VETERANS STRENGTHENING AMERICA
NATIONAL SECURITY DIVISION'S WEEKLY REPORT

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July 6 – July 12, 2024

Meetings

- NS Staff attended the *Foreign Policy* Security Forum. Experts from *Foreign Policy*, the Department of Defense (DOD), the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the Department of State, and other organizations shared their insights about the utility of NATO in a quickly changing security landscape.

- NS Staff touched base with the Legislative Division to discuss advocacy efforts for the Afghan Adjustment Act. NS analysts and legislative associates are working in tandem with Members of Congress to highlight the vitality of the legislation in the coming weeks.

- Along with other staff members from The American Legion's Washington, D.C. headquarters, NS Staff was invited to attend the NATO-Day celebration at the Washington Nationals Park, where the NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg threw the first pitch.

- NS Staff dialed in to a virtual fireside conversation with the Secretary of Homeland Security Alejandro Mayorkas and experts from the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). Secretary Mayorkas updated viewers on the enforcement of the Uyghur Forced Labor Prevention Act (UFLPA).

- NS Staff attended a Congressional Panel hosted by Philips, the American Legion and also Representatives Greg Murphy (R-NC-3) and Chris Papas (D-NH-1) for the two-year anniversary of the signing of the PACT Act to discuss Scaling Veterans Enrollment, Screening and Benefits Access. ED Nuntavong made opening remarks and the panel was moderated by Legislative Division Director Julia Mathis. Panelists also included representation from Steve Miska from the Department of Veterans Affairs.

- NS Staff prepared talking points for the National Commander for his upcoming meeting with the Korean Veterans Association (KVA) visit to the United States. The American Legion and KVA has maintained a decades-long relationship since 1973.

- NS Staff completed a white paper on the progress of the U.S.'s withdrawal from Niger. The paper focuses on where troops will be relocated and the current state of affairs for the Nigerien public.

- NS Staff virtually attended the NATO Public Forum 2024 featuring US Secretary of State Antony Blinken, Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin III, Secretary General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg and various foreign leaders and heads of state.

- NS Staff met with partners from TECRO (Taiwan Delegation in D.C.) to discuss upcoming travel plans for the National Convention.

- NS Staff participated in a follow up call with Navy MWR in Rota, Spain to discuss possible sponsorship for quality of life support for our Sailors and families stationed in Rota, Spain. This is a follow-up call which resulted from the national Commander's visit to Spain this past May.

- NS Staff conduced a detailed coordination meeting for a BASE program visit in South Carolina this coming fall.

- NS Staff continued working on consolidation ideas for multiple immigration resolutions into one product the organization can maintain as a position of record.

- NS Staff met with the SgtMaj of the Marine Corps' office in preparation for a VSO briefing next week at the Naval Academy.

- NS Staff met with multiple NATO Alliance and partner nation staff during several events connected to the NATO Summit. Details of these meetings will be inserted into the weekly over the next two weeks.

Policy

- NS Staff read and analyzed an amicus curiae brief that calls for the overturn of the *Feres* Doctrine, which prevents members of the Armed Forces from bringing torts claims against the federal government for injury or death, if the injury or death is deemed "incident to service." NS Staff is compiling a list of military medical malpractice, toxic exposure, and military sexual assault torts claims that were denied using *Feres* to compare with the amicus curiae brief.

- The NS Africa Analyst continued to research the war in Sudan and Niger, focusing on the regional effects of mass displacement, a new refugee population, Russian military I the region and displacement of US Troops out of Africa.

- NS Staff is working with the Legislative Staff on a comprehensive grass roots campaign plan to highlight Afghan Adjustment Act Advocacy efforts as legislation/amendments are being proposed as part of the National Defense Authorization Act.

Programs

- NS Staff has been in contact with the seven Spirit of Service Award winners and preparing for their attendance at National Convention.

The American Legion Military Surplus Equipment

- Items requested: Ammo – 3,720 Clips – 50 Static Display - 1
- Requests submitted by: Post – 5 Departments - 5

POW/MIA

July 11, 2024

- Soldier Accounted for from Korean War (Smith, E.)
- Pilot Accounted for From WWII (Knepper, A.)

July 10, 2024

- Airman Accounted for from WWII (Tedone, F.)
- Soldier Accounted for from WWII (Prince, S.)

July 9, 2024

- Soldier Accounted for from WWII (Flores, A.)
- Soldier Accounted for from Korean War (Mitchell, J.)
- Soldier Accounted for from WWII (Smith, W.)

July 3, 2024

- Marine Accounted for from World War II (Ervin, A.)

DPAA has identified/repatriated 112 service members this year.

Be The One (BTO)

- NS Staff prepared to attend the VA/DOD Suicide Prevention Conference in Portland, Oregon. The staff will have the opportunity to share the successes of Be The One and Buddy Checks, while hearing about the progress made by DOD and VA on improving access to mental health care.

Focus Topic: The American Legion's Participation in the NATO Summit

This week, leaders from across the globe convened in Washington, D.C. for the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) summit and a celebration of the alliance's 75th anniversary. Among the NATO leaders and non-NATO allies invited to the summit was The American Legion's National Security Director Mario Marquez, retired Sergeant Major of the Marine Corps. Director Marquez joined Lieutenant Colonel (LtCol) Melanie Lake of the Canadian Armed Forces to discuss the sacrifices made by NATO veterans.

Director Marquez served in Kosovo under NATO forces on a peacekeeping mission. He began the conversation by discussing NATO's support for the United States under Article 5 after the devastating September 11, 2001 terrorist attacks and further explained the gravity of maintaining a strong allied defense.

LtCol Lake and Director Marquez shared stories about the camaraderie and interoperability of NATO forces, this partnership and compassion is critical to both NATO troops and civilians living in warzones. For both speakers, the humanitarian aspect of NATO missions was extremely impactful. These memories have informed the Lt. Colonel and the Marquez's dedication to credible deterrence and cooperation.

The decisions that followed from Heads of State reflected the values discussed by LtCol Lake and Director Marquez. NATO leaders published a declaration on July 10th promising to "defend every inch of allied territory" against malign state actors, namely Russia, China, and Iran. Moreover, European members have made strides to ensure they are meeting the defense spending requirements. NATO defense spending, and the ability of allies to meet the requirement, is increasingly necessary to the sanctity of the treaty. As allies continue to increase their spending and meet their goals, NATO will be better postured to deter aggressive nation-states. This forum is a major foreign policy and defense expert/state leader gathering and our participation placed the American Legion in a global spotlight.

To read the official Washington Summit declaration, please click here.

To view the Legion's role in the conversation, click here. Fast forward to the 6:15:15 through 6:31:00 time mark to listen to Lake and Marquez' discussion.