

# Top General Warns Enemies Not to Test US Military Readiness



Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Army Gen. Mark A. Milley speak to reporters at the Pentagon, Washington, D.C., March 2, 2020. (DoD/Lisa Ferdinando)

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The Pentagon's top leaders said Thursday they can see a "light at the end of the tunnel" of the COVID-19 pandemic and stressed that the U.S. military remains a force in readiness, with fewer than 2,000 cases out of more than two million troops available to support contingency operations.

During an internet broadcast Thursday morning, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Gen. Mark Milley warned adversaries that it would be a "terrible, tragic mistake if they thought that ... [they] can take advantage of any opportunities ... at a time of crisis."

"The U.S. military is very, very capable to conduct whatever operations are necessary to defend the American people," Milley said. "We will adapt ourselves to operating in a COVID-19 environment. We are already doing that."

As of Thursday, 1,898 service members had confirmed cases of COVID-19, including 389 soldiers, 367 airmen, 164 Marines, 597 sailors and 381 National Guard members.

Given that the Defense Department has 2.3 million troops, including the National Guard and reserve components, the services are “ready today and will be ready tomorrow,” Milley said.

“I’m absolutely confident that we are very ready to handle any mission that comes our way,” added Defense Secretary Mark Esper during the broadcast. “Why is that? It’s because our commanders and NCOs have taken measures to protect our members.”

Less than .09 percent of U.S. forces have confirmed COVID-19 infections, and nearly all are “mild or moderate” cases, according to Esper. Sixty-four service members have been hospitalized for the coronavirus.

By contrast, .13 percent of the U.S. population have confirmed cases of the illness.

“We also have far, far, far smaller numbers of hospitalizations. .... I attribute that to the measures we took very early on, going all the way back to 3 February when we issued our first guidance to the field in regard to health protection,” Esper said.

According to Esper and Milley, the DoD has more than 50,000 service members responding to the COVID-19 pandemic. This includes 29,400 National Guard members, as well as 17,000 members of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers and thousands of military medical personnel.

Air Force Gen. John Hyten, vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs, said Thursday that many of the military medical personnel are now serving in civilian hospitals, filling in for staff members who have become ill or need rest — especially in hard-hit areas like New York City.

The strategy is a switch from the initial intent for military health professionals to treat patients transported to field hospitals such as the Javits Center in New York, he said.

“We have thousands of reservists — medical professionals — deployed all over the

country from their normal lives at home to the middle of New York City, in hours or days, leaving their families, leaving their homes, running toward the trouble,” Hyten said.

To date, 113 service members of the 1,898 infected have recovered from the coronavirus. One service member, Army National Guard Capt. Douglas Linn Hickok, died March 28.

A sailor from the carrier Theodore Roosevelt became gravely ill Thursday and was transported to an intensive care unit after being discovered unresponsive in his room by shipmates, Hyten said.

“We are hoping that the sailor recovers. We are praying for him and his families and his shipmates,” he added.

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