National Security Division Report

Week ending 19 June 2020

Laid Off By U.S. Contractor, Iraqi Interpreters Fear ISIS Retaliation

A U.S. military contractor in Iraq has abruptly laid off the majority of the U.S.-led coalition's Iraqi interpreters. The move has left many fearing retaliation from ISIS and Iran-backed militias hostile to U.S. forces, and forced some into hiding.

The sudden layoffs — and lack of safeguards or responses to the interpreters' concerns — appear to be the latest examples of how the U.S. has left in harm's way Iraqi citizens who risked their lives with U.S. forces.

Virginia-based Valiant Integrated Systems last month informed more than 200 locally hired Iraqis interpreting for U.S. and coalition forces that they were being laid off immediately, according to several former contract workers. They asked to remain anonymous because they were worried about their safety and prospects for future employment.

The U.S. military, asked about the layoffs, told NPR that staffing levels at several Iraqi bases had been reduced "as a result of our Iraqi partners' success against ISIS." The military's Combined Joint Task Force-Inherent Resolve, which heads the anti-ISIS coalition in Iraq and Syria, said in a written response to NPR's queries that as a result, "the military Coalition repositioned military and civilian personnel out of several Iraqi bases. As our operational mission reduced, the requirement for contracted staff reduced."

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US Air Force fighter jet pilot dead after North Sea crash

A US Air Force F-15 fighter jet pilot died Monday after the aircraft crashed in the North Sea off England, according to a statement from the 48th Fighter Wing.

The unit identified the pilot as 1st Lt. Kenneth Allen, assistant chief of weapons and tactics for the 493rd Fighter Squadron. Allen arrived at 48th Fighter Wing in February and is survived by his wife and parents, according to a statement.

"We are deeply saddened by the loss of Lt. Allen, and mourn with his family and his fellow Reapers in the 493rd Fighter Squadron," Col. Will Marshall, 48th Fighter Wing commander, said in a statement. "The tremendous outpouring of love and support from our communities has been a ray of light in this time of darkness."

The 48th Fighter Wing said in an earlier statement that the cause of the crash was unknown at the time, and that U.K. Search and Rescue had been called for support.

"A U.S. Air Force F-15C Eagle crashed at approximately 0940 [local time] today in the North Sea," the earlier statement said, noting that "at the time of the accident, the aircraft was on a routine training mission with one pilot on board."

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North Korea blows up joint liaison office with South in Kaesong

North Korea has blown up a joint liaison office with the South near the North's border town of Kaesong. The move comes just hours after the North renewed threats of military action at the Korean border.

The site was opened in 2018 to help the Koreas - officially in a state of war - to communicate. It had been empty since January due to Covid-19 restrictions. In a statement, South Korea warned it would "respond strongly" if the North "continues to worsen the situation".

The destruction of the office, it said, "abandons the hopes of everyone who wanted the development of inter-Korean relations and peace settlement in the Korean Peninsula. The government makes it clear that all responsibility of this situation lies in the North."

Russia expressed concern at the renewed tensions between the Koreas. "We call for restraint from all the sides," Dmitry Peskov, a spokesman for President Vladimir Putin, said on Tuesday.

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Soldiers fell to their deaths as India and China's troops fought with rocks

The hand-to-hand combat lasted hours, on steep, jagged terrain, with iron bars, rocks and fists. Neither side carried guns. Most of the soldiers killed in the worst fighting between India and China in 60 years lost their footing or were knocked from the narrow Himalayan ridge, plunging to their deaths.

India has reacted with shock and caution to the loss of at least 20 soldiers on its disputed border with China, with images of the Chinese president, Xi Jinping, burned in Indian cities.

In his first public comments on the dispute, prime minister Narendra Modi led a two-minute silence for the killed soldiers and said India would "defend every stone, every inch of its territory."

"I would like to assure the nation that the sacrifice of our jawans [troops] will not be in vain," said Modi, speaking at a televised meeting of India's chief ministers. "For us, the unity and sovereignty of the country is the most important."

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POW/MIA Update

This week, the Defense POW/MIA Accounting Agency released the following announcements. Click on the links to read more:

June 12, 2020
USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted For From World War II (Flanagan, J.)
USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted For From World War II (Graham, W.)
USS Oklahoma Sailor Accounted For From World War II (Rice, I.)

June 16, 2020
Soldier Accounted For From Korean War (Hash, B.J)

Staff Activity:

- National Security staff continues working to get all National Security resolutions together in a digital file for distribution to the National Security Commission and Committees. These will be broken down by committee and sent by both email and USPS mail to the relevant chairmen when completed.
- National Security Policy Advisors (NSPA) Nick Riffel and Jeff Steele continue work on several award programs: Law Officer & Fire Fighter of the Year and Spirit of Service.

- On Tuesday, June 16, NSPA Jeff Steele participated in the Conservative Working Group weekly teleconference hosted by Republican leadership in the Senate.
- On Tuesday, June 16, NSPA Jeff Steele attended an invitation-only briefing moderated by ADM Dennis Blair (Ret.) to share the results of Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA's Tabletop Exercise (TTX) Pacific Trident III. From February 4-6, 2020, Sasakawa USA conducted its unclassified exercise in Suffolk, VA. The exercise was held as part of Sasakawa USA Tabletop Exercises, which brings together policy experts from the United States, Japan, Korea and other countries to examine pressing security issues in East Asia through simulated real-world contingencies. The objective of these exercises have been to strengthen U.S.-Japan alliance coordination mechanisms –and broader multilateral cooperation—in the face of current and future security challenges. The game's findings and policy recommendations are available **here**.
- On Tuesday, June 16, NSPA Jeff Steele participated in a German Marshall Fund conversation with national security and Asia expert Mira Rapp-Hooper to discuss her latest book *Shields of the Republic: The Triumph and Peril of America's Alliances*. The book audits the record of America's alliance system and lays out a proposal to salvage it for the 21st century. More information and video of the event are available **here**.
- On Wednesday, June 17, NSPA Jeff Steele participated in a CSIS event with former Secretary of Defense Robert Gates. He discussed his newest book, *Exercise of Power: American Failures, Successes, and a New Path Forward in the Post-Cold War World*, which provides a candid, sweeping examination of power in all its manifestations, and how it has been exercised, effectively or poorly, by American presidents in the post-Cold War world. More information and video of the event are available **here**.
- On Wednesday, June 17, NSPA Jeff Steele participated in a Quincy Institute event with Patrick Porter, Professor of International Security and Strategy at the University of Birmingham (UK) He discussed his new book, "*The False Promise of Liberal Order,*" which argues that the U.S.-led international order is inherently illiberal, and that its mythmakers flatter themselves while creating antagonisms around the world. More information and video of the event are available **here**.

Rhonda Powell, Director, National Security Division