

September 13, 2023

The Honorable Lloyd J. Austin III
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Austin:

We, the undersigned individuals and organizations, are committed to addressing white supremacy and other forms of extremism impacting the military and veteran communities, and we urge the Department of Defense (DoD) to issue a report on your progress to confront this threat.

We welcomed [your stand-down](#) in February 2021 to address extremism, the establishment of the Countering Extremist Activity Working Group (CEAWG) in April 2021, and the [CEAWG's final report](#) in December 2021, which provided a path forward on planned actions and recommendations. In your [December 20, 2021 memo accompanying the release of the CEAWG's report](#), you stated that “the Department has revised its accessions screening and transition materials, will strengthen our vetting and insider threat programs, and will increase training to address and counter extremist activities.” You directed the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness and the Under Secretary of Defense for Intelligence and Security to oversee the implementation of these actions to ensure swift adoption across the entire DoD.

Since the report's release, however, the Department has made little information public regarding whether the DoD is successfully implementing the report's recommendations or has made other progress in mitigating this threat. For example, your Department ordered a study on extremism impacting the total force, [which has reportedly been completed](#), but findings have not been publicized. Other recommendations made by the CEAWG involved an assessment of resources needed to update insider threat processes, (including an anonymous hotline to report concerns), and developing a training program to educate servicemembers and DoD civilians on extremist threats in the military. While the DoD has [publicly](#) stated they are implementing relevant training, no details have been provided, nor any other information on progress on improving insider threat programs and policies. A disturbing [recent USA Today investigation](#) found little or no progress on 20 reforms proposed by the Department and the CEAWG, stating that “Most steps in the process are stalled or inactive, and the reforms experts said were most important haven't happened.”

A [recently-released Department Inspector General's report](#) documented ineffective screening for extremist and criminal gang behavior among new recruits, “increasing the potential for future security risks and disruptions to good order, morale, and discipline.”

More than a thousand persons have been arrested in connection with the deadly January 6th attack on the U.S. Capitol – a disproportionate number of whom had military experience compared to the general population, including [at least 5 active duty servicemembers](#). In the

meantime, cases of veteran and active-duty extremists continue to emerge. In June 2023, an active duty Marine was arrested for allegedly [firebombing a women's health clinic and abortion provider](#). [In April 2023](#), a white supremacist soldier at Fort Bragg was arrested on gun charges. [In February 2023](#), a Neo-Nazi veteran, who had already served time for weapons charges, was re-arrested for plotting to attack a power grid. [In June 2022](#), four veterans and a member of the National Guard who were members of a white supremacist organization were arrested for conspiracy to disrupt an LGBTQ+ Pride event.

As close observers in this field, we understand the urgency of this threat and the impact it has on servicemembers, veterans, and their families. In addition to the recent arrests, extensive data demonstrate that extremism among the military and veteran communities pose grave risks to public safety, national security, and to active duty servicemembers [themselves](#). According to a report from [the University of Maryland's National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism \(START\)](#), between 1990 and August, 2023, 659 individuals with military backgrounds were arrested for committing extremist crimes. While these data represent only a fraction of servicemembers and veterans, the same research shows that they have an outsized impact in extremist groups due to their unique skill set and position in society. Indeed, among extremists, those with military backgrounds are more likely to plan or to carry out [mass casualty terrorist attacks](#).

Extremism undermines the strength of the military and our democracy. As [you have emphasized](#) “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 our people.” We owe it to those who are serving and who have served to make addressing this threat a priority.

We urge the DoD to continue the essential work you have begun in addressing white supremacy and other forms of extremism in the military – and to inform Congress and the American public about progress made towards fulfilling these critical commitments and recommendations. Thank you for your attention to this matter.

Signed,

Veterans' and Military Families' Organizations

Common Defense US
Military Veterans in Journalism
Minority Veterans of America
Secure Families Initiative
Union Veterans Council, AFL-CIO
Vet Voice Foundation
Veterans for American Ideals (VFAI)

Civil Rights, Human Rights, and Anti-Extremism Organizations

America's Voice
American Counterterrorism Targeting and Resilience Institute (ACTRI)

American-Arab Anti-Discrimination Committee (ADC)
Americans for Democratic Action (ADA)
Anti-Defamation League (ADL)
Bend the Arc: Jewish Action
California Association of Human Relations Organizations
Center for the Study of Hate and Extremism
Global Project Against Hate and Extremism
Human Rights Campaign
Human Rights First
Interfaith Alliance
Japanese American Citizens League
Jewish Council for Public Affairs
Matthew Shepard Foundation
Movement Advancement Project
Muslim Public Affairs Council (MPAC)
National Black Justice Coalition
National Center for Transgender Equality
National Federation of Filipino American Associations
National Organization for Women
National Urban League
OCA - Asian Pacific American Advocates
PFLAG National
Southern Poverty Law Center
The Sikh Coalition
Truman Center for National Policy
Union for Reform Judaism
Western States Center

Individual Experts on Extremism

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