

Congressional Testimony

Alarming Incidents of White Supremacy in the Military—How to Stop It?

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*Working to stop the defamation of the
Jewish people and to secure justice and
fair treatment to all since 1913*

Chairwoman Speier, Ranking Member Kelly, and distinguished members of the Subcommittee: thank you on behalf of the Anti-Defamation League for the opportunity to testify before you today.

Since 1913, the mission of ADL has been to “stop the defamation of the Jewish people and to secure justice and fair treatment to all.” For decades, ADL has fought against bigotry and anti-Semitism by monitoring and exposing extremist groups and movements who spread hate and commit acts of violence. Through our Center on Extremism, widely recognized as a leading authority on combating extremism, terrorism and hate in the United States, ADL plays a prominent role in exposing extremist movements and activities, while helping communities and government agencies alike to combat them. ADL’s team of experts, analysts, and investigators track and disrupt extremist and terrorist activity, and provide law enforcement officials and the public with extensive resources, including analytic reports on extremist trends. We also offer unique resources, such as the Hate on Display Hate Symbols Database¹, which identifies symbols used by extremists, and the Hate, Extremism, Anti-Semitism and Terrorism (HEAT)TM Map, an online tool that provides details on extremist and anti-Semitic incidents nationwide that can be filtered by region and type.²

For decades, ADL has been proud to work closely with a variety of military personnel from all the services on numerous issues. ADL has, upon request, provided trainings or briefings related to extremism, terrorism and hate crimes for force protection officers, military police, prosecutors, recruiters, Equal Opportunity personnel, and the military’s criminal investigative organizations, including the Air Force’s Office of Special Investigations (OSI) , the Army’s Criminal Investigation Command (CID) , and the Navy’s Naval Criminal Investigative Service (NCIS). We have assisted with investigations and provided intelligence on potential extremists in the Armed Forces. And every year, we conduct Law Enforcement and Society training for the command staff of the US Army CID/Provost Marshal General, which focuses on the lessons of the Holocaust for law enforcement. We have been honored to assist the men and women working so dedicatedly to protect all Americans.

Extremists and the Military: The Nature of the Problem

Extreme social, political and religious movements pose many problems for the societies in which they are active, particularly when such movements engage in criminal or violent means to achieve their goals. ADL has long understood that adherents of extreme causes, such as the white supremacist movement, pose special problems when allowed to exist within key institutions dedicated to protecting the people of the United States. These institutions include first responders, law enforcement, and the military.

¹ Anti-Defamation League, Hate on DisplayTM Hate Symbols Database, (<https://www.adl.org/education-and-resources/resource-knowledge-base/hate-symbols>).

² Anti-Defamation League, *ADL H.E.A.T. Map: Hate, Extremism, Anti-Semitism, Terrorism* (<https://www.adl.org/heat-map>).

The unchecked presence of extremists in the military has already led to serious negative consequences for the services themselves as well as for the country and could again. These include:

- **Physical harm to service members and/or civilians as a result of hate crimes or other violence by extremist military personnel.** The shooting spree committed by Major Nidal Hasan at Fort Hood, Texas, in November 2009, which killed 13 people and injured more than 30 others, is a sobering example of the severity of this potential threat.³
- **Illegal activities such as the theft of military equipment.** Over the years, many extremist movements have viewed the military as a potential source of weaponry and equipment to be appropriated for arming and equipping themselves or for sale. In 2006, to give just one example, ADL provided evidence to the Army that a white supremacist in the 82nd Airborne Division was stealing military equipment. That person and another soldier were arrested in 2007, charged with selling stolen government property, including body armor and medical supplies, to an undercover FBI agent. At the time of their arrest, they were actually planning to steal a 105mm artillery piece.⁴
- **Security breaches.** Extremists also pose security risks, as they may convey military information to individuals or groups fighting for their cause. This was the case with Specialist Ryan Anderson of the Washington State National Guard, currently serving a life sentence for trying to provide information to Al Qaeda. Anderson's interests in extremism started with the right-wing militia movement but eventually moved to sympathy with Al Qaeda.⁵
- **Harm to morale, unit cohesion and personnel retention.** The presence of known extremists in a unit can be disruptive to morale and effectiveness. Moreover, service members who are members of racial, ethnic or religious minorities are less likely to stay in the military if they have negative experiences as a result of the behavior of extremists such as white supremacists. There is evidence that service members today are encountering such extremists. In 2017, the *Military Times* conducted a survey of over 1,100 service members that suggested that one in four had seen "examples of white nationalism" among their fellow service members. In 2019, they repeated the survey and found the percentage had risen to more than one in three.⁶
- **Harm to recruiting efforts.** Members of those same minority communities are less likely to consider enlistment if they believe that the services are a haven for extremists.

³ "Nidal Hasan Email Correspondence with Al-Awlaki Released," Anti-Defamation League, August 1, 2012 (<https://www.adl.org/blog/nidal-hasan-email-correspondence-with-al-awlaki-released>).

⁴ Kevin Maurer, "Soldiers charged with equipment thefts," *Fayette Observer*, June 22, 2007; "2 paratroopers charged with selling drugs, stolen equipment," WRAL.com, June 21, 2007, (<https://www.wral.com/news/local/story/1522034/>).

⁵ Eli Sanders, "Guardzman Given Life in Prison for Trying to Help Al Qaeda," *The New York Times*, September 4, 2004, (<https://www.nytimes.com/2004/09/04/us/guardsman-given-life-in-prison-for-trying-to-help-al-qaeda.html>).

⁶ Leo Shane III, "One in four troops sees white nationalism in the ranks," *Military Times*, October 23, 2017, (<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2017/10/23/military-times-poll-one-in-four-troops-sees-white-nationalism-in-the-ranks/>); Leo Shane III, "Signs of white supremacy, extremism up again in poll of active-duty troops," *Military Times*, February 6, 2020, (<https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/02/06/signs-of-white-supremacy-extremism-up-again-in-poll-of-active-duty-troops/>)

- **Harm to mission success.** In an era when the U.S. military is engaged in missions around the world, the negative actions of extremist service members may be directly counterproductive to mission success or may become fodder for propagandists of nations unfriendly to the United States. For example, Russian English-language propaganda outlet RT.com (short for *Russia Today*), which has a history of promoting divisiveness within and negative impressions of the United States, has publicized racism and white supremacy in the U.S. military.⁷

The military's unique command structure makes the need for leadership in rejecting extremism and bigotry essential. Instructors, officers, and upper class cadets have virtually absolute command authority over their students and subordinates, creating a unique potential for undue pressure on an individual to conform—or not to complain or report bigotry or race-based intimidation—in order not to jeopardize his or her military career. Conversely, commanders have an outsized ability to address problems within their ranks before they escalate and to discipline or separate those who participate in extremist behavior.

It is in the interests of both the American people as well as the military services themselves that extremists and extremist activity not be tolerated in the ranks.

Right-Wing Extremists and the U.S. Military

Different types of extremists have posed problems for the U.S. military at different times, but for much of the past century it is the presence of right-wing extremists in the officer corps and particularly in the enlisted ranks that has been the most consistent type of extremist-related problem experienced by the services.

Further, while there are many extreme right-wing causes in the United States, white supremacists have posed the greatest challenges to the U.S. military. There are numerous white supremacist movements alone in the United States, ranging from neo-Nazis to the alt right. Over the past quarter-century, the anti-government extremist militia movement, including its Three Percenter and Oath Keeper wings, has also come to be a significant challenge that should be addressed by the military. Indeed, the Oath Keepers explicitly seek to recruit military personnel to their cause. Finally, the past 20 years have also seen the rise of virulent anti-Muslim extremism, which has made some inroads into the military as well.⁸

⁷ Examples include “Many US troops say they encounter racism in the ranks – poll,” RT.com, October 24, 2017, (<https://www.rt.com/usa/407676-quarter-us-soldiers-white-nationalism/>); “National guardsman gave Florida Nazi group combat trainings to prepare for ‘race war,’” RT.com, August 13, 2012, (<https://www.rt.com/usa/guardsman-white-group-supremacist-585/>); and “Nazi extremists infiltrate US military,” RT.com, August 21, 2012, (<https://www.rt.com/usa/military-extremist-supremacist-page-231/>), among others.

⁸ On the different movements of the extreme right, see Mark Pitcavage, “Surveying the Landscape of the American Far Right,” George Washington University Program on Extremism, August 2019, (https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Surveying%20The%20Landscape%20of%20the%20American%20Far%20Right_0.pdf). For the Oath Keepers, see “The Oath Keepers: Anti-Government Extremists Recruiting Military and Police,” Anti-Defamation League, 2015, (<https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/combating-hate/The-Oath-Keepers-ADL-Report.pdf>).

ADL has expressed concern about the issue of right-wing extremists in the military for some years. In July 2009, ADL wrote to then-Secretary of Defense Robert M. Gates specifically to urge the Secretary “to take appropriate measures to deal with the problem of extremists within the ranks of our armed forces.” Over the previous three years, ADL had reported 72 suspected white supremacists to the various branches, including thirty-eight in the Army, two in the Army National Guard, four in the Navy, nineteen in the Marine Corps, two in the Air Force, and one in the Coast Guard, as well as six with an indeterminate service branch. ADL advocated “a renewed emphasis and increased attention to this issue.”⁹

Today, ten years later, the need to comprehensively address this issue has grown even greater.

The problem exists primarily in two forms: 1) people with extreme ideologies who attempt to join one of the military services; and 2) personnel already serving who join or become sympathetic to an extremist movement. While the number of service members who have extreme ideologies is certainly a small fraction of the overall number of personnel, such individuals can cause harm far disproportionate to their number. Moreover, both the number of extremist personnel and the problems they cause tend to increase during upswells of right-wing extremism in the broader society.

Historians have traced problems related to right-wing extremism in the military back to well before World War II, when officers such as Major General George Van Horn Moseley, a Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army, actively promoted anti-Semitic and white supremacist views within the U.S. Army officer corps. In the years before World War II, Moseley wanted refugees fleeing Nazi persecution in Europe—most of whom were Jews—to be sterilized before being admitted by the United States, claiming “only that way can we properly protect our future.”¹⁰

The services at the time were segregated, as they had been since the Civil War, and some officers opposed the move to desegregate the Armed Forces that began after World War II. One Air Force officer predicted that some officers, like himself, would be court-martialed for their opposition to desegregation. In fact, the integration of the military branches from 1946-1954 proved to be a success story, though it took longer for the National Guard to be integrated and for other key anti-discrimination measures to be implemented.¹¹

⁹ Glen S. Lewy and Abraham H. Foxman to The Honorable Robert M. Gates, July 29, 2009.

¹⁰ Joseph W. Bendersky, *The “Jewish Threat”: Anti-Semitic Politics of the U.S. Army*, New York (Basic Books, 2000), 250.

¹¹ Glenn Feldman, *Politics, Society and the Klan in Alabama, 1915-1949*, Tuscaloosa (University of Alabama Press, 1999), 287. On desegregation of the military in general, see Morris J. MacGregor, Jr., *Integration of the Armed Forces, 1940-1965*, Washington, D.C. (Center of Military History, 1981). ADL supported the integration of the military and related measures, such as providing integrated education for the children of military personnel; see Morton Puner, “The Armed Forces: An Integration Success Story,” *Anti-Defamation League Bulletin*, November 1962.

Despite this success, there were officers in the military who continued to promote extremist views, including to the troops. In the late 1950s, Major General Edwin Walker distributed right-wing literature to soldiers under his command and accused prominent public figures of loyalty to communism. The subsequent scandal resulted in a court martial and his resignation from the Army. Walker then became a leader in the far right, promoting white supremacy and conspiracy theories—as did a number of other high-ranking officers after their retirement, including Rear Admiral John Crommelin, Jr., Lieutenant General Edward Almond of the Army, and Lieutenant General Pedro del Valle of the Marine Corps, among others.¹²

It was following the Civil Rights Era, however, that the patterns emerged that to this day shape the issue of white supremacists and other right-wing extremists in the military. Since the 1980s, American society has experienced periodic upsurges in right-wing extremism. These surges occurred in the early-to-mid 1980s, in the mid-to-late 1990s, and during the period of 2008-2011. The United States is currently experiencing the fourth such resurgence of right-wing extremism, which began in 2015.

During each of these upswings in extremism, the military services experienced increased extremist activity within their ranks, in part because these surges typically cause an increase in the number of newly radicalized young white males, some of whom may join the military. The increased extremist presence eventually leads to major criminal incidents, sometimes including extreme violence. Following such scandals, the services have sometimes made partial reforms to address extremist-related issues, without adopting comprehensive approaches.

During the early-to-mid 1980s surge of right-wing extremism, white supremacists took an active part in the military. From 1980 to 1982, for example, some active-duty soldiers from Fort Hood joined the Texas Emergency Reserve, a large paramilitary group established by two Ku Klux Klan groups in order to harass and intimidate immigrant Vietnamese fishermen in Southeast Texas. In 1987, two soldiers stationed at Fort Bragg donned masks to tie two fellow soldiers to a tree and steal their rifles as part of a large military-equipment-theft ring operated by white supremacists. When federal agents solved the case in 1990, they found a large cache of military weapons and explosives, including what one ATF official described as “enough military explosives to destroy a city block.”

Nor is this merely ancient history; the ringleader of this cell, Sergeant Michael Tubbs, decades later became one of the ringleaders of the violent white supremacist protests in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017. Indeed, Tubbs is currently a defendant in a federal lawsuit in Virginia arising out of those protests, *Sines v. Kessler*, that ADL is helping to support and in which our Center on Extremism has provided expert input. The Sines plaintiffs, who suffered various injuries, have sued Ku Klux Klan and neo-Nazi groups, and other associated white supremacists, including Tubbs, currently a leader of the white supremacist group League of the South, for conspiring to engage in violence against racial minorities and their supporters. While ultimate resolution

¹² On Walker, Crommelin, and del Valle, see Clive Webb, *Rabble Rousers: The American Far Right in the Civil Rights Era*, Athens (University of Georgia Press, 2010, 103-150).

awaits another day, the court has held that the plaintiffs have plausibly alleged that the defendants formed a conspiracy to commit the racial violence that led to the plaintiffs' varied injuries.¹³

Following scandals in the 1980s involving military-related white supremacist incidents, Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger issued a directive prohibiting military members from actively participating in white supremacist groups. Prior to that, there was no such prohibition; in the late 1970s, a Navy spokesperson even said Klan membership was “no more illegal than membership in the Elks.”¹⁴

The 1980s surge also provides a cautionary tale of the potential consequences of failure to deal with the issue of extremism in the ranks. During the 1980s, so many right-wing extremists joined state defense forces—small state-run military forces allowed by federal law—that some units became controlled by extremists. In 1984, Texas had to disband a unit of its State Guard because of the activities of extremists. In 1987, Utah dismantled its state defense force after discovering that some members were providing training for Aryan Nations and engaging in other similar activities. In Ohio, some state defense force members broke away from the force to form their own private militia—which still exists today.¹⁵

In the mid-to-late 1990s, the U.S. experienced another surge of right-wing extremism, propelled not only by an upswing in white supremacy but also the rise of anti-government extremism in the form of the new militia movement. For the first time, the Internet helped play a role in the spread of extremist ideology. Both white supremacists and anti-government extremists enlarged their presence in the military services. Once more, problems such as theft increased; in 1997, for example, three New Hampshire militia members, one an Army reservist, were convicted of stealing \$100,000 in military equipment from Fort Devens. But the most serious incident occurred in 1995, when two active-duty soldiers stationed at Fort Bragg—both white

¹³ Anti-Defamation League, “Ku Klux Klan Paramilitary Activities: Report to National Executive Committee Anti-Defamation League of B'nai B'rith, Oct. 12-26, 1980, Dallas, Texas,” New York (Anti-Defamation League, 1980); “2 Soldiers and 2 Civilians Arrested in Theft of Huge Weapons Cache,” Associated Press story as published in *The New York Times*, November 19, 1980 (<https://www.nytimes.com/1990/11/19/us/2-soldiers-and-2-civilians-arrested-in-theft-of-huge-weapons-cache.html>); Kathleen Belew, *Bring the War Home: The White Power Movement and Paramilitary America*, Cambridge, Mass. (Harvard University Press, 2018), 135-137; Trymaine Lee, “The Other Michael Tubbs: Two Men, Two Radically Different Paths,” NBCNews.com, August 29, 2017 (<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/nbcblk/other-michael-tubbs-two-men-two-radically-different-paths-n794901>); “League of the South (LOS) [Backgrounder],” Anti-Defamation League, (<https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/league-of-the-south-los>); Brad Kutner, “Civil Lawsuit Against Charlottesville Rally Organizers Can Move Forward,” Courthouse News Service, July 10, 2018, (<https://www.courthousenews.com/civil-lawsuit-against-charlottesville-rally-organizers-can-move-forward/>).

¹⁴ Dave Philipps, “White Supremacism in the U.S. Military, Explained,” *The New York Times*, February 27, 2019 (<https://www.nytimes.com/2019/02/27/us/military-white-nationalists-extremists.html>).

¹⁵ Ed Connolly, “Scandals of the State Militias,” *The Nation* 252 (March 18, 1991): 338; Untitled UPI story, October 23, 1984; Untitled Associated Press story, October 23, 1984; “Preparedness training in Virginia,” *Washington Post*, August 9, 1987; Christopher Smith, “D.C. politics fueling a new wave of militias,” *Salt Lake Tribune*, September 5, 1994; Ulysses Torassa, Untitled story, States News Service, June 22, 1987; Myron Struck, Untitled story, State News Service, September 29, 1987; Kevin Maurer, “Soldiers charged with equipment thefts,” *Fayette Observer*, June 22, 2007.

supremacists—shot and killed an African-American couple in a horrific hate crime murder. This incident resulted in a major investigation of white supremacy at Fort Bragg and in the discharge of 20 members of the 82nd Airborne Division. That there was a problem at Fort Bragg should have been no surprise; at the time, one special forces sergeant even anonymously (under the pseudonym “Special Forces Underground”) published a magazine, *The Resister*, popular with the militia movement and white supremacists—and read by Timothy McVeigh. The Fort Bragg murders resulted in a tightening of regulations regarding extremism in the military to prohibit not just active participation but also membership in extremist groups.¹⁶

A third surge in right-wing extremism occurred roughly from 2008-2011. During that period, there was a major resurgence of the militia movement, including the rise of many calling themselves “Three Percenters” as well as others joining a new militia-related group called The Oath Keepers that was created to target active and former police officers, first responders and members of the military for recruitment. The evolution of the Internet, especially the rapid growth of social media during these years, once more played a significant role in spreading extremist ideology. During this period, much of the attention related to extremism in the military, by the military and the media alike, understandably focused on the 2009 Fort Hood shootings. Yet right-wing extremists, too, engaged in murder and terrorism in this time frame.

The most concerning incident involved a large anti-government militia group called FEAR (an acronym for Forever Enduring, Always Ready), formed by soldiers stationed at Fort Stewart in Georgia, whose members plotted a variety of different terrorist acts. The group’s leader, Private Isaac Aguigui, and other members murdered a fellow FEAR member and his girlfriend in 2011 out of fear of informants. During the police investigation of these murders, law enforcement officers also discovered that Aguigui had murdered his own pregnant wife in order to secure \$400,000 in insurance money that he used in part to help fund the activities of FEAR. At least 10 civilian and military members of FEAR were convicted on various charges stemming from the investigations. As happened during previous surges, Department of Defense regulations were revised and somewhat tightened in 2009.¹⁷

¹⁶ “Boastful leader of militia faces jail,” *Boston Globe*, March 4, 1997; “Second Ex-Paratrooper Gets Life In North Carolina Racial Killings,” *The New York Times*, May 13, 1997 (<https://www.nytimes.com/1997/05/13/us/second-ex-paratrooper-gets-life-in-north-carolina-racial-killings.html>); Gregory Walker, “Steven Barry becomes important figure in paramilitary underground,” *Intelligence Report*, Summer 1999, (<https://www.splcenter.org/fighting-hate/intelligence-report/1999/steven-barry-becomes-important-figure-paramilitary-underground>); Department of Defense Directive, Number 1325.6, “Guidelines for Handling Dissident and Protest Activities Among Members of the Armed Forces,” October 1, 1996 (<https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/a320448.pdf>). One white supremacist service member stationed at Fort Bragg at the time who was not detected by authorities was Wade Michael Page, who would in 2012 kill six people in a shooting spree at a Sikh temple in Wisconsin; see Megan McCloskey, “Sikh temple shooter promoted extremist views during his Army years,” *Stars and Stripes*, August 7, 2012, (<http://www.stripes.com/sikh-temple-shooter-promoted-extremist-views-during-his-army-years-1.185085>).

¹⁷ Marilyn Mayo and Mark Pitcavage, “Rage Grows in America: Anti-Government Conspiracies,” Anti-Defamation League, November 2009 (<https://www.adl.org/sites/default/files/documents/assets/pdf/combating-hate/Rage-Grows-In-America.pdf>); Nadya Labi, “Rogue Element: How an anti-government militia grew on a U.S. Army base,” *The New Yorker*, May 26, 2014, (<https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2014/05/26/rogue-element>); “Army private convicted of murdering pregnant wife,” CBSNews.com, March 27, 2014, (<https://www.cbsnews.com/news/army-private-convicted-of-murdering-pregnant-wife/>); Department of Defense Instruction Number 1325.06, November

Extremism in the Military in 2020

Today, the United States is experiencing yet another surge of right-wing extremism, one that began in 2015-2016. The previous surges primarily affected anti-government extremists, but the current one is largely driven by the alt right, the newest segment of the white supremacist movement. Its rise over the past decade has brought a significant influx of thousands of young white males into the white supremacist movement.¹⁸

ADL's data finds that of the 427 people killed by extremists in America between 2009 and 2018, 73% were killed by right-wing extremists—76% of them by white supremacists—making white supremacists the deadliest type of extremist movement in the United States in those ten years, by far.

Like previous upswells of the white supremacist movement, the current surge has affected the U.S. military. Based on monitoring extremist groups and movements, as well as information from public sources, ADL believes the number of extremists in the military has increased due to a higher percentage of white supremacists attempting to join the military and the development of white supremacist leanings among some currently-serving personnel. The overall percentage of extremists in the military remains quite low compared to the approximately 2.2 million men and women serving in the military on active duty or in the reserve components—but extremists cause problems far disproportionate to their numbers.

To an even greater degree than in previous surges of extremism, the Internet has played a role in the present one, with extremist content found on websites, discussion forums, chat rooms, social media, messaging apps, gaming and streaming sites, and other platforms. The rise of the alt right began as largely an Internet-driven phenomenon and only later expanded to the physical world. On-line radicalization—including radicalization of military members—is more common now than ever before, though most radicalization occurs as a combination of online and offline elements. It is no coincidence that many service members exposed in recent years by journalists and anti-racist activists were discovered because of their extensive online activities. The white supremacist online ecosystem, always evolving, poses problems for military authorities seeking to curb the spread of extremism in the ranks, as they may miss evidence of extremism that appears only online.

27, 2009, "Handling Dissident and Protest Activities Among Members of the Armed Forces," (<https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/132506p.pdf>); "Protecting the Force: Lessons from Fort Hood; Department of Defense Independent Review Related to Fort Hood," January 2010, (<https://fas.org/sgp/eprint/fthood.pdf>).

¹⁸ Mark Pitcavage, "New Hate and Old: The Changing Face of White Supremacy," Anti-Defamation League, 2018, (<https://www.adl.org/new-hate-and-old>); "Alt Right: A Primer on the New White Supremacy," Anti-Defamation League, 2016, (<https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/alt-right-a-primer-on-the-new-white-supremacy>); "From Alt Right to Alt Lite: Naming the Hate," Anti-Defamation League, 2017, (<https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/from-alt-right-to-alt-lite-naming-the-hate>).

The current surge of extremism, like previous ones, has had consequences for the military services. In the past few years, numerous serious criminal incidents have been linked to white supremacists currently serving as active-duty or reserve military personnel. Less than two weeks ago, Coast Guard Lieutenant Christopher Hasson was sentenced in federal court to 13 years in prison on weapons and other charges in connection with alleged plans to commit domestic terrorism.¹⁹

The FBI investigation into Hasson revealed chilling details, including the influence on Hasson by the manifesto of Norwegian terrorist and mass murderer Anders Behring Breivik. Internet searches that Hasson performed—often on his Coast Guard work computer—revealed his mindset and intention. Among these were terms such as “homemade C4,” “biological weapon,” “bomb [Timothy] McVeigh used,” and “best n-----killing gun.” Searches related to potential targets included “destruction of Washington DC,” “how to bring down the us government,” “where do congressmen and senators live when they are in DC,” “how to rid the us of jews,” “George Soros lives where,” “most liberal fed judges,” and “biggest donors to d[emocrats].”²⁰

In a document that investigators found on Hasson’s Coast Guard computer, Hasson claimed that “liberalist/globalist ideology” was destroying white people and there was “no way to counteract without violence.” According to Hasson, “much blood will have to be spilled to get whitey off the couch.” For that reason, he wrote, “I will strike. I can’t strike just to wound. I must find a way to deliver a blow that cannot be shaken off.”²¹

Prosecutors accurately summarized Hasson as a man “inspired by racist murderers” who “stockpiled assault weapons, studied violence, and intended to exact retribution on minorities and those he considered traitors.” Had law enforcement not caught him while he was still making his plans, they noted, “we now would be counting the bodies of the defendant’s victims instead of years of the defendant’s prison time.”²²

The Hasson incident is a shocking example of an extremist plotting a major terrorist act while serving as an active-duty officer in the U.S. Coast Guard. Yet it is by no means an isolated incident. Rather, it is one of numerous disturbing acts of violence, planned violence, or other criminal activity by white supremacists and other extremists that have emerged from the military in just the past few years.

¹⁹ Pete Williams, “White supremacist Coast Guard officer sentenced to 13 years in prison,” NBCNews.com, January 21, 2020 (<https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/white-supremacist-coast-guard-officer-sentenced-13-years-prison-n1127636>).

²⁰ Exhibit 19, United States. v. Christopher Paul Hasson, Case 8:19-cr-0096-GJH, Document 115-20, filed January 29, 2020, 5-8, 33, 55; Exhibit 23, Ibid. For these and many other references, see “Sentencing Memorandum by USA as to Christopher Paul Hasson (and attachments), entered January 29, 2020, United States v. Hasson (8:19-cr-00096), (<https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/14581072/united-states-v-hasson/>).

²¹ Exhibit 19, Ibid, 8.

²² Government’s Memorandum in Aid of Sentencing, entered January 17, 2020, 1.

Some of the other criminal incidents that have been uncovered include:

- **Topeka, Kansas, September 2019:** Jarret William Smith, a soldier stationed at Fort Riley and an alleged white supremacist, was charged with distributing information related to explosives and mass destruction. Smith allegedly offered to teach people to make explosive devices and talked about killing Antifa activists or attacking a local news station.²³
- **Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, June 2018:** Marine Lance Corporal Vasillios Pistolis was demoted and ejected from the Marines after a court martial related to his connections to white supremacist groups such as Atomwaffen Division and the Traditionalist Worker Party. Pistolis was photographed assaulting a man during the August 2017 “Unite the Right” white supremacist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.²⁴
- **Fort Myers, Florida, April 2018:** A soldier who was absent without leave, Alex Zwiefelhofer, and Craig Lang, a former Army specialist, were indicted for the double murder of a Florida couple who had met with them to sell them guns. Zwiefelhofer and Lang were extremists who in 2016 traveled to Ukraine to fight in an extreme right-wing Ukrainian militia against Russian separatists. The Army discharged Zwiefelhofer between the time he went AWOL and the time of the murders.²⁵
- **Tampa, Florida, June 2017:** Florida National Guardsman—and a founding member of the neo-Nazi group Atomwaffen Division—Brandon Russell was arrested after officers found explosives in his apartment while investigating the death of two of his roommates at the hands of a fourth roommate. Prosecutors claimed that Russell planned to use the explosives to attack civilians, nuclear facilities, and synagogues. Russell pleaded guilty in January 2018 to possessing an unregistered destructive device and unlawful storage of explosive materials.²⁶
- **Fayetteville, North Carolina, February 2017:** Russell Thomas Langford, a major in the Army Reserve, was sentenced to eight months of home confinement after pleading guilty in federal court to using a firearm to threaten members of a local mosque.²⁷

²³ “Soldier at Fort Riley Charged with Distributing Instructions for Bombs,” United States Attorney’s Office District of Kansas Press Release, September 23, 2019, (<https://www.justice.gov/usao-ks/pr/soldier-fort-riley-charged-distributing-instructions-bombs>).

²⁴ Shawn Snow, “27 reports of extremist activity by US service members over the past 5 years, DoD says,” *Marine Corps Times*, September 13, 2019, (<https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2019/09/13/27-reports-of-extremist-activity-by-us-service-members-over-the-past-5-years-dod-says/>).

²⁵ Mike Eckel and Christopher Miller, “Former U.S. Soldier Who Fought With Ukrainian Far-Right Militia Wanted for U.S. Murder,” Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty, September 26, 2019, (<https://www.rferl.org/a/former-u-s-soldier-who-fought-with-ukrainian-far-right-militia-wanted-for-u-s-murder/30185448.html>); Jordan Green, “Combat Vet. Ukrainian Freedom Fighter. Alleged Murderer: Craig Lang Was Always Looking for a War,” *Indy Week*, November 26, 2019, (<https://indyweek.com/news/longform/craig-lang-ukraine-murder-white-supremacist/>).

²⁶ Joanna Mendelson, “Atomwaffen Division (AWD),” Anti-Defamation League, n.d., (<https://www.adl.org/resources/backgrounders/atomwaffen-division-awd>).

²⁷ Tasneem Nashrulla, “Army Reserve Officer Arrested for Targeting a Mosque Threatened to Kill Retired Muslim Army Captain,” *BuzzFeed News*, June 10, 2016, (<https://www.buzzfeednews.com/article/tasneemnashrulla/armed-suspect-arrested-for-threatening-a-muslim-man-who-serv#.by6K4Vm6l>); “North Carolina Man Sentenced for Threats Against Mosque Members in Raeford, North Carolina,” Department of Justice press release, February 2,

Beyond these criminal incidents there have been many more recent incidents involving white supremacists on active duty, or in the National Guard or Reserves, who attended white supremacist events, spread white supremacist propaganda, participated in white supremacist groups, posted in white supremacist discussion forums, or engaged in other similar activities.

Just a few selected examples from 2019 alone:

- **Atlanta, Georgia, December 2019:** Two National Guardsmen were discharged after their membership in a white supremacist group and their appearance carrying signs with white supremacist slogans at a white supremacist event became public.²⁸
- **Camp Lejeune, North Carolina, November 2019:** Marine Corps officials began an investigation into a lance corporal after he was identified as having been active on a white supremacist message board.²⁹
- **Colorado Springs, Colorado, September 2019:** An Air Force master sergeant was demoted and now faces possible discharge proceedings after he was identified as a chapter leader of the white supremacist group Identity Evropa.³⁰
- **Kaneohe Bay, Hawaii, June 2019:** A Marine lance corporal was discharged after admitting to having promoted white supremacist ideology online.³¹
- **Tacoma, Washington, April 2019:** An enlisted soldier left the Army after anti-racist activists exposed his active membership in the white supremacist group Identity Evropa. An Army spokesperson would not confirm if he had been discharged.³²
- **San Diego, California, May 2019:** A Marine lance corporal was discharged from the Marine Reserves after being identified taking part in Identity Evropa events and attending the white supremacist “Unite the Right” rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, in 2017.³³

2017, (<https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/north-carolina-man-sentenced-threats-against-mosque-members-raeford-north-carolina>).

²⁸ Chris Joyner, “National Guard drops two Georgians after investigating extremist ties,” *Atlanta Journal-Constitution*, December 26, 2019, (<https://www.ajc.com/news/national-guard-drops-two-georgians-after-investigating-extremist-ties/>).

²⁹ James Laporta and Asher Stockler, “Active duty marine who posted racist slurs on neo-Nazi website is identified: ‘Anybody else with our views?’” *Newsweek*, November 18, 2019, (<https://www.newsweek.com/active-duty-marine-neo-nazi-website-white-supremacist-identified-1470487>).

³⁰ Elise Schmelzer, “Air Force moves to discharge Colorado sergeant tied to white supremacist group,” *Denver Post*, December 17, 2019, (<https://www.denverpost.com/2019/12/17/air-force-identity-evropa-cory-reeves/>).

³¹ Gina Harkins, “Marine Lance Corporal Will Be Kicked Out Over Racist Social Media Posts,” *Military.com*, June 11, 2019, (<https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/06/11/marine-lance-corporal-will-be-kicked-out-over-racist-social-media-posts.html>).

³² Christopher Mathias, “After HuffPost Investigation, 4 White Nationalists Out of U.S. Military—But Others Allowed to Remain,” *Huffington Post*, August 7, 2019, (https://www.huffpost.com/entry/white-nationalists-military-kicked-out-huffpost-investigation_n_5d4b0f83e4b0066eb70b9945).

³³ Shawn Snow, “27 reports of extremist activity;” “Two Years Ago, They Marched in Charlottesville. Where Are They Now?” *Anti-Defamation League*, August 8, 2019, (<https://www.adl.org/blog/two-years-ago-they-marched-in-charlottesville-where-are-they-now>).

- **Stamford, Connecticut, March 2019:** The Marines administratively discharged a Marine Reserve lance corporal for hosting Identity Evropa events and distributing white supremacist propaganda on college campuses in Connecticut and New York.³⁴
- **Jackson, Tennessee, March 2019:** A lieutenant colonel in the Army Reserve was exposed as a participant on an online chat site linked to Identity Evropa. In posts made to the site, the colonel allegedly discussed distributing white supremacist propaganda in Tennessee and Mississippi. As of December 2019, the colonel was still in the Army Reserve.³⁵
- **Brighton, New York, March 2019:** Local police cited a University of Rochester ROTC cadet and member of the Army Reserve for violating town code after his fingerprints were allegedly found during an investigation into a rash of white supremacist fliers and stickers. He has allegedly been allowed to stay in the military.³⁶

Unfortunately, these are far from the only incidents involving extremists and the military over the past few years. That almost all of the extremists in these examples were initially exposed by journalists or anti-racist activists is another troubling sign that the military branches may not be engaged in sufficient self-scrutiny.

Coming to Grips with Extremism in the Military

With over two million men and women in the active duty and reserve components, the U.S. military is a large segment of the American population, representative enough that it will always have some extremists within its ranks or seeking to join them. Moreover, the history of the past several decades has amply demonstrated that surges of white supremacy and other forms of extremism in the general population are mirrored by an increase in the number of extremists in the military, as well as the problems caused by those extremists.

It's not really a question of if there are extremists in the military. They exist—not in huge numbers, but in numbers large enough to cause significant problems, including a potential for violence and terrorism. The question really is, how can the military services and the Department of Defense better deal with this problem?

The Department and the military branches must seek to prevent extremists from entering their ranks in the first place, while having measures in place to detect and discharge already-serving members who become involved in extremist causes. To do this, the Department and the services need not only comprehensive and effective regulations, but also must provide systematic training

³⁴ Christopher Mathias, "After HuffPost Investigation."

³⁵ Katie Shephard, "'Vile and disturbing': Army unit marks Battle of the Bulge with picture of Nazi war criminal who massacred Americans," *Washington Post*, December 17, 2019, (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/nation/2019/12/17/joachim-peiper-nazi-war-criminal-photo-shared-us-army-units-battle-bulge/>).

³⁶ Trevor Whitestone, "UR senior linked to spate of white nationalist fliers in Brighton," *Campus Times*, March 5, 2019, (<http://www.campustimes.org/2019/03/05/ur-senior-linked-to-spate-of-white-nationalist-fliers-in-brighton/>); Christopher Mathias, "After HuffPost Investigation."

to all relevant personnel, both on the regulations and on their responsibilities in this area and the tools at their disposal.

ADL's experiences working with the military branches over the years on the issue of extremism have led us to be concerned that some personnel have lacked clear training and guidance and that policies and regulations have not always been widely and uniformly implemented. This has sometimes left decision-makers to their own devices without clear understanding of what they should do in particular situations involving service members with extremist ties. The result has been that some personnel are well-versed and responsive to extremist-related issues, while others are not. Some may be aware of tools, such as administrative discharges, that may be available to them, while others may not.

It is important that all military recruiters and initial entry trainers receive uniform training on how to detect signs of extremist activism among recruits and newly-inducted personnel, and how to respond accordingly. It is important that all company-grade officers and senior non-commissioned officers, all advanced trainers, equal opportunity officers, civilian investigators and other relevant personnel have training on detecting signs of extremist involvement by service members under their purview and on how to implement relevant regulations. Moreover, to allow these people to perform effectively, the regulations on extremist-related issues ranging from prohibited activities to prohibited tattoos must be clear, uniform from service to service, and comprehensive.

First Amendment freedoms, including free speech protections, are a core American value that ADL strongly supports. Like many other rights more liberally exercised in the civilian sphere, however, free speech may be curtailed in the military context due to the military's necessity for good order and discipline. Superiors who detect signs of extremist activism or involvement should take action where appropriate, but accused military personnel should be given due process.

ADL understands how important it is that the Armed Services prevent adherents of extremist causes from entering the ranks and appropriately address those who are found in service. As such, ADL offers our expertise and experience to help the Department of Defense and the separate branches tackle this serious issue, including assistance in developing training curricula, as well as train-the-trainer events.

The U.S. Army, Navy, Air Force, Marines, and Coast Guard have protected this nation well in the past—and will continue to do so into the future, along with the Space Force. It is important that extremists in the military are not allowed to undermine this mission or harm their brothers and sisters in arms or the American people.

POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

1) Commanders and DoD Leaders Must Lead

In September 2017, Lieutenant General Jay Silveria, Superintendent of the U.S. Air Force Academy, set an excellent standard for a forceful response to bigotry in his strong, eloquent repudiation of hate at a school-wide assembly when racial slurs appeared in the Academy's preparatory school dormitory and photos were shared on social media. General Silveria told the assembly of nearly 5,500 students, faculty, and command staff: "If you can't treat someone with dignity and respect, Get out!" The right to free speech is a core value, but the promotion of hate should be vehemently and consistently rejected. Military leaders are uniquely capable of influencing those who serve below them by speaking out clearly against hate and extremism and by ensuring that these issues are taken seriously throughout the ranks.³⁷

2) Provide Training and Resources to Prevent Extremists From Entering the Military

The military services must have comprehensive policies and procedures in place to prevent extremists from joining the military. Recruiters and others charged with promoting accessions in the Armed Forces must be trained on these procedures and on symbols associated with hate groups and extremists that could prompt appropriate concerns about recruiting a particular individual.

3) DoD and Service Policy and Reporting Regarding White Supremacist and Extremist Activity Must Be Clear, Transparent and Consistent

The regulations on extremist-related issues ranging from prohibited activities to prohibited tattoos must be clear, uniform from service to service, and comprehensive. Commanders, NCOs and investigators must have clear and consistent guidance regarding their options—including discharges or separations when appropriate—for handling documented extremist activities as well as early stage interventions to stop the radicalization process. In instances when white supremacist activity is documented, separation or prosecution under the UCMJ should be prioritized.

Further, it is critical that the military's efforts be transparent to engender faith among service members, their families and all Americans. The Department and services should consistently track and label extremist activity and any resulting separations and, where appropriate, provide referrals to civilian law enforcement agencies to ensure that this information is not lost in the separation process.

³⁷ After an investigation, officials found that the scrawled slur in a dormitory was a hoax committed by one of its targets, a black cadet candidate, who was actually responsible for the act. General Silveria, again, responded appropriately: "Regardless of the circumstances under which those words were written, they were written, and that deserved to be addressed...You can never overemphasize the need for a culture of dignity and respect — and those who don't understand those concepts, aren't welcome here." Tom Roeder, "Air Force Academy finds cadet candidate responsible for racist messages," Colorado Springs Gazette, November 7, 2017, (https://gazette.com/air-force-academy-finds-cadet-candidate-responsible-for-racist-messages/article_e0abd653-e47b-5b6f-837b-d793a8369e34.html).

4) **Provide Training and Resources to Detect, Discipline and Discharge Service Members Involved in Promoting Hate Violence or Extremist Activities**

The Department and the military services should provide regular, comprehensive training on existing regulations that set out the terms for how to handle involvement in extremist activities. Policies are only as effective as their implementation and good implementation requires proper training. All company-grade officers and senior non-commissioned officers, all initial entry and advanced trainers, equal opportunity officers, civilian investigators, and other relevant personnel should be trained on detecting signs of extremist involvement among service members and on how to understand and implement relevant regulations. DoD and the services should incorporate the best tools and expertise in identifying and addressing radicalization and extremism, including partnering with civil society organizations that can provide expertise on the radicalization process and appropriate interventions.

5) **Carefully Vet Individuals Selected to Provide Hate and Extremism Training for Bias**

Some outside experts hired to teach programs designed to address diversity and equal opportunity have, instead, promoted stereotypical or inaccurate information about Muslims, Islam, and other groups and their connection with terrorism. These views are not only inaccurate but undermine the mission, and should be treated as such. Similar reviews have taken place in the past,³⁸ and yet the risk of bigoted training endures. We urge a prompt review of all training materials to ensure service members are trained accurately about the threats we face while preserving core American values in how those threats are conveyed.

6) **Assess the Impact on the Force of White Supremacy,**

A recent survey suggests that many service members are exposed to white supremacy. We recommend the Department and services study the impact on good order, discipline, morale and readiness of this exposure. Further, given the overt misogyny present within the alt right segment of the white supremacist movement and the recent rise of another extremist movement, the so-called “incels” or involuntary celibates, who have a belief system centered around misogyny, we encourage DoD to study whether extremist-related misogyny specifically has had any impact on the Armed Forces and what measures could be adopted to prevent it from having any in the future.

³⁸ Spencer Ackerman, “FBI Calls In The Army To Fix Its Counterterrorism Training,” Wired. November 3, 2011, (<https://www.wired.com/2011/11/fbi-west-point-training/>)