

U.S.

EXCLUSIVE: FIRST PUBLIC MAP REVEALS MILITARY BASES WITH CORONAVIRUS CASES AS PENTAGON SECRECY DRAWS BACKLASH

BY WILLIAM M. ARKIN ON 4/9/20 AT 10:18 AM EDT

CORONAVIRUS PANDEMIC

“If he didn’t think that information was going to get out into the public in this information age that we live in, then he was 'A' too naive or too stupid to be the commanding officer of a ship like this. ...”

-Thomas Modly
Acting Navy Secretary

in a profanity-laced speech to the crew

CORONAVIRUS GLOBAL	
TOTAL CASES	DEATHS
1,413,415	81,103
UNITED STATES	
TOTAL CASES	DEATHS
386,817	12,285

SOURCE: JOHNS HOPKINS UNIVERSITY

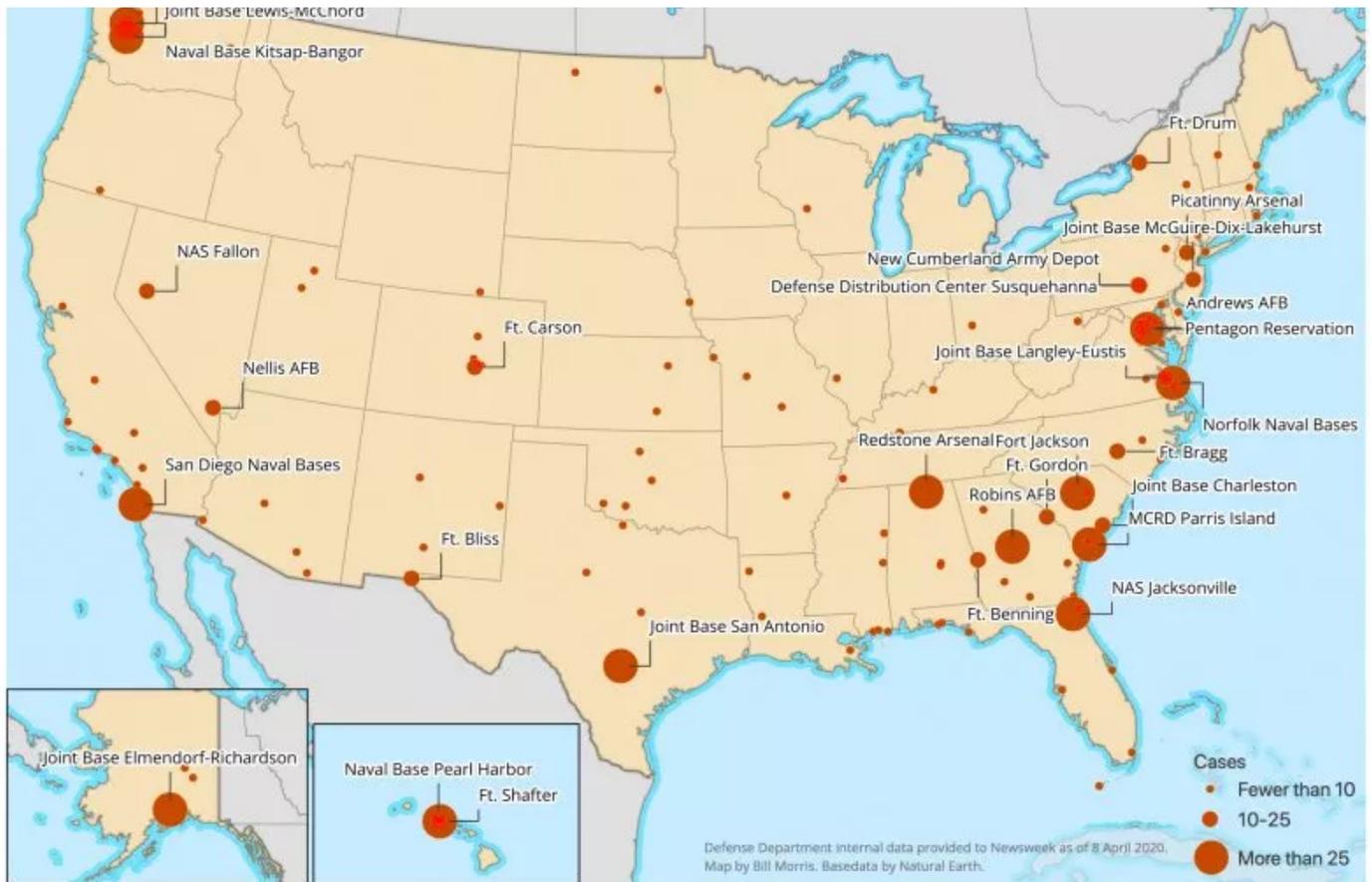
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U.S. U.S. MILITARY PENTAGON CORONAVIRUS



First public map of the more than 100 U.S. military bases in 41 states with coronavirus cases.

MAP BY BILL MORRIS; BASE DATA BY NATURAL EARTH

More than 150 military bases in 41 states have been hit with coronavirus, according to new information exclusively obtained by *Newsweek*. The Pentagon on Tuesday also said that the armed forces had surpassed 3,000 cases, more than doubling their number of people tested positive for coronavirus in less than a week's time. The scope of geographic spread among the military in the United States mirrors the civilian world and also shows few signs of abating.

The continued spread of coronavirus throughout the military, both in the United States and at overseas bases, has halted all non-essential movement, interrupted recruiting and basic training, and led to a virtual standstill in large scale activity. It has also led to draconian secrecy, justified as necessary to preserve operational security. But that policy of secrecy is now getting strong pushback, both from the communities around military bases as well as from lawmakers.

The latest Defense Department data show that 2,120 men and women in uniform have tested positive for the COVID-19 virus. The hardest hit service is the U.S. Navy, followed closely by the Army, Air Force, and finally the Marine Corps. Civilians working for the department make up the second largest overall group after those in uniform, followed by military dependents, and then by private contractors working at military facilities.

In the 41 states where the Defense Department reports coronavirus, nine states show over 100 cases in the larger military communities. Some of the hardest hit are the naval base complexes of San Diego, Norfolk, Virginia; and Jacksonville, Florida; the San Antonio, Texas area bases; and the naval bases of Washington state. A large number of cases are also being handled at Andrews air force base in Maryland and reflect medical support for military workers assigned throughout the Washington, DC area. Training facilities where

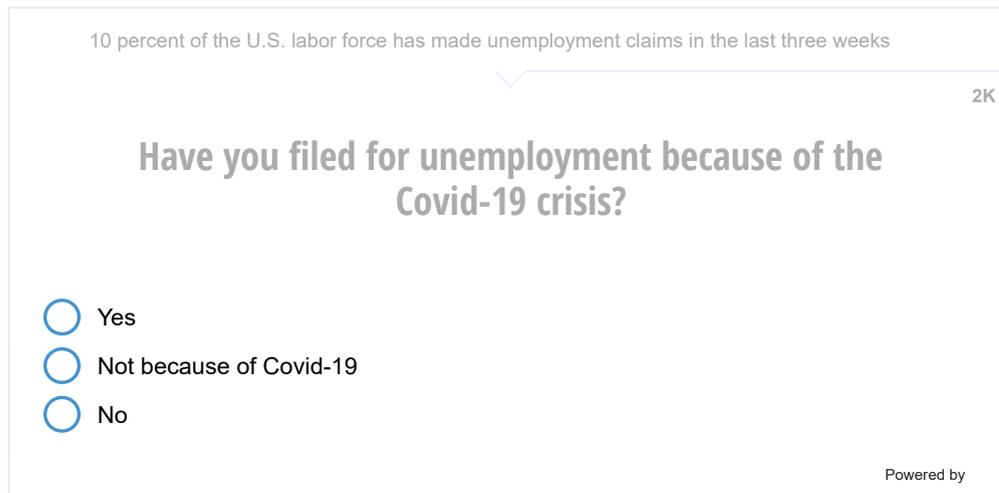
Two weeks ago, Secretary of Defense Mark T. Esper told Reuters that the military would stop providing "granular data" about coronavirus infections within its ranks. "What we want to do is give you aggregated numbers. But we're not going to disaggregate numbers because it could reveal information about where we may be affected at a higher rate than maybe some other places," he said.

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Exclusive: Comprehensive Map of U.S. Military Bases with Coronavirus Cases

The secretary's announcement was followed by official Reporting Guidance issued on March 31st, where Esper pledged that the military would do its best "to balance transparency in this crisis with operational security."

What happened instead of balancing, military sources and observers say, is that the flow of information to the public ground to a halt. No one wanted to put out any new data, risking the possibility of running afoul of Washington. And so almost immediately, announcements of new cases of coronavirus on military bases ceased. The Pentagon started to put out a daily tabulation of totals, but almost everyone else outside the Washington leadership, including local officials, found themselves in the dark.



By the time the case of the aircraft carrier USS Theodore Roosevelt hit the front pages this week, most people were taken by surprise. Secrecy had a large part to do with that.

"Navy leadership initially made the tough choice of mission readiness over sailor safety," a retired Navy admiral said in an email to *Newsweek*, "because we all underestimated the seriousness of the virus and the rate of spread. In hindsight though, greater transparency would have communicated to leadership how bad the situation was, also that extreme measures needed to be taken."

The admiral requested anonymity because he did not want to become involved in what he called the politicized battles over the firing of Capt. Brian Crozier, the Roosevelt's commander; or the resignation of Navy Secretary Thomas Modly.

But he said there were still many lingering questions about the Roosevelt and another ship, the cruiser USS Bunker Hill, which was part of the Roosevelt battle group and visited Da Nang, Vietnam, along with the carrier

The admiral says he also has questions about the USS Boxer, an amphibious assault ship homeported in San Diego, California. The Boxer was one of the first U.S.-based vessels to report a case of coronavirus, on March 13, with a second case developing on March 17; the Navy said the second case was unconnected because the sailors worked in two different departments.

After the Roosevelt story exploded in the media, the admiral says, he also started to hear questions through his email and social media contacts regarding these two ships. It is from social media, for instance, that he learned that the San Diego-based Boxer held a Friends and Family Day Cruise on March 6, where evidently the virus was brought on board by a civilian.

"Could we have prevented that?" he asks. "Maybe not. But I'm sure the captain and other commanders would have been much more careful with more and better information flowing up and down the chain."

"Now, we need maximum transparency," the admiral says, "to run down these cases, to take appropriate actions, and to reassure those very friends and families."

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"It's a fine line," says Congressman Adam Kinzinger (R-IL), "on the one hand maintaining our combat posture, and on the other recognizing the unique challenges right now that we have to also take care of our military."

Rep. Kinzinger is in a unique position to assess the military impact of making a public release of more information. He is also a Lt. Col. and pilot in the Wisconsin Air National Guard. In an interview with *Newsweek*, Rep. Kinzinger says the Pentagon should be more open and transparent, not only so that lawmakers and others can oversee if the military is taking proper precautions but also because when things are secret, he says, "people begin to wonder."

"I think the military should release the numbers broken down by bases," Kinzinger told *Newsweek*.

"There's a benefit in being open and transparent," he says, especially since it might indicate good news. "Right now all we hear is about the Roosevelt, but the overall number might make people more at ease." As of Wednesday, the Pentagon was saying there were 230 positive coronavirus cases among the 4,800 person crew of the aircraft carrier.

"I am deeply alarmed by the Defense Department's decision that will seemingly leave many of our service members, military families, community members and more without the information they need to protect themselves and others and stay healthy," Sen. Parry Murray (D-WA) told the Kitsap Sun, referring to the lack of information available on the various bases in Washington state that make up one of the military's hotspots.

"We think that this crisis is a particularly important time to make sure that the defense line doesn't divide the installation from the community," Joe Driskill, president of the pro-defense Association of Defense Communities, wrote in a letter to Esper, appealing for greater transparency.

"I've had my frustrations with the Pentagon," Kinzinger finally says. "Some don't fully grasp that they are under civilian control. In reality we're the board of directors for the military." Kinzinger says he understands

Pentagon spokesperson Jonathan Hoffman told *Newsweek* the military is committed to transparency. "As we continue to grapple with the novel nature of COVID19, we are constantly assessing and adapting not only how we respond to combatting the virus, but also how we share critical public health information with our communities. Therefore, the Department of Defense has issued department-wide guidance to ensure continued public reporting of cases of COVID19 positive DOD personnel through the responsible military service. The services will each provide a daily public update. Additionally, the Department of Defense will continue to offer a public daily update of the full number of cases in all services and of civilians, contractors and dependents.

"In keeping with our commitment to transparency, we will assiduously continue to make the public aware of the presence of any potential new COVID-19 outbreaks within our base communities. Base commanders are instructed to continue to work with local community health officials to share information on base community cases. As we confront this growing crisis, and out of a concern for operational security with regard to readiness, we will not report the aggregate number of individual service member cases at individual unit, base or Combatant Commands. We will continue to do our best to balance transparency in this crisis with operational security."

Hoffman said the coronavirus outbreaks on bases or the Roosevelt "have not impeded our operational readiness or ability to conduct our national security missions."

See full list of affected U.S. military bases [here](#).

UPDATE 4/9; 1:44 p.m.: *This story was updated to include the Pentagon statement, which was given to Newsweek after the story was published.*

Correction 4/9; 3:50: *The map labels for Ft. Bragg and Norfolk have been corrected.*

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OPINION



Only Joe Biden Has the Ability Now to Heal This Nation

BY FRED GUTTENBERG



Trump Is Putting America First to Fight Coronavirus—And I, for One, Am Grateful

BY CHARLIE KIRK



This Pandemic Will Turbo-Charge New Technologies. Companies Must Adapt

BY MAX SIMKOFF



The U.S. Must Provide Health Insurance for All—And This Pandemic Proves It

BY BEATRIX HOFFMAN
