

Today in History:

- On January 6, 1838, Samuel Morse's telegraph system is demonstrated for the first time at the Speedwell Iron Works in Morristown, New Jersey. The telegraph, a device which used electric impulses to transmit encoded messages over a wire, would eventually revolutionize long-distance communication, reaching the height of its popularity in the 1920s and 1930s.
- 1919: Theodore Roosevelt, the 26th president of the United States, dies at Sagamore Hill, his estate overlooking New York's Long Island Sound. A dynamic and energetic politician, Theodore Roosevelt is credited with creating the modern presidency. As a young Republican, Roosevelt held a number of political posts in New York in the 1880s and '90s and was a leader of reform Republicans in the state. In 1898, as assistant secretary to the U.S. Navy, Roosevelt vehemently advocated war with Spain. When the Spanish-American War began, he formed the "Rough Riders," a volunteer cavalry that became famous for its contribution to the United States victory at the Battle of San Juan Hill in Cuba. The publicity-minded Roosevelt rode his military fame to the New York governor's seat in 1898 and to the vice presidency in 1900.
- On January 6, 1941, President Franklin D. Roosevelt addresses Congress in an effort to move the nation away from a foreign policy of neutrality. The president had watched with increasing anxiety as European nations struggled and fell to Hitler's fascist regime and was intent on rallying public support for the United States to take a stronger interventionist role. Roosevelt insisted that people in all nations of the world shared Americans' entitlement to four freedoms: the freedom of speech and expression, the freedom to worship God in his own way, freedom from want and freedom from fear. After Roosevelt's death and the end of World War II, his widow Eleanor often referred to the four freedoms when advocating for passage of the United Nations' Universal Declaration of Human Rights. Mrs. Roosevelt participated in the drafting of that declaration, which was adopted by the United Nations in 1948.

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Associated Press: [Iraq's Parliament calls for expulsion of US troops](#)

By QASSIM ABDUL-ZAHRA AND BASSEM MROUE | Associated Press | Published: January 5, 2020

BAGHDAD — Iraq's Parliament called for the expulsion of U.S. forces from the country in reaction to the American drone attack that killed a top Iranian general, raising the prospect of a troop withdrawal that could cripple the battle against Islamic State and could allow a resurgence of the extremists.

Lawmakers approved a resolution asking the Iraqi government to end the agreement under which Washington sent troops more than four years ago to help fight ISIS. The bill is nonbinding and subject to approval by the Iraqi government but has the backing of the outgoing prime minister. But the vote was another sign of the blowback from the U.S. airstrike Friday that killed Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani and a number of top Iraqi officials at the Baghdad airport. Soleimani was the architect of Iran's proxy wars across the Mideast and was blamed for the deaths of hundreds of Americans in roadside bombings and other attacks.

Speaking to lawmakers in Parliament, Prime Minister Adel Abdul-Mahdi said that after the killing of Soleimani, the government has two choices: End the presence of foreign troops in Iraq or restrict their mission to training Iraqi forces.

"As a prime minister and supreme commander of the armed forces, I call for adopting the first choice," Abdul-Mahdi said.

Abdul-Mahdi resigned last year in response to the anti-government demonstrations that have engulfed Baghdad and the mostly Shiite southern provinces. Political factions have been unable to agree on a new prime minister, and Abdul-Mahdi continues in a caretaker capacity.

Asked shortly before the parliamentary vote whether the U.S. would comply with an Iraqi government request for American troops to leave, U.S. Secretary of State Mike Pompeo would not answer directly.

"We'll watch. We're following very closely what's taking place in the Iraqi Parliament," he told CBS's "Face the Nation." "It is the United States that is prepared to help the Iraqi people get what it is they deserve and continue our mission there to take down terrorism from ISIS and others in the region."

A pullout of the estimated 5,200 U.S. troops not only could allow ISIS to make a comeback, but also could enable Iran to deepen its influence in Iraq.

U.S. Sen. Lindsey Graham, R-S.C., a member of the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, said on Fox News that the parliamentary vote is "a bit concerning."

"The Iranian government is trying to basically take over Iraq's political system. Iran is bribing Iraqi politicians. To the Iraqi people, do not allow your politicians to turn Iraq into a proxy of Iran," he said.

The attack that killed Soleimani has escalated regional tensions dramatically and has raised fears of outright war.

Amid Iran's threats of vengeance, the U.S.-led military coalition in Iraq announced Sunday it is putting the fight against ISIS militants on hold to focus on protecting its troops and bases. The coalition said it is suspending the training of Iraqi forces and other operations in support of the battle against ISIS.

Also, the leader of Lebanon's Iran-backed Hezbollah group vowed to end the U.S. military's presence in the Middle East, saying U.S. bases, warships and soldiers are now fair targets. "The suicide attackers who forced the Americans to leave from our region in the past are still here and their numbers have increased," Nasrallah said. It was not clear which suicide bombings Nasrallah was referring to. But a 1983 attack on a U.S. Marine barracks in Beirut, killed 241 U.S. servicemen and spurred President Ronald Reagan to withdraw all American forces from the country.

Nasrallah spoke from an undisclosed location and his speech was played on large screens for thousands of Shiite followers in southern Beirut, interrupted occasionally by chants of "Death to America!" The comments were Nasrallah's first since Soleimani's killing.

The majority of about 180 legislators present in Parliament voted in favor of the troop-removal resolution. It was backed by most Shiite members of parliament, who hold a majority of seats. Many Sunni and Kurdish legislators did not show up for the session, apparently because they oppose abolishing the deal.

"The government should work on ending the presence of all foreign forces," Parliament Speaker Mohamed a-Halbousi said after the vote.

Iraqi officials have decried the killing of the general a violation of Iraqi sovereignty. Abdul-Mahdi called it a "political assassination."

Killing Iran's most powerful general marked a turning point in U.S. Mideast policy by elevating a conflict that had previously been more of a shadow war, and by putting in doubt the Pentagon's ability to keep troops in Iraq.

More broadly, the killing appears to have lessened chances that President Donald Trump will achieve the central goal of his "maximum pressure" campaign against Iran: to compel its leaders to negotiate a new, broader nuclear deal.

The administration also faces troubling questions about the legality of the Soleimani killing, its failure to consult Congress in advance, and the prospect of plunging America into a new Mideast war.

Washington Post: [Trump claims his tweets are sufficient notice to Congress that US might strike Iran](#)

By FELICIA SONMEZ | The Washington Post | Published: January 5, 2020

President Donald Trump claimed Sunday that his tweets are sufficient notice to Congress of any possible U.S. military strike on Iran, in an apparent dismissal of his obligations under the War Powers Act of 1973.

Trump's declaration, which comes two days after his administration launched a drone strike that killed top Iranian military commander Qasem Soleimani, was met with disbelief and ridicule from congressional Democrats, who called on the president to respect the role of the legislative branch in authorizing new military action abroad.

"These Media Posts will serve as notification to the United States Congress that should Iran strike any U.S. person or target, the United States will quickly & fully strike back, & perhaps in a disproportionate manner," Trump tweeted from his Mar-a-Lago Club in Palm Beach, Fla., late Sunday afternoon. "Such legal notice is not required, but is given nevertheless!"

Trump's claim that the U.S. will retaliate against Iran "perhaps in a disproportionate manner" also contrasts with Secretary of State Mike Pompeo's statement hours earlier on "Fox News Sunday" that the administration "will take responses that are appropriate and commensurate with actions that threaten American lives."

The War Powers Act of 1973 mandates that the president report to lawmakers within 48 hours of introducing military forces into armed conflict abroad. Such notifications generally detail an administration's justification for U.S. intervention, as well as the constitutional and legislative rationale used by the administration to send troops. They also might include how long the involvements could last.

On Saturday, the White House delivered a formal notification to Congress of the strike that killed Soleimani, according to a senior Democratic aide and another official familiar with the matter who spoke on the condition of anonymity ahead of the notification.

But the document, which is entirely classified, drew scathing criticism from House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., who said in a statement that the notification "raises more questions than it answers."

Several congressional Democrats sharply criticized the president's tweet Sunday afternoon. "OMG, Trump thinks a crazed Tweet satisfies his War Powers Act obligations to Congress," tweeted Rep. Jared Huffman, D-Calif. "Our President has taken us to the brink of war and is now vamping with no plan and no clue. Please, someone in the GOP, take the car keys - read the 25th Amendment."

The 25th Amendment outlines a procedure by which the Cabinet can remove a president from office.

Rep. Mark Pocan, D-Wis., also pushed back against Trump's declaration.

"@realDonaldTrump, this is Twitter," Pocan tweeted. "This is not where you wage unauthorized wars."

Sen. Bernie Sanders, I-Vt., who is running for the Democratic presidential nomination, called on members of Congress to unite against Trump's potential efforts to take further military action against Iran.

"Congress must reassert its constitutional responsibility over war," Sanders said in a tweet. "The Senate and House must vote to immediately defund unauthorized military action against Iran."

Military Times: [How far can Trump push Iran without Congress' OK? Depends who you ask](#)

By: Leo Shane III | 2 days ago

A day after President Donald Trump ordered an airstrike to kill a key Iranian military leader on Iraqi soil, lawmakers on Capitol Hill were left with questions over whether the attack was legal and how much further the commander-in-chief can push the confrontation with Iran without congressional approval.

"The administration did not consult (with Congress) in this case, and I fear that very serious questions have not been answered and may not be fully considered," Senate Minority Leader Chuck Schumer, D-N.Y., said on Friday. "Among those questions, what was the legal basis for conducting this operation? And how far does that legal basis extend?"

“It is my view that the president does not have the authority for a war with Iran. If he plans a large increase in troops and potential hostility over a longer time, the administration will require congressional approval and the approval of the American people.”

Earlier, the Pentagon confirmed that Iranian Gen. Qassem Soleimani, the head of an elite arm of Iran’s Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps, was killed along with several others in an U.S. operation near the Baghdad International Airport in Iraq.

The move drew immediate condemnation from Iranian leaders, who vowed to leave “the dead bodies of Americans all over the Middle East” in retaliation.

Pentagon officials said the move was in response to an imminent threat posed by Soleimani, and that U.S. personnel in the region were saved by the killing. Trump in a Friday morning tweet said that the general “should have been taken out many years ago.”

But numerous Democrats in Congress said they still have not seen enough information about the threat posed by Soleimani or the legal justification for such a military strike. They warned the action could further destabilize the Middle East, especially if Trump decides to act impulsively and without permission from Congress.

Under the War Powers Resolution in 1973, the president is required to notify Congress within 48 hours of any military action and prohibits the president from continuing that action for more than 60 days without an authorization for use of force from Congress.

Different presidents have interpreted those requirements in different ways, especially since Congress approved a pair of broad military force authorizations in the wake of the Sept. 11, 2001 attacks.

House Speaker Nancy Pelosi, D-Calif., said in a statement Friday that this week’s attack occurred “without an Authorization for Use of Military Force against Iran” and “without the consultation of the Congress,” both of which are needed to ensure national security.

“The full Congress must be immediately briefed on this serious situation, and on the next steps under consideration by the administration, including the significant escalation of the deployment of additional troops to the region,” she said.

Senate Majority Leader Mitch McConnell, R-Ky., said Pentagon officials are working on an all-member briefing on Capitol Hill next week, after most lawmakers return from the holiday break. He also said he has spoken to Defense Secretary Mark Esper about the operation and expressed no reservations about the decision to kill Soleimani.

“Although I anticipate and welcome a debate about America’s interest in foreign policy in the Middle East, I recommend that all senators wait to review the facts and hear from the administration before passing much public judgment on this operation and its potential consequences,” he said in a floor speech on Friday.

Many members appear to have already made up their minds. Rep. Michael Waltz, R-Fla. and an Army veteran who served in Afghanistan, criticized Democratic colleagues for questioning the legal basis for the strike.

“Congressional authorization isn’t required for an act of self defense to prevent further attacks against our military,” he said on social media. “To sit and wait while Soleimani puts more Americans in body bags would be completely irresponsible of (the president).”

But Rep. Elissa Slotkin, D-Mich., who previously worked as a Middle East analyst for the CIA and Defense Department, said the move may have made U.S. personnel in the region less safe because White House officials have not developed a strategy with lawmakers to handle the potentially violent aftermath of such an operation.

“This administration, like all others, has the right to act in self-defense,” she said on social media. “But the administration must come to Congress immediately and consult. If military engagement is going to be protracted — which any informed assessment would consider — the administration must request an (authority for use of military force).”

Congress has been unable to find a compromise on a new military force authorization framework for years, despite fears from many lawmakers that authorities put in place in the aftermath of the 2001 attacks have been interpreted too broadly by multiple administrations.

The most recent legislation effort to pull back some of those presidential war powers failed last month, when congressional negotiators dropped new authorization language from the annual defense budget policy bill.

Scott Anderson, who works as the David M. Rubenstein fellow in governance studies at the Brookings Institution, said it is unclear whether the administration’s interpretation of those existing authorities will run afoul of Congress or outside legal arguments.

“It definitely seems this was an action which pushes the envelope in a number of regards, both under domestic and international law,” he told reporters in a conference call Friday. “I’m not sure that describing it as ‘illegal’ or ‘unlawful’ is necessarily correct because the legal questions tends to be viewed through a highly differential view of [executive power].”

But those questions are likely to take on extra focus in coming days as tensions in the region increase. Pentagon officials confirmed Friday that a force of nearly 4,000 soldiers would head to Kuwait and neighboring countries to act as a response force to regional threats. Earlier in the week, about 750 troops were sent to Iraq to help secure the U.S. embassy there.

House Armed Services Committee Chairman Adam Smith, D-Wash., said that move demands more and better communication between the White House and Congress.

“I do not want an open war with Iran, and neither do the American people,” he said.

“The administration must clearly articulate how this action, and potential future actions, will protect U.S. global interests while ensuring the safety and security of our personnel in the region and worldwide. The American people deserve to know why President Trump has brought us to the brink of another war and under what authorization.”

Stars & Stripes: [AFRICOM: US service member, two contractors killed in attack on Kenya base](#)

By JOHN VANDIVER | STARS AND STRIPES | Published: January 5, 2020

STUTTGART, Germany — One U.S. servicemember and two Defense Department contractors were killed Sunday in Kenya after their military base was overrun by al-Qaida-aligned militants, U.S. Africa Command said.

In addition, two DOD members were evacuated for treatment of wounds sustained in the attack at a Kenyan military compound used by U.S. counterterrorism forces. The names of the fallen are being withheld pending notification of next of kin, AFRICOM said.

“Our thoughts and prayers are with the families and friends of our teammates who lost their lives today,” said AFRICOM’s Gen. Stephen Townsend in a statement Sunday.

The attack occurred at the Kenyan military’s Manda Bay airfield, a base that plays a key role in supporting U.S. operations in Somalia. Al-Shabab fighters, who have been waging an insurgency

for more than decade in neighboring Somalia, stormed the base and used indirect and small-arms fire, AFRICOM said.

The fighters overran the base, but after an initial penetration of the perimeter, Kenyan and U.S. forces repelled the militants, AFRICOM said. Six contractor-operated civilian aircraft also were damaged during the battle, AFRICOM said.

The Manda Bay Airfield is used by U.S. forces for a variety of missions such as crisis-response efforts in the region.

AFRICOM said it was premature to comment on whether force protection levels for troops in Kenya are sufficient or in need of upgrade.

“That decision will ultimately reside with our Pentagon leadership after an assessment (or investigation) produces preliminary findings ... I’m unable to confirm the scope of what type of assessment will be conducted (considering we’re not even 24 hours outside the attack), but it’s customary after the death of a deployed U.S. service member,” said Samantha Reho, an AFRICOM spokeswoman, in a statement.

The killing of U.S. troops in combat in unexpected places in Africa has sparked military inquiries in the past.

In 2017, four U.S. soldiers were killed during an ambush in Niger that prompted an extensive Pentagon probe into whether troops were prepared for their mission and whether leaders took unnecessary risks. The investigation resulted in several reprimands of mostly lower-ranking officers and enlisted troops.

While al-Shabab has concentrated most of its efforts inside Somalia, it occasionally has conducted high-profile assaults outside its borders, most notably in Kenya. Sunday’s attack marks the first time U.S. forces have been killed by the group in Kenya.

While military officials have acknowledged al-Shabab doesn’t currently have the capacity to launch attacks in the West, AFRICOM officials say that group has ambitions to do so.

“The terrorist group has expressed the intent to attack the United States homeland and target Americans, but U.S. persistent pressure placed on them constrains their ability to carry out those desires,” AFRICOM said in a statement.

The U.S. has a small military presence in Kenya — about 300 personnel. In Somalia, the number of U.S. forces fluctuates, but hovers around 500. U.S. troops are involved in an effort to build up Somalia’s army and also serve as advisers in the fight against militants.

In 2019, AFRICOM stepped up operations against al-Shabab, conducting a record 63 airstrikes in Somalia, up from 47 the previous year.

The attack in Kenya on Sunday isn’t the first time U.S. forces have been forced to fight off al-Shabab fighters attempting to break into a base. In September, U.S. troops also were forced to fight and to call in airstrikes after a base used by American forces in the country — Baledogle Military Airfield — came under attack. No U.S. troops were killed or injured during that confrontation.

Col. Chris Karns, an AFRICOM spokesman, said the attack on Sunday was unrelated to events in Iraq, where a U.S. airstrike last week killed a top Iranian general.

Al-Shabab is aligned with al-Qaida and “very much has its own agenda,” Karns said. “Their intentions are to cause harm to innocent Africans as well as U.S. and Western interests. They certainly have a desire to export their brand of violence and hate more broadly.”

Townsend said the U.S. would remain committed to the fight against al-Shabab despite the casualties and that AFRICOM would “harden our resolve.”

“Alongside our African and international partners, we will pursue those responsible for this attack and al-Shabaab, who seeks to harm Americans and U.S. interests,” Townsend said. “We remain committed to preventing al-Shabaab from maintaining a safe haven to plan deadly attacks against the U.S. homeland, East African and international partners.”

Military Times: [New veterans find themselves employed and connected but battling health woes after discharge](#)

By: Patricia Kime | 2 days ago

Health issues are the main concern facing veterans in the first year after leaving the military — more than jobs or personal relationships, a new survey of nearly 10,000 veterans has found. While most veterans said they were satisfied and functioning well at work and in their social lives, more than half reported having a physical health problem and a third said they had a mental health condition.

The survey, conducted by researchers from the VA National Center for PTSD and elsewhere, also showed that women veterans had a higher prevalence of mental health conditions than men and lower satisfaction with overall health, while enlisted veterans reported poorer health and work satisfaction than officers.

The research, published Thursday in the American Journal of Preventive Medicine, sought to determine what the most pressing challenges encountered by veterans in the first year of transition — a period during which they must find a new home, job, health care and community. The results could help guide development programs to support former service members, explained lead author Dawne Vogt, a research health scientist with the VA’s National Center, the VA Boston Healthcare System and Boston University School of Medicine.

“We wanted to see what the broader population looks like in terms of their health and well-being, with the idea that this can inform how we prioritize the support that we provide to veterans as they go through transition,” Vogt said.

What the researchers found was that new veterans face a “pretty high health burden,” reporting chronic pain, sleeping disorders, anxiety, depression, arthritis and other conditions.

But the study also found that most of the 9,566 respondents were employed (68 percent), functioning well at work (86 percent) and satisfied with their jobs (65 percent), nine months after leaving service.

They also reported being in an intimate relationship (80 percent) and were satisfied with it (68 percent). And the majority also reported being involved in their communities (60 percent).

“Most veterans reported relatively high vocational and social well-being, a finding that highlights the resilience of the veteran population ... that should be reassuring to those concerned about the well-being of newly separated veterans,” the authors wrote.

Where these veterans encountered problems, however, is with their health.

The survey found troops who had deployed to war zones had more health problems than those never assigned to a combat zone, and women veterans reported higher rates of mental health conditions, including depression, anxiety and post-traumatic stress disorder, than men.

Men experienced higher rates of chronic pain, sleeping issues, arthritis, hearing loss or tinnitus, high blood pressure and high cholesterol at higher rates than women.

More than 200,000 troops leave military service each year. Advocates for veterans and researchers point to the first year of transition as a critical period for former service members' well-being and acclimating to civilian life.

While past studies have indicated that veterans flail in the first year of leaving the military, Vogt said their survey did not show this to be the case.

"There have been some studies ... that suggested there were lots of problems with veterans finding jobs. That's not really what we saw. We saw they were doing well in lots of ways," Vogt said.

The surveyors reached out to nearly 47,000 veterans who left the service in 2016 and received survey responses from 23 percent of the group.

Chief among findings was that enlisted veterans fared worse in the first year than officers, reporting higher rates of mental and physical health conditions, lower employment and lower rates of satisfaction with their health, jobs and relationships.

The survey also found that between six months and nine months after the transition, assessments of job performance declined, a data point Vogt said could be related to health problems.

Veterans who left the military in fall 2016 were invited to participate in the research.

Respondents were surveyed at three months and nine months after discharge.

While the small sample size points to the survey's limits, Vogt expressed confidence in the results because her team looked at characteristics of those who didn't respond, and after comparing them with the characteristics of those who took the survey, found similar circumstances, suggesting "our results aren't too biased," she said.

Vogt added that if the study had limitations, it is likely that the health conditions were under-reported because those surveyed may not recognize that they have a health problem or were reluctant to discuss personal health issues.

The researchers say their findings can help not only the VA, which provides services and care for veterans, but the 40,000 advocacy and health groups that provide programs and services to transitioning veterans.

Vogt said the findings suggest that health concerns should be prioritized when planning transition support and programs.

Vogt has discussed the findings with VA officials managing the Transition Assistance Program and the Solid Start program — an initiative in which VA contacts all new veterans in the year after discharge — to add a medical screening awareness component to such programs.

"The results are really applicable to those efforts," Vogt said.

She added that the team continued to survey the veterans after their departure and plans to analyze the results to determine how the health and well-being of these former service members changes over the years.

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