
November 18, 2022

The Honorable Charles E. Schumer
Majority Leader
United States Senate
Senate S-221, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

The Honorable Mitch McConnell
Minority Leader
United States
S-230, The Capitol
Washington, DC 20510

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

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

The Honorable Adam Smith
Chairman
House 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, Ranking Member Rogers:

We at Human Rights First and Veterans for American Ideals¹ (VFAI) are writing to express our concern that the upcoming FY 2023 National Defense Authorization Act, and accompanying report, may exclude a call for resources and policies to address extremism and antisemitism in the ranks, as recommended by the Countering Extremist Activity Working Group commissioned by Secretary Austin in 2021. Furthermore, we are concerned by language in the Senate Armed Services Committee Report suggesting that domestic extremism is not an urgent threat.

We agree with Secretary Austin that “[E]xtremist 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.” We are also increasingly concerned that domestic extremists are targeting veterans for recruitment in an attempt to leverage their leadership, technical skills, and widespread credibility in our society.

¹ VFAI is a project of Human Rights First that represents over 11,000 veterans and allies, who continue their service to America by upholding, defending, and advocating for human rights at home and abroad. We have a responsibility to protect veterans and the military community from the extremist actors, whose presence in the ranks threatens the reputation and effectiveness of the armed services.

A body of research and expert analysis supports the working group's conclusion. For example, one study found that 23 percent of far-right extremists were veterans or active duty service members. Research from the project showed that 150 active or former service members were charged in connection with the January 6th attack on the Capitol. Our forthcoming research on the antisemitic QAnon conspiracy movement identifies over 25 QAnon-associated influencers with a military background, who use their credibility as veterans to promote anti-democratic and discriminatory propaganda. Furthermore, earlier this week, the heads of the FBI, DHS, and NCTC all testified about the magnitude of the threat posed by domestic extremism.

We were encouraged that the House FY23 NDAA bill directly addressed the extremist threat in the military, especially Rep. Schneider's amendment requiring the Secretary of Defense to regularly report on progress in this area. We urge you to continue to address the threat that extremists in the ranks pose to the military by keeping the following amendments which passed the House and were incorporated in the House version of the FY23 NDAA in the final FY23 NDAA:

- SEC. 1036. REPORT ON THREAT POSED BY DOMESTIC TERRORISTS - 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 - 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 - 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 - 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 - 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 - 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.

As human rights defenders and veterans, we understand how critical it is to root out extremism from the armed forces. Our national security is entirely dependent on the unit cohesion and trust that servicemembers place in each other. Extremism in the ranks, no matter how small or imperceptible from the outside, has an exponentially large and damaging effect on a unit's combat effectiveness. It must be addressed immediately and with the full support of every level of government, lest we risk the breakdown of the shared bonds of national service which makes the United States military the greatest fighting force on earth.



The issue of extremism in the military is an immediate threat both to the men and women who serve, our veterans, as well as to our nation and we urge you to address this threat to our democracy by including the House provisions in the final FY23 National Defense Authorization Act.

Sincerely,

Michael Breen
President and CEO, Human Rights First

Christopher Purdy
Director, Veterans for American Ideals

Erin E. Wilson
Senior Director, Extremism & Human Rights Program, Human Rights First

CC:
Congressman Brad Schneider
Congresswoman Sheila Jackson Lee
Congresswoman Kathy Manning
Congresswoman Kathleen Rice
Congressman Josh Gottheimer