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**ADL Foundation**

Michael Sheetz, President

November 22, 2022

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer  
Majority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Nancy Pelosi  
Speaker  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Jack Reed  
Chairman  
Senate Committee on Armed Services  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Adam Smith  
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House Committee on Armed Services  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell  
Minority Leader  
United States Senate  
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Kevin McCarthy  
Minority Leader  
United States House of Representatives  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable James Inhofe  
Ranking Member  
Senate Committee on Armed Services  
Washington, D.C. 20510

The Honorable Mike Rogers  
Ranking Member  
House Committee on Armed Services  
Washington, D.C. 20510

Dear Majority Leader Schumer, Minority Leader McConnell, Speaker Pelosi, Minority Leader McCarthy, Chairman Reed, Ranking Member Inhofe, Chairman Smith, and Ranking Member Rogers:

As you finalize the Fiscal Year 2023 National Defense Authorization Act (FY 2023 NDAA), we strongly urge you to accept House approved amendments outlined in this letter that address the threat of extremism to U.S. national security, specifically to our armed forces and uniformed services, and to remove the Senate report language that calls on the U.S. Department of Defense to stop programs to mitigate extremism.

ADL remains deeply concerned by violent extremists’ attempted recruitment from and targeting of government institutions, and the severe danger extremism poses to the entire nation. While we agree with the Senate Armed Services Committee’s assertion that “the vast majority of servicemembers serve with honor and distinction,” even a small number of unchecked extremists in the ranks is a stain on the credibility of America’s armed forces and can cause harm far disproportionate to their number. The threat of extremism to the armed forces and uniformed services is too important to be left unaddressed. We call upon you to ensure that key anti-extremism provisions passed in the House are included in the final FY2023 NDAA legislation.

There is significant evidence that servicemembers today are encountering extremist personnel. A 2019 [Military Times survey](#) revealed that “[m]ore than one-third of all active-duty troops and more than half of minority service members say they have personally witnessed examples of white nationalism or ideological-driven racism within the ranks.” In 2020, 6.4 percent of all domestic terrorist attacks and plots were committed by one or more active-duty or reserve members, according to the [Center for Strategic and International Studies](#). One [long-term study](#) found that 23 percent of far-right extremists arrested between 1948 and 2018 had a military background.

Extremism in the military is not a new problem nor a small one, with direct consequences for the operational effectiveness, safety, and security of our armed forces. ADL’s Center on Extremism (COE) has tracked the issue of extremists in military ranks and for more than 20 years has regularly identified serving extremists and reported them to the military for investigation and action. COE’s research has found that extremist groups like the [Oath Keepers](#) explicitly focus on recruiting current and former military, law enforcement, and first responder personnel. The Oath Keepers is a collection of right-wing anti-government extremists who are part of the [militia movement](#), which believes that the federal government has been co-opted by a shadowy conspiracy that is trying to strip American citizens of their rights.

Moreover, a [2021 COE report](#) revealed that extremism in the ranks has harmed the force in multiple ways, leading to:

- **Physical harm to service members and/or civilians because 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, killed 13 people and injured more than 30 others, [most of whom were servicemembers](#). This was a sobering example of the severity of this potential threat.
- **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. For example, in 2006 a white supremacist in the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division of the Army was caught stealing military equipment. That person and another soldier [were arrested in 2007](#), charged with selling stolen government property, including body armor and medical supplies. At the time of their arrest, they were planning to steal a 105mm artillery piece.
- **Security breaches.** Extremists also pose security risks, as they may convey military information to individuals or groups. 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](#) in 2004. Anderson’s interests in extremism started with the right-wing militia movement but eventually moved to sympathy with al Qaeda.
- **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.

- **Harm to recruiting efforts.** Members of minority communities are less likely to consider enlistment if they believe that the services are a haven for extremists.
- **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 on a number of occasions.

For a comprehensive list of recent examples of the threat extremism poses to the military, see Appendix 1.

We urge the House and Senate Armed Services Committees to preserve the amendments passed in the [House of Representatives’ FY 2023 NDAA](#) aimed at prioritizing the threat domestic extremism poses to our military and ensure these provisions remain in the final FY23 NDAA:

- SEC. 1036. REPORT ON THREAT POSED BY DOMESTIC TERRORISTS – Sponsored by Rep. Sheila Jackson Lee (TX)
  - Directs the Secretary of Defense to report to Congress in not less than 180 days the results of its evaluation as to the extent, if any, of the threat to national security posed by domestic terrorist groups and organizations motivated by a belief system of white supremacy, such as the Proud Boys and Boogaloo.
- SEC. 1336. ANNUAL REPORT ON ROLE OF ANTISEMITISM IN VIOLENT EXTREMIST MOVEMENTS – Sponsored by Rep. Kathy Manning (NC)
  - Requires the Secretary of Defense to report to Congress on the role of antisemitism in violent extremist movements, and the threat that global antisemitism and violent extremist movements pose to United States Armed Forces and national security.
- SEC. 5814. INTERAGENCY REPORT ON EXTREMIST ACTIVITY – Sponsored by Rep. Brad Schneider (IL)
  - Directs the FBI, Department of Homeland Security, and the Secretary of Defense to publish a report that analyzes and sets out strategies to combat White supremacist and neo-Nazi activity in the uniformed services and Federal law enforcement agencies not later than 180 days after enactment and every 6 months thereafter.
- SEC. 5815. REPORTING ON PREVIOUS FEDERAL BUREAU OF INVESTIGATION AND DEPARTMENT OF HOMELAND SECURITY REQUIREMENTS – Sponsored by Rep. Kathleen Rice (NY) and Rep. Brad Schneider (IL)

- Requires a report to Congress by the FBI and DHS, in consultation with DNI, on compliance with reporting requirements under the FY20 NDAA related to domestic terrorism and a summary of findings; requires a GAO report on FBI, DHS, and DNI compliance with domestic violent extremism transparency mechanisms required by Federal law.
- SEC. 599G. REPORT ON INSTANCES OF ANTISEMITISM – Sponsored by Rep. Josh Gottheimer (NJ)
  - Requires each military service to report on all substantiated administrative investigations or instances of antisemitism within the Equal Opportunity Program.
- SEC. 1079K. ANNUAL REPORT ON USE OF SOCIAL MEDIA BY FOREIGN TERRORIST ORGANIZATIONS – Sponsored by Rep. Josh Gottheimer (NJ)
  - Requires the Secretary of Defense, in coordination with the Secretary of State, to report to Congress on the use of online social media by U.S. State Department-designated foreign terrorist organizations, and the threat posed to U.S. national security by online radicalization.

We urge you to include these common sense amendments to address the threat extremism poses to our military service in the FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act. A bipartisan, whole-of-government approach is needed to counter the extremist threat to every facet of our society, and that approach cannot be successful if it fails to include the ways in which extremism impacts our military.

Sincerely,



Max Sevilla  
Vice President for Government Relations, Advocacy and Community Engagement  
ADL (Anti-Defamation League)

## Appendix 1 Recent Historical Perspectives

In addition to threatening the integrity of the armed forces, extremists with a military background pose a serious threat to society more broadly and often play an outsized role in extremist groups. For example, [half of the defendants facing sedition charges from the January 6<sup>th</sup> insurrection – the most serious charges stemming from the breach – are U.S. military veterans](#). Extremist movements recruit veterans and active-duty service members not only for their skills and potential access to resources, but because they recognize the symbolic value that the U.S. military holds in society, and they hope to leverage that value to gain legitimacy for their extremist ideologies and organizations. American society holds veterans as the ideal citizen, one which would lay their life down for the cause of democracy. Extremist organizations understand that if even one member of the military can be swayed to their corrupted ideology, the impact that would have on the general public’s perception of their organization is worth the effort. In short, extremist organizations seek to weaponize America’s service members against our national ideals.

Among the dozens of cases over the last few years, a few examples illustrate this threat:

- [Long Island, New York, June 2022](#): Matthew Belanger, a former U.S. Marine and member of far-right neo-Nazi group, “Rapekrieg,” was arrested for allegedly plotting an [attack on a New York synagogue](#), as well as mass murder and sexual assault to “decrease the number of minority residents” in the United States.
- [Las Vegas, Nevada June 2020](#): Army Reservist Andrew Lynam was indicted with two others – both U.S. military veterans – on state charges of terrorism and weapons, as well as federal conspiracy and weapons charges. The trio were actively engaged in the anti-government extremist Boogaloo movement and discussed targeting law enforcement at a peaceful protest merely to cause chaos and confusion. They also considered plans to attack a power substation. [Lynam administered a popular Boogaloo Facebook group and was in touch with members in Nevada as well as other states](#). At a protest, Lynam reportedly said that his group was “[not for people who were joking around](#)” but was for “[people who want to violently overthrow the U.S. government](#).” All three suspects are still awaiting trial.
- [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.
- [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.
- [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.

The January 6 attack on the Capitol further exposed the scope and threat of this problem. Data from the [University of Maryland National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism \(START\)](#), shows that over 150 individuals with a military background have been charged due to their participation in the Capitol breach on January 6, 2021. And as the [George Washington University's Program on Extremism reports](#), "37% of individuals with military experience had affiliations to domestic violent extremist (DVE) organizations like the Oath Keepers and the Proud Boys, around four times more likely to be a part of such groups than those without military experience. Some individuals with military experience held leadership positions in these organizations." The involvement of active duty and retired Service members in the January 6 attack was one of the reasons that the [Secretary of Defense called for a stand down in February 2021](#) to address extremism in the Services.

Once enlisted, extremists in military service detract from order, discipline, and morale within the ranks by fostering environments in which minority personnel do not feel valued or safe. They may become insider threats who use their authorized access to Department facilities to harm the Services or nation. When right-wing extremism experiences surges in American society, those surges are also reflected in the military.

In December 2021, Secretary Austin's [review](#) to explore options for discovering and mitigating the threat of extremists in the ranks concluded that: "Extremist activity within the Department of Defense is rare, but even the actions of a few can have an outsized impact on unit cohesion, morale and readiness – and the physical harm some of these activities can engender can undermine the safety of the Total Force. The Department will continue to address insider threats and other activities that might undermine unit cohesion, including extremist activity. These efforts will improve the readiness of our Total Force, ensuring that the United States continues to have the finest, most disciplined military in the world."