

Center for Strategic and International Studies

TRANSCRIPT  
Online Event

**“A Conversation with General Van Ovost, Commander,  
U.S. Transportation Command”**

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FEATURING  
**General Jacqueline Van Ovost**  
*Commander, U.S. Transportation Command (USTRANSCOM)*

CSIS EXPERTS  
**Seth G. Jones**  
*Senior Vice President; Harold Brown Chair; and Director, International Security Program,  
CSIS*

*Transcript By  
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Seth G. Jones: Thank you for joining us, and welcome.

I want to welcome General Jacqueline Van Ovost, who's the commander of U.S. Transportation Command, one of 11 combatant commands in the U.S. Department of Defense. USTRANSCOM's mission is to project and sustain military power globally in order to assure friends and allies, deter potential adversaries, and if necessary to respond to win decisively.

So welcome to the Center for Strategic and International Studies.

General  
Jacqueline Van  
Ovost:

Hey, thanks, Seth. I appreciate it. It's great to see you again.

Look, I've been in command here now for about a hundred days, and so I've been on this listening and learning tour. And today I just want to have an opportunity to talk to you about sort of where we're going in the future, but first I want to start with how incredible the men and women of United States Transportation Command are for this nation, right? You mentioned an unmatched ability to project and sustain the joint force around the globe 24/7 – ships on the sea, airplanes in the air. They really – they really ensure the lethality of the joint force and provide our nation's leaders options, while we also provide dilemmas for the adversaries when we think about how we can deploy and distribute forces around the world.

Look, we do these operations through our components. We'll go through that quickly. We have an air component, the Air Mobility Command; the Surface Deployment Distribution Command; the Military Sealift Command; and the Joint Enabling Capabilities Command. And so the men and women of those components execute every day and they ensure that we have strategic dominance, right, by providing these options to our military.

Now, we fight through a warfighting framework, which is essentially our global posture, our capacity – mobility capacity, and our ability to command and control and integrate our mobility forces with the greater joint force. And in those three elements, we have been challenged. Since World War II, we have had, you know, dominance, essentially, in being able to maneuver around the globe when and where we want to, but we're now challenged in all domains. So when we think about the future, I've done quite a bit of time thinking about how are we going to be able to execute in the competitive world of the future.

So I'll start with our posture, which is foundational to our success, right? This is about our access to basing and overflight around the world, right, our amazing bench of allies and partners that give us that access and that are interoperable with us around the world to ensure that we could get anywhere we need to go. But also, we have to start thinking a little bit more about the homeland. Eighty-five percent of the force elements for the joint

force are right here in CONUS. We have to be able to marshal them to power-projection platforms and deploy them – and ever so more, especially in space and cyber, right? We can – we’re going to be under attack, right? So how do we – how do we build a system that’s resilient enough to overcome those disruptions? So these are the kinds of things that we’re trying to work our way through now.

Another thing about mobility capacity, not simply our active-duty organic forces; I think about our Guard and Reserve forces. Sixty percent of our military capability lie in the Guard and Reserves for mobility. And I think about our commercial partners. The commercial networks are expansive. They’re around the globe. And it’s not simply a port or a ship; it’s about all of their threads of stevedores and labor, right, and warehousing, and their subcontracts that they have around the world. So it’s a pretty extensive network that we work together to ensure that we have the capacity we need.

And then I think about that capacity itself really becomes irrelevant unless you have the ability to survive, right, and you’re capable and flexible. And I talk about things like: In the contested environment, what does it mean to have a ship that doesn’t have a real good comms suite, right? And so what do we have to do to our capacity in order to make it credible? And that includes the training of the forces, whether it’s our Guard or Reserve, active duty, or our commercial partners. How do we ensure that they will be resilient when they’re out on the water or in the air?

And finally, global command and control and integration. Being able to apply our scarce mobility resources against the nation’s highest priority is a challenge, right? Frankly, it’s a center of gravity for us and it’s an area of great concern, especially when it comes to cyber, right? A cyberattack attacking our services is so vast that, you know, it’s really hard to cover down. We have to think very diligently about cyber hygiene, about transition to the cloud and zero trust and those kinds of things to not just protect the military networks, but the commercial networks.

Logistics is noisy, right? We are out, we’re passing manifests back and forth. We have beacons on ships, beacons on airplanes, right? How do we ensure the security of our commercial networks as well? So we’ve done quite a bit of work looking at how do we shore them up, how do we ensure they understand their weaknesses, how do we give them the best practices and share with them along those lines to ensure that they will be ready into the future.

Dr. Jones:

So we’ll get into a lot more of the specifics of what you laid out, including issues like contested logistics, but let me just start off a little bit with U.S. defense strategy. The department is in the process of working on and

preparing to release the National Defense Strategy. There is a major focus and we've heard the secretary talk about the Indo-Pacific. So part of this is: What kind of changes do you expect over the next year or two from TRANSCOM forces as a result of this shift to the Indo-Pacific?

Gen. Van Ovost: Obviously, the previous National Defense Strategy was turning us that way. But I think the secretary has made very clear that China's our pacing challenge. So I think you'll see in the National Defense Strategy how we're going to be looking more at shifting to ensure that we can meet the gaps that we're seeing right now with respect to that particular competitor.

For U.S. Transportation Command, first and foremost we still have to maintain our global presence, right? We move stuff around the world at a time and place of our choosing. But when we look in the Indo-Pacific – again, this is sort of our warfighting framework – I look at the posture and I think: What will we have to move? What will be there? Where do we need to be with respect to, you know, how do we build up our allies and partners in that area and shore up some capability? And then, should we have to go from competition into conflict, what are we going to be moving and where, right?

And then I think about the capacity, how the capacity has to change as well, when I think about, you know, hey, we need to be connected to the grid. The battlespace, right? We have to be able to see that battlespace to be survivable. So what kinds of things we need to do to that capacity, to include training and exercises with the joint force and with – and with our allies and partners. And frankly, how do we better meld into the maneuver force?

One thing that's become really clear is TRANSCOM has been the force that deploys the force, sustains the force, and redeploys the force. And what I'm seeing in the new Joint Warfighting Concept, the way that the services are going to fight in the future, is now we're going to be deploying the force, maneuvering the force, sustaining the force, and redeploys the force. So what does that maneuver piece mean? What are we going to have to do? And so I think about it that way.

And then the third thing I think about is, under the C2 realm, how are we going to operate under attack from generating forces here in the United States all the way down those long, contested line(s) of logistics to the final tactical mile? You know, what is that going to consist of? And the INDOPACOM theater is a much, much larger theater than even – then even CENTCOM, right? So these large movements may require different kinds of capabilities and different – and different posture settings.

So as we go forward, I look into the Joint Warfighting Concept how we're actually going to fight it, and I'm seeing in the – in the National Defense Strategy that even they are nodding now to the fact that logistics is an

explicit task. We're going to need to be integrated to be successful in the future. I think all those wargames have pointed all that way, and we're finally going to say it out there explicitly what we're going to have to do to protect the force as we mobilize and move it forward.

So I think the NDS is absolutely moving in the – in the right direction. And as TRANSCOM, we're willing to – I was just out in the Indo-Pacific. We're going to do some more experimentation with them on what they actually need to get that done.

Dr. Jones: So one of the issues that has come up with the – with the National Defense Strategy – and the secretary has talked about this as well – is the concept of integrated deterrence. So what does – what does that mean to you? And how does – how do you incorporate that into what you're doing at TRANSCOM?

Gen. Van Ovost: So I would say we – an integrated deterrence, we do integrated deterrence every day because we don't – our job is to project and sustain. So we work very closely with allies and partners to get the access, basing, and overflight, again, part of that whole-of-government, whole-of-allies. And then with respect to, you know, looking at the secretary's priorities, the government priorities, and ensuring that we can meet them in the ways they need us to meet them.

And so I think about what's going on even, you know, right now with Russia. You're seeing integrated deterrence in action. You're seeing Department of State, Department of Treasury, you're seeing Commerce, you're seeing sanctions, you're seeing Congress, you're seeing, again, the Department of Defense, all the services, NATO, and our bilateral partners, and you're seeing us all moving towards a sort of unified objective – unified actions to achieve objectives of, in this case, Russian de-escalation and bringing them to the diplomatic table, right? And so – and exposing, frankly, the activities. Intelligence that you're seeing our partners have; intelligence, frankly, that you're seeing the National Geospatial and, frankly, even our – even private companies that are showing, you know, pictures of tanks and people, you know, on trains, right?

Dr. Jones: We've been very active in showing our own satellite imagery.

Gen. Van Ovost: Right. And so that is – that is the whole of government to go after that very focused objective.

Dr. Jones: So you raised the issue of Russia and we talked a little bit about the Indo-Pacific, but I do want to – I do want to bring the issue home. TRANSCOM, obviously, when it comes to moving U.S. equipment/materiel from the homeland – from CONUS overseas, the homeland is important. China may present some threats to the homeland, but the Russians do as well. They

continue to be active in the region and have capabilities that can reach the U.S. homeland. So to what degree to adversary activities or capabilities impact what you can do? And how are you thinking about deterring those kinds of – or countering those kinds of actions?

Gen. Van Ovost: Yeah, thanks. Look, these are – these are complex issues. When I think about Russia, right, there's an Atlantic portion of that. There's also a Pacific portion of that. And when I think of TRANSCOM, we have to serve both.

And then I think about the homeland, as you pointed out. General VanHerck, the NORTHCOM commander, has talked often about, you know, our ability to see and counteract Russian activities coming from the Arctic. And when he needs something, he calls upon us, right, for airlift and for air refueling to have the capability to see over the horizon.

And then I think of Strategic Command, right, our strategic nuclear deterrence and how do we support – and we're in all of that. So I talk about, how can we take our scarce resources and put it against the secretary's highest priorities? That's what I'm talking about. So we prepare the entire enterprise. I mean, we exercise it every day but, you know, especially right now we're preparing and doing a lot of planning for all of those what-ifs, right? That's what we do best, but we want to be ready and we have been ready to do that.

So I think about the authorities given to me as the TRANSCOM commander, sort of uniquely compared to a geographic combatant commander. I own the most of the mobility forces, and under my own authorities, I can move them around to position them, to posture them to then set the capacity for any of the various plans that any one of the geographic combatant commanders is asked to execute. So we're thinking and juggling that all of the time. And, you know, again, right now, we think about the problem set that's going on right now; that's exactly what we're doing in the background.

Dr. Jones: Just a reminder to folks as well: As much as we may focus here and elsewhere on the Indo-Pacific and the Chinese as the pacing threat, you know, the Russians do have ballistic missile capabilities directed at the homeland, including through the Arctic. They obviously have submarines that they could put in or near the West or East Coasts. We've seen Russians active along the coast of Ireland near the fiber optic network. So these are all issues I think that have to be thought through.

I wonder if I could come back to – and you raised it earlier – just the subject of contested logistics. Could you talk a little bit about what contested logistics means to you, and again, how you think of, in this era, dealing more effectively with logistics that's contested globally by our competitors?

Gen. Van Ovost: Yeah, thanks. You know, when I first became a pilot and flew in Desert Shield and Desert Storm, my job then was to fly and stack up a mound of supplies in Saudi Arabia for the counterattack in Kuwait. And we had plenty of time to do it and we just continued to fly all this stuff and steamships over and offloaded ships with impunity. And Middle East was a pretty far location from the United States at that point, right? Now we think of it as normal operations. But the fact that we could marshal and do all of that without having to have secure communications, transmitting what we're doing, beaconing off with our transponders – today that's not the case, because, frankly, the two new domains, cyber domain and the space domain, right? We had to think that, you know, our GPS could be jammed right here in the United States and our ability to start generating that combat power. And your ability to talk to higher headquarters could be cut off. And so now, what do you do as a young pilot? You know, where are you supposed to go? What are you supposed to do? And if you don't have orders, you know, what good are you, right? We have to train that when you're cut off you know what commander's intent is and can actually execute that. That's a far cry from being told by somebody, hey, just show up at this location at this time. So we have to be constantly connected.

So this is new training, it's new capabilities, and it's also integration with all, you know, the joint functions. I never thought about that being, you know, ingrained in joint fires. When we did the counterattack into Kuwait, I just kept flying the C-141s around, right? They didn't say, hey, just – as long as you stay from this border away you're good to go. Now, there are no borders, right? And you have to be cognizant of where the joint fires are. Where is the force maneuvering? You know, where's the capability needed and where are you going to go, all the time? So it is a different atmosphere. You know, I harp on cyber and space but it's also kinetic, right, and aircraft aerial denial. You've seen some of the equipment, you know – from Russia, where they can reach from China, where they can reach. And you have to think about, if you land, are you a target? Right? We didn't have to think about that before, right, because there were just Scud missiles that really were unguided back when I started, right? But now it's very precise missiles and intent.

Dr. Jones: So you talked a little bit about the various domains, including cyber and space. There's obviously that area that comes in the middle of that or what some call the gray zone. And we've seen – even on the mobility side, we've seen countries like Iran operate and target using partner forces, whether it's the Houthis in Yemen or partner forces, the Hashd Al-Sha'bi in Iraq. So can you talk about – are you seeing more activity in the gray zone? And how do you think about, frankly, shining light on the gray?

Gen. Van Ovost: Yeah, thanks. I think absolutely, and let me just add information operations to that discussion because we're in the infosphere every day and it's sort of where you operate as well, right? And so when you see, when you're flying

around the world and, you know, we're delivering supplies, supporting the joint force, supporting our allies and partners, you know, we have an understanding of, you know, what they're up against, right, whether we're trying to build partner capacity, counterterrorism or, frankly, building their defense. So our ability to understand – really, we see this globally, right? And you can see it in Africa with the different partners there. And what is that doing? You know, there is diplomatic and economic coercion going on, right? They are coercing other nations to not partner with us, maybe to not recognize Taiwan, right, or hey, we'll build this port if you do not allow the Americans to exercise here, right? So what we want to do is expose that, right, shine the light on what they're trying to do. But, you know, you have to have trust with those allies and partners, right?

Dr. Jones: And how do you build trust becomes an important question.

Gen. Van Ovost: Right. Right. Right. Because if you're not there and you just show up one day to do a task, a task is not trust. Trust is a long-term relationship where you're investing in them for what they need, and we need to continue to do that. That's the only way where we can shine the light, because it won't just be us. If it's just a single country that's shining the light on something that seems like they're, you know, they're – they might not be seeing the truth. But when you see all of our allies and partners and you see NATO getting together and saying yes, this is, you know, this is what we're seeing, we're in harmony, that is powerful. I think Russia is feeling that now, and I think, frankly, China is feeling that in very different ways as well.

Dr. Jones: So we talked a little bit about a range of issues at more of the strategic level and we got some questions that I want to bring in from folks in the audience that bring us down to capability, for example. And so one of them here is that the administration will likely implement a divest-to-invest approach that retires older systems to acquire new ones. TRANSCOM could lose the KC-10s and many C-130s. How will this affect TRANSCOM forces and capabilities?

Gen. Van Ovost: Yeah, you know, when I look at the capabilities that TRANSCOM – I look at the sealift. You know, our ships are 46 years old in the reserve fleet. We are – we're in steam ships. We have steam ships. You can't even find engineers that work on steam ships. We have to keep, you know, 60-, 70-year-old engineers around to keep running them. We must recapitalize that.

We look at the KC-10 in particular. It's very expensive to keep that airframe going; it's going to cost a lot of money to keep it going. We need to replace it. And frankly, we need to also start replacing the KC-135 as well, you know. And we need to replace it not just for – with something else that carries that kind of volume – in this case air refueling a tank of fuel – it's got to be more capable. I talked about with respect to being in a contested environment. The KC-46, which is the current aircraft we have on contract, the Air Force has on

contract, is a very capable, multi-capable airplane. It can do air medical evacuation. It can do cargo. It can do probe-and-drogue and boom refueling. And it's connected to the net. You know, it's Link 16. It's our ability to see the battlespace, transmit as a node in the network, which makes everybody better. And why not? Because we're there, right? We can be alternate C2 node. And we're actually experimenting with edge node; we're bringing a cloud-forward on one of the refueling airplanes and using Starlink, right, to essentially pull the battlefield together if we need to, right? If we get cut off from main, can you have an airplane out there that does that work? And why not – why not the refuelers?

So it is absolutely necessary that we recapitalize on a schedule that we're not finding ourselves throwing good money after bad. OK? And so I don't know if I'd call it divest-to-invest. What I look at is, what is the problem set? Where are the gaps that we're trying to get after? And how do we get the services to purchase the capabilities necessary to close those gaps as soon as possible? And then how do we work legitimately day to day to ensure that we have readiness today and we're ready for the future? Because, as I said, as Transportation Command, unlike most of the other combatant commands, I have the forces assigned to me. So I am responsible to ensure I can meet tonight's fight and be ready in the future. So I have to watch the balance. And ready in the future means, you know, for example, a KC-135 unit may need to take a knee so they can convert into KC-46s so that they'll be ready for the future fights. So I've got to balance both.

Dr. Jones: And how much – there's a follow-up question here, which is, how much of your strategic thought is also purchasing or leasing used sealift, for example, right now versus acquisition processes that can take a long time?

Gen. Van Ovost: Yeah, you know, in our discussions with the Navy, there is a strategy out there to begin to purchase used ships, which is essentially what was our strategy almost 30 years ago, is to purchase some used ships and get them into the fleet because our fleet is old, right? So when I talk about used ships, I'm talking about 15 to 25 years old, which is better than 47, because 37 of our 50 large roll-on, roll-off ships – really, these capital ships that we need to move this big equipment – they'll all retire in the next 10 years. So we've got to begin a stabilized program of recapitalization. So we're working with the Navy on this strategy to purchase used, in the beginning, and we're working with Congress and we've been authorized to purchase up to nine used ships in combination with some new ships, so we're working together to get there. But the most important thing is we've got to revitalize our shipbuilding capability and our ability at the docks to do repairs and maintenance and modifications. That is critical for our defense industrial base, not just for sealift but, frankly, for all of our sea power.

Dr. Jones: Not just at home but also overseas as well.

Gen. Van Ovost: That's right.

Dr. Jones: So one additional sidebar question gets into what your thoughts are on the current – and this could be true, say, for the airlift – what your sense is of whether you have the right active reserve mix and whether that is sufficient for great-power or, you know, or competition with state adversaries. And if not, how do we go about, then, adjusting that?

Gen. Van Ovost: Sure. I'll tell you, we cannot do our jobs day to day without our active – our Guard and Reserve component. Sixty percent of the capability is in their fleets. So they, frankly, have come call – and they support us every day and they volunteer at great rates when we have a crisis. So I'm very grateful for their work. And I tell you, they're very experienced; they know how to take care of those airplanes and ships, and they're on their way. But I think about our latest study. We did a mobility-capability study, which is essentially – I will call it loosely a force-sizing study that looks at the defense scenarios and we do a couple of, you know, essentially sensitivity analyses on if you had more active, which is full-time people, or part-time. What should the mix be? And we came out of that with, in our day-to-day competition, we have the right active reserve mix for now. But if we have – if we go into crisis, we've got to be able to smoothly go into mobilization. And as we do that, we have a lot of volunteerism up front, but at some point, we have to ensure that all of them are ready to go and so that's our training and whatnot. So for today, we can make that transition and we have the capacity that we need. And we're looking now into the future, as our warfighting scenarios change, to see if any of that needs to be changed. But I tell you, what great partners they make. We could not do it without them. And if we have to change the mix itself, we're going to be in full and open collaboration with everyone on that.

Dr. Jones: That's good.

We have an interesting question, which will be a big change from what we talked about so far; this gets into leadership issues and how you think, actually, about innovation. So the question here is, how do you – in what way does your team incentivize innovation? How do you get people on your staff and that you work with to think not just about working day-to-day, kind of the routines, but innovating, thinking creatively? How do you encourage, as a leader, people to do that?

Gen. Van Ovost: This is about, first of all, understanding the new strategic environment. Just because this is how you did it before doesn't mean it's actually going to be successful into the future. And this is about leaders empowering others to try new things, right, to get after experiments and be a part of experimentation. So we tell all the combatant commanders that we're here for you; if you want to try something new, you know, let's try it. You know, we want to fail early,

get back, get the lessons learned, and incorporate those. So we have to be hungry and we have to foster that, you know, kind of be hungry to be competitive, because in this – you know, in this infinite game, right, all we're looking for every day is, what's our new strategic advantage? How can I gain those advantages every day? Because every day in competition, things shift and things change. And in a heartbeat, we could not have the advantage anymore. So we've got to be aggressive to stay after that. And that really requires all of us as leaders to take a risk, right, to say, hey, we need to go do this, because if we don't take that risk, the risk alone of not taking the risk means that, you know, we may not be able to perform tomorrow. You want to talk about ready now and into the future? That's how I balance it. Everyone's got to have their eyes on the future while we still need to be able to fight tonight.

Dr. Jones: Great. I mean, that's something that I think all of us struggle with, is how to push innovation and creativity in staffs. It's not an easy – not an easy thing.

I wonder if you could talk a little bit about – because we've talked about a range of issues, including cyber and satellites and protecting those infrastructures. But, you know, a significant chunk of TRANSCOM also does rely on the commercial sector and, you know, that also poses additional challenges because they have to protect their cyber networks; they've got to be able to – you know, they use the satellites as well for GPS and a range of activity. So can you talk a little bit about your role in working with the commercial sector, including some of the challenges in dealing with the threats you face, but when they're not straight-up U.S. government entities, you know, it does add additional challenges.

Gen. Van Ovost: Yeah, and thanks for mentioning that. Look, we could not do it without our partners. They have been – and it's not just about a ship, right? It's about a network. They have networks around. Just like with our allies and partners, they have contracts and capabilities –

Dr. Jones: Ports and –

Gen. Van Ovost: – all around the world – ports, berths. And so our being able to leverage them has been a huge advantage, right? But what you're speaking to is a little bit of the disadvantage of having commercials which are out on the net, right, in unclassified space and pushing logistics data around the world that people, you know, can see. So I think about, how do we best prepare them because – you know, hey, with the – essentially they're being attacked as well – ransomware, right? So they have incentive. We're pushing on an open door here. They do want to ensure that they are secure.

So they're moving forward and we are writing into our contracts some basic cyber hygiene and requirements. They're doing self-assessments on their

own vulnerabilities and providing that to us. And we've even gone and looked into a pilot program where we have a third party that's looking at their assessments and trying to help them. And then we're partnering with NSA to try to get them to do – sharing best practices, sharing a little bit of intelligence to see, you know, if they'll buy all of that and from a voluntary basis, but really, again, pushing on an open door because they want to protect themselves as well, and they want to protect their other partners that they have around the world.

So again, they have vulnerabilities but we're working with them. The other piece that we've been doing, really frankly, in the past couple of years is we are integrating them into our scheme of maneuver. For example, we did what was called DEFENDER-Europe series and we had our commercial ships escorted through over to Europe, which we haven't done that in a while, right? So what is that like? How do we do that? So integrating in the scheme of maneuver. And so the more we do those reps and sets with them and providing them communications and tactical advisers onboard their ships, the more confident they get, that trust builds up and that we can use them in places around the world. And there again, especially – very patriotic – our VISA and CRAF programs, our emergency preparedness programs. They want to participate, they want to help, but they also know that it's a little different than just flying passengers or managing bulk cargo on your ships.

Dr. Jones:

And I think we've seen, even in the U.S. homeland, whether it's the Colonial Pipeline attack – not even necessarily tied at all to Transportation Command – the threat that these ransomware attacks can – I mean, that impacted the movement of key gasoline for cars. So those attacks are important.

We have a question, an interesting question here, as we look towards the future, because we've been monitoring some of our competitors, including Chinese use of things like machine learning and artificial intelligence, or AI. So this question is, where do you think artificial intelligence will have the greatest impact on TRANSCOM's mission and capabilities in the coming years? How are you thinking about AI?

Gen. Van Ovost:

Yeah, I can tell you, when we look into the joint warfighting scenario, we recognize that we're going to be fighting and supplying at a higher tempo than we've seen in a long time, right? The timing and tempo of great-power competition is such that, you know, we can't afford to sift through reams and reams of data. The heart of the envelope here is to understand the data better, to get the different types of logistics feed data, to get the operational feeds data, and get the intelligence feeds data, and fuse it together. And this is a lot of data. So we really do need to apply machine learning and eventual artificial intelligence to turn that data into knowledge for which we can make decisions, right? Creating that decision advantage is going to give us that time and space and options for senior leaders to come up with different, you

know, options to reduce risk, to increase effectiveness. And so that is the heart-of-the-envelope issue that we're trying to work.

So in addition to cyber, we're trying to work on making sure we have the digital backbone, we have standards on the data, and that we're applying data, that everybody looks at data, like, how can I use this data to my advantage? What questions do I need answered? No matter who you are – whether you're working finance or you're on the floor working on a concept-of-operations for air refueling – how do we get the data in your hands and you can turn it into more actual info, more informed info to make better decisions? And that's where I feel we're going to make the greatest leaps at U.S. Transportation Command.

Dr. Jones: And do you also see both our allies and partners as well as our competitors moving swiftly into the artificial intelligence and machine learning realms? Are you seeing them in arenas that you deal with doing the same?

Gen. Van Ovost: I do. I do. Again, this is – when we think about becoming more effective and, frankly, more efficient, that's the coin of the realm. But you've got to be – you know, trust the data that's managed and trust the networks and apply, you know, with intelligence and in-flows, right? So we don't have all the streams of data, but I think if we brought it all together we'd absolutely have a better picture of what we need to do, especially when we think about being jammed and unable to communicate, right? Having that data and being able to make that decision at every echelon is absolutely going to increase our effectiveness and, frankly, it will increase the effectiveness of our allies and partners as well.

Dr. Jones: One question, an interesting one, is – and this goes back a little bit to our discussion on creativity and innovation. There have been some efforts, including within TRANSCOM, to think a little bit differently about logistics, so this person notes that there's – one example is the rocket cargo program, which envisions an ability to conduct a logistics movement anywhere in the world in less than an hour. What's your sense about – I mean – about the feasibility of some – or how are you thinking about these kinds of efforts – even if it's not the rocket program specifically, these kinds of efforts?

Gen. Van Ovost: First of all, I am all about new ways, right? I think that anything we can do to increase deterrence for our competitors is something we should explore. When we think about rocket cargo – and it's a little interesting to be able to think that you could fly a C-17's worth of stuff somewhere around the world in an hour. Now, we're actually in some research agreements right now with a couple of companies to take a look at the feasibility, how would you stack it, how would you load, how could you, you know, put it on the rocket, take it off the rocket? You know, what kind of frequency would you need? Where would you go to make this work? And there's a lot of great ideas out there,

and there's some experimentation going on and that's why we're doing these research initiatives with them. But I think, why not, right? If you – if something is that critical, whether it's food or it's an electronic part that you absolutely have to have, you know, why wouldn't we have that – why wouldn't we use that opportunity? And frankly, the different space companies already now are experimenting with, you know, how to go to Mars. They already have to think about how they have to defeat gravity in landing, and this is just a little more gravity than what you see on Mars, right? So how do we take advantage of that, right, and not just that, but what else is out there? How else could we, you know, just show up with humanitarian capability or with anything else we need to around the world?

Dr. Jones: Well, I think this is an area, too, where it is important to leverage some of the advances being made on the commercial side, because, I mean, I think as we look from a Department of Defense standpoint at what is going on on the commercial sector from the various cyber activity to we see a lot of what's generally called open source including satellite imagery, to some of the very sophisticated machine-learning activities, there is a growing importance, I think – Bob Work would often call it the Third Offset – to leverage our relationship with the private sector. And I think these kinds of examples – and some of them aren't going to work, some of them will – but are really ways for the Department of Defense to work closely with the private sector.

Gen. Van Ovost: Absolutely. I think of Boom Supersonic doing some supersonic work and I think of Agility Prime, which is, you know, a small UAV-like capability to move stuff around. And again, a lot of that, the vast majority of that is – being research; the money's being spent by private organizations. And what we're doing in these research agreements is just sort of giving them business cases. Like, OK, could you do this? Or we have a need to do that; what would that look like? Without, you know, fully committing to, you know, to buy something, this is just about, what do you have and then how do I inform my thinking and how more innovative I can be in delivering the goods.

Dr. Jones: So we have a question that goes back to the Indo-Pacific and the individual here is – I'll just read it: How's TRANSCOM increasing access and interoperability and thinking about access and interoperability with partners in the Indo-Pacific who may be less willing, or whether it's not actually clear, they're willing to support the U.S. in a conflict in China? I mean, it's one thing to be moving material now in, you know, in a "phase zero" situation, but as you ramp up to a potential conflict, how do you think about various – juggling various options and backups and plan Bs, and in the Indo-Pacific – probably a little bit less of an issue in Europe, where we have a lot more options available with actual NATO allies that we have an Article 5 agreement with? The Indo-Pacific may be a little bit more challenging. So what is your sense about how we think about partners and allies that we

need but in a conflict where there may be Chinese pressure? So how do we get that access?

Gen. Van Ovost: (Laughs.) Yeah. So, as you say, it starts with that peacetime building up of our allies and partners, and we have an extensive network, as you know, in the Pacific. And then our partners have partners, right? So, again, building trust with them, building up their capacity, you know, being transparent about what we're trying to do out there – all bills so that if a conflict occurs there's this discussion about, you know, what's right, what's wrong, you know, where do I land with respect to this? But in general, we work with not only the Department of Defense, of course, but, in this case, the INDOPACOM commander. As he goes around and he's directing exercises, you know, we may say, hey, there's a new capability or there's an airfield here at this particular location we would like to exercise. We work with them to work with that country to see if they'll let us in, right, as we say, hey, this might not be a bad place to do distribution. And so, how do we get them into an exercise? What do they need? What kind of capabilities do they have? What is it that they can bring to this, and what can we bring to them? How do we make it, you know, mutually essentially that we can build upon each other's strengths and what we need as nations, right? What is the diplomatic alignment there? Again, working with OSD, State Department, and the INDOPACOM commander.

But we always have to think about where are the networks and what we do, again, with that vast commercial and military network that we have and our allies and partners is come up with options, such that even if we've worked with this country and they've decided to sort of stand this one out, you know, what are my other options? Which is why we like to bring various options to the table that we may or may not decide to exercise. So that's really the beauty of what we do, providing I say multiple options to our senior leaders, as well as multiple dilemmas to our adversary.

Dr. Jones: So the last question is – almost goes back to the way we started, which is, you've been in this job for about a hundred days and, you know, I'm sure there were plenty of surprises, both good and challenging moments. So just, if you look back, what has given you the most hope, whether it's about your staff or the country or allies and partners? What gives you the most hope about the position you find yourself in at TRANSCOM?

Gen. Van Ovost: The men and women of TRANSCOM and the entire joint deployment distribution enterprise are amazing. We were talking earlier about things just happen, right? Sprinkle the fairy dust and stuff is there. I look at Operation Allied Refuge, which is, you know, bringing citizens out of Afghanistan and the amazing work that the team did there, and it was, again, all of our networks, everybody pulling together, civilian and military, to make it happen, you know. And our civilians – they're patriotic. They want to

support – and the time and effort they give to the Department of Defense, it's really been heartwarming to see, and I'm really super proud to lead this enterprise.

Dr. Jones: Well, that's great, and congratulations, for your time. Welcome again to the Center for Strategic International Studies, and thank you very much for joining us today.

Gen. Van Ovost: Thanks, Seth.