Weekly Report

National Security Division

Week ending 13 Dec 2019

National Security Strategy:

1. **Protect the homeland, the American people, and the American way of life**
2. **Promote American prosperity**
3. **Preserve peace through strength**
4. **Advance American influence**

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National Defense Strategy:

1. **Rebuilding military readiness as we build a more lethal Joint Force**
2. **Strengthening alliances as we attract new partners**
3. **Reforming the Department's business practices for greater performance and affordability**

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Congress Agrees Space Force; 2020 NDAA Vote Next Week

This week Secretary of Defense Mark Esper thanked Congress for approving Space Force for the fiscal 2020 National Defense Authorization Act (NDAA). The bill is expected to come to a vote this week. The Space Force is to become a sixth branch of the military. Rep. Mike Rodgers commented, "The hay's not in the barn, but it's real close to the barn door." Democrat chairman of the House Armed Services Committee (HASC) Adam Smith stated, "The biggest concern is maximize efficiency, minimize the amount of money spent." He went on to say after the forum, "We don't need to create a whole bunch more positions. It's really a matter of realigning the priorities." The NDAA will final version will include the establishment of Space Force and a Joint Chiefs of Staff, 12 week paid parental leave, repeal widows tax, 3.1 percent troop pay raise, sanctions related to Russia's Nord Stream 2 energy pipeline, and new fighter jets. A vote on the NDAA is expected this week.

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Senate and House Armed Services Committees Complete Conference on FY20 National Defense Authorization Act

(Readiness)

U.S. Senators Jim Inhofe (R-Okla.) and Jack Reed (D-R.I.), chairman and ranking member of the Senate Armed Services Committee, and Representatives Adam Smith (D-Wash.) and Mac Thornberry (R-Texas), chairman and ranking member of the House Armed Services Committee, announced details of the Conference Report for the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, which authorizes funding for the Department of Defense and the national security programs of the Department of Energy.

"The Fiscal Year 2020 National Defense Authorization Act fulfills one of Congress' most important constitutional duties: to provide for the common defense. This bipartisan, bicameral agreement puts our troops and America's security first by continuing to rebuild our military, positioning our Armed Forces to meet the next wave of threats outlined in the National Defense Strategy, reforming the business side of the Pentagon, and most importantly, caring for our service members and their families.

The NDAA Conference Report is consistent with the bipartisan budget agreement. It supports a base budget of **$658.4 billion,** an additional **$71.5 billion for Overseas Contingency Operations**, and **$5.3 billion for emergency disaster recovery** to restore installations damaged by extreme weather or earthquakes.

TABLE 1: Discretionary Funding Levels

DOD Discretionary Base Budget	$635B
DOE Discretionary Base Budget	$23.1B
Other Non-Defense	$300M
FY20 Base Budget NDAA Topline	$658.4B
Overseas Contingency Operations	$71.5B
FY20 Discretionary Topline	$729.9B
Defense-Related Activities Outside NDAA Jurisdiction	$8.1B
National Defense Topline w/ OCO	**$738B**
Emergency Disaster Recovery	**$5.3B**

Mandatory Spending: The bill also includes $10.6 billion in authorizations for Defense mandatory spending, as requested in the President's budget request. The bill also includes approximately $5.7 billion in additional mandatory spending resulting from three-year phased repeal of the Survivor Benefit Plan/Dependency and Indemnity Compensation offset, a new medical malpractice claims process, 4,000 Afghan Special Immigrant Visas, and other items.

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Indo-Pacom Commander Describes Threats From China

(Department of Defense: Partnership)

In addition to threatening freedom of navigation in international waters off its coast, China is stealing intellectual property and personally identifiable information from U.S. companies and citizens, as well as from allies and partners, the commander of U.S. Indo-Pacific Command said. Navy Adm. Philip Davidson addressed threats from China at the Reagan National Defense Forum in Simi Valley, California, Dec. 7.

The United States, its allies and its partners will continue to navigate through the East and South China Seas, he said, noting that undersea telecommunications cables and $3 trillion worth of trade, all vital to the global economy, pass through that area.

Last week, the admiral said, he spoke with telecommunications and technology industry leaders about China and its Huawei 5G network. That network is a threat to the United States and other nations, he said, because by law, Huawei and other firms such as ZTE must provide information to the Chinese Communist Party when asked. China's advantage in spreading this technology is its ability to offer extraordinarily cheap goods at state direction that other nations can't compete with. China's Belt and Road Initiative, which includes lending money to countries wanting to improve their infrastructure, is another threat China poses, Davidson said. The danger, he explained, is that if nations can’t pay back the loans, they can be subject to political, economic or military pressure from China.

Nations are starting to resist the initiative, he said, citing the example of the small island nation of Tuvalu in the Southwest Pacific. Tuvalu rejected China's offer of a $400 million loan for infrastructure improvements such as levee construction, he said. The island's annual gross domestic product is just $40 million, and Tuvalu's leaders recognized that if they were unable to pay it back, their sovereignty could be threatened.

The admiral also noted that China's authoritarian model has resulted in the suffering of its own people from the Uighurs in the Xinjiang region and the people of Hong Kong, who want freedom and democracy.

The world should be outraged China's behavior, Davidson said, adding that about 100,000 Americans live in Hong Kong. And if things don't go well there, he said, global business — including China's – will suffer.

Davidson said the United States and other countries have no desire to see the Chinese economy collapse or to "decouple" with China on a diplomatic, economic or military level. Nations just want China to offer a fair playing field and to play by the rules of international norms, he said.

As it engages in great-power competition with China and Russia, Davidson said, the United States draws strength through its numerous alliances and partnerships.

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Esper Outlines Global Challenges, Opportunities

(National Defense Strategy: Strengthening alliances)

Defense Secretary Dr. Mark T. Esper discussed issues ranging from the budget and National Defense Strategy to global Defense Department activities today at the Reagan National Defense Forum in Simi Valley, California.

National Defense Strategy

Esper said he and top military and civilian leaders from each of the services meet every week in the Pentagon to discuss progress on NDS efforts, including focusing on NDS priorities and cutting or eliminating programs that don't.

"This is a significant management shift inside the Pentagon, but we are committed to fully implementing the strategy at every level. ... We have already made solid progress, however to keep up this momentum we depend on a predictable sufficient and timely budget," the defense secretary said.

Partnerships

The defense secretary also highlighted global developments, particularly DOD's reliance on allies and partners. Esper said NATO is critical to world peace and security, noting it has started focusing on threats from China, not just regional threats from Russia. Nine NATO member nations now meet the 2% GDP commitment, he said, adding that many more are on their way to meeting that goal by 2024.

"We continue to add more partners to global efforts to deter aggression," the defense secretary said, "such as the international maritime security construct in the Strait of Hormuz and the more nascent integrated air and missile defense effort to protect critical infrastructure in the Middle East. And we have secured greater host nation support in countries where U.S. troops are stationed abroad."

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Gunman who killed 3 in Pensacola Navy shooting was reportedly Saudi student

Last Friday three people were killed in a shooting that took place at Naval Air Station Pensacola in Florida. There were multiple people wounded including two responding officers. The suspected gunman was a Saudi military member who was attending aviation training at the Naval base, Florida Governor Ron DeSantis said.

The gunman was among the dead Friday and later identified as Mohammed Saeed Alshamrani. He was a second lieutenant in the Saudi Air Force, according to the AP. Local law enforcement and FBI are investigating whether the shooting was a terrorist attack.

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Afghanistan papers reveal US public were misled about unwinnable war

Hundreds of documents and confidential interviews with key figures involved in the war in Afghanistan have reviled the US public was misled. Not only misled, but consistently misled for the past 18 years. The Washington Post fought a three year legal battle to get the Lessons Learned Project published.

The project is meant to shed light on and eliminate corruption and inefficiency in the US war effort. The report showed a bleak outlook on the war and US blunders to include more than 2,300 dead American troops, more than 20,000 Americans wounded, tens of thousands of civilians dead, and over a trillion spent. After 18 years of conflict the war has been the most expensive war to date with little to no progress.

It has led to many Americans and service members shaking their heads asking what happened. After the long conflict top officials are still uncertain of the road ahead.

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Commentary

For island vets, benefits are a 4,000-mile plane ride away

After coming home from war and striving to reintegrate into civilian life, many military veterans feel like they're alone on an island. For service members returning to Guam and the Northern Mariana Islands, it's more than just a feeling.

Four thousand miles west of Hawaii, 1,500 miles south of Japan, and 1,600 miles east of the Philippines, United States military veterans live, work, and strive to heal the wounds of war in extreme isolation.

In these island territories, it's not unusual for nearly half a graduating high school class to join the military. When faced with a choice between the low-paying hospitality industry or military service, the latter offers young people a higher salary, the security of lifetime government benefits, and a chance to get off the islands. Because of these enticing perks, the 2010 Census estimated that 5.6 percent of the population on these islands is active-duty military compared with 0.4 percent of the mainland U.S. population (United States Census Bureau).

They undergo intense training, they leave their families, they fight our wars, and they risk their lives. When they return from service, they need adequate medical care and relief from post-traumatic stress, but they also need access to mental health care for help with the deeper, darker scars of war: the grief, shame, guilt, and sorrow associated with moral injury.

Moral injury is a wound to the soul and the psyche. It confuses veterans' place in society by warping their understanding of right and wrong. A returning veteran wonders, "Was I justified in doing the things I did in war? Am I still a good person if I did bad things? Can I be forgiven?"

These are the questions that haunt combat veterans. Their answers can only be found with long-term, consistent, dependable mental health care, community support, and a diverse regime of healing modalities, which can include anything from meditation and yoga to art therapy and nature immersion.

Like veterans on the mainland, the returning service members of Guam, Rota, Tinian, and Saipan must navigate the complex labyrinth of the VA health system in order to partake in the benefits promised to them. Unlike many of their mainland counterparts, island vets often find that mental health care is either geographically inaccessible or only available via telehealth services like video chat.

Some mainland veterans have to drive several hours to reach the nearest VA hospital. But many vets who live on these islands have to take a seven-hour flight — some 4,000 miles — to see a therapist or other specialist at the nearest VA hospital in Hawaii.

Some veterans have to pay for their flight upfront and get reimbursed months later. Those whose flights are paid upfront by the VA report poorly coordinated, mismatched flights. Sometimes, the flight is paid upfront but the veteran has to pay out-of-pocket for ground transportation, meals and lodging, with the hope of getting partially reimbursed later. And with time away from work and family, in-person mental health care can quickly become an investment of $3,000 or more.

According to Rep. Tina Sablan of the Northern Mariana Islands, some veterans make the trip to Hawaii to find they need treatment that hasn't yet been approved by the VA.

"It is not uncommon to hear of a vet making the 4,000-mile flight to Hawaii for a particular appointment, finding that they need an additional type of care or service that wasn't already approved by the VA, and then flying all the way back to the Marianas to wait for approval for yet another appointment and flight."

On a recent trip to the islands, I was astounded to learn that the yoga-for-veterans course I was teaching was one of the only accessible healing modalities provided to address veteran mental health — and I was a visiting teacher, temporarily on the islands as part of a private (non-government) program called VEToga.

On the island of Rota, I met an Army veteran who was separated from his wife and suffering intensely from post-traumatic stress and moral injury.

"I am lost and confused with my life," he wrote me after the yoga course. "I am close to ending my life."

He needed help, fast. His options were to purchase a plane ticket and fly to Hawaii to see a therapist or specialist; purchase a plane ticket to Guam and try to see one of the clinical psychologists or psychiatrists who periodically visit the VA outpatient clinic there; purchase a plane ticket to Saipan and try to get an appointment with the one licensed clinical social worker at the VA there; or video chat with someone online.

Sablan says that telehealth mental health services have proven a poor substitute for access to human-to-human healing.

"Telehealth mental health services are available to Marianas veterans, but we have heard many complaints about that," said Sablan.

"Vets say they don't like the impersonal contact via TV screen or laptop, and there is high turnover of therapists, so they are constantly having to repeat their stories and build rapport anew, which is frustrating and discouraging in any case but especially over a screen."

Because of the level of care he needed, the veteran I met was thinking of leaving Rota altogether and moving 7,000 miles away to Texas, where he had been stationed during his time in the service. When moving 7,000 miles away from home is the best choice for a suicidal veteran to get the help he needs, it's clear we have a gap in care.

The government has not invested in mental health services for these islands because it considers these veterans a low-priority population. Their low numbers when compared with the mainland veteran population make them easy to overlook. The VA further evaluates the need for care based on the number of veterans taking advantage of the current care offerings.

Since it takes a superhuman effort to get care in the first place, demand for care remains low. Getting on a plane just to see a therapist in person is a lot to ask of anyone. But for someone with moral injury, for whom just getting out of bed in the morning can feel next to impossible, the monumental nature of seeking help can stop them from seeking help altogether. Demand for care remains low even though the need for care is high. Since demand is low, government resources remain low.

If the government evaluates the need for help by the number of veterans who ask for help, they will continue to draw the wrong conclusions. Signing up to serve in the first place was the moment the service member raised her hand to say, "I need support right now, as I'm learning how to protect and serve this nation, and I will need support later, after I have given myself, body and soul, to this nation."

The long-term solution to this problem is simple enough: stop making war. Stop sending high school graduates into battle. Stop ending lives before they begin. The short-term solution is to provide accessible, effective mental health care to all returning combat veterans, no matter where they are in the world. We should not ask veterans to make sacrifices that result in moral injury unless we're willing to help heal that moral injury, however — and wherever — it appears.

The need for mental health care is borne of the actions we ask our service members to take during war. Until we can stop engaging in war altogether, it's our duty to make that mental health care convenient, accessible, affordable and effective. If we don't, the wounds of war will continue to negatively impact our service members, families, communities and the strength of our nation for generations to come.

Iraq War veteran Tom Voss and his sister Rebecca Anne Nguyen are co-authors of the new book Where War Ends: A Combat Veteran's 2,700-Mile Journey to Heal — Recovering from PTSD and Moral Injury through Meditation.

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Warfare in space

America is seeking a faster way to launch military satellites into orbit. Top military advisors stress that if one is damaged or destroyed, a replacement needs to be on its way soon. In March India shot a missile into one of its satellites proving that it is still on the forefront of powerful minds.

Back in 2007 China had blown up one of their satellites in a similar demonstration. Satellites are too vital to military operations to consider them off-limits. As technology continues to constantly develop the U.S. must stay abreast of state and non-state actors willing to do damage to satellite systems.

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POW/MIA Update

This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency made 4 new announcements. Click on the links to read more:

News Releases

December 11, 2019
Soldier Accounted For From Korean War (Winchester, W.)

December 9, 2019
Marine Accounted For From World War II (Rambo, W.)

Staff Activities

- Attended Hillvets Capcon III to locate new veteran leaders who are already engaged in policy and communications and build their skills via training from experts. This is to include job placement on and around the hill as it pertains to national security.
- Friday staff attended a Foundation for Defense of Democracies briefing on North Korea. The briefing entailed the push pull factors of this administration, nuclear power, capabilities, and military might.
- This week staff continued to developed briefing and sponsor pages for National Security Commission programs. These sheets will be used by the Marketing Division to seek corporate donors to fund The American Legion's National Security programs that promote community
- All Staff have returned from supporting The National Commanders Indo-Pacific engagement. Over the coming weeks the focus to evaluate key engagements, follow up and chart forward progress to solidify American Legion as a competent, credible and capable partner and advocate.
- Participated at the MSO/VSO roundtable at the Defense Health Agency. Discussed TRICARE programs as defined under title 10, United States code (U.S.C.), identifies which beneficiaries are eligible to participate and how many are enrolled in each program, and provides the average cost to the Department of Defense (DoD), as well as to the beneficiaries in each program.

Freddy Gessner, Acting Director, National Security Division