

January 14, 2021

The Honorable Sean O'Donnell
Acting Inspector General
Department of Defense
4800 Mark Center Drive
Alexandria, VA 22350-1500

Dear Acting Inspector General O'Donnell:

As you are aware, several insurrectionists who attacked the United States Capitol on January 6, 2021 have been identified as active duty servicemembers, reservists, retirees, and veterans. The issue of white supremacy and extremist ideology within the ranks of our military is not new, but the attack on the Capitol makes clear this alarming trend must be immediately addressed. We urge you to launch a comprehensive investigation into instances of white supremacist and violent fringe extremist activity within the military. Further, we ask that you identify recommendations for each of the services to prevent, address, and neutralize extremist ideology within the Armed Forces.

In recent days, we learned that several former military personnel participated in the insurrectionist attack on the Capitol. Retired Air Force Lieutenant Colonel Larry Rendall Brock, Jr. besieged Speaker Pelosi's office clad in combat gear and handcuffs.¹ Navy veteran Jake Angeli was arrested and charged with violent entry and disorderly conduct after he carried a spear while he stormed the complex.² And although her role in the attack remains unclear, the Army confirmed that Captain Emily Rainey attended the riot, leading members of the Moore County Citizens for Freedom to challenge the certification of election results.³ As investigations continue, it is possible that additional military personnel beyond those we already know of will be found complicit.

Beyond the insurrectionist attack on the Capitol, it has been widely reported that white supremacists are joining the military and permeating the ranks.⁴ Although some recruits with extremist views attempt to join the military, it is also common for this destructive ideology to take hold during military service. The spread of white supremacist ideology is dangerous for the military and threatens to rupture civil-military safeguards that our democracy requires.⁵

A 2020 poll "found about one-third of all active-duty respondents said they saw signs of white supremacist or racist ideology in the ranks."⁶ Further, 47.6% of respondents ranked white nationalists as a significant national security threat – an issue that overshadowed concerns over North Korea, Afghanistan, Iraq, immigration, and U.S. protests – and "nearly two thirds of minority servicemembers... called white

¹ Ronan Farrow, "An Air Force Combat Veteran Breached the Senate and Descended on Nancy Pelosi's Office Suite," *The New Yorker* (New York, New York), Jan. 9, 2021.

² Gina Harkins, "QAnon Shaman' Arrested for Storming the US Capitol Is a Navy Veteran," *Military.com* (Washington, D.C.), Jan. 11, 2021.

³ Matthew Cox, "Army Investigates Fort Bragg Soldier for Attending Rally That Ended in US Capitol Breach," *Military.com* (Washington, D.C.), Jan. 11, 2021.

⁴ Bryan Bender, "The military has a hate group problem. But it doesn't know how bad it's gotten," *POLITICO* (Arlington, Virginia), Jan. 11, 2021.

⁵ *Ibid.*

⁶ Leo Shane III, "Troops: White nationalism a national security threat equal to ISIS, al-Qaida," *Military Times*, (Tysons, Virginia), Sept. 3, 2020.

nationalists a notable threat.”⁷ Although the Pentagon has acknowledged this issue, it has failed to implement a comprehensive action plan to address it.

Members of the Armed Forces are an extension of our communities and are not exempt from extremist influences on the rise within the civilian community. Research demonstrates that servicemembers and veterans are often targeted by right-wing extremists seeking to capitalize on their specialized training and combat experience. As the Southern Poverty Law Center noted in testimony before the House Subcommittee on Military Personnel, “hateful groups and individuals encourage their followers to join a branch of the military and that they target existing servicemembers for recruitment.”⁸ This makes the threat of extremist ideology becoming violent activity all the more acute. The Department of Defense must support servicemembers when they transition out of the military so that our active duty and veteran populations are less vulnerable to recruitment by extremist organizations, and more resilient in the face of misinformation and conspiracy theories – the perpetuation of which the FBI has deemed a domestic terrorism threat. The Department must make every effort to identify servicemembers involved with violent extremist groups to curtail future misconduct and to ensure the maintenance of good order and discipline within the ranks.⁹

Section 554 of the Fiscal Year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act creates a Deputy Inspector General to conduct oversight of diversity and inclusion, as well as supremacist, extremist, or criminal gang activity in the Armed Forces. The urgent need for this new role could not be more apparent, as it would ensure Department-wide policies promote diversity and inclusion, but also prevent and respond to white supremacist and violent extremist ideology. The escalating threat as demonstrated by the January 6 insurrection necessitates a comprehensive investigation as early as possible.

Extremist ideology threatens to compromise the unity and effectiveness of our Armed Forces, and in turn jeopardizes the national security of the United States. We appreciate your immediate attention to this issue and urge you to take action on this wave of violent extremism.

Sincerely,



RICHARD BLUMENTHAL
United States Senate



TAMMY DUCKWORTH
United States Senate



ELIZABETH WARREN
United States Senate



ROBERT MENENDEZ
United States Senate

⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸ Lecia Brooks, “SPLC Testifies Before Congress on Alarming Incidents of White Supremacy in the Military” (Washington, D.C., Feb. 11, 2020), *Southern Poverty Law Center*.

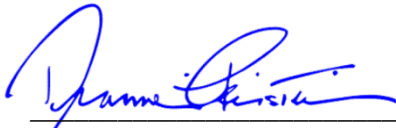
⁹ Jennifer Steinhauer, “Veterans Fortify the Ranks of Militias Aligned with Trump’s Views,” *New York Times*, Sept. 25, 2020.



BERNARD SANDERS
United States Senate

/s/

MARTIN HEINRICH
United States Senate



DIANNE FEINSTEIN
United States Senate



MAZIE K. HIRONO
United States Senate

/s/

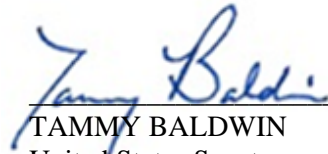
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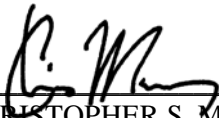
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