VETERANS STRENGTHENING AMERICA
NATIONAL SECURITY DIVISION'S WEEKLY REPORT

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Meetings

- NS staff viewed a webinar titled "Biden's Trip to Angola: What to Expect" that was hosted by the Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). President Biden's trip to Angola is foundational to his administration's emphasis on friendly relationships with Africa. Especially as Russian and Chinese influence grows across the continent, a welcomed U.S. presence will be crucial for the next administration's success.

- NS Staff attended a meeting to discuss efforts to repeal the 2002 Iraq Authorization for Use of Military Force (AUMF) during the lame duck session.

- NS Staff attended the monthly Directors meeting hosted by the National Adjutant.

- NS Staff attended an internal holiday awards ceremony to recognize staff who have reached milestone employment years and recognize new personnel who have joined the DC office in 2024.

- NS staff attended The American Legion's Congressional Holiday Reception. The event had over 350 attendees, including world and government leaders. Among attendees were 12 Members of Congress, representatives from the Taiwan Economic and Cultural Representative Office, and Ukrainian Ambassador Oskana Marakova.

- NS staff attended the We The Veterans briefing During the call, attendees received a summarization of recent misinformation and cybercrime campaigns that were affecting U.S. civil society.

- NS staff attended a Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) webinar titled, "Examining PRC activities in the Arctic." The webinar provided great insight into our adversary's long-term goals in the region, as decided by the People's Republic of China (PRC), and how the U.S. can strategically protect the Arctic as a global common.

Policy

- NS Staff completed and submitted the 2025 Legislative Priorities document for the National Security Division.

- NS staff completed two bill reviews in support of the Gold Star Spouses Health Care Enhancement Act and the Military Housing Oversight and Service Member Protection Act.

- NS staff began a report outlining President Biden's trip to Angola. The focus of the trip was the Lobito Corridor infrastructure project. President Biden And President Lourenco also discussed other aspects of our economic partnership and paths to greater stability in South Central Africa.

- NS staff analyzed the effect that France's recent dissolution of Parliament may have on bilateral relations and France's role in NATO.

Programs

- NS Staff sent out the Firefighter and Law Enforcement Officer of the Year Award courtesy reminder notification to all Department Adjutants.

- NS staff is drafting letters to send out to the POC for the 7 Spirit of Service Awardees for 2025.

- NS staff has updated the Firefighter and Law Enforcement webpage to reflect the November 2024 updated application.

The American Legion Military Surplus Equipment

- Items requested: Ammo- 6200; Rifles- 14; Static Display- 1
- Requests submitted by: Posts- 7; Departments- 6

POW/MIA

Dec. 5, 2024
- Airman Accounted For From World War II (Kovaleski, E.)
- USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted For From World War II (Auld, J.)

Dec. 4, 2024
- Pilot Accounted For From Vietnam War (Trudeau, A.)

Nov. 26, 2024
- Soldier Accounted For From Korean War (Slaten, W.)
- Airman Accounted For From World War II (Roy, S.)

Nov. 25, 2024
- Soldier Accounted For From Korean War (Troup, H.)

Nov. 22, 2024

- Pilot Accounted For From World War II (Wilson, G.)

DPAA has identified/repatriated 233 service members this year.

Be The One: Department of Defense Releases its Annual Report of Suicide in the Military for Calendar Year 2023

Published on November 14, 2024 by the Department of Defense

Every death by suicide is a tragedy. That's why on May 7, 2022, Secretary Lloyd J. Austin established the Suicide Prevention Response and Independent Review Committee (SPRIRC) to conduct a review of clinical and non-clinical suicide prevention and response programs which provided over 100 recommendations. As a result of the SPRIRC recommendations, in September 2023, Secretary Austin announced a suicide prevention campaign plan across five lines of effort: fostering a supportive environment, improving the delivery of mental health care, addressing stigma and other barriers to care, revising suicide prevention training, and promoting a culture of lethal means safety with 83 enabling actions.

In the first year since Secretary Austin's establishment of the suicide prevention campaign plan, the Department has completed 20 SPRIRC recommendations and we have an aggressive path forward with unprecedented investments for FY25 to combat current trends. The Department will continue to build on these efforts to demonstrate our unwavering commitment to the wellness, health, and morale of our Force, and honor the memory of those lost to suicide.

About the data and findings in the Annual Report on Suicide in the Military:

- The Department assesses suicide rates - the number of suicide deaths per 100,000 people per year - to better understand changes or trends in suicidal behavior. Suicide rates fluctuate from year to year.
    - In this context, 'not statistically significant' means that experts who analyze the data cannot be certain this is a true change and, instead, changes from one year to the next could be due to natural variations in data. "Statistically significant" means that there is high confidence we are observing a true change.
- In CY 2023, 523 servicemembers died by suicide, which is more than the previous year (493). The Total Force rate – which is the focus of the ASRM report – of suicide deaths per 100,000 Service members was 9 percent higher than in 2022.
- Active Component suicide rates have gradually increased since 2011. The 2023 Active Component rate is higher (12 percent) than 2022. This 12 percent increase was not statistically significant.
- Active Component suicide rates were similar to the U.S. population in most years between 2011-2023 after accounting for age and sex differences.
- Most servicemembers who died by suicide were young, enlisted men.
- In CY 2022, 146 family members died by suicide, including 93 spouses and 53 dependents. While every death by suicide is a tragedy, we are cautiously encouraged at this reduction from the previous year (CY 2021) when 165 family members died by suicide.

- Firearms were the primary method of suicide death for Service members (65 percent for the Active Component) and family members (61 percent for spouses and 43 percent for dependents).

The Department also considers overall trends and seeks a sustained reduction in rates over multiple years. For example:

- For the Reserve and Guard, there is no increasing or decreasing long-term trend between 2011 – 2022. Relative to 2022, the Reserve rate was 8 percent higher, and the National Guard rate was 5 percent lower. In both cases, these differences were not statistically significant.
- For our military family members, the rate decreased by 9% in 2022 (most recent year available) versus 2021. This percentage change also was not statistically significant.

To ensure long-term change, we must continue to work toward sustained reductions over many years.

Servicemembers and veterans who are in crisis or having thoughts of suicide, and those who know a servicemember or veteran in crisis, can call the Veterans/Military Crisis Line for confidential support available 24 hours a day, seven days a week, 365 days a year. Call 988 and Press 1, text 838225, chat online at MilitaryCrisisLine.net.

Focus Topic: Kosovo-Serbia Relations

On November 29th, 2024, a water canal critical to supplying water plants critical to supplying the country's electricity was targeted with explosives. Kosovo's government has labeled it a terrorist attack and accused Serbia of orchestrating it. Around 15-20 kilograms were used in the attack. However, Serbia has denied involvement. Both sides are calling for impartial investigations.

This incident has escalated tensions between the two states even more. Weapons, military uniforms, and other objects of interests tied to Russia were found in the subsequent police raids after the attack. There are fears of broader destabilization in the region.

The Kosovo-Serbia relationship warrants attention due to its impact on regional stability and U.S. foreign policy. Despite Kosovo's 2008 independence declaration, Serbia still opposes it, with ongoing tensions that could destabilize the Balkans and draw in NATO, including U.S. forces. As a NATO member, the U.S. has a strategic interest in resolving this conflict, which also affects veterans who served in the region. This relationship is vital for both international security and veterans' concerns.