**VETERANS STRENGTHENING AMERICA**
**NATIONAL SECURITY DIVISION'S WEEKLY REPORT**

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**June 8 – June 14, 2024**

## Meetings

- NS Staff is closely monitoring the arrival of four Russian naval vessels in Cuba on Wednesday for military drills. The vessels, including a nuclear-powered submarine and a frigate, are perceived as a show of force amidst Moscow's ongoing tensions with the West over the war in Ukraine. The ships will remain in the region through the summer, potentially stopping in Venezuela. The following day, a U.S. submarine arrived at Guantanamo Bay.

- NS Staff visited Capitol Hill to observe a hearing of the Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Sea Power. During the hearing, members unanimously agreed to adopt eight amendments to the NDAA that addressed procurement processes.

- NS Staff went to Capitol Hill to observe a Senate Armed Services Subcommittee on Personnel hearing. During the hearing, members unanimously agreed to adopt 36 amendments to bolster recruitment and retention for the armed services and improve the quality of life for our servicemembers.

- NS Staff met with Connecticut's second district Representative, Joe Courtney's Military Legislative Assistant, to express our support of their proposal to allocate funds for two Virginia class submarines in the 2025 NDAA.

- NS Staff attended a Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) seminar titled "African Youth Influence and Outlook." Experts from CSIS and The Accountability Lab discussed the issues and opportunities associated with a median age of 19 across the continent.

- NS Staff participated in a Virtual Military Spouse Roundtable hosted by the Defense Health Agency. This roundtable focused on meaningful discussions to better understand the concerns, obstacles, and issues that military families face.

- NS Staff attended a small group meeting with German Vice Chief of Defense (and Commissioner of Veterans Affairs), LTG Andreas Hoppe, to discuss establishing a Veterans Affairs program in their country and the various lessons learned that have come with the journey and mission of veterans advocacy.

- NS Director joined Executive Director Nuntavong in a meeting with Marine Corps and Navy Retiree Council Co-Chairs, Vice Admiral Trussler (retired) and the 17th SgtMaj of the Marine Corps, Micheal Barrett to discuss a full range of military retiree matters and the overlap with the American Legion's advocacy efforts across our entire portfolio. Additionally, the Secretary of the Navy Retiree council is working to connect TAL with other service retiree councils to better connect the entire community for a more comprehensive approach to resolving retiree-related matters.

- NS Staff met with Staff from the Atlantic Council to discuss the upcoming 75th Anniversary of NATO and related events.

- NS Staff responded to multiple email queries from legionnaires on various topics related to The American Legion's National Security portfolio.

- NS Staff joined other DC staff at a meet and greet hosted by the Paralyzed Veterans of America.

- NS Staff attended Flag Day events at the Mt. Vernon Inn, in support of Americanism Director, Ron Neff who spoke on a veterans panel.

**Policy**

- NS Director has assigned Policy staff to specific regions of the world so that we can spread load how we approach a variety of foreign policy and military-related matters. The Policy staff is also assigned specific focus areas across the entirety of the NS portfolio. Having said that, this section of the weekly report is dedicated to all forms of policy work we do in the division and will vary weekly in content.

- NS Staff reviewed the Department of the Air Force (DAF) vision for the service's future posture. Called Force Re-optimization, DAF looks to structure the force into three distinct elements: deployable combat wings, combat generation wings, and in-place combat wings. This effort is critical to improving TAL's advocacy and awareness involving the NS Commission and Aerospace Committee's work.

- The NS Africa Analyst began assessing the civil war in Sudan. Staff hopes to gain insight into how the war and the large-scale displacement of Sudanese people will affect regional security and U.S. Africa Command's (AFRICOM) priorities.

- NS Staff analyzed the current potential issues concerning a medical treatment facility (MTF) and its emergency room operations and their adverse effects on servicemembers and their families. MTFS must comply with the NDAA 2017 regulations to ensure that service members and their families always have reliable access to emergency medical care. Expanding the operational hours of MTF ERs to 24/7 is essential to mitigate these adverse effects and uphold the commitment to providing comprehensive healthcare services to our military community.

- NS Staff continue advising various departments with subject matter topics such as the military recruiting crisis, identifying a veterans role in supporting active duty and reserve/guard forces and military benefits.

**Special Reports: Shangri-La Dialogue and the G-7 Summit**

With international matters continuing to dominate foreign affairs news, NS Division produced the following short-summary updates:

Report on the 2024 Shangri-La Dialogue on international security:

Earlier this month, defense ministers, heads of state, and other high-profile military officials convened in Singapore for the 21st annual Shangri-La Dialogue. The summit, hosted by the International Institute for Strategic Studies, has become one of the most crucial forums through which military leaders debate and develop joint approaches to international security challenges.

Tensions in the Indo-Pacific and their global effects dominated this year's conversations. In his keynote address, President Ferdinand Marcos Jr. of the Philippines declared that there is no such thing as a mere regional conflict in the current climate, and all issues should be seen as global.

According to President Marcos, if global leaders wish to uphold multilateralism, rule of law, and sovereignty in the Indo-Pacific, and therefore across the globe, they must uphold and invest in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) as the primary mechanism for Indo-pacific stabilization. ASEAN is a political and economic bloc comprising many Southeast Asian countries and could counter some of China's economic and military prowess.

Ukrainian President Volodymyr Zelenskyy echoed the importance of Indo-Pacific countries' engagement and empowerment and entreated leaders of ASEAN countries to help Ukraine end Russia's offensive. President Marcos and President Zelenskyy emphasized the need to uphold the rules-based international order and hold the major players (Russia and China) who are breaking these rules accountable.

Disputes between the People's Republic of China and the United States underpinned many of these conversations. During the three-day summit, U.S. Defense Secretary Lloyd Austin met with Chinese Defense Minister Dong Jun for the first time in person since 2022. Secretary Austin and Minister Dong discussed the need for frank communication and consistent dialogue between the two powers.

However, Minister Dong did imply that the United States was a disruptor in pan-Asian unity. While the discussion signaled positive developments between the two countries, the distrust between China and the United States lingered throughout the conversation.

Initial summary of the Group of Seven (G7) Summit in Italy:

The 50th annual Group of Seven (G7) summit began in the Puglia region of Italy on June 13th, 2024. The G7 is a forum in which seven of the world's largest democracies and economies meet to discuss global affairs. The current members of the G7 include Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, the United Kingdom, and the United States. At the annual summit, members will invite Heads of State from non-member countries and other key political figures to participate.

In the early hours of the summit, the G7 countries agreed to use frozen Russian assets to help fund Ukraine's military goals. Moreover, the United States and the United Kingdom announced new bilateral agreements to aid and support Ukraine's defense. The G7 members will more than likely issue a statement on Chinese economic and military aggression in the Indo-Pacific, which was key topic at the 2023 summit.

While these are likely to be two of the most critical development, the agenda for this year's summit also covers tensions in the Middle East, development in emergent economies, migration across the Mediterranean, and the advent of artificial intelligence.

With immigration and economic development in Africa being a key concern for the host country of Italy, discussions with Kenya, Algeria, and Tunisia are sure to be fruitful as well.

**Be The One (BTO) related-efforts**

- NS Staff communicated with the Department of the Air Force (DAF) regarding PTSD awareness month. DAF highlighted ways that the servicemembers and their families can lean more about resources by visiting the following sites: : PTSD | AFMS, Military Health System: Posttraumatic Stress Disorder | Health.mil, US Department of Veteran Affairs: National Center for PTSD | va.gov, and TRICARE: Crisis Hotlines | TRICARE.

- NS Staff participated in a roundtable hosted by the Defense Health Agency, focusing on behavioral health for our service members and their families. During the discussion, a question was raised about the availability of online training for individuals in remote locations. The meeting also focused on special care for children with behavioral and developmental issues. DoD Child Collaboration Study

- Washington DC Directors joined the Executive Director in a meeting with Everytown's head of government affairs, Jill Kaleta, and multiple members of the veterans affairs council to discuss veteran suicide, suicide prevention, fire arms safety training and firearms safety advocacy.

## Programs

Awards Programs

- NS Staff sent notification letters to the respective departments of The American Legion's National Winners for the Law Enforcement Officer and Fire Fighter of the Year.

- NS Staff has received all nominations from the respective services for The American Legion Spirit of Service Award. Congratulatory letters are being drafted. The award will be presented at the 105th National Convention in New Orleans, Louisiana.

The American Legion Military Surplus Equipment

- Items requested: Ammo – 3720; Rifles – 10; Clips – 25; Static Displays – 1
- Requests submitted by: Posts – 5; Departments – 5

## POW/MIA reporting

DPAA has identified/repatriated 80 service members this year.

**June 10, 2024**

- USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted for from WWII (Thompson, G.)
- Airman Accounted for from WWII (Pyle, E.)