical concern and climate
9 considerations will be a part of how we inform our
10 strategies, our plans, and our infrastructure going into the
11 future.

12 And if confirmed, I look forward to looking at the
13 strategies plans and the infrastructure and evaluating them
14 with respect to the climatology of those locations.

15 Senator Blumenthal: Thank you, very much.

16 Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

17 Chairman Reed: Thank you, Senator Blumenthal.

18 Senator Kelly, please?

19 Senator Kelly: Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

20 General, great seeing you again. Congratulations on
21 your nomination.

22 I would like to follow-up with some of the discussion
23 that we had last week. General, a concern of mine that I
24 believe you share is the readiness of our nation's sealift
25 capabilities. Our competitors are investing heavily in this

1 area; in fact, the Naval War College published an assessment
2 this spring, which found that the Chinese maritime industry
3 is now the largest in the world in nearly every relevant
4 category, from investment in global ports to shipbuilding,
5 while our former dominance of this industry is slipping.

6 Just to put this in perspective, right now, the Chinese
7 have over 5,000 ocean-going merchant vessels. We have less
8 than a hundred.

9 And after years of focus on counterinsurgency, we need
10 to take a clear-eyed look at the range of scenarios our
11 military must prepare for. It is absolutely vital that we
12 assess and respond to the unique demands of engagement in
13 regions as distant as INDOPACOM, the Indo-Pacific Region.

14 So, to start, General, can you say a bit about our
15 current state of readiness and any concerns that you have
16 about our sealift capability.

17 General Van Ovost: Senator, you rightly hit upon a
18 concern. China has been developing capabilities in order to
19 project combat power around the world to secure their
20 overseas interests and objectives. And it is concerning, it
21 is concerning from an access, basing, and overflight, and it
22 is concerning with respect to their capabilities to monitor
23 our capabilities around the world.

24 With respect to warfighting readiness, which is a key
25 to our functioning as a warfighting combatant command, the

1 Mobility Capability Requirements Study did validate the
2 amount of sealift that we would need to deliver a decisive
3 force, and I am concerned about the readiness, given the age
4 of the fleet and the maintenance, and its day-to-day
5 readiness capacity.

6 So, the first thing I would do is I would continue the
7 great work by TRANSCOM, working with the Navy, to execute
8 their buy-used strategy, so that we can get more U.S.-
9 flagged, U.S.-manned, sealift capability that we can count
10 on. In addition, the recent fuel tanker study did validate
11 the fact that we had insufficient U.S.-flagged POL tanker
12 capacity to meet the needs of the National Defense Strategy.

13 So, if confirmed, I will work with the Navy and MARAD
14 on a way forward to try to secure more U.S.-flagged tanker
15 capacity.

16 Senator Kelly: Yeah, to do that, we have got to get,
17 figure out a way to get more U.S.-built ships, as well,
18 U.S.-flagged, U.S.-crewed to meet this need, and I feel we
19 need some rapid progress on this front. We can't wait
20 years. This is a national security issue. If we can't meet
21 the requirements of the NDS, we put our national security at
22 risk.

23 So, I would like to see a plan, and I am going to work
24 with my colleagues on both sides of the aisle of this, to
25 return our sealift capability to what it formerly was, where

1 it had the capability to meet the needs of our nation,
2 because that is not true today.

3 So, I think it is important that we all understand that
4 this is a critical investment to make as a nation, and this
5 is going to need to be a whole-of-government effort,
6 including stakeholders outside of this committee's
7 jurisdiction. So, I appreciate your commitment to this
8 issue and I look forward to working with you more on it
9 after your confirmation.

10 And with that, I yield back the remainder of my time.
11 Thank you.

12 Chairman Reed: Thank you very much, Senator Kelly.

13 General, let me resume and ask some additional
14 questions. Some of our colleagues are trying to get online
15 by Webex and some may be trying to return, but as I noted
16 initially, there are votes in progress, also.

17 It is usually the little things that go wrong and mess
18 up all the big things we have planned. That is what I
19 learned when I was wearing the uniform. And U.S. roads and
20 U.S. bridges could be some of those little things.

21 I was struck when the Commander of the 4th, the 3rd ID,
22 rather, at Fort Stewart indicated his real problem is the
23 railroad bridges can't sustain the weight of the tanks that
24 he would have to roll out there to the port of embarkation.
25 So, you could have your ships ready, down and ready to take

1 them on, but they don't get there on time or they never get
2 there.

3 There is, under TRANSCOM, the Defense Access Road
4 Program, and it is a cooperation between the DOD and the
5 Department of Transportation to jointly address surface-
6 transportation issues with a concern to DOD. And it is
7 neglected, frankly.

8 In the fiscal year 2020 and 2021 NDAA legislation, we
9 put in extensive amendments to try to update the program and
10 energize the program. And in one respect, it was a
11 reflection of the growing concern over rising oceans, et
12 cetera, and many of our bases are right along the coast and
13 the roads and railroads are affected by this.

14 TRANSCOM and associated entities have yet to issue any
15 updates to their guidance and eligibility criteria for
16 projects under the DAR program, so can you give us an update
17 as to what is happening with the DAR program, how are our
18 changes being implemented, and the status of coordination
19 between the DOT and the Federal Highway Administration, et
20 cetera. Again, great strategists don't usually think about
21 the road outside the base; they are thinking about, you
22 know, do I have enough ships? Do I have enough? But it is
23 the little things, so any comments, I would appreciate.

24 General Van Ovost: Yes, Senator. You pointed to a
25 critical capability. Our posture is really dependent upon,

1 it starts with the national infrastructure here and power
2 projection, especially from our Army, power projection
3 platforms begins with sufficient road and rail capacity to
4 get to the seaports, as part of the initial marshaling for
5 projection of that decisive power into the future.

6 And I am not familiar with the Defense Access Road
7 Program, but I am familiar with the national, the
8 infrastructure bills and the various strategic highway
9 programs and strategic rail programs. And my understanding
10 is that U.S. Transportation Command has been working with
11 the Department of Transportation on providing some advice in
12 the areas of most risk in that area.

13 So, Chairman, if confirmed, I would look to come back
14 to you with my assessment of the DAR program.

15 Chairman Reed: Well, thank you very much, General.

16 Again, this might be seen as details, but as I keep
17 harping, it is the little stuff that, oops, we forgot that,
18 and the big stuff doesn't happen.

19 We are at a juncture where my colleagues, we have no
20 one, I think, available on either the Webex or in person; as
21 such, General, let me thank you for your testimony and I
22 look forward to your confirmation and to your service as the
23 next USTRANSCOM Commander.

24 Thank you very much, ma'am.

25 General Van Ovost: Thank you, Chairman.

1 Chairman Reed: And with that, the hearing is
2 adjourned.

3 [Whereupon, at 10:50 a.m., the hearing was adjourned.]

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