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DoD leadership:

I am writing to inform you of the upcoming release of a RAND National Defense Research Institute (NDRI) research report titled *Reducing the Risk of Extremist Activity in the U.S. Military*. A pre-release copy of the report, which will be made public on rand.org < Caution-https://www.rand.org/ > on September 16th, 2021, is attached here.

This report was funded with NDRI research support funds, which is independent exploratory research funding provided for in the FFRDC contract, as approved by NDRI's primary OSD sponsor.

Please let me know if you have questions.

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Reducing the Risk of Extremist Activity in the U.S. Military

In recent years, news headlines have highlighted the involvement of current or former U.S. military personnel in protest violence;[1] supremacist groups;[2] the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol;[3] and other forms of violent extremism spanning different political and ideological spectra.[4] The threat of extremism is not new, but the proliferation of social media has made it easier for radical ideas to spread quickly and for extremist groups to organize, even reaching into the military community (e.g., service members, military spouses, military dependents, civilian employees, and contractors) to expand membership and gain operational capabilities.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has long prohibited service members from actively advocating for extremist activities.[5] DoD policy establishes the expectation that commanders detect prohibited activities, investigate them, and take corrective action. It also relies on commanders to help minimize the risk by intervening early, "primarily through counseling" when they observe "signs of future prohibited activities."[6] Thus, commanders have a dual mandate to enforce current policy violations and anticipate future violations by personnel. DoD policy also places great responsibility on commanders to appropriately weigh the

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potentially competing interests of national security; service members' right of expression; and good unit order, discipline, and effectiveness.[7]

In this Perspective, we outline a framework to help commanders reduce the risk of extremism in the military. First, we provide highlights from research on extremism, including a framework for understanding these types of activities. Second, we use this framework to outline four strategies for reducing the risk of extremism in the military. Third, we recommend a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs to better support commanders as they carry out their responsibilities to prevent and mitigate exposure to extremism within the military.

Seeking Identity, Meaning, and Social Bonds, Service Members Might Find Them in Extremist Movements

Recent news headlines raise questions about the extent to which and the reasons why current and former members of the U.S. military would associate with extremist movements. For example, in 2017, U.S. Marine Corps Lance Corporal Vasillios Pistolis was imprisoned over his participation in the violent white supremacist "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.[8] In another case, the government charged U.S. Army Private Ethan Melzer with conspiring to murder his fellow soldiers by allegedly sharing sensitive details about his unit's upcoming deployment with a neo-Nazi and white supremacist group to facilitate an attack.[9] In January 2021, the government arrested ousted ex-soldier and self-proclaimed "hardcore leftist" Daniel Baker,

Key Points

- *Extremism* is a term used to characterize a variety of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that often are on the extreme end of the political, religious, or ideological spectrum within society (e.g., white nationalist, anarchist).
- Extremist beliefs, affiliations, and activities are constantly evolving.
- Service members, military families, and civilian employees might actively or passively associate with extremist groups.
- DoD prohibits active involvement in extremist activities, but laws place limits on what activities the military can and cannot restrict or punish.
- Current policy requires commanders to intervene when they observe extremist activities or behaviors that might lead to future extremism.
- We present a framework to assist DoD in reducing the risk of extremism in the military.
- We make five recommendations, each focusing on a community-based approach that leverages existing DoD programs to help commanders and their subordinates prevent, detect, intervene, and measure extremist activities earlier rather than later.

who is accused of making online threats and attempting to organize violence against fascists, white supremacists, conservative protestors, and U.S. military officers.[10]

Individuals labeled as *extremists* (1) identify with beliefs and organizations that are on the far end of political, religious, or ideological spectra within a society and (2) advocate for activities that are outside societal norms and laws. These individuals often draw meaning from the

identity that they apply to themselves and others based on their group affiliations (e.g., race, gender, religion, nationality, political beliefs). Studies have identified a variety of factors that lead people to join extremist movements, such as having a passion for political change, looking for a sense of belonging, and seeking excitement.[11] One former leader of a white nationalist group claims that new members are often seeking to form a sense of identity, community, and purpose[12]—some of the same reasons that people join the military.[13] Research has identified at least four types of experiences that people tend to follow into extremism:

- *life events*: traumatic life events that prompt people to consider extremist views as a framework to understand their trauma
- *propaganda*: consumption of extremist material, including books, music, or online content
- *recruitment*: interactions with members of extremist groups that either reach out to individuals or that individuals seek out after self-radicalizing
- *social bonds*: social interactions with other members of extremist groups, especially if individuals are feeling lonely or isolated.[14]

There is no single factor that sufficiently explains why people become active in extremist causes. Often, a combination of factors leads individuals to become increasingly active in extremist activities. This ratcheting up of involvement might help people construct a new identity that is defined by an extremist ideology. Specifically, research has proposed that extremist identities become problematic when they (1) consume a large part of one's life[15] and (2) are defined by extreme hatred or prejudice toward other groups of people.[16]

Current and former military personnel might come into contact with extremist beliefs or groups on their own initiative, be exposed to those beliefs or groups online or through friends or family, or be approached by extremists seeking to recruit them.

Framework for Reducing the Risk of Extremism in the Military

Figure 1 shows a four-part framework we use to categorize the ways in which the military could combat extremism. We first provide an overview of the framework, and then we examine each element more closely. The first part is to recognize the problem of extremism and define *extrem-*

Abbreviations

ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
CAT	Community Action Team
DAF	U.S. Department of the Air Force
DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
DIBRS	Defense Incident-Based Reporting System
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FRG	Family Readiness Group
MWR	U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation
NIBRS	National Incident-Based Reporting System
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense

FIGURE 1

Framework for Reducing the Risk of Extremism Within the U.S. Military Community

| Recognize and scope the problem of extremism | Prevent future extremist views and activities | Detect and intervene when observing extremism | Measure extremist trends and evaluate interventions |

ist activities. The military has already done this through policy, public statements by military leadership, and a one-day "stand down" of activities to discuss extremism in the military.[17] Some experts argue that the scope of extremism should be narrow, with the goal of isolating the most-dangerous members participating in fringe elements of these movements.[18] Others argue that a broader scope can help identify those supporting extremists or provide an early warning about those at risk of becoming extremists. Our proposed framework focuses on addressing these early warning signs of extremism.

Second, the military could better leverage existing violence prevention programs to prevent service members from becoming involved with extremist groups. Some examples of existing prevention resources within the military are chaplains, mental health counselors, the Family Advocacy Program, and Military OneSource.

Third, this framework focuses on detecting extremist activities and designing interventions to respond to them. The military has existing authorities to detect broad patterns of extremism in its ranks; for instance, the military is authorized to coordinate with civilian law enforcement agencies, conduct defense criminal investigative services, and track extremist activities online. Leveraging existing resources designed to support the military community

could help commanders detect early signals that might lead to future extremist activities, and then the commanders could intervene. People in existing programs, such as chaplains, counselors, and other sources of support, might become aware of emerging extremist groups, ideologies, rumors, and misinformation being circulated. Although those sources cannot violate their professional and ethical codes or standards for confidentiality, privacy, and the protection of sensitive health information, they could be encouraged and provided with a means to share general information about those trends so commanders could address them across the population at large.

Finally, our framework includes measuring extremist activities and using the results to inform the evaluation of programs designed to prevent, detect, and intervene when commanders become aware of signs of extremist activities. DoD currently tracks bias motivations in the Defense Incident-Based Reporting System (DIBRS), but it might need to reevaluate and revise these reporting codes in DIBRS and consider whether alternative forms of data collection would be useful to measure extremist trends in the future.

Part 1. Recognize and Scope the Problem of Extremism

The first part of our proposed framework is to recognize and define the problem of extremism. Military leadership has publicly recognized this problem, as is evident from the policies against it, recent statements made by U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III and various senior civilian and defense leaders, and the 2021 DoD order for commanders to conduct a one-day "stand-down" to discuss extremism with personnel.[19]

Defining the problem of extremism has been a challenge, however, because there is no widely accepted set of criteria for making that determination. In an attempt to draw the line for legal purposes, U.S. courts have tried to balance freedom of expression with the need to protect the public from disruptions and threats.[20] U.S. military courts have focused on the degree to which extremist behaviors were either damaging the reputation or public esteem of the military ("service discrediting") or harming good order and discipline, two concepts that are outlined in the Uniform Code of Military Justice.[21] The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI),[22] however, focus their definitions on how a particular belief system motivates someone to commit acts of violence. There are also definitions of extremism employed by private and nonprofit organizations. The Anti-Defamation League, for example, uses a broad definition of extremism that includes any "religious, social, or political belief systems that exist substantially outside of belief systems more broadly accepted in society."[23]

Historically, the military has struggled to identify and manage personnel whose beliefs might lead to future prob-

lems. During World War II, for example, the Army created the 620th Engineer General Services Company as a holding unit for personnel, many of them German-born, whom commanders suspected of being disloyal to the United States.[24] During the Vietnam War, basic military functioning was undermined by racial conflict within the ranks, some of which involved violence—including attacks against officers and enlisted leaders.[25] During the 1980s, following reports of service members involved in Ku Klux Klan activities, then–Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger released a memo broadening the policy against participation in hate groups, stating that active participation in white supremacy groups was "utterly incompatible" with military service, and authorizing commanders to discipline or even discharge those involved in disruptive activities.[26] Although the memo did not forbid joining these groups, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) criticized the policy as overly broad.[27] In 2013, the ACLU also criticized U.S. Army Equal Opportunity training materials that characterized a variety of beliefs as extremism, including some held by evangelical Christian, ultra-Orthodox Jewish, and Ku Klux Klan groups.[28]

It is beyond the scope of this effort to develop a standardized definition of extremism. However, to further illuminate the complexity, we review select definitions from federal law enforcement agencies, DoD, and the military Services.

How Law Enforcement Agencies, the Department of Defense, and the Military Services Define Extremism

This section focuses on definitions of extremism used by selected federal law enforcement agencies, DoD, and each of the military departments as of the date this document was written. These definitions varied in scope. For example, some federal law enforcement agencies narrowly focus on the link between ideological beliefs and unlawful actions. In the U.S. military, however, the focus more broadly includes participation in activities that undermine good order and discipline or are service discrediting.

Federal Law Enforcement

As required by law, the FBI and DHS, in consultation with the Director of National Intelligence, developed definitions for terms related to domestic terrorism.[29] Their definitions for extremism are not identical to one another, but both the DHS and FBI define *domestic violent extremist* as

> an individual based and operating primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States who seeks to further their ideological goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence. It is important to remember that the mere advocacy of ideological positions and/or the use of strong rhetoric does not constitute violent extremism, and in some cases direct or specific threats of violence must be present to constitute a violation of federal law.[30]

Department of Defense

DoD policy related to extremism recognizes that "a service member's right of expression should be preserved to the maximum extent possible."[31] Furthermore, it notes that, while balancing the rights of service members, no commander should be indifferent to conduct that undermines unit effectiveness.

The policy also delimits prohibited and preventive activities. First, DoD policy states,

> Military personnel must not actively advocate supremacist, extremist, or criminal gang doctrine, ideology, or causes, including those that advance, encourage, or advocate illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, ethnicity, or national origin or those that advance, encourage, or advocate the use of force, violence, or criminal activity or otherwise advance efforts to deprive individuals of their civil rights.[32]

Furthermore, the policy instructs personnel to reject active participation in criminal gangs or other organizations that advocate such prohibited views, activities, and illegal discrimination. Some examples of active participation include fundraising, demonstrating or rallying, recruiting, training, and wearing gang colors, clothing, or tattoos. The policy gives commanders authority to use a variety of administrative and disciplinary actions:

> The functions of command include vigilance about the existence of such activities; active use of investigative authority to include a prompt and fair complaint process; and use of administrative powers such as counseling, reprimands, orders, and performance evaluations to deter such activities.[33]

Second, DoD policy requires actions to prevent extremist activities. Specifically, the policy instructs commanders to intervene early (primarily with counseling) when they observe signs of potential future policy violations or actions

Current policy places a significant amount of responsibility on commanders to not only identify current violations of policies that prohibit extremist activities but also anticipate when behaviors might suggest a future policy violation.

that could undermine good order and discipline. For example, the policy states that possessing literature associated with extremist causes, ideology, doctrine, or organizations is not necessarily prohibited, but it signals that further investigations or counseling might be warranted.

Put simply, *current policy places a significant amount of responsibility on commanders to not only identify current violations of policies that prohibit extremist activities but also anticipate when behaviors might suggest a future policy violation.*

Military Departments

Military department policies reiterate key elements of the DoD policy and provide more detail for specific implementation. For example, guidance from the U.S. Department of the Air Force (DAF) prohibits personnel from active advocacy of "supremacist, extremist, or criminal gang doctrine, ideology, or causes."[34] These causes include the advocacy of "illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, ethnicity, or national origin." Furthermore, prohibited causes include advocacy for "the use of force,

violence, or criminal activity" that deprive the civil rights of others. DAF policy also highlights that efforts to counter violent extremism must be balanced, because "commanders must preserve the service member's constitutional right of expression to the maximum extent possible, consistent with good order, discipline, and national security."[35]

The U.S. Department of the Army policy on extremist organizations and activities, Army Regulation 600–20, which was revised in July 2020, is designed to be used in conjunction with DoD Instruction 1325.06. This Army policy prohibits extremist activities. Specifically, the revised policy clearly states that "it is the commander's responsibility to maintain good order and discipline" and notes that "every commander has the inherent authority to take appropriate actions to accomplish this goal."[36] The Army defines extremism by a variety of views that groups are advocating for, including hatred, intolerance, or discrimination based on race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. It also includes the use of violence to deprive people of their individual rights; support for terrorism, sedition, and violence against the United States or

DoD; and unlawful violence to achieve political, religious, discriminatory, and ideological goals.

Furthermore, Army policy prohibits a wide variety of activities if associated with extremist groups; for instance, policy prohibits participating in public demonstrations or rallies, attending meetings on or off duty, fundraising activities, recruiting or training others to join such groups, holding apparent leadership roles, distributing literature on or off military installations, or receiving financial assistance from others associated with extremist groups.

Similarly, the U.S. Department of the Navy's policy prohibits participation in organizations that espouse supremacist causes. It also prohibits participation in organizations that create illegal discrimination based on race, creed, sex, religion, or national origin; advocate the use of force against the United States or subdivisions of the government; or seek to deprive individuals of their civil rights. This policy defines *participation* as conduct that is performed alone or with others (e.g., rallies, fundraising, recruiting, training) and describes the link between prohibited activities and impacts on good order, discipline, or mission accomplishment.[37]

Furthermore, the Navy's military personnel policy outlines a process for administrative or disciplinary actions for personnel who are involved in "any substantiated incident of serious misconduct resulting from participation in supremacist or extremist activities."[38] This policy describes relevant prescribed misconduct that relates to "illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, or national origin" or "advocating the use of force or violence against any federal, state, or local government[s]."[39] The policy also lists various types of violations (e.g., insubordinate conduct, maltreatment of subordinates, rioting, provoking speech or gesture, assault, disloyal statements), noting this list is not exhaustive. More recently, the U.S. Marine Corps issued an order that consolidates various policies to prohibit a variety of activities, including "hazing, bullying, ostracism, retaliation, wrongful distribution, or broadcasting of intimate images, and certain dissident and protest activities (to include supremacist activity)."[40]

To summarize, the department-level policies share many of the same features, including prohibitions on extremist and supremacist ideology and active advocacy of these beliefs. These policies primarily focus on service members. All policies focus on illegal discrimination or depriving personnel of civil rights and prohibit violence against others or the government. The list of groups mentioned in these policy documents are not exhaustive, and there are a variety of potentially marginalized groups who might become targets. The policies also rely on the judgments of commanders to adjudicate policy violations, but there appears to be less guidance for commanders on how best to identify future violations and preserve service members' right of expression. We conclude that DoD, military department, and Service policies should maintain a standard definition of extremism and provide more guidance for commanders on how best to balance the rights of service members with unit functioning and national security interests. Furthermore, policy should also include guidance on a broader variety of members within the military community who might exhibit extremist behaviors (e.g., military families, military dependents, civilian employees, and contractors).

Part 2: Prevent Future Extremist Views and Activities

The second part of our proposed framework is to design programs to prevent members of the military community from associating with extremist groups or beliefs. Figure 2 outlines some of the features of extremism and proposed corresponding types of interventions. This encompasses activities within narrow definitions of extremism (labeled here as "extremist manifestations") and broader emotions, beliefs, and activities (characterized as "initial states" and "initial manifestations") that might be precursors to those extremist manifestations. The features displayed in Figure 2 are not necessarily linked as a linear process. The goal of these prevention programs should be to counsel individuals when they exhibit initial states or manifestations of extremism—two of the three attributes of extremism that are displayed in Figure 2—and to alert leaders to signs of misinformation, recruitment, and emerging groups that might be posing a threat to the military community.

The initial states of extremism include feelings and emotions, such as frustration and anger, that might not be noticed by others because they might be kept internal and are also common human emotions.[41] In the case of

FIGURE 2

Features of Extremism and Levels of Intervention

Initial states	Initial manifestations	Extremist manifestations
Internal emotions about society, institutions, culture	**Beliefs and actions more visible to friends, families, colleagues**	**Activities often shared with like-minded others**
• Anger, frustration, outrage • Dissatisfaction, distancing • Alienation, "otherness" • Revenge, hatred • Grievance, distrust, rejection of authorities and society • Disempowerment, lowered resilience to radicalization	• Lack of participation in political processes • Negative feelings at lack of status, recognition in mainstream society • Acceptance of views that violence is acceptable, justifiable, necessary • Online interactions with extremists • Involvement in sharing extremist material	• Recruitment, radicalization, mobilization of others • Criminality to aid extremist groups • Membership, indoctrination, training in extremist groups • Terrorism, traveling to commit an act of terrorism
Prevention	**Early intervention**	**Aggressive intervention**
Preliminary prevention and detection by military community	Early and intensive intervention by military community	Aggressive intervention using law enforcement

SOURCE: Adapted from Baruch et al., 2018.
NOTE: This figure organizes three broad sets of features. It is not a linear progression of stages, and one might exhibit some or all of these features simultaneously.

extremism, however, the risk is that these intense, hostile feelings can be directed toward the wider society, culture, and authorities. Mentors and service providers, such as counselors and chaplains, can help members manage these feelings in productive ways and find legitimate channels for members to register their grievances.

Initial extremist manifestations are more-clearly visible identifiers of violent extremism—for example, dropping out of political processes and mainstream cultures, accepting extremist group narratives regarding the justification of and need for violence, and interacting with extremist groups and materials.[42] These attributes might be cause for concern for family members, military peers, or commanders, but to preserve the rights of service members, a sophisticated approach to addressing them will be needed, particularly when no policy has been violated.

Finally, extremist activities might be shared with wider groups of individuals who also hold similar beliefs. And, in some cases, these activities may cross into support, or justification, of violence that includes criminal activities.[43] These are the more clear-cut activities for which law enforcement should be contacted.

Existing military programs could augment commanders' efforts, particularly with the initial states and initial manifestations of extremism. These resources include but are not limited to chaplains; mental health counselors; Family Readiness Groups (FRGs); the Military Crisis Line; Military OneSource; the U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) program; and Air Force Community Action Boards. Behavioral and mental health resources and counseling are indispensable for identifying and countering extremism, and a majority of these programs might embrace psychosocial approaches that examine a combination of psychological and environmental factors.

Chaplains are a key line of defense for service members' existential, spiritual, or moral concerns.[44] They can be a point of referral for those in need of behavioral health care services and also provide privileged communication that other service providers would often be required to report.[45] Furthermore, perceived stigma associated with mental health treatment is a complicated barrier to seeking behavioral health interventions,[46] so some service members might be more inclined to seek out the support of military chaplains instead of counselors.

Extremist activities might be shared with wider groups of likeminded individuals and sometimes cross the line by supporting and justifying the use of violence, up to and including committing a criminal offense.

Rather than deciding to seek counseling on their own, service members might be encouraged or required to do so by their commander or other relevant personnel. One study examined how active-duty military personnel choose between options for help with emotional or mental health concerns and reported that soldiers generally seek out *civilian* mental health professionals for family and substance abuse problems, whereas *military* mental health professionals are primarily consulted for stress management, depression, anxiety, combat or operational stress, or anger management.[47]

Established in 2012, DoD's Military Family Readiness System comprises a diverse set of policies, programs, services, resources, and practices to support and promote family well-being. Commanders are supposed to work within this system when addressing many of the service member attitudes and behaviors that fall within the initial states and initial manifestations of extremism. Service member and family well-being fosters family readiness, which in turn enhances service members' readiness.[48] DoD's Military Family Readiness System includes such resources as FRGs (and their equivalents in the Services), the Military Crisis Line, and Military OneSource. As official command-sponsored and command-resourced organizations, FRGs offer assistance, mutual support, and a network of communications between family members, the chain of command, and community resource providers.[49] The Military Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource for service members. Military OneSource offers support for nonmedical counseling (e.g., marriage counseling, stress management) and referrals to other types of resources. Military mental health professionals address such issues as suicidal and homicidal thoughts; experiences of sexual assault, child abuse, or domestic violence; alcohol and substance abuse; and serious mental health conditions that require medical treatment. MWR and its partners offer education and counseling services for such issues as suicide prevention and survivor outreach.[50]

Air Force Community Action Boards and Community Action Teams (CATs) are another viable resource for coordinating strategies to identify and address patterns related to signs of initial states or initial manifestations of extremism. These are entities at the installation, major command, and headquarters level composed of representatives from diverse organizations (e.g., leadership, law enforcement, service providers) who coordinate periodically to identify and monitor the needs of the various populations within the military community (i.e., service members, their families, Air Force employees) and develop strategies to address them. For example, Air Force Instruction 90-5001 encourages commanders to consult with CAT members, Community Support Coordinators, and Violence Prevention Integrators to enhance well-being and resilience within their units.[51]

Part 3: Detect and Intervene When Observing Extremism

The third part of our proposed framework is to detect early trends of extremist activity at the installation level and then intervene at these installations, accordingly.[52] Coordination between military and civilian law enforcement and collection of open-source intelligence are two strategies for detecting these trends.

First, civilian and military law enforcement agencies have useful information they could share on which groups

pose the greatest threats for service members online and in the areas surrounding particular installations, as well as whether they observe indicators of extremist affiliations, such as symbols or slogans.[53] Military leaders, educators, and service providers could draw upon these resources for education, training, and informational awareness activities. For example, installation-level Air Force CATs (or equivalents in other Services) could develop a toolkit to provide access to videos, reports, bulletins, or other materials that could inform unit or community programming. The toolkit could offer ideas on organizations to contact for guest speakers who could educate and warn members about particular extremist groups and their beliefs, activities, and recruitment tactics. This information could help provide counter-messaging or inoculation against narratives and propaganda by extremist groups.

There are various criminal investigative services across DoD that might encounter evidence of extremist activities during investigations, either directly or indirectly. These include the Defense Criminal Investigation Services,[54] Air Force Office of Special Investigations,[55] U.S. Army Criminal Investigations Command,[56] and Naval Criminal Investigation Service.[57] Although they need to preserve the integrity of their investigations, there might be patterns or broader trends they could then share with military leaders and service providers to aid in detection, stop the spread of harmful information, and engage in other countermeasures. The Office of Law Enforcement Policy and Support within the Defense Human Resources Activity could also help coordinate the detection of extremist activities and sharing of information across DoD.

Second, the internet has made it easier for extremist groups to interact with a broader variety of potential members. New machine learning techniques can aid in searching for online trends of extremist involvement.[58] For example, models can be trained to detect extremist communities on such social media platforms as Twitter and to infer the degree to which users who appear to have current or past associations with the military are engaging with these extremist groups. From these online discussions, insights could be drawn to inform headquarters-prepared materials targeting misinformation, recruitment language, and so on for broader use by the military community. However, there are risks associated with the use of artificial intelligence and machine-learning tools, including privacy concerns, false positive or negative results, and algorithmic bias that require continuous recalibration by a human-in-the-loop.[59]

Detection and intervention are not solely the domain of law enforcement or data analysts. Service providers might have information about potential risks for extremist activity, although they might not always recognize it as such. Chaplains, psychologists, social workers, Military and Family Life counselors, psychiatrists, and health care providers might be providing support for individuals exhibiting the initial states or initial manifestations of extremism. These support service providers must preserve their professional and ethical obligations regarding confidentiality and act in ways that promote rather than undermine help-seeking behaviors and treatment. We do not imply that these professionals should report every individual who feels frustrated with the government, feels alienated from others, or is withdrawing from political processes, for example, but in the course of their work they might become aware of information that could be impor-

tant for detecting and intervening to counter extremism. Such information might include

- extremist materials appearing on the installation (e.g., left in the chapel or hospital waiting rooms)
- emerging extremist groups, movements, or causes
- rumors or misinformation being spread that could stoke the flames of social conflicts (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation)
- justifications of extremist activities that resonate with members
- poor reputation of military channels for filing complaints or appeals, or service members' lack of awareness of these channels.

Sharing this type of information—not tied to any particular individuals—could inform efforts to keep abreast of ever-evolving groups and social movements, to actively dispel myths and misinformation or dismantle justifications that could increase the risk of adopting extremist views, and to improve the awareness and functioning of complaint channels to encourage people to work within them.

It is important that providers (1) understand the types of aggregate information that they could share with commanders that would be helpful and (2) have a safe way to share this information.

Part 4. Measure Extremist Trends and Evaluate Interventions

The last part of our proposed four-part framework involves the measurement of extremist trends and subsequent evaluation of the early interventions previously described. DoD already collects some data on extremism using the DIBRS, which records law enforcement activities and statistics within the military and reports criminal data to the FBI as required by the Uniform Federal Crime Reporting Act of 1988.[60]

One data element in DIBRS is "bias motivation." *Bias* is defined as "a performed negative opinion or attitude toward a group of persons" (e.g., racial, religious, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation, or disability groups).[61] Table 1 displays some of these codes in DIBRS.

There are several potential areas of improvement for data collection related to extremism in the military. First, the codes used in DIBRS might not always align with those used in the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).[62] For example, NIBRS has a code for "Anti-Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander" while DIBRS has a separate code just for "Anti-Pacific Islander." DIBRS has separate bias motivation codes for seven religions, while NIBRS has 14 codes for religious bias. Furthermore, NIBRS has a code for "Anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (mixed group)" while DIBRS has no code for transgender bias.

Second, there might be biases in how incidents are reported to DIBRS. For example, incidents in the FBI's NIBRS are not necessarily representative of all incidents among the U.S. population,[63] and some have reported a nonresponse rate in reporting by law enforcement agencies to the FBI.[64] The same might hold true for DIBRS. Furthermore, some have raised concerns in the past about the reliability of data from the DIBRS.[65] Thus, there might be a need to continuously review what is reported to DIBRS (i.e., consistent use of correct motivation bias codes), the frequency of reporting (i.e., consistent reporting by the Services over time), and the sharing of data with the FBI to ensure that broad trends related to

TABLE 1

Bias Motivation Codes in the Defense Incident-Based Reporting System

Race and Ethnicity	Religion	Sexual Orientation	Mental and Physical Disabilities	Unknown Bias
• AW = Anti-White • AH = Anti-Black • AD = Anti-Arab • AM = Anti-Hispanic • AC = Anti-American Indian • AB = Anti-Alaskan • AE = Anti-Asian • AT = Anti-Pacific Islander • AR = Anti-Multi-Racial Group • AZ = Anti-Other Ethnicity	• AO = Anti-Jewish • AI = Anti-Catholic • AN = Anti-Islamic (Moslem) • AU = Anti-Protestant • AS =Anti-Multi-Religious Group • AA = Anti-Agnostic • AY = Anti-Other Religions	• AQ = Anti-Male Homosexual • AK = Anti-Female Homosexual • AL = Anti-Heterosexual • AG = Anti-Bisexual	• BA = Anti-Mental Disability • BB = Anti-Physical Disability	• AX = Unknown Bias

SOURCE: DoD, 2020, p. 26.
NOTE: Table 1 does not display the code "NB = None (no bias)."

extremism are captured between civilian and military law enforcement organizations.

Third, there could be alternative ways to collect data on trends related to extremism and how they might relate to intervention activities. For example, the Army's iSA-LUTE program is an online reporting tool for members of the Army community to report suspected extremist activities.[66] As military leaders release new tools, there will be a need to continuously evaluate these data sources and subsequent interventions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This Perspective outlines a framework for reducing the risk of extremism in the U.S. military. It provides a brief review of relevant background information about extrem-

ism and presents a four-part framework for mitigating such activities. The first part is recognizing and defining the problem of extremism, which the military has already done. The second part is preventing future extremist activities from occurring across the ranks, and the framework outlines ways for the military to accomplish this. The third part involves using strategies to detect what might be precursors of extremism and helping commanders intervene accordingly. The fourth part describes ways for the military to measure extremist trends and evaluate interventions using an evidence-based approach.

Conclusions

We have identified four conclusions using this framework.

First, current DoD policies clearly prohibit extremism in the military and place significant responsibilities on commanders to implement this policy. Specifically, policy requires commanders to take corrective action when they observe active forms of extremist activities. It also requires commanders to intervene when they observe behaviors that *might* lead to a future violation of policies that prohibit extremism. This is a tremendous responsibility, particularly given that commanders are not subject-matter experts in extremism and that, even for experts, this would be difficult, because many of the precursors to extremism are common (e.g., frustration with society, institutions, and culture) and do not lead to extremism.

Second, there is no widely accepted definition of extremism that delineates where to draw the line between *extremism* and beliefs and behaviors that are simply *outside the norm*. That presents challenges for commanders in trying to balance the rights of service members with detection of current extremist policy violations or problematic behaviors that have a high probability of leading to extremist activity in the future.

Third, policy largely focuses on extremist activities by service members. The problem of extremism emerges from and affects the broader military community, meaning not only service members but also their families and civilian employees.

Fourth, DoD has several existing support programs that could be better leveraged to support commanders in implementing DoD's ban on extremist activities while protecting the rights and needs of those they serve. Such programs could also help a broader variety of members of the military community (e.g., military spouses, dependents, civilian employees, contractors) to detect and intervene

earlier rather than later when they observe extremist activities that affect the military.

Recommendations

We offer five recommendations that inform a strategy to support commanders in mitigating extremism within the military.

DoD efforts to combat extremism should engage the wider military community, not focus solely on service members. Given the diversity of the U.S. military community, any policies or programs designed to prevent or detect extremism should consider *all* members of the military community—in partnership with relevant civilian community members—as potential partners in the fight against extremism. In 2019, there were more than 1.3 million members on active duty, but also more than 1 million members of the Ready Reserve, more than 200,000 members of the Standby or Retired Reserve, almost 900,000 DoD civilian employees, more than 965,000 military spouses, and more than 1.6 million children of members.[67] Additionally, military installations and deployed environments can include contractors, personnel from other agencies, and members of other nations' militaries. Any member of these groups might adopt and promote extremist beliefs and act upon them, including becoming active or passive members of extremist groups promoting racial supremacy, religious extremism, or specific social or political issues. Commanders and supervisors face major challenges detecting early signs of extremism across the various members in the broader military community, many of whom commanders will rarely if ever directly meet. Anti-extremism efforts focused just on active-duty personnel will miss key sources of information and opportu-

nities for influence. Such military activities and resources as stand-downs, town halls, information campaigns, and channels to share tips with leaders should also engage the broader community, including active and reserve component personnel, spouses and partners, children, civilian employees, and contractors.

Efforts to address extremism should take a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs. Responding to early signs of extremism is preferable to waiting until initial extremist states manifest in ways that directly affect military readiness or preparedness. Service providers from the various support agencies already do help individuals find more-acceptable ways to manage emotions, such as frustration and anger directed toward authority figures or certain segments of society. Community service providers could also think about broader ways to counter the influence and impact of extremist groups. For example, they could

- provide general guidance on how to break cycles of outrage and hate and to manage personal relationships with any friends or relatives who hold extremist views or are involved in violent extremist groups
- organize activities to dispel stereotypes and myths promulgated by hate groups and to illuminate the harm of hate speech, targeted threats, and other extremist activities
- organize real-time live or virtual question-and-answer sessions with reformed extremists to understand the impacts of extremism and how people disengage from these groups.

Service providers could also alert leaders to signs of misinformation, recruitment, and emerging groups that might be posing a threat to the military community.

A community-based approach would also emphasize the need to support unit and broader installation-wide morale, welfare, and recreational activities to strengthen the military identity, community, and sense of belonging. These may counterbalance extremist recruitment strategies, which seek to build rapport, camaraderie, and loyalty at the small-group level as a bridge to introducing extreme beliefs and actions. A stronger sense of unit cohesion and community well-being can make personnel and their families more resistant to these strategies within the military community.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) should continue to coordinate information-sharing between civilian and military law enforcement agencies. Extremist groups are volatile by nature. Such groups might form, evolve, splinter, or disintegrate relatively quickly, only to reemerge later in new forms. The tracking of these trends will require cooperation among federal law enforcement agencies (e.g., FBI), state and local law enforcement agencies, military law enforcement organizations (e.g., Army Criminal Investigation Command), and domestic intelligence and security agencies (e.g., DHS and the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency).

OSD and the military departments should employ machine-learning technologies to help detect broad, emerging trends of extremism that might affect members of the military community. The internet and social media have reduced the costs of creating, sustaining, and growing extremist organizations—not only in the United States but also around the world. Many of these online data are publicly available, and recent advances in machine-learning methods would allow trained professionals within OSD and the military departments to spot early patterns of extrem-

ist activities that might target members of the military community.[68] Such tools are useful for identifying broad trends at the installation level, using de-identified data. We distinguish this approach from law enforcement analyses of individual-level identifiable data for investigation purposes. The use of these machine-learning tools does carry risks, including privacy concerns, false positive or negative results, and algorithmic bias. Thus, we recommend continuous recalibration of these tools that involves a human-in-the-loop.

OSD should continually measure existing extremist trends and evaluate programs designed to prevent, detect, and intervene when members of the military community express extremist views. There is a paucity of data on trends surrounding the prevalence of extremist activities in the military. For example, extremism might occur at the nexus of civil-military relations, whereby civilian extremist groups attempt to recruit members of the military community; but civilian and military law enforcement agencies might not always share information about possible extremism. The bias motivation codes used in DIBRS and the process for collecting and reporting bias-motivated incidents should align with the FBI's NIBRS. This integration would ensure that trends in extremism are shared between civilian and military law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, as the Services and OSD develop new tools for collecting data on extremism,

opportunities will arise to identify best practices for measuring extremist activities over time.

Cautionary Points on Implementation

This section discusses four cautionary points on the issue of scope creep when implementing policies designed to reduce the risk of extremism in the U.S. military. First, policy should avoid loosely applying the label of *extremist* to *all* people who exhibit initial states of extremism. Not all people who express anger, frustration, outrage, or feelings of alienation are or will become extremists. Second, we are not suggesting that the military should assign the mission of combating extremism to any of its existing community support services. These services are a set of tools out of many (e.g., law enforcement entities, counterintelligence efforts, mental health services) and should be part of a comprehensive strategy to combat extremism.

Third, the military should avoid using its community support services as an extension of law enforcement. Chaplains, mental health counselors, and FRGs should support personnel and their families versus collecting evidence on individuals for future law enforcement actions.[69] These services can help provide information about misinformation, patterns, and external groups but must not undermine their

Community support services are a set of tools out of many that should be part of a comprehensive strategy to combat extremism.

own efforts, ethics, or professional standards. Finally, "early interventions" refer to leveraging existing support services to prevent people from ever taking up active involvement in extremism that requires disciplinary actions. Preventive work can be achieved through helping individuals manage difficult feelings and life experiences and guiding them to more-productive channels for expressing their grievances and bringing about change.

Closing Thoughts

The vast majority of military personnel and their families are not extremists. But even a small number of people engaged in extremist activities could damage the U.S. military's reputation, its force, its members, and the larger community. Extremist activities can also be harmful to the individuals who are radicalized and their friends and family. DoD has existing programs that support personnel and their families, promote diversity and inclusion, and prevent violence. A community-based approach that leverages these existing programs could help the military to prevent service members and their families from associating with extremist groups and to respond sooner—and more effectively—when they do.

Notes

[1] Thompson, Winston, and Hanrahan, 2018.

[2] Wilkinson, 2020.

[3] Dreisbach and Anderson, 2021.

[4] Shammas and De Vynck, 2021.

[5] DoD Directive 1325.6, 1996; DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012.

[6] DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012, p. 10.

[7] DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012.

[8] Thompson and Winston, 2018.

[9] U.S. Department of Justice, 2020.

[10] Shammas and De Vynck, 2021; *United States v. Baker*, 2021.

[11] Helmus, 2009.

[12] Picciolini, 2020.

[13] Helmus et al., 2018.

[14] Brown et al., 2021.

[15] Burke, 1980.

[16] Fromm, 1973.

[17] Austin, 2021.

[18] Jenkins, 2021.

[19] Garamone, 2021.

[20] Williford, 2019.

[21] DoD, 2019b; *United States v. Wilcox*, 2008.

[22] DHS and FBI, 2020.

[23] Anti-Defamation League, undated.

[24] Ricks, 2011.

[25] Cortwright, 1990.

[26] Gross, 1986.

[27] United Press International, 1986.

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[28] Murphy, Rottman, and Sher, 2013; Sher and Rottman, 2013.

[29] DHS and FBI, 2020.

[30] DHS and FBI, 2020, p. 2.

[31] DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012, p. 1.

[32] DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012, p. 9.

[33] DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012, p. 9.

[34] DAF Instruction 51-508, 2018, p. 14.

[35] DAF Instruction 51-508, 2018, p. 14.

[36] U.S. Department of the Army Regulation 600–20, 2020, p. 30.

[37] U.S. Department of the Navy, 1997.

[38] U.S. Department of the Navy, 2008, p. 1.

[39] U.S. Department of the Navy, 2008, p. 1.

[40] U.S. Marine Corps, undated; U.S. Marine Corps, 2021.

[41] Baruch et al., 2018.

[42] Baruch et al., 2018.

[43] Baruch et al., 2018.

[44] Kim et al., 2016.

[45] See Rule 503 in DoD, 2019b.

[46] Kazman et al., 2020.

[47] Morgan et al., 2016.

[48] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019.

[49] U.S. Army, undated.

[50] MWR, undated.

[51] DAF Instruction 90-5001, 2019.

[52] For a similar approach that collected data on individual members of the U.S. Air Force community using surveys but aggregated them to the installation level, see Sims et al., 2019.

[53] National Gang Intelligence Center, 2015.

[54] DoD, 2010.

[55] Grabosky, 2020; Losey, 2020.

[56] Ethridge, 2020.

[57] McMahon, 2020.

[58] Marcellino et al., 2020.

[59] Brown et al., 2020.

[60] DoD Instruction 7730.47, 2020.

[61] DoD Instruction 7730.47, 2020.

[62] U.S. Department of Justice, 2021.

[63] Addington, 2008.

[64] McCormack, Pattavina, and Tracy, 2017.

[65] DoD, 2014; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010.

[66] U.S. Army, 2021.

[67] DoD, 2019a.

[68] Marcellino et al., 2020; Marcellino et al., 2021.

[69] For a discussion of how some heavy-handed responses to extremism may fail, see Brown et al., 2021.

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About This Perspective

In recent years, news headlines have highlighted the involvement of current or former U.S. military personnel in protest violence; supremacist groups; the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol; and other forms of violent extremism spanning different political and ideological spectra. The threat of extremism is not new, but the proliferation of social media has made it easier for radical ideas to spread quickly and for extremist groups to organize, even reaching into the military community (e.g., service members, military spouses, military dependents, civilian employees, and contractors) to expand membership and gain operational capabilities.

This Perspective outlines a framework to help commanders reduce the risk of extremism in the military. First, we provide highlights from research on extremism, including a framework for understanding these types of activities. Second, we use this framework to outline four strategies for reducing the risk of extremism in the military. Third, we recommend a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs to better support commanders as they carry out their responsibilities to prevent and mitigate exposure to extremism by members of the military community.

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PE-A1447-1

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DoD leadership:

I am writing to inform you of the upcoming release of a RAND National Defense Research Institute (NDRI) research report titled *Reducing the Risk of Extremist Activity in the U.S. Military*. A pre-release copy of the report, which will be made public on rand.org < Caution-https://www.rand.org/ > on September 16th, 2021, is attached here.

This report was funded with NDRI research support funds, which is independent exploratory research funding provided for in the FFRDC contract, as approved by NDRI's primary OSD sponsor.

Please let me know if you have questions.

Jack

Jack Riley
Vice President, RAND National Security Research Division
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MAREK N. POSARD, LESLIE ADRIENNE PAYNE, LAURA L. MILLER

Reducing the Risk of Extremist Activity in the U.S. Military

I n recent years, news headlines have highlighted the involvement of current or former U.S. military personnel in protest violence;[1] supremacist groups;[2] the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol;[3] and other forms of violent extremism spanning different political and ideological spectra.[4] The threat of extremism is not new, but the proliferation of social media has made it easier for radical ideas to spread quickly and for extremist groups to organize, even reaching into the military community (e.g., service members, military spouses, military dependents, civilian employees, and contractors) to expand membership and gain operational capabilities.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has long prohibited service members from actively advocating for extremist activities.[5] DoD policy establishes the expectation that commanders detect prohibited activities, investigate them, and take corrective action. It also relies on commanders to help minimize the risk by intervening early, "primarily through counseling" when they observe "signs of future prohibited activities."[6] Thus, commanders have a dual mandate to enforce current policy violations and anticipate future violations by personnel. DoD policy also places great responsibility on commanders to appropriately weigh the

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potentially competing interests of national security; service members' right of expression; and good unit order, discipline, and effectiveness.[7]

In this Perspective, we outline a framework to help commanders reduce the risk of extremism in the military. First, we provide highlights from research on extremism, including a framework for understanding these types of activities. Second, we use this framework to outline four strategies for reducing the risk of extremism in the military. Third, we recommend a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs to better support commanders as they carry out their responsibilities to prevent and mitigate exposure to extremism within the military.

Seeking Identity, Meaning, and Social Bonds, Service Members Might Find Them in Extremist Movements

Recent news headlines raise questions about the extent to which and the reasons why current and former members of the U.S. military would associate with extremist movements. For example, in 2017, U.S. Marine Corps Lance Corporal Vasillios Pistolis was imprisoned over his participation in the violent white supremacist "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.[8] In another case, the government charged U.S. Army Private Ethan Melzer with conspiring to murder his fellow soldiers by allegedly sharing sensitive details about his unit's upcoming deployment with a neo-Nazi and white supremacist group to facilitate an attack.[9] In January 2021, the government arrested ousted ex-soldier and self-proclaimed "hardcore leftist" Daniel Baker,

> **Key Points**
>
> - *Extremism* is a term used to characterize a variety of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that often are on the extreme end of the political, religious, or ideological spectrum within society (e.g., white nationalist, anarchist).
> - Extremist beliefs, affiliations, and activities are constantly evolving.
> - Service members, military families, and civilian employees might actively or passively associate with extremist groups.
> - DoD prohibits active involvement in extremist activities, but laws place limits on what activities the military can and cannot restrict or punish.
> - Current policy requires commanders to intervene when they observe extremist activities or behaviors that might lead to future extremism.
> - We present a framework to assist DoD in reducing the risk of extremism in the military.
> - We make five recommendations, each focusing on a community-based approach that leverages existing DoD programs to help commanders and their subordinates prevent, detect, intervene, and measure extremist activities earlier rather than later.

who is accused of making online threats and attempting to organize violence against fascists, white supremacists, conservative protestors, and U.S. military officers.[10]

Individuals labeled as *extremists* (1) identify with beliefs and organizations that are on the far end of political, religious, or ideological spectra within a society and (2) advocate for activities that are outside societal norms and laws. These individuals often draw meaning from the

identity that they apply to themselves and others based on their group affiliations (e.g., race, gender, religion, nationality, political beliefs). Studies have identified a variety of factors that lead people to join extremist movements, such as having a passion for political change, looking for a sense of belonging, and seeking excitement.[11] One former leader of a white nationalist group claims that new members are often seeking to form a sense of identity, community, and purpose[12]—some of the same reasons that people join the military.[13] Research has identified at least four types of experiences that people tend to follow into extremism:

- *life events*: traumatic life events that prompt people to consider extremist views as a framework to understand their trauma
- *propaganda*: consumption of extremist material, including books, music, or online content
- *recruitment*: interactions with members of extremist groups that either reach out to individuals or that individuals seek out after self-radicalizing
- *social bonds*: social interactions with other members of extremist groups, especially if individuals are feeling lonely or isolated.[14]

There is no single factor that sufficiently explains why people become active in extremist causes. Often, a combination of factors leads individuals to become increasingly active in extremist activities. This ratcheting up of involvement might help people construct a new identity that is defined by an extremist ideology. Specifically, research has proposed that extremist identities become problematic when they (1) consume a large part of one's life[15] and (2) are defined by extreme hatred or prejudice toward other groups of people.[16]

Current and former military personnel might come into contact with extremist beliefs or groups on their own initiative, be exposed to those beliefs or groups online or through friends or family, or be approached by extremists seeking to recruit them.

Framework for Reducing the Risk of Extremism in the Military

Figure 1 shows a four-part framework we use to categorize the ways in which the military could combat extremism. We first provide an overview of the framework, and then we examine each element more closely. The first part is to recognize the problem of extremism and define *extrem-*

Abbreviations

ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
CAT	Community Action Team
DAF	U.S. Department of the Air Force
DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
DIBRS	Defense Incident-Based Reporting System
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FRG	Family Readiness Group
MWR	U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation
NIBRS	National Incident-Based Reporting System
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense

FIGURE 1

Framework for Reducing the Risk of Extremism Within the U.S. Military Community

Recognize and scope the problem of extremism	Prevent future extremist views and activities	Detect and intervene when observing extremism	Measure extremist trends and evaluate interventions

ist activities. The military has already done this through policy, public statements by military leadership, and a one-day "stand down" of activities to discuss extremism in the military.[17] Some experts argue that the scope of extremism should be narrow, with the goal of isolating the most-dangerous members participating in fringe elements of these movements.[18] Others argue that a broader scope can help identify those supporting extremists or provide an early warning about those at risk of becoming extremists. Our proposed framework focuses on addressing these early warning signs of extremism.

Second, the military could better leverage existing violence prevention programs to prevent service members from becoming involved with extremist groups. Some examples of existing prevention resources within the military are chaplains, mental health counselors, the Family Advocacy Program, and Military OneSource.

Third, this framework focuses on detecting extremist activities and designing interventions to respond to them. The military has existing authorities to detect broad patterns of extremism in its ranks; for instance, the military is authorized to coordinate with civilian law enforcement agencies, conduct defense criminal investigative services, and track extremist activities online. Leveraging existing resources designed to support the military community

could help commanders detect early signals that might lead to future extremist activities, and then the commanders could intervene. People in existing programs, such as chaplains, counselors, and other sources of support, might become aware of emerging extremist groups, ideologies, rumors, and misinformation being circulated. Although those sources cannot violate their professional and ethical codes or standards for confidentiality, privacy, and the protection of sensitive health information, they could be encouraged and provided with a means to share general information about those trends so commanders could address them across the population at large.

Finally, our framework includes measuring extremist activities and using the results to inform the evaluation of programs designed to prevent, detect, and intervene when commanders become aware of signs of extremist activities. DoD currently tracks bias motivations in the Defense Incident-Based Reporting System (DIBRS), but it might need to reevaluate and revise these reporting codes in DIBRS and consider whether alternative forms of data collection would be useful to measure extremist trends in the future.

Part 1. Recognize and Scope the Problem of Extremism

The first part of our proposed framework is to recognize and define the problem of extremism. Military leadership has publicly recognized this problem, as is evident from the policies against it, recent statements made by U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III and various senior civilian and defense leaders, and the 2021 DoD order for commanders to conduct a one-day "stand-down" to discuss extremism with personnel.[19]

Defining the problem of extremism has been a challenge, however, because there is no widely accepted set of criteria for making that determination. In an attempt to draw the line for legal purposes, U.S. courts have tried to balance freedom of expression with the need to protect the public from disruptions and threats.[20] U.S. military courts have focused on the degree to which extremist behaviors were either damaging the reputation or public esteem of the military ("service discrediting") or harming good order and discipline, two concepts that are outlined in the Uniform Code of Military Justice.[21] The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI),[22] however, focus their definitions on how a particular belief system motivates someone to commit acts of violence. There are also definitions of extremism employed by private and nonprofit organizations. The Anti-Defamation League, for example, uses a broad definition of extremism that includes any "religious, social, or political belief systems that exist substantially outside of belief systems more broadly accepted in society."[23]

Historically, the military has struggled to identify and manage personnel whose beliefs might lead to future prob-

lems. During World War II, for example, the Army created the 620th Engineer General Services Company as a holding unit for personnel, many of them German-born, whom commanders suspected of being disloyal to the United States.[24] During the Vietnam War, basic military functioning was undermined by racial conflict within the ranks, some of which involved violence—including attacks against officers and enlisted leaders.[25] During the 1980s, following reports of service members involved in Ku Klux Klan activities, then–Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger released a memo broadening the policy against participation in hate groups, stating that active participation in white supremacy groups was "utterly incompatible" with military service, and authorizing commanders to discipline or even discharge those involved in disruptive activities.[26] Although the memo did not forbid joining these groups, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) criticized the policy as overly broad.[27] In 2013, the ACLU also criticized U.S. Army Equal Opportunity training materials that characterized a variety of beliefs as extremism, including some held by evangelical Christian, ultra-Orthodox Jewish, and Ku Klux Klan groups.[28]

It is beyond the scope of this effort to develop a standardized definition of extremism. However, to further illuminate the complexity, we review select definitions from federal law enforcement agencies, DoD, and the military Services.

How Law Enforcement Agencies, the Department of Defense, and the Military Services Define Extremism

This section focuses on definitions of extremism used by selected federal law enforcement agencies, DoD, and each of the military departments as of the date this document was written. These definitions varied in scope. For example, some federal law enforcement agencies narrowly focus on the link between ideological beliefs and unlawful actions. In the U.S. military, however, the focus more broadly includes participation in activities that undermine good order and discipline or are service discrediting.

Federal Law Enforcement

As required by law, the FBI and DHS, in consultation with the Director of National Intelligence, developed definitions for terms related to domestic terrorism.[29] Their definitions for extremism are not identical to one another, but both the DHS and FBI define *domestic violent extremist* as

> an individual based and operating primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States who seeks to further their ideological goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence. It is important to remember that the mere advocacy of ideological positions and/or the use of strong rhetoric does not constitute violent extremism, and in some cases direct or specific threats of violence must be present to constitute a violation of federal law.[30]

Department of Defense

DoD policy related to extremism recognizes that "a service member's right of expression should be preserved to the maximum extent possible."[31] Furthermore, it notes that, while balancing the rights of service members, no commander should be indifferent to conduct that undermines unit effectiveness.

The policy also delimits prohibited and preventive activities. First, DoD policy states,

> Military personnel must not actively advocate supremacist, extremist, or criminal gang doctrine, ideology, or causes, including those that advance, encourage, or advocate illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, ethnicity, or national origin or those that advance, encourage, or advocate the use of force, violence, or criminal activity or otherwise advance efforts to deprive individuals of their civil rights.[32]

Furthermore, the policy instructs personnel to reject active participation in criminal gangs or other organizations that advocate such prohibited views, activities, and illegal discrimination. Some examples of active participation include fundraising, demonstrating or rallying, recruiting, training, and wearing gang colors, clothing, or tattoos. The policy gives commanders authority to use a variety of administrative and disciplinary actions:

> The functions of command include vigilance about the existence of such activities; active use of investigative authority to include a prompt and fair complaint process; and use of administrative powers such as counseling, reprimands, orders, and performance evaluations to deter such activities.[33]

Second, DoD policy requires actions to prevent extremist activities. Specifically, the policy instructs commanders to intervene early (primarily with counseling) when they observe signs of potential future policy violations or actions

Current policy places a significant amount of responsibility on commanders to not only identify current violations of policies that prohibit extremist activities but also anticipate when behaviors might suggest a future policy violation.

that could undermine good order and discipline. For example, the policy states that possessing literature associated with extremist causes, ideology, doctrine, or organizations is not necessarily prohibited, but it signals that further investigations or counseling might be warranted.

Put simply, *current policy places a significant amount of responsibility on commanders to not only identify current violations of policies that prohibit extremist activities but also anticipate when behaviors might suggest a future policy violation.*

Military Departments

Military department policies reiterate key elements of the DoD policy and provide more detail for specific implementation. For example, guidance from the U.S. Department of the Air Force (DAF) prohibits personnel from active advocacy of "supremacist, extremist, or criminal gang doctrine, ideology, or causes."[34] These causes include the advocacy of "illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, ethnicity, or national origin." Furthermore, prohibited causes include advocacy for "the use of force,

violence, or criminal activity" that deprive the civil rights of others. DAF policy also highlights that efforts to counter violent extremism must be balanced, because "commanders must preserve the service member's constitutional right of expression to the maximum extent possible, consistent with good order, discipline, and national security."[35]

The U.S. Department of the Army policy on extremist organizations and activities, Army Regulation 600–20, which was revised in July 2020, is designed to be used in conjunction with DoD Instruction 1325.06. This Army policy prohibits extremist activities. Specifically, the revised policy clearly states that "it is the commander's responsibility to maintain good order and discipline" and notes that "every commander has the inherent authority to take appropriate actions to accomplish this goal."[36] The Army defines extremism by a variety of views that groups are advocating for, including hatred, intolerance, or discrimination based on race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. It also includes the use of violence to deprive people of their individual rights; support for terrorism, sedition, and violence against the United States or

DoD; and unlawful violence to achieve political, religious, discriminatory, and ideological goals.

Furthermore, Army policy prohibits a wide variety of activities if associated with extremist groups; for instance, policy prohibits participating in public demonstrations or rallies, attending meetings on or off duty, fundraising activities, recruiting or training others to join such groups, holding apparent leadership roles, distributing literature on or off military installations, or receiving financial assistance from others associated with extremist groups.

Similarly, the U.S. Department of the Navy's policy prohibits participation in organizations that espouse supremacist causes. It also prohibits participation in organizations that create illegal discrimination based on race, creed, sex, religion, or national origin; advocate the use of force against the United States or subdivisions of the government; or seek to deprive individuals of their civil rights. This policy defines *participation* as conduct that is performed alone or with others (e.g., rallies, fundraising, recruiting, training) and describes the link between prohibited activities and impacts on good order, discipline, or mission accomplishment.[37]

Furthermore, the Navy's military personnel policy outlines a process for administrative or disciplinary actions for personnel who are involved in "any substantiated incident of serious misconduct resulting from participation in supremacist or extremist activities."[38] This policy describes relevant prescribed misconduct that relates to "illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, or national origin" or "advocating the use of force or violence against any federal, state, or local government[s]."[39] The policy also lists various types of violations (e.g., insubordinate conduct, maltreatment of subordinates, rioting, provoking speech or

gesture, assault, disloyal statements), noting this list is not exhaustive. More recently, the U.S. Marine Corps issued an order that consolidates various policies to prohibit a variety of activities, including "hazing, bullying, ostracism, retaliation, wrongful distribution, or broadcasting of intimate images, and certain dissident and protest activities (to include supremacist activity)."[40]

To summarize, the department-level policies share many of the same features, including prohibitions on extremist and supremacist ideology and active advocacy of these beliefs. These policies primarily focus on service members. All policies focus on illegal discrimination or depriving personnel of civil rights and prohibit violence against others or the government. The list of groups mentioned in these policy documents are not exhaustive, and there are a variety of potentially marginalized groups who might become targets. The policies also rely on the judgments of commanders to adjudicate policy violations, but there appears to be less guidance for commanders on how best to identify future violations and preserve service members' right of expression. We conclude that DoD, military department, and Service policies should maintain a standard definition of extremism and provide more guidance for commanders on how best to balance the rights of service members with unit functioning and national security interests. Furthermore, policy should also include guidance on a broader variety of members within the military community who might exhibit extremist behaviors (e.g., military families, military dependents, civilian employees, and contractors).

Part 2: Prevent Future Extremist Views and Activities

The second part of our proposed framework is to design programs to prevent members of the military community from associating with extremist groups or beliefs. Figure 2 outlines some of the features of extremism and proposed corresponding types of interventions. This encompasses activities within narrow definitions of extremism (labeled here as "extremist manifestations") and broader emotions, beliefs, and activities (characterized as "initial states" and "initial manifestations") that might be precursors to those extremist manifestations. The features displayed in Figure 2 are not necessarily linked as a linear process. The goal of these prevention programs should be to counsel individuals when they exhibit initial states or manifestations of extremism—two of the three attributes of extremism that are displayed in Figure 2—and to alert leaders to signs of misinformation, recruitment, and emerging groups that might be posing a threat to the military community.

The initial states of extremism include feelings and emotions, such as frustration and anger, that might not be noticed by others because they might be kept internal and are also common human emotions.[41] In the case of

FIGURE 2

Features of Extremism and Levels of Intervention

Initial states	Initial manifestations	Extremist manifestations
Internal emotions about society, institutions, culture	**Beliefs and actions more visible to friends, families, colleagues**	**Activities often shared with like-minded others**
• Anger, frustration, outrage • Dissatisfaction, distancing • Alienation, "otherness" • Revenge, hatred • Grievance, distrust, rejection of authorities and society • Disempowerment, lowered resilience to radicalization	• Lack of participation in political processes • Negative feelings at lack of status, recognition in mainstream society • Acceptance of views that violence is acceptable, justifiable, necessary • Online interactions with extremists • Involvement in sharing extremist material	• Recruitment, radicalization, mobilization of others • Criminality to aid extremist groups • Membership, indoctrination, training in extremist groups • Terrorism, traveling to commit an act of terrorism
Prevention	**Early intervention**	**Aggressive intervention**
Preliminary prevention and detection by military community	Early and intensive intervention by military community	Aggressive intervention using law enforcement

SOURCE: Adapted from Baruch et al., 2018.

NOTE: This figure organizes three broad sets of features. It is not a linear progression of stages, and one might exhibit some or all of these features simultaneously.

extremism, however, the risk is that these intense, hostile feelings can be directed toward the wider society, culture, and authorities. Mentors and service providers, such as counselors and chaplains, can help members manage these feelings in productive ways and find legitimate channels for members to register their grievances.

Initial extremist manifestations are more-clearly visible identifiers of violent extremism—for example, dropping out of political processes and mainstream cultures, accepting extremist group narratives regarding the justification of and need for violence, and interacting with extremist groups and materials.[42] These attributes might be cause for concern for family members, military peers, or commanders, but to preserve the rights of service members, a sophisticated approach to addressing them will be needed, particularly when no policy has been violated.

Finally, extremist activities might be shared with wider groups of individuals who also hold similar beliefs. And, in some cases, these activities may cross into support, or justification, of violence that includes criminal activities.[43] These are the more clear-cut activities for which law enforcement should be contacted.

Existing military programs could augment commanders' efforts, particularly with the initial states and initial manifestations of extremism. These resources include but are not limited to chaplains; mental health counselors; Family Readiness Groups (FRGs); the Military Crisis Line; Military OneSource; the U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) program; and Air Force Community Action Boards. Behavioral and mental health resources and counseling are indispensable for identifying and countering extremism, and a majority of these programs might embrace psychosocial approaches that examine a combination of psychological and environmental factors.

Chaplains are a key line of defense for service members' existential, spiritual, or moral concerns.[44] They can be a point of referral for those in need of behavioral health care services and also provide privileged communication that other service providers would often be required to report.[45] Furthermore, perceived stigma associated with mental health treatment is a complicated barrier to seeking behavioral health interventions,[46] so some service members might be more inclined to seek out the support of military chaplains instead of counselors.

Extremist activities might be shared with wider groups of likeminded individuals and sometimes cross the line by supporting and justifying the use of violence, up to and including committing a criminal offense.

Rather than deciding to seek counseling on their own, service members might be encouraged or required to do so by their commander or other relevant personnel. One study examined how active-duty military personnel choose between options for help with emotional or mental health concerns and reported that soldiers generally seek out *civilian* mental health professionals for family and substance abuse problems, whereas *military* mental health professionals are primarily consulted for stress management, depression, anxiety, combat or operational stress, or anger management.[47]

Established in 2012, DoD's Military Family Readiness System comprises a diverse set of policies, programs, services, resources, and practices to support and promote family well-being. Commanders are supposed to work within this system when addressing many of the service member attitudes and behaviors that fall within the initial states and initial manifestations of extremism. Service member and family well-being fosters family readiness, which in turn enhances service members' readiness.[48] DoD's Military Family Readiness System includes such resources as FRGs (and their equivalents in the Services), the Military Crisis Line, and Military OneSource. As official command-sponsored and command-resourced organizations, FRGs offer assistance, mutual support, and a network of communications between family members, the chain of command, and community resource providers.[49] The Military Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource for service members. Military OneSource offers support for nonmedical counseling (e.g., marriage counseling, stress management) and referrals to other types of resources. Military mental health professionals address such issues as suicidal and homicidal thoughts; experiences of sexual

assault, child abuse, or domestic violence; alcohol and substance abuse; and serious mental health conditions that require medical treatment. MWR and its partners offer education and counseling services for such issues as suicide prevention and survivor outreach.[50]

Air Force Community Action Boards and Community Action Teams (CATs) are another viable resource for coordinating strategies to identify and address patterns related to signs of initial states or initial manifestations of extremism. These are entities at the installation, major command, and headquarters level composed of representatives from diverse organizations (e.g., leadership, law enforcement, service providers) who coordinate periodically to identify and monitor the needs of the various populations within the military community (i.e., service members, their families, Air Force employees) and develop strategies to address them. For example, Air Force Instruction 90-5001 encourages commanders to consult with CAT members, Community Support Coordinators, and Violence Prevention Integrators to enhance well-being and resilience within their units.[51]

Part 3: Detect and Intervene When Observing Extremism

The third part of our proposed framework is to detect early trends of extremist activity at the installation level and then intervene at these installations, accordingly.[52] Coordination between military and civilian law enforcement and collection of open-source intelligence are two strategies for detecting these trends.

First, civilian and military law enforcement agencies have useful information they could share on which groups

pose the greatest threats for service members online and in the areas surrounding particular installations, as well as whether they observe indicators of extremist affiliations, such as symbols or slogans.[53] Military leaders, educators, and service providers could draw upon these resources for education, training, and informational awareness activities. For example, installation-level Air Force CATs (or equivalents in other Services) could develop a toolkit to provide access to videos, reports, bulletins, or other materials that could inform unit or community programming. The toolkit could offer ideas on organizations to contact for guest speakers who could educate and warn members about particular extremist groups and their beliefs, activities, and recruitment tactics. This information could help provide counter-messaging or inoculation against narratives and propaganda by extremist groups.

There are various criminal investigative services across DoD that might encounter evidence of extremist activities during investigations, either directly or indirectly. These include the Defense Criminal Investigation Services,[54] Air Force Office of Special Investigations,[55] U.S. Army Criminal Investigations Command,[56] and Naval Criminal Investigation Service.[57] Although they need to preserve the integrity of their investigations, there might be patterns or broader trends they could then share with military leaders and service providers to aid in detection, stop the spread of harmful information, and engage in other countermeasures. The Office of Law Enforcement Policy and Support within the Defense Human Resources Activity could also help coordinate the detection of extremist activities and sharing of information across DoD.

Second, the internet has made it easier for extremist groups to interact with a broader variety of potential members. New machine learning techniques can aid in searching for online trends of extremist involvement.[58] For example, models can be trained to detect extremist communities on such social media platforms as Twitter and to infer the degree to which users who appear to have current or past associations with the military are engaging with these extremist groups. From these online discussions, insights could be drawn to inform headquarters-prepared materials targeting misinformation, recruitment language, and so on for broader use by the military community. However, there are risks associated with the use of artificial intelligence and machine-learning tools, including privacy concerns, false positive or negative results, and algorithmic bias that require continuous recalibration by a human-in-the-loop.[59]

Detection and intervention are not solely the domain of law enforcement or data analysts. Service providers might have information about potential risks for extremist activity, although they might not always recognize it as such. Chaplains, psychologists, social workers, Military and Family Life counselors, psychiatrists, and health care providers might be providing support for individuals exhibiting the initial states or initial manifestations of extremism. These support service providers must preserve their professional and ethical obligations regarding confidentiality and act in ways that promote rather than undermine help-seeking behaviors and treatment. We do not imply that these professionals should report every individual who feels frustrated with the government, feels alienated from others, or is withdrawing from political processes, for example, but in the course of their work they might become aware of information that could be impor-

tant for detecting and intervening to counter extremism. Such information might include

- extremist materials appearing on the installation (e.g., left in the chapel or hospital waiting rooms)
- emerging extremist groups, movements, or causes
- rumors or misinformation being spread that could stoke the flames of social conflicts (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation)
- justifications of extremist activities that resonate with members
- poor reputation of military channels for filing complaints or appeals, or service members' lack of awareness of these channels.

Sharing this type of information—not tied to any particular individuals—could inform efforts to keep abreast of ever-evolving groups and social movements, to actively dispel myths and misinformation or dismantle justifications that could increase the risk of adopting extremist views, and to improve the awareness and functioning of complaint channels to encourage people to work within them.

It is important that providers (1) understand the types of aggregate information that they could share with commanders that would be helpful and (2) have a safe way to share this information.

Part 4. Measure Extremist Trends and Evaluate Interventions

The last part of our proposed four-part framework involves the measurement of extremist trends and subsequent evaluation of the early interventions previously described. DoD already collects some data on extremism using the DIBRS, which records law enforcement activities and statistics within the military and reports criminal data to the FBI as required by the Uniform Federal Crime Reporting Act of 1988.[60]

One data element in DIBRS is "bias motivation." *Bias* is defined as "a performed negative opinion or attitude toward a group of persons" (e.g., racial, religious, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation, or disability groups).[61] Table 1 displays some of these codes in DIBRS.

There are several potential areas of improvement for data collection related to extremism in the military. First, the codes used in DIBRS might not always align with those used in the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).[62] For example, NIBRS has a code for "Anti-Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander" while DIBRS has a separate code just for "Anti-Pacific Islander." DIBRS has separate bias motivation codes for seven religions, while NIBRS has 14 codes for religious bias. Furthermore, NIBRS has a code for "Anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (mixed group)" while DIBRS has no code for transgender bias.

Second, there might be biases in how incidents are reported to DIBRS. For example, incidents in the FBI's NIBRS are not necessarily representative of all incidents among the U.S. population,[63] and some have reported a nonresponse rate in reporting by law enforcement agencies to the FBI.[64] The same might hold true for DIBRS. Furthermore, some have raised concerns in the past about the reliability of data from the DIBRS.[65] Thus, there might be a need to continuously review what is reported to DIBRS (i.e., consistent use of correct motivation bias codes), the frequency of reporting (i.e., consistent reporting by the Services over time), and the sharing of data with the FBI to ensure that broad trends related to

TABLE 1

Bias Motivation Codes in the Defense Incident-Based Reporting System

Race and Ethnicity	Religion	Sexual Orientation	Mental and Physical Disabilities	Unknown Bias
• AW = Anti-White • AH = Anti-Black • AD = Anti-Arab • AM = Anti-Hispanic • AC = Anti-American Indian • AB = Anti-Alaskan • AE = Anti-Asian • AT = Anti-Pacific Islander • AR = Anti-Multi-Racial Group • AZ = Anti-Other Ethnicity	• AO = Anti-Jewish • AI = Anti-Catholic • AN = Anti-Islamic (Moslem) • AU = Anti-Protestant • AS =Anti-Multi-Religious Group • AA = Anti-Agnostic • AY = Anti-Other Religions	• AQ = Anti-Male Homosexual • AK = Anti-Female Homosexual • AL = Anti-Heterosexual • AG = Anti-Bisexual	• BA = Anti-Mental Disability • BB = Anti-Physical Disability	• AX = Unknown Bias

SOURCE: DoD, 2020, p. 26.
NOTE: Table 1 does not display the code "NB = None (no bias)."

extremism are captured between civilian and military law enforcement organizations.

Third, there could be alternative ways to collect data on trends related to extremism and how they might relate to intervention activities. For example, the Army's iSALUTE program is an online reporting tool for members of the Army community to report suspected extremist activities.[66] As military leaders release new tools, there will be a need to continuously evaluate these data sources and subsequent interventions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This Perspective outlines a framework for reducing the risk of extremism in the U.S. military. It provides a brief review of relevant background information about extrem-

ism and presents a four-part framework for mitigating such activities. The first part is recognizing and defining the problem of extremism, which the military has already done. The second part is preventing future extremist activities from occurring across the ranks, and the framework outlines ways for the military to accomplish this. The third part involves using strategies to detect what might be precursors of extremism and helping commanders intervene accordingly. The fourth part describes ways for the military to measure extremist trends and evaluate interventions using an evidence-based approach.

Conclusions

We have identified four conclusions using this framework.

First, current DoD policies clearly prohibit extremism in the military and place significant responsibilities on commanders to implement this policy. Specifically, policy requires commanders to take corrective action when they observe active forms of extremist activities. It also requires commanders to intervene when they observe behaviors that *might* lead to a future violation of policies that prohibit extremism. This is a tremendous responsibility, particularly given that commanders are not subject-matter experts in extremism and that, even for experts, this would be difficult, because many of the precursors to extremism are common (e.g., frustration with society, institutions, and culture) and do not lead to extremism.

Second, there is no widely accepted definition of extremism that delineates where to draw the line between *extremism* and beliefs and behaviors that are simply *outside the norm*. That presents challenges for commanders in trying to balance the rights of service members with detection of current extremist policy violations or problematic behaviors that have a high probability of leading to extremist activity in the future.

Third, policy largely focuses on extremist activities by service members. The problem of extremism emerges from and affects the broader military community, meaning not only service members but also their families and civilian employees.

Fourth, DoD has several existing support programs that could be better leveraged to support commanders in implementing DoD's ban on extremist activities while protecting the rights and needs of those they serve. Such programs could also help a broader variety of members of the military community (e.g., military spouses, dependents, civilian employees, contractors) to detect and intervene

earlier rather than later when they observe extremist activities that affect the military.

Recommendations

We offer five recommendations that inform a strategy to support commanders in mitigating extremism within the military.

DoD efforts to combat extremism should engage the wider military community, not focus solely on service members. Given the diversity of the U.S. military community, any policies or programs designed to prevent or detect extremism should consider *all* members of the military community—in partnership with relevant civilian community members—as potential partners in the fight against extremism. In 2019, there were more than 1.3 million members on active duty, but also more than 1 million members of the Ready Reserve, more than 200,000 members of the Standby or Retired Reserve, almost 900,000 DoD civilian employees, more than 965,000 military spouses, and more than 1.6 million children of members.[67] Additionally, military installations and deployed environments can include contractors, personnel from other agencies, and members of other nations' militaries. Any member of these groups might adopt and promote extremist beliefs and act upon them, including becoming active or passive members of extremist groups promoting racial supremacy, religious extremism, or specific social or political issues. Commanders and supervisors face major challenges detecting early signs of extremism across the various members in the broader military community, many of whom commanders will rarely if ever directly meet. Anti-extremism efforts focused just on active-duty personnel will miss key sources of information and opportu-

nities for influence. Such military activities and resources as stand-downs, town halls, information campaigns, and channels to share tips with leaders should also engage the broader community, including active and reserve component personnel, spouses and partners, children, civilian employees, and contractors.

Efforts to address extremism should take a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs. Responding to early signs of extremism is preferable to waiting until initial extremist states manifest in ways that directly affect military readiness or preparedness. Service providers from the various support agencies already do help individuals find more-acceptable ways to manage emotions, such as frustration and anger directed toward authority figures or certain segments of society. Community service providers could also think about broader ways to counter the influence and impact of extremist groups. For example, they could

- provide general guidance on how to break cycles of outrage and hate and to manage personal relationships with any friends or relatives who hold extremist views or are involved in violent extremist groups
- organize activities to dispel stereotypes and myths promulgated by hate groups and to illuminate the harm of hate speech, targeted threats, and other extremist activities
- organize real-time live or virtual question-and-answer sessions with reformed extremists to understand the impacts of extremism and how people disengage from these groups.

Service providers could also alert leaders to signs of misinformation, recruitment, and emerging groups that might be posing a threat to the military community.

A community-based approach would also emphasize the need to support unit and broader installation-wide morale, welfare, and recreational activities to strengthen the military identity, community, and sense of belonging. These may counterbalance extremist recruitment strategies, which seek to build rapport, camaraderie, and loyalty at the small-group level as a bridge to introducing extreme beliefs and actions. A stronger sense of unit cohesion and community well-being can make personnel and their families more resistant to these strategies within the military community.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) should continue to coordinate information-sharing between civilian and military law enforcement agencies. Extremist groups are volatile by nature. Such groups might form, evolve, splinter, or disintegrate relatively quickly, only to reemerge later in new forms. The tracking of these trends will require cooperation among federal law enforcement agencies (e.g., FBI), state and local law enforcement agencies, military law enforcement organizations (e.g., Army Criminal Investigation Command), and domestic intelligence and security agencies (e.g., DHS and the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency).

OSD and the military departments should employ machine-learning technologies to help detect broad, emerging trends of extremism that might affect members of the military community. The internet and social media have reduced the costs of creating, sustaining, and growing extremist organizations—not only in the United States but also around the world. Many of these online data are publicly available, and recent advances in machine-learning methods would allow trained professionals within OSD and the military departments to spot early patterns of extrem-

ist activities that might target members of the military community.[68] Such tools are useful for identifying broad trends at the installation level, using de-identified data. We distinguish this approach from law enforcement analyses of individual-level identifiable data for investigation purposes. The use of these machine-learning tools does carry risks, including privacy concerns, false positive or negative results, and algorithmic bias. Thus, we recommend continuous recalibration of these tools that involves a human-in-the-loop.

OSD should continually measure existing extremist trends and evaluate programs designed to prevent, detect, and intervene when members of the military community express extremist views. There is a paucity of data on trends surrounding the prevalence of extremist activities in the military. For example, extremism might occur at the nexus of civil-military relations, whereby civilian extremist groups attempt to recruit members of the military community; but civilian and military law enforcement agencies might not always share information about possible extremism. The bias motivation codes used in DIBRS and the process for collecting and reporting bias-motivated incidents should align with the FBI's NIBRS. This integration would ensure that trends in extremism are shared between civilian and military law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, as the Services and OSD develop new tools for collecting data on extremism,

opportunities will arise to identify best practices for measuring extremist activities over time.

Cautionary Points on Implementation

This section discusses four cautionary points on the issue of scope creep when implementing policies designed to reduce the risk of extremism in the U.S. military. First, policy should avoid loosely applying the label of *extremist* to *all* people who exhibit initial states of extremism. Not all people who express anger, frustration, outrage, or feelings of alienation are or will become extremists. Second, we are not suggesting that the military should assign the mission of combating extremism to any of its existing community support services. These services are a set of tools out of many (e.g., law enforcement entities, counterintelligence efforts, mental health services) and should be part of a comprehensive strategy to combat extremism.

Third, the military should avoid using its community support services as an extension of law enforcement. Chaplains, mental health counselors, and FRGs should support personnel and their families versus collecting evidence on individuals for future law enforcement actions.[69] These services can help provide information about misinformation, patterns, and external groups but must not undermine their

Community support services are a set of tools out of many that should be part of a comprehensive strategy to combat extremism.

own efforts, ethics, or professional standards. Finally, "early interventions" refer to leveraging existing support services to prevent people from ever taking up active involvement in extremism that requires disciplinary actions. Preventive work can be achieved through helping individuals manage difficult feelings and life experiences and guiding them to more-productive channels for expressing their grievances and bringing about change.

Closing Thoughts

The vast majority of military personnel and their families are not extremists. But even a small number of people engaged in extremist activities could damage the U.S. military's reputation, its force, its members, and the larger community. Extremist activities can also be harmful to the individuals who are radicalized and their friends and family. DoD has existing programs that support personnel and their families, promote diversity and inclusion, and prevent violence. A community-based approach that leverages these existing programs could help the military to prevent service members and their families from associating with extremist groups and to respond sooner—and more effectively—when they do.

Notes

1   Thompson, Winston, and Hanrahan, 2018.

2   Wilkinson, 2020.

3   Dreisbach and Anderson, 2021.

4   Shammas and De Vynck, 2021.

5   DoD Directive 1325.6, 1996; DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012.

6   DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012, p. 10.

7   DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012.

8   Thompson and Winston, 2018.

9   U.S. Department of Justice, 2020.

10   Shammas and De Vynck, 2021; *United States v. Baker*, 2021.

11   Helmus, 2009.

12   Picciolini, 2020.

13   Helmus et al., 2018.

14   Brown et al., 2021.

15   Burke, 1980.

16   Fromm, 1973.

17   Austin, 2021.

18   Jenkins, 2021.

19   Garamone, 2021.

20   Williford, 2019.

21   DoD, 2019b; *United States v. Wilcox*, 2008.

22   DHS and FBI, 2020.

23   Anti-Defamation League, undated.

24   Ricks, 2011.

25   Cortwright, 1990.

26   Gross, 1986.

27   United Press International, 1986.

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[28] Murphy, Rottman, and Sher, 2013; Sher and Rottman, 2013.

[29] DHS and FBI, 2020.

[30] DHS and FBI, 2020, p. 2.

[31] DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012, p. 1.

[32] DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012, p. 9.

[33] DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012, p. 9.

[34] DAF Instruction 51-508, 2018, p. 14.

[35] DAF Instruction 51-508, 2018, p. 14.

[36] U.S. Department of the Army Regulation 600–20, 2020, p. 30.

[37] U.S. Department of the Navy, 1997.

[38] U.S. Department of the Navy, 2008, p. 1.

[39] U.S. Department of the Navy, 2008, p. 1.

[40] U.S. Marine Corps, undated; U.S. Marine Corps, 2021.

[41] Baruch et al., 2018.

[42] Baruch et al., 2018.

[43] Baruch et al., 2018.

[44] Kim et al., 2016.

[45] See Rule 503 in DoD, 2019b.

[46] Kazman et al., 2020.

[47] Morgan et al., 2016.

[48] National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019.

[49] U.S. Army, undated.

[50] MWR, undated.

[51] DAF Instruction 90-5001, 2019.

[52] For a similar approach that collected data on individual members of the U.S. Air Force community using surveys but aggregated them to the installation level, see Sims et al., 2019.

[53] National Gang Intelligence Center, 2015.

[54] DoD, 2010.

[55] Grabosky, 2020; Losey, 2020.

[56] Ethridge, 2020.

[57] McMahon, 2020.

[58] Marcellino et al., 2020.

[59] Brown et al., 2020.

[60] DoD Instruction 7730.47, 2020.

[61] DoD Instruction 7730.47, 2020.

[62] U.S. Department of Justice, 2021.

[63] Addington, 2008.

[64] McCormack, Pattavina, and Tracy, 2017.

[65] DoD, 2014; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010.

[66] U.S. Army, 2021.

[67] DoD, 2019a.

[68] Marcellino et al., 2020; Marcellino et al., 2021.

[69] For a discussion of how some heavy-handed responses to extremism may fail, see Brown et al., 2021.

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About This Perspective

In recent years, news headlines have highlighted the involvement of current or former U.S. military personnel in protest violence; supremacist groups; the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol; and other forms of violent extremism spanning different political and ideological spectra. The threat of extremism is not new, but the proliferation of social media has made it easier for radical ideas to spread quickly and for extremist groups to organize, even reaching into the military community (e.g., service members, military spouses, military dependents, civilian employees, and contractors) to expand membership and gain operational capabilities.

This Perspective outlines a framework to help commanders reduce the risk of extremism in the military. First, we provide highlights from research on extremism, including a framework for understanding these types of activities. Second, we use this framework to outline four strategies for reducing the risk of extremism in the military. Third, we recommend a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs to better support commanders as they carry out their responsibilities to prevent and mitigate exposure to extremism by members of the military community.

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Acknowledgments

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DoD leadership:

I am writing to inform you of the upcoming release of a RAND National Defense Research Institute (NDRI) research report titled *Reducing the Risk of Extremist Activity in the U.S. Military*. A pre-release copy of the report, which will be made public onrand.org < Caution-https://www.rand.org/ > on September 16th, 2021, is attached here.

This report was funded with NDRI research support funds, which is independent exploratory research funding provided for in the FFRDC contract, as approved by NDRI's primary OSD sponsor.

Please let me know if you have questions.

Jack

Jack Riley
Vice President, RAND National Security Research Division
   and director, National Defense Research Institute
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MAREK N. POSARD, LESLIE ADRIENNE PAYNE, LAURA L. MILLER

Reducing the Risk of Extremist Activity in the U.S. Military

In recent years, news headlines have highlighted the involvement of current or former U.S. military personnel in protest violence;[1] supremacist groups;[2] the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol;[3] and other forms of violent extremism spanning different political and ideological spectra.[4] The threat of extremism is not new, but the proliferation of social media has made it easier for radical ideas to spread quickly and for extremist groups to organize, even reaching into the military community (e.g., service members, military spouses, military dependents, civilian employees, and contractors) to expand membership and gain operational capabilities.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has long prohibited service members from actively advocating for extremist activities.[5] DoD policy establishes the expectation that commanders detect prohibited activities, investigate them, and take corrective action. It also relies on commanders to help minimize the risk by intervening early, "primarily through counseling" when they observe "signs of future prohibited activities."[6] Thus, commanders have a dual mandate to enforce current policy violations and anticipate future violations by personnel. DoD policy also places great responsibility on commanders to appropriately weigh the

potentially competing interests of national security; service members' right of expression; and good unit order, discipline, and effectiveness.[7]

In this Perspective, we outline a framework to help commanders reduce the risk of extremism in the military. First, we provide highlights from research on extremism, including a framework for understanding these types of activities. Second, we use this framework to outline four strategies for reducing the risk of extremism in the military. Third, we recommend a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs to better support commanders as they carry out their responsibilities to prevent and mitigate exposure to extremism within the military.

Seeking Identity, Meaning, and Social Bonds, Service Members Might Find Them in Extremist Movements

Recent news headlines raise questions about the extent to which and the reasons why current and former members of the U.S. military would associate with extremist movements. For example, in 2017, U.S. Marine Corps Lance Corporal Vasillios Pistolis was imprisoned over his participation in the violent white supremacist "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.[8] In another case, the government charged U.S. Army Private Ethan Melzer with conspiring to murder his fellow soldiers by allegedly sharing sensitive details about his unit's upcoming deployment with a neo-Nazi and white supremacist group to facilitate an attack.[9] In January 2021, the government arrested ousted ex-soldier and self-proclaimed "hardcore leftist" Daniel Baker,

Key Points

- *Extremism* is a term used to characterize a variety of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that often are on the extreme end of the political, religious, or ideological spectrum within society (e.g., white nationalist, anarchist).
- Extremist beliefs, affiliations, and activities are constantly evolving.
- Service members, military families, and civilian employees might actively or passively associate with extremist groups.
- DoD prohibits active involvement in extremist activities, but laws place limits on what activities the military can and cannot restrict or punish.
- Current policy requires commanders to intervene when they observe extremist activities or behaviors that might lead to future extremism.
- We present a framework to assist DoD in reducing the risk of extremism in the military.
- We make five recommendations, each focusing on a community-based approach that leverages existing DoD programs to help commanders and their subordinates prevent, detect, intervene, and measure extremist activities earlier rather than later.

who is accused of making online threats and attempting to organize violence against fascists, white supremacists, conservative protestors, and U.S. military officers.[10]

Individuals labeled as *extremists* (1) identify with beliefs and organizations that are on the far end of political, religious, or ideological spectra within a society and (2) advocate for activities that are outside societal norms and laws. These individuals often draw meaning from the

identity that they apply to themselves and others based on their group affiliations (e.g., race, gender, religion, nationality, political beliefs). Studies have identified a variety of factors that lead people to join extremist movements, such as having a passion for political change, looking for a sense of belonging, and seeking excitement.[11] One former leader of a white nationalist group claims that new members are often seeking to form a sense of identity, community, and purpose[12]—some of the same reasons that people join the military.[13] Research has identified at least four types of experiences that people tend to follow into extremism:

- *life events*: traumatic life events that prompt people to consider extremist views as a framework to understand their trauma
- *propaganda*: consumption of extremist material, including books, music, or online content
- *recruitment*: interactions with members of extremist groups that either reach out to individuals or that individuals seek out after self-radicalizing
- *social bonds*: social interactions with other members of extremist groups, especially if individuals are feeling lonely or isolated.[14]

There is no single factor that sufficiently explains why people become active in extremist causes. Often, a combination of factors leads individuals to become increasingly active in extremist activities. This ratcheting up of involvement might help people construct a new identity that is defined by an extremist ideology. Specifically, research has proposed that extremist identities become problematic when they (1) consume a large part of one's life[15] and (2) are defined by extreme hatred or prejudice toward other groups of people.[16]

Current and former military personnel might come into contact with extremist beliefs or groups on their own initiative, be exposed to those beliefs or groups online or through friends or family, or be approached by extremists seeking to recruit them.

Framework for Reducing the Risk of Extremism in the Military

Figure 1 shows a four-part framework we use to categorize the ways in which the military could combat extremism. We first provide an overview of the framework, and then we examine each element more closely. The first part is to recognize the problem of extremism and define *extrem-*

Abbreviations	
ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
CAT	Community Action Team
DAF	U.S. Department of the Air Force
DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
DIBRS	Defense Incident-Based Reporting System
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FRG	Family Readiness Group
MWR	U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation
NIBRS	National Incident-Based Reporting System
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense

FIGURE 1

Framework for Reducing the Risk of Extremism Within the U.S. Military Community

| Recognize and scope the problem of extremism | Prevent future extremist views and activities | Detect and intervene when observing extremism | Measure extremist trends and evaluate interventions |

ist activities. The military has already done this through policy, public statements by military leadership, and a one-day "stand down" of activities to discuss extremism in the military.[17] Some experts argue that the scope of extremism should be narrow, with the goal of isolating the most-dangerous members participating in fringe elements of these movements.[18] Others argue that a broader scope can help identify those supporting extremists or provide an early warning about those at risk of becoming extremists. Our proposed framework focuses on addressing these early warning signs of extremism.

Second, the military could better leverage existing violence prevention programs to prevent service members from becoming involved with extremist groups. Some examples of existing prevention resources within the military are chaplains, mental health counselors, the Family Advocacy Program, and Military OneSource.

Third, this framework focuses on detecting extremist activities and designing interventions to respond to them. The military has existing authorities to detect broad patterns of extremism in its ranks; for instance, the military is authorized to coordinate with civilian law enforcement agencies, conduct defense criminal investigative services, and track extremist activities online. Leveraging existing resources designed to support the military community could help commanders detect early signals that might lead to future extremist activities, and then the commanders could intervene. People in existing programs, such as chaplains, counselors, and other sources of support, might become aware of emerging extremist groups, ideologies, rumors, and misinformation being circulated. Although those sources cannot violate their professional and ethical codes or standards for confidentiality, privacy, and the protection of sensitive health information, they could be encouraged and provided with a means to share general information about those trends so commanders could address them across the population at large.

Finally, our framework includes measuring extremist activities and using the results to inform the evaluation of programs designed to prevent, detect, and intervene when commanders become aware of signs of extremist activities. DoD currently tracks bias motivations in the Defense Incident-Based Reporting System (DIBRS), but it might need to reevaluate and revise these reporting codes in DIBRS and consider whether alternative forms of data collection would be useful to measure extremist trends in the future.

Part 1. Recognize and Scope the Problem of Extremism

The first part of our proposed framework is to recognize and define the problem of extremism. Military leadership has publicly recognized this problem, as is evident from the policies against it, recent statements made by U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III and various senior civilian and defense leaders, and the 2021 DoD order for commanders to conduct a one-day "stand-down" to discuss extremism with personnel.[19]

Defining the problem of extremism has been a challenge, however, because there is no widely accepted set of criteria for making that determination. In an attempt to draw the line for legal purposes, U.S. courts have tried to balance freedom of expression with the need to protect the public from disruptions and threats.[20] U.S. military courts have focused on the degree to which extremist behaviors were either damaging the reputation or public esteem of the military ("service discrediting") or harming good order and discipline, two concepts that are outlined in the Uniform Code of Military Justice.[21] The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI),[22] however, focus their definitions on how a particular belief system motivates someone to commit acts of violence. There are also definitions of extremism employed by private and nonprofit organizations. The Anti-Defamation League, for example, uses a broad definition of extremism that includes any "religious, social, or political belief systems that exist substantially outside of belief systems more broadly accepted in society."[23]

Historically, the military has struggled to identify and manage personnel whose beliefs might lead to future prob-

lems. During World War II, for example, the Army created the 620th Engineer General Services Company as a holding unit for personnel, many of them German-born, whom commanders suspected of being disloyal to the United States.[24] During the Vietnam War, basic military functioning was undermined by racial conflict within the ranks, some of which involved violence—including attacks against officers and enlisted leaders.[25] During the 1980s, following reports of service members involved in Ku Klux Klan activities, then–Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger released a memo broadening the policy against participation in hate groups, stating that active participation in white supremacy groups was "utterly incompatible" with military service, and authorizing commanders to discipline or even discharge those involved in disruptive activities.[26] Although the memo did not forbid joining these groups, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) criticized the policy as overly broad.[27] In 2013, the ACLU also criticized U.S. Army Equal Opportunity training materials that characterized a variety of beliefs as extremism, including some held by evangelical Christian, ultra-Orthodox Jewish, and Ku Klux Klan groups.[28]

It is beyond the scope of this effort to develop a standardized definition of extremism. However, to further illuminate the complexity, we review select definitions from federal law enforcement agencies, DoD, and the military Services.

How Law Enforcement Agencies, the Department of Defense, and the Military Services Define Extremism

This section focuses on definitions of extremism used by selected federal law enforcement agencies, DoD, and each of the military departments as of the date this document was written. These definitions varied in scope. For example, some federal law enforcement agencies narrowly focus on the link between ideological beliefs and unlawful actions. In the U.S. military, however, the focus more broadly includes participation in activities that undermine good order and discipline or are service discrediting.

Federal Law Enforcement

As required by law, the FBI and DHS, in consultation with the Director of National Intelligence, developed definitions for terms related to domestic terrorism.[29] Their definitions for extremism are not identical to one another, but both the DHS and FBI define *domestic violent extremist* as

> an individual based and operating primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States who seeks to further their ideological goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence. It is important to remember that the mere advocacy of ideological positions and/or the use of strong rhetoric does not constitute violent extremism, and in some cases direct or specific threats of violence must be present to constitute a violation of federal law.[30]

Department of Defense

DoD policy related to extremism recognizes that "a service member's right of expression should be preserved to the maximum extent possible."[31] Furthermore, it notes that, while balancing the rights of service members, no commander should be indifferent to conduct that undermines unit effectiveness.

The policy also delimits prohibited and preventive activities. First, DoD policy states,

> Military personnel must not actively advocate supremacist, extremist, or criminal gang doctrine, ideology, or causes, including those that advance, encourage, or advocate illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, ethnicity, or national origin or those that advance, encourage, or advocate the use of force, violence, or criminal activity or otherwise advance efforts to deprive individuals of their civil rights.[32]

Furthermore, the policy instructs personnel to reject active participation in criminal gangs or other organizations that advocate such prohibited views, activities, and illegal discrimination. Some examples of active participation include fundraising, demonstrating or rallying, recruiting, training, and wearing gang colors, clothing, or tattoos. The policy gives commanders authority to use a variety of administrative and disciplinary actions:

> The functions of command include vigilance about the existence of such activities; active use of investigative authority to include a prompt and fair complaint process; and use of administrative powers such as counseling, reprimands, orders, and performance evaluations to deter such activities.[33]

Second, DoD policy requires actions to prevent extremist activities. Specifically, the policy instructs commanders to intervene early (primarily with counseling) when they observe signs of potential future policy violations or actions

Current policy places a significant amount of responsibility on commanders to not only identify current violations of policies that prohibit extremist activities but also anticipate when behaviors might suggest a future policy violation.

that could undermine good order and discipline. For example, the policy states that possessing literature associated with extremist causes, ideology, doctrine, or organizations is not necessarily prohibited, but it signals that further investigations or counseling might be warranted.

Put simply, *current policy places a significant amount of responsibility on commanders to not only identify current violations of policies that prohibit extremist activities but also anticipate when behaviors might suggest a future policy violation.*

Military Departments

Military department policies reiterate key elements of the DoD policy and provide more detail for specific implementation. For example, guidance from the U.S. Department of the Air Force (DAF) prohibits personnel from active advocacy of "supremacist, extremist, or criminal gang doctrine, ideology, or causes."[34] These causes include the advocacy of "illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, ethnicity, or national origin." Furthermore, prohibited causes include advocacy for "the use of force,

violence, or criminal activity" that deprive the civil rights of others. DAF policy also highlights that efforts to counter violent extremism must be balanced, because "commanders must preserve the service member's constitutional right of expression to the maximum extent possible, consistent with good order, discipline, and national security."[35]

The U.S. Department of the Army policy on extremist organizations and activities, Army Regulation 600–20, which was revised in July 2020, is designed to be used in conjunction with DoD Instruction 1325.06. This Army policy prohibits extremist activities. Specifically, the revised policy clearly states that "it is the commander's responsibility to maintain good order and discipline" and notes that "every commander has the inherent authority to take appropriate actions to accomplish this goal."[36] The Army defines extremism by a variety of views that groups are advocating for, including hatred, intolerance, or discrimination based on race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. It also includes the use of violence to deprive people of their individual rights; support for terrorism, sedition, and violence against the United States or

DoD; and unlawful violence to achieve political, religious, discriminatory, and ideological goals.

Furthermore, Army policy prohibits a wide variety of activities if associated with extremist groups; for instance, policy prohibits participating in public demonstrations or rallies, attending meetings on or off duty, fundraising activities, recruiting or training others to join such groups, holding apparent leadership roles, distributing literature on or off military installations, or receiving financial assistance from others associated with extremist groups.

Similarly, the U.S. Department of the Navy's policy prohibits participation in organizations that espouse supremacist causes. It also prohibits participation in organizations that create illegal discrimination based on race, creed, sex, religion, or national origin; advocate the use of force against the United States or subdivisions of the government; or seek to deprive individuals of their civil rights. This policy defines *participation* as conduct that is performed alone or with others (e.g., rallies, fundraising, recruiting, training) and describes the link between prohibited activities and impacts on good order, discipline, or mission accomplishment.[37]

Furthermore, the Navy's military personnel policy outlines a process for administrative or disciplinary actions for personnel who are involved in "any substantiated incident of serious misconduct resulting from participation in supremacist or extremist activities."[38] This policy describes relevant prescribed misconduct that relates to "illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, or national origin" or "advocating the use of force or violence against any federal, state, or local government[s]."[39] The policy also lists various types of violations (e.g., insubordinate conduct, maltreatment of subordinates, rioting, provoking speech or

gesture, assault, disloyal statements), noting this list is not exhaustive. More recently, the U.S. Marine Corps issued an order that consolidates various policies to prohibit a variety of activities, including "hazing, bullying, ostracism, retaliation, wrongful distribution, or broadcasting of intimate images, and certain dissident and protest activities (to include supremacist activity)."[40]

To summarize, the department-level policies share many of the same features, including prohibitions on extremist and supremacist ideology and active advocacy of these beliefs. These policies primarily focus on service members. All policies focus on illegal discrimination or depriving personnel of civil rights and prohibit violence against others or the government. The list of groups mentioned in these policy documents are not exhaustive, and there are a variety of potentially marginalized groups who might become targets. The policies also rely on the judgments of commanders to adjudicate policy violations, but there appears to be less guidance for commanders on how best to identify future violations and preserve service members' right of expression. We conclude that DoD, military department, and Service policies should maintain a standard definition of extremism and provide more guidance for commanders on how best to balance the rights of service members with unit functioning and national security interests. Furthermore, policy should also include guidance on a broader variety of members within the military community who might exhibit extremist behaviors (e.g., military families, military dependents, civilian employees, and contractors).

Part 2: Prevent Future Extremist Views and Activities

The second part of our proposed framework is to design programs to prevent members of the military community from associating with extremist groups or beliefs. Figure 2 outlines some of the features of extremism and proposed corresponding types of interventions. This encompasses activities within narrow definitions of extremism (labeled here as "extremist manifestations") and broader emotions, beliefs, and activities (characterized as "initial states" and "initial manifestations") that might be precursors to those extremist manifestations. The features displayed in Figure 2 are not necessarily linked as a linear process. The goal of these prevention programs should be to counsel individuals when they exhibit initial states or manifestations of extremism—two of the three attributes of extremism that are displayed in Figure 2—and to alert leaders to signs of misinformation, recruitment, and emerging groups that might be posing a threat to the military community.

The initial states of extremism include feelings and emotions, such as frustration and anger, that might not be noticed by others because they might be kept internal and are also common human emotions.[41] In the case of

FIGURE 2

Features of Extremism and Levels of Intervention

Initial states	Initial manifestations	Extremist manifestations
Internal emotions about society, institutions, culture	**Beliefs and actions more visible to friends, families, colleagues**	**Activities often shared with like-minded others**
• Anger, frustration, outrage • Dissatisfaction, distancing • Alienation, "otherness" • Revenge, hatred • Grievance, distrust, rejection of authorities and society • Disempowerment, lowered resilience to radicalization	• Lack of participation in political processes • Negative feelings at lack of status, recognition in mainstream society • Acceptance of views that violence is acceptable, justifiable, necessary • Online interactions with extremists • Involvement in sharing extremist material	• Recruitment, radicalization, mobilization of others • Criminality to aid extremist groups • Membership, indoctrination, training in extremist groups • Terrorism, traveling to commit an act of terrorism
Prevention	**Early intervention**	**Aggressive intervention**
Preliminary prevention and detection by military community	Early and intensive intervention by military community	Aggressive intervention using law enforcement

SOURCE: Adapted from Baruch et al., 2018.

NOTE: This figure organizes three broad sets of features. It is not a linear progression of stages, and one might exhibit some or all of these features simultaneously.

extremism, however, the risk is that these intense, hostile feelings can be directed toward the wider society, culture, and authorities. Mentors and service providers, such as counselors and chaplains, can help members manage these feelings in productive ways and find legitimate channels for members to register their grievances.

Initial extremist manifestations are more-clearly visible identifiers of violent extremism—for example, dropping out of political processes and mainstream cultures, accepting extremist group narratives regarding the justification of and need for violence, and interacting with extremist groups and materials.[42] These attributes might be cause for concern for family members, military peers, or commanders, but to preserve the rights of service members, a sophisticated approach to addressing them will be needed, particularly when no policy has been violated.

Finally, extremist activities might be shared with wider groups of individuals who also hold similar beliefs. And, in some cases, these activities may cross into support, or justification, of violence that includes criminal activities.[43] These are the more clear-cut activities for which law enforcement should be contacted.

Existing military programs could augment commanders' efforts, particularly with the initial states and initial manifestations of extremism. These resources include but are not limited to chaplains; mental health counselors; Family Readiness Groups (FRGs); the Military Crisis Line; Military OneSource; the U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) program; and Air Force Community Action Boards. Behavioral and mental health resources and counseling are indispensable for identifying and countering extremism, and a majority of these programs might embrace psychosocial approaches that examine a combination of psychological and environmental factors.

Chaplains are a key line of defense for service members' existential, spiritual, or moral concerns.[44] They can be a point of referral for those in need of behavioral health care services and also provide privileged communication that other service providers would often be required to report.[45] Furthermore, perceived stigma associated with mental health treatment is a complicated barrier to seeking behavioral health interventions,[46] so some service members might be more inclined to seek out the support of military chaplains instead of counselors.

Extremist activities might be shared with wider groups of likeminded individuals and sometimes cross the line by supporting and justifying the use of violence, up to and including committing a criminal offense.

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Rather than deciding to seek counseling on their own, service members might be encouraged or required to do so by their commander or other relevant personnel. One study examined how active-duty military personnel choose between options for help with emotional or mental health concerns and reported that soldiers generally seek out *civilian* mental health professionals for family and substance abuse problems, whereas *military* mental health professionals are primarily consulted for stress management, depression, anxiety, combat or operational stress, or anger management.[47]

Established in 2012, DoD's Military Family Readiness System comprises a diverse set of policies, programs, services, resources, and practices to support and promote family well-being. Commanders are supposed to work within this system when addressing many of the service member attitudes and behaviors that fall within the initial states and initial manifestations of extremism. Service member and family well-being fosters family readiness, which in turn enhances service members' readiness.[48] DoD's Military Family Readiness System includes such resources as FRGs (and their equivalents in the Services), the Military Crisis Line, and Military OneSource. As official command-sponsored and command-resourced organizations, FRGs offer assistance, mutual support, and a network of communications between family members, the chain of command, and community resource providers.[49] The Military Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource for service members. Military OneSource offers support for nonmedical counseling (e.g., marriage counseling, stress management) and referrals to other types of resources. Military mental health professionals address such issues as suicidal and homicidal thoughts; experiences of sexual assault, child abuse, or domestic violence; alcohol and substance abuse; and serious mental health conditions that require medical treatment. MWR and its partners offer education and counseling services for such issues as suicide prevention and survivor outreach.[50]

Air Force Community Action Boards and Community Action Teams (CATs) are another viable resource for coordinating strategies to identify and address patterns related to signs of initial states or initial manifestations of extremism. These are entities at the installation, major command, and headquarters level composed of representatives from diverse organizations (e.g., leadership, law enforcement, service providers) who coordinate periodically to identify and monitor the needs of the various populations within the military community (i.e., service members, their families, Air Force employees) and develop strategies to address them. For example, Air Force Instruction 90-5001 encourages commanders to consult with CAT members, Community Support Coordinators, and Violence Prevention Integrators to enhance well-being and resilience within their units.[51]

Part 3: Detect and Intervene When Observing Extremism

The third part of our proposed framework is to detect early trends of extremist activity at the installation level and then intervene at these installations, accordingly.[52] Coordination between military and civilian law enforcement and collection of open-source intelligence are two strategies for detecting these trends.

First, civilian and military law enforcement agencies have useful information they could share on which groups

pose the greatest threats for service members online and in the areas surrounding particular installations, as well as whether they observe indicators of extremist affiliations, such as symbols or slogans.[53] Military leaders, educators, and service providers could draw upon these resources for education, training, and informational awareness activities. For example, installation-level Air Force CATs (or equivalents in other Services) could develop a toolkit to provide access to videos, reports, bulletins, or other materials that could inform unit or community programming. The toolkit could offer ideas on organizations to contact for guest speakers who could educate and warn members about particular extremist groups and their beliefs, activities, and recruitment tactics. This information could help provide counter-messaging or inoculation against narratives and propaganda by extremist groups.

There are various criminal investigative services across DoD that might encounter evidence of extremist activities during investigations, either directly or indirectly. These include the Defense Criminal Investigation Services,[54] Air Force Office of Special Investigations,[55] U.S. Army Criminal Investigations Command,[56] and Naval Criminal Investigation Service.[57] Although they need to preserve the integrity of their investigations, there might be patterns or broader trends they could then share with military leaders and service providers to aid in detection, stop the spread of harmful information, and engage in other countermeasures. The Office of Law Enforcement Policy and Support within the Defense Human Resources Activity could also help coordinate the detection of extremist activities and sharing of information across DoD.

Second, the internet has made it easier for extremist groups to interact with a broader variety of potential members. New machine learning techniques can aid in searching for online trends of extremist involvement.[58] For example, models can be trained to detect extremist communities on such social media platforms as Twitter and to infer the degree to which users who appear to have current or past associations with the military are engaging with these extremist groups. From these online discussions, insights could be drawn to inform headquarters-prepared materials targeting misinformation, recruitment language, and so on for broader use by the military community. However, there are risks associated with the use of artificial intelligence and machine-learning tools, including privacy concerns, false positive or negative results, and algorithmic bias that require continuous recalibration by a human-in-the-loop.[59]

Detection and intervention are not solely the domain of law enforcement or data analysts. Service providers might have information about potential risks for extremist activity, although they might not always recognize it as such. Chaplains, psychologists, social workers, Military and Family Life counselors, psychiatrists, and health care providers might be providing support for individuals exhibiting the initial states or initial manifestations of extremism. These support service providers must preserve their professional and ethical obligations regarding confidentiality and act in ways that promote rather than undermine help-seeking behaviors and treatment. We do not imply that these professionals should report every individual who feels frustrated with the government, feels alienated from others, or is withdrawing from political processes, for example, but in the course of their work they might become aware of information that could be impor-

tant for detecting and intervening to counter extremism. Such information might include

- extremist materials appearing on the installation (e.g., left in the chapel or hospital waiting rooms)
- emerging extremist groups, movements, or causes
- rumors or misinformation being spread that could stoke the flames of social conflicts (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation)
- justifications of extremist activities that resonate with members
- poor reputation of military channels for filing complaints or appeals, or service members' lack of awareness of these channels.

Sharing this type of information—not tied to any particular individuals—could inform efforts to keep abreast of ever-evolving groups and social movements, to actively dispel myths and misinformation or dismantle justifications that could increase the risk of adopting extremist views, and to improve the awareness and functioning of complaint channels to encourage people to work within them.

It is important that providers (1) understand the types of aggregate information that they could share with commanders that would be helpful and (2) have a safe way to share this information.

Part 4. Measure Extremist Trends and Evaluate Interventions

The last part of our proposed four-part framework involves the measurement of extremist trends and subsequent evaluation of the early interventions previously described. DoD already collects some data on extremism using the DIBRS,

which records law enforcement activities and statistics within the military and reports criminal data to the FBI as required by the Uniform Federal Crime Reporting Act of 1988.[60]

One data element in DIBRS is "bias motivation." *Bias* is defined as "a performed negative opinion or attitude toward a group of persons" (e.g., racial, religious, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation, or disability groups).[61] Table 1 displays some of these codes in DIBRS.

There are several potential areas of improvement for data collection related to extremism in the military. First, the codes used in DIBRS might not always align with those used in the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).[62] For example, NIBRS has a code for "Anti-Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander" while DIBRS has a separate code just for "Anti-Pacific Islander." DIBRS has separate bias motivation codes for seven religions, while NIBRS has 14 codes for religious bias. Furthermore, NIBRS has a code for "Anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (mixed group)" while DIBRS has no code for transgender bias.

Second, there might be biases in how incidents are reported to DIBRS. For example, incidents in the FBI's NIBRS are not necessarily representative of all incidents among the U.S. population,[63] and some have reported a nonresponse rate in reporting by law enforcement agencies to the FBI.[64] The same might hold true for DIBRS. Furthermore, some have raised concerns in the past about the reliability of data from the DIBRS.[65] Thus, there might be a need to continuously review what is reported to DIBRS (i.e., consistent use of correct motivation bias codes), the frequency of reporting (i.e., consistent reporting by the Services over time), and the sharing of data with the FBI to ensure that broad trends related to

TABLE 1

Bias Motivation Codes in the Defense Incident-Based Reporting System

Race and Ethnicity	Religion	Sexual Orientation	Mental and Physical Disabilities	Unknown Bias
• AW = Anti-White • AH = Anti-Black • AD = Anti-Arab • AM = Anti-Hispanic • AC = Anti-American Indian • AB = Anti-Alaskan • AE = Anti-Asian • AT = Anti-Pacific Islander • AR = Anti-Multi-Racial Group • AZ = Anti-Other Ethnicity	• AO = Anti-Jewish • AI = Anti-Catholic • AN = Anti-Islamic (Moslem) • AU = Anti-Protestant • AS =Anti-Multi-Religious Group • AA = Anti-Agnostic • AY = Anti-Other Religions	• AQ = Anti-Male Homosexual • AK = Anti-Female Homosexual • AL = Anti-Heterosexual • AG = Anti-Bisexual	• BA = Anti-Mental Disability • BB = Anti-Physical Disability	• AX = Unknown Bias

SOURCE: DoD, 2020, p. 26.
NOTE: Table 1 does not display the code "NB = None (no bias)."

extremism are captured between civilian and military law enforcement organizations.

Third, there could be alternative ways to collect data on trends related to extremism and how they might relate to intervention activities. For example, the Army's iSALUTE program is an online reporting tool for members of the Army community to report suspected extremist activities.[66] As military leaders release new tools, there will be a need to continuously evaluate these data sources and subsequent interventions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This Perspective outlines a framework for reducing the risk of extremism in the U.S. military. It provides a brief review of relevant background information about extrem-

ism and presents a four-part framework for mitigating such activities. The first part is recognizing and defining the problem of extremism, which the military has already done. The second part is preventing future extremist activities from occurring across the ranks, and the framework outlines ways for the military to accomplish this. The third part involves using strategies to detect what might be precursors of extremism and helping commanders intervene accordingly. The fourth part describes ways for the military to measure extremist trends and evaluate interventions using an evidence-based approach.

Conclusions

We have identified four conclusions using this framework.

First, current DoD policies clearly prohibit extremism in the military and place significant responsibilities on commanders to implement this policy. Specifically, policy requires commanders to take corrective action when they observe active forms of extremist activities. It also requires commanders to intervene when they observe behaviors that *might* lead to a future violation of policies that prohibit extremism. This is a tremendous responsibility, particularly given that commanders are not subject-matter experts in extremism and that, even for experts, this would be difficult, because many of the precursors to extremism are common (e.g., frustration with society, institutions, and culture) and do not lead to extremism.

Second, there is no widely accepted definition of extremism that delineates where to draw the line between *extremism* and beliefs and behaviors that are simply *outside the norm*. That presents challenges for commanders in trying to balance the rights of service members with detection of current extremist policy violations or problematic behaviors that have a high probability of leading to extremist activity in the future.

Third, policy largely focuses on extremist activities by service members. The problem of extremism emerges from and affects the broader military community, meaning not only service members but also their families and civilian employees.

Fourth, DoD has several existing support programs that could be better leveraged to support commanders in implementing DoD's ban on extremist activities while protecting the rights and needs of those they serve. Such programs could also help a broader variety of members of the military community (e.g., military spouses, dependents, civilian employees, contractors) to detect and intervene

earlier rather than later when they observe extremist activities that affect the military.

Recommendations

We offer five recommendations that inform a strategy to support commanders in mitigating extremism within the military.

DoD efforts to combat extremism should engage the wider military community, not focus solely on service members. Given the diversity of the U.S. military community, any policies or programs designed to prevent or detect extremism should consider *all* members of the military community—in partnership with relevant civilian community members—as potential partners in the fight against extremism. In 2019, there were more than 1.3 million members on active duty, but also more than 1 million members of the Ready Reserve, more than 200,000 members of the Standby or Retired Reserve, almost 900,000 DoD civilian employees, more than 965,000 military spouses, and more than 1.6 million children of members.[67] Additionally, military installations and deployed environments can include contractors, personnel from other agencies, and members of other nations' militaries. Any member of these groups might adopt and promote extremist beliefs and act upon them, including becoming active or passive members of extremist groups promoting racial supremacy, religious extremism, or specific social or political issues. Commanders and supervisors face major challenges detecting early signs of extremism across the various members in the broader military community, many of whom commanders will rarely if ever directly meet. Anti-extremism efforts focused just on active-duty personnel will miss key sources of information and opportu-

nities for influence. Such military activities and resources as stand-downs, town halls, information campaigns, and channels to share tips with leaders should also engage the broader community, including active and reserve component personnel, spouses and partners, children, civilian employees, and contractors.

Efforts to address extremism should take a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs. Responding to early signs of extremism is preferable to waiting until initial extremist states manifest in ways that directly affect military readiness or preparedness. Service providers from the various support agencies already do help individuals find more-acceptable ways to manage emotions, such as frustration and anger directed toward authority figures or certain segments of society. Community service providers could also think about broader ways to counter the influence and impact of extremist groups. For example, they could

- provide general guidance on how to break cycles of outrage and hate and to manage personal relationships with any friends or relatives who hold extremist views or are involved in violent extremist groups
- organize activities to dispel stereotypes and myths promulgated by hate groups and to illuminate the harm of hate speech, targeted threats, and other extremist activities
- organize real-time live or virtual question-and-answer sessions with reformed extremists to understand the impacts of extremism and how people disengage from these groups.

Service providers could also alert leaders to signs of misinformation, recruitment, and emerging groups that might be posing a threat to the military community.

A community-based approach would also emphasize the need to support unit and broader installation-wide morale, welfare, and recreational activities to strengthen the military identity, community, and sense of belonging. These may counterbalance extremist recruitment strategies, which seek to build rapport, camaraderie, and loyalty at the small-group level as a bridge to introducing extreme beliefs and actions. A stronger sense of unit cohesion and community well-being can make personnel and their families more resistant to these strategies within the military community.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) should continue to coordinate information-sharing between civilian and military law enforcement agencies. Extremist groups are volatile by nature. Such groups might form, evolve, splinter, or disintegrate relatively quickly, only to reemerge later in new forms. The tracking of these trends will require cooperation among federal law enforcement agencies (e.g., FBI), state and local law enforcement agencies, military law enforcement organizations (e.g., Army Criminal Investigation Command), and domestic intelligence and security agencies (e.g., DHS and the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency).

OSD and the military departments should employ machine-learning technologies to help detect broad, emerging trends of extremism that might affect members of the military community. The internet and social media have reduced the costs of creating, sustaining, and growing extremist organizations—not only in the United States but also around the world. Many of these online data are publicly available, and recent advances in machine-learning methods would allow trained professionals within OSD and the military departments to spot early patterns of extrem-

ist activities that might target members of the military community.[68] Such tools are useful for identifying broad trends at the installation level, using de-identified data. We distinguish this approach from law enforcement analyses of individual-level identifiable data for investigation purposes. The use of these machine-learning tools does carry risks, including privacy concerns, false positive or negative results, and algorithmic bias. Thus, we recommend continuous recalibration of these tools that involves a human-in-the-loop.

OSD should continually measure existing extremist trends and evaluate programs designed to prevent, detect, and intervene when members of the military community express extremist views. There is a paucity of data on trends surrounding the prevalence of extremist activities in the military. For example, extremism might occur at the nexus of civil-military relations, whereby civilian extremist groups attempt to recruit members of the military community; but civilian and military law enforcement agencies might not always share information about possible extremism. The bias motivation codes used in DIBRS and the process for collecting and reporting bias-motivated incidents should align with the FBI's NIBRS. This integration would ensure that trends in extremism are shared between civilian and military law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, as the Services and OSD develop new tools for collecting data on extremism,

opportunities will arise to identify best practices for measuring extremist activities over time.

Cautionary Points on Implementation

This section discusses four cautionary points on the issue of scope creep when implementing policies designed to reduce the risk of extremism in the U.S. military. First, policy should avoid loosely applying the label of *extremist* to *all* people who exhibit initial states of extremism. Not all people who express anger, frustration, outrage, or feelings of alienation are or will become extremists. Second, we are not suggesting that the military should assign the mission of combating extremism to any of its existing community support services. These services are a set of tools out of many (e.g., law enforcement entities, counterintelligence efforts, mental health services) and should be part of a comprehensive strategy to combat extremism.

Third, the military should avoid using its community support services as an extension of law enforcement. Chaplains, mental health counselors, and FRGs should support personnel and their families versus collecting evidence on individuals for future law enforcement actions.[69] These services can help provide information about misinformation, patterns, and external groups but must not undermine their

Community support services are a set of tools out of many that should be part of a comprehensive strategy to combat extremism.

own efforts, ethics, or professional standards. Finally, "early interventions" refer to leveraging existing support services to prevent people from ever taking up active involvement in extremism that requires disciplinary actions. Preventive work can be achieved through helping individuals manage difficult feelings and life experiences and guiding them to more-productive channels for expressing their grievances and bringing about change.

Closing Thoughts

The vast majority of military personnel and their families are not extremists. But even a small number of people engaged in extremist activities could damage the U.S. military's reputation, its force, its members, and the larger community. Extremist activities can also be harmful to the individuals who are radicalized and their friends and family. DoD has existing programs that support personnel and their families, promote diversity and inclusion, and prevent violence. A community-based approach that leverages these existing programs could help the military to prevent service members and their families from associating with extremist groups and to respond sooner—and more effectively—when they do.

Notes

1   Thompson, Winston, and Hanrahan, 2018.

2   Wilkinson, 2020.

3   Dreisbach and Anderson, 2021.

4   Shammas and De Vynck, 2021.

5   DoD Directive 1325.6, 1996; DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012.

6   DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012, p. 10.

7   DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012.

8   Thompson and Winston, 2018.

9   U.S. Department of Justice, 2020.

10   Shammas and De Vynck, 2021; *United States v. Baker*, 2021.

11   Helmus, 2009.

12   Picciolini, 2020.

13   Helmus et al., 2018.

14   Brown et al., 2021.

15   Burke, 1980.

16   Fromm, 1973.

17   Austin, 2021.

18   Jenkins, 2021.

19   Garamone, 2021.

20   Williford, 2019.

21   DoD, 2019b; *United States v. Wilcox*, 2008.

22   DHS and FBI, 2020.

23   Anti-Defamation League, undated.

24   Ricks, 2011.

25   Cortwright, 1990.

26   Gross, 1986.

27   United Press International, 1986.

28 Murphy, Rottman, and Sher, 2013; Sher and Rottman, 2013.

29 DHS and FBI, 2020.

30 DHS and FBI, 2020, p. 2.

31 DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012, p. 1.

32 DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012, p. 9.

33 DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012, p. 9.

34 DAF Instruction 51-508, 2018, p. 14.

35 DAF Instruction 51-508, 2018, p. 14.

36 U.S. Department of the Army Regulation 600–20, 2020, p. 30.

37 U.S. Department of the Navy, 1997.

38 U.S. Department of the Navy, 2008, p. 1.

39 U.S. Department of the Navy, 2008, p. 1.

40 U.S. Marine Corps, undated; U.S. Marine Corps, 2021.

41 Baruch et al., 2018.

42 Baruch et al., 2018.

43 Baruch et al., 2018.

44 Kim et al., 2016.

45 See Rule 503 in DoD, 2019b.

46 Kazman et al., 2020.

47 Morgan et al., 2016.

48 National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine, 2019.

49 U.S. Army, undated.

50 MWR, undated.

51 DAF Instruction 90-5001, 2019.

52 For a similar approach that collected data on individual members of the U.S. Air Force community using surveys but aggregated them to the installation level, see Sims et al., 2019.

53 National Gang Intelligence Center, 2015.

54 DoD, 2010.

55 Grabosky, 2020; Losey, 2020.

56 Ethridge, 2020.

57 McMahon, 2020.

58 Marcellino et al., 2020.

59 Brown et al., 2020.

60 DoD Instruction 7730.47, 2020.

61 DoD Instruction 7730.47, 2020.

62 U.S. Department of Justice, 2021.

63 Addington, 2008.

64 McCormack, Pattavina, and Tracy, 2017.

65 DoD, 2014; U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2010.

66 U.S. Army, 2021.

67 DoD, 2019a.

68 Marcellino et al., 2020; Marcellino et al., 2021.

69 For a discussion of how some heavy-handed responses to extremism may fail, see Brown et al., 2021.

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About This Perspective

In recent years, news headlines have highlighted the involvement of current or former U.S. military personnel in protest violence; supremacist groups; the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol; and other forms of violent extremism spanning different political and ideological spectra. The threat of extremism is not new, but the proliferation of social media has made it easier for radical ideas to spread quickly and for extremist groups to organize, even reaching into the military community (e.g., service members, military spouses, military dependents, civilian employees, and contractors) to expand membership and gain operational capabilities.

This Perspective outlines a framework to help commanders reduce the risk of extremism in the military. First, we provide highlights from research on extremism, including a framework for understanding these types of activities. Second, we use this framework to outline four strategies for reducing the risk of extremism in the military. Third, we recommend a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs to better support commanders as they carry out their responsibilities to prevent and mitigate exposure to extremism by members of the military community.

RAND National Security Research Division

Acknowledgments

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Hi, when Mr. Cisneros was at the Unders' staff meeting this morning, SD asked for an executive summary of the attached RAND report (which we did not commission). Can you all do a quick summary? We should also mention that we have our own study going on with IDA. He would like it today. (b) (5) . Just a one pager…

Julie Blanks
OUSD(P&R)
(b) (6)

From: Riley, Jack <riley@rand.org>
Sent: Monday, September 13, 2021 9:01 AM
To: (b) (6) ; Cisneros, Gilbert R Jr HON (USA) (b) (6) ; Blanks, Julie A SES OSD OUSD P-R (USA) (b) (6) ; bishop.garrison (b) (6) ; Kahl, Colin H HON OSD OUSD POLICY (USA) <(b) (6) ; Karlin, Mara E HON (USA) <(b) (6) ; Penrod, Virginia S SES OSD OUSD P-R (USA) (b) (6) (b) (6) OSD OUSD A-S (USA) (b) (6) >
Cc: (b) (6)
Subject: [Non-DoD Source] Forthcoming RAND Report on Extremism in the Military

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DoD leadership:

I am writing to inform you of the upcoming release of a RAND National Defense Research Institute (NDRI) research report titled*Reducing the Risk of Extremist Activity in the U.S. Military*. A pre-release copy of the report, which will be made public onrand.org < Caution-https://www.rand.org/ > on September 16th, 2021, is attached here.

This report was funded with NDRI research support funds, which is independent exploratory research funding provided for in the FFRDC contract, as approved by NDRI's primary OSD sponsor.

Please let me know if you have questions.

(b) (6)

(b) (6)
Vice President, RAND National Security Research Division
   and director, National Defense Research Institute
(b) (6)

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MAREK N. POSARD, LESLIE ADRIENNE PAYNE, LAURA L. MILLER

Reducing the Risk of Extremist Activity in the U.S. Military

In recent years, news headlines have highlighted the involvement of current or former U.S. military personnel in protest violence;[1] supremacist groups;[2] the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol;[3] and other forms of violent extremism spanning different political and ideological spectra.[4] The threat of extremism is not new, but the proliferation of social media has made it easier for radical ideas to spread quickly and for extremist groups to organize, even reaching into the military community (e.g., service members, military spouses, military dependents, civilian employees, and contractors) to expand membership and gain operational capabilities.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has long prohibited service members from actively advocating for extremist activities.[5] DoD policy establishes the expectation that commanders detect prohibited activities, investigate them, and take corrective action. It also relies on commanders to help minimize the risk by intervening early, "primarily through counseling" when they observe "signs of future prohibited activities."[6] Thus, commanders have a dual mandate to enforce current policy violations and anticipate future violations by personnel. DoD policy also places great responsibility on commanders to appropriately weigh the

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potentially competing interests of national security; service members' right of expression; and good unit order, discipline, and effectiveness.[7]

In this Perspective, we outline a framework to help commanders reduce the risk of extremism in the military. First, we provide highlights from research on extremism, including a framework for understanding these types of activities. Second, we use this framework to outline four strategies for reducing the risk of extremism in the military. Third, we recommend a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs to better support commanders as they carry out their responsibilities to prevent and mitigate exposure to extremism within the military.

Seeking Identity, Meaning, and Social Bonds, Service Members Might Find Them in Extremist Movements

Recent news headlines raise questions about the extent to which and the reasons why current and former members of the U.S. military would associate with extremist movements. For example, in 2017, U.S. Marine Corps Lance Corporal Vasillios Pistolis was imprisoned over his participation in the violent white supremacist "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.[8] In another case, the government charged U.S. Army Private Ethan Melzer with conspiring to murder his fellow soldiers by allegedly sharing sensitive details about his unit's upcoming deployment with a neo-Nazi and white supremacist group to facilitate an attack.[9] In January 2021, the government arrested ousted ex-soldier and self-proclaimed "hardcore leftist" Daniel Baker,

Key Points

- *Extremism* is a term used to characterize a variety of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that often are on the extreme end of the political, religious, or ideological spectrum within society (e.g., white nationalist, anarchist).
- Extremist beliefs, affiliations, and activities are constantly evolving.
- Service members, military families, and civilian employees might actively or passively associate with extremist groups.
- DoD prohibits active involvement in extremist activities, but laws place limits on what activities the military can and cannot restrict or punish.
- Current policy requires commanders to intervene when they observe extremist activities or behaviors that might lead to future extremism.
- We present a framework to assist DoD in reducing the risk of extremism in the military.
- We make five recommendations, each focusing on a community-based approach that leverages existing DoD programs to help commanders and their subordinates prevent, detect, intervene, and measure extremist activities earlier rather than later.

who is accused of making online threats and attempting to organize violence against fascists, white supremacists, conservative protestors, and U.S. military officers.[10]

Individuals labeled as *extremists* (1) identify with beliefs and organizations that are on the far end of political, religious, or ideological spectra within a society and (2) advocate for activities that are outside societal norms and laws. These individuals often draw meaning from the

identity that they apply to themselves and others based on their group affiliations (e.g., race, gender, religion, nationality, political beliefs). Studies have identified a variety of factors that lead people to join extremist movements, such as having a passion for political change, looking for a sense of belonging, and seeking excitement.[11] One former leader of a white nationalist group claims that new members are often seeking to form a sense of identity, community, and purpose[12]—some of the same reasons that people join the military.[13] Research has identified at least four types of experiences that people tend to follow into extremism:

- *life events*: traumatic life events that prompt people to consider extremist views as a framework to understand their trauma
- *propaganda*: consumption of extremist material, including books, music, or online content
- *recruitment*: interactions with members of extremist groups that either reach out to individuals or that individuals seek out after self-radicalizing
- *social bonds*: social interactions with other members of extremist groups, especially if individuals are feeling lonely or isolated.[14]

There is no single factor that sufficiently explains why people become active in extremist causes. Often, a combination of factors leads individuals to become increasingly active in extremist activities. This ratcheting up of involvement might help people construct a new identity that is defined by an extremist ideology. Specifically, research has proposed that extremist identities become problematic when they (1) consume a large part of one's life[15] and (2) are defined by extreme hatred or prejudice toward other groups of people.[16]

Current and former military personnel might come into contact with extremist beliefs or groups on their own initiative, be exposed to those beliefs or groups online or through friends or family, or be approached by extremists seeking to recruit them.

Framework for Reducing the Risk of Extremism in the Military

Figure 1 shows a four-part framework we use to categorize the ways in which the military could combat extremism. We first provide an overview of the framework, and then we examine each element more closely. The first part is to recognize the problem of extremism and define *extrem-*

Abbreviations

ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
CAT	Community Action Team
DAF	U.S. Department of the Air Force
DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
DIBRS	Defense Incident-Based Reporting System
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FRG	Family Readiness Group
MWR	U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation
NIBRS	National Incident-Based Reporting System
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense

FIGURE 1

Framework for Reducing the Risk of Extremism Within the U.S. Military Community

Recognize and scope the problem of extremism	Prevent future extremist views and activities	Detect and intervene when observing extremism	Measure extremist trends and evaluate interventions

ist activities. The military has already done this through policy, public statements by military leadership, and a one-day "stand down" of activities to discuss extremism in the military.[17] Some experts argue that the scope of extremism should be narrow, with the goal of isolating the most-dangerous members participating in fringe elements of these movements.[18] Others argue that a broader scope can help identify those supporting extremists or provide an early warning about those at risk of becoming extremists. Our proposed framework focuses on addressing these early warning signs of extremism.

Second, the military could better leverage existing violence prevention programs to prevent service members from becoming involved with extremist groups. Some examples of existing prevention resources within the military are chaplains, mental health counselors, the Family Advocacy Program, and Military OneSource.

Third, this framework focuses on detecting extremist activities and designing interventions to respond to them. The military has existing authorities to detect broad patterns of extremism in its ranks; for instance, the military is authorized to coordinate with civilian law enforcement agencies, conduct defense criminal investigative services, and track extremist activities online. Leveraging existing resources designed to support the military community could help commanders detect early signals that might lead to future extremist activities, and then the commanders could intervene. People in existing programs, such as chaplains, counselors, and other sources of support, might become aware of emerging extremist groups, ideologies, rumors, and misinformation being circulated. Although those sources cannot violate their professional and ethical codes or standards for confidentiality, privacy, and the protection of sensitive health information, they could be encouraged and provided with a means to share general information about those trends so commanders could address them across the population at large.

Finally, our framework includes measuring extremist activities and using the results to inform the evaluation of programs designed to prevent, detect, and intervene when commanders become aware of signs of extremist activities. DoD currently tracks bias motivations in the Defense Incident-Based Reporting System (DIBRS), but it might need to reevaluate and revise these reporting codes in DIBRS and consider whether alternative forms of data collection would be useful to measure extremist trends in the future.

Part 1. Recognize and Scope the Problem of Extremism

The first part of our proposed framework is to recognize and define the problem of extremism. Military leadership has publicly recognized this problem, as is evident from the policies against it, recent statements made by U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III and various senior civilian and defense leaders, and the 2021 DoD order for commanders to conduct a one-day "stand-down" to discuss extremism with personnel.[19]

Defining the problem of extremism has been a challenge, however, because there is no widely accepted set of criteria for making that determination. In an attempt to draw the line for legal purposes, U.S. courts have tried to balance freedom of expression with the need to protect the public from disruptions and threats.[20] U.S. military courts have focused on the degree to which extremist behaviors were either damaging the reputation or public esteem of the military ("service discrediting") or harming good order and discipline, two concepts that are outlined in the Uniform Code of Military Justice.[21] The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI),[22] however, focus their definitions on how a particular belief system motivates someone to commit acts of violence. There are also definitions of extremism employed by private and nonprofit organizations. The Anti-Defamation League, for example, uses a broad definition of extremism that includes any "religious, social, or political belief systems that exist substantially outside of belief systems more broadly accepted in society."[23]

Historically, the military has struggled to identify and manage personnel whose beliefs might lead to future prob-lems. During World War II, for example, the Army created the 620th Engineer General Services Company as a holding unit for personnel, many of them German-born, whom commanders suspected of being disloyal to the United States.[24] During the Vietnam War, basic military functioning was undermined by racial conflict within the ranks, some of which involved violence—including attacks against officers and enlisted leaders.[25] During the 1980s, following reports of service members involved in Ku Klux Klan activities, then–Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger released a memo broadening the policy against participation in hate groups, stating that active participation in white supremacy groups was "utterly incompatible" with military service, and authorizing commanders to discipline or even discharge those involved in disruptive activities.[26] Although the memo did not forbid joining these groups, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) criticized the policy as overly broad.[27] In 2013, the ACLU also criticized U.S. Army Equal Opportunity training materials that characterized a variety of beliefs as extremism, including some held by evangelical Christian, ultra-Orthodox Jewish, and Ku Klux Klan groups.[28]

It is beyond the scope of this effort to develop a standardized definition of extremism. However, to further illuminate the complexity, we review select definitions from federal law enforcement agencies, DoD, and the military Services.

How Law Enforcement Agencies, the Department of Defense, and the Military Services Define Extremism

This section focuses on definitions of extremism used by selected federal law enforcement agencies, DoD, and each of the military departments as of the date this document was written. These definitions varied in scope. For example, some federal law enforcement agencies narrowly focus on the link between ideological beliefs and unlawful actions. In the U.S. military, however, the focus more broadly includes participation in activities that undermine good order and discipline or are service discrediting.

Federal Law Enforcement

As required by law, the FBI and DHS, in consultation with the Director of National Intelligence, developed definitions for terms related to domestic terrorism.[29] Their definitions for extremism are not identical to one another, but both the DHS and FBI define *domestic violent extremist* as

> an individual based and operating primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States who seeks to further their ideological goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence. It is important to remember that the mere advocacy of ideological positions and/or the use of strong rhetoric does not constitute violent extremism, and in some cases direct or specific threats of violence must be present to constitute a violation of federal law.[30]

Department of Defense

DoD policy related to extremism recognizes that "a service member's right of expression should be preserved to the

maximum extent possible."[31] Furthermore, it notes that, while balancing the rights of service members, no commander should be indifferent to conduct that undermines unit effectiveness.

The policy also delimits prohibited and preventive activities. First, DoD policy states,

> Military personnel must not actively advocate supremacist, extremist, or criminal gang doctrine, ideology, or causes, including those that advance, encourage, or advocate illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, ethnicity, or national origin or those that advance, encourage, or advocate the use of force, violence, or criminal activity or otherwise advance efforts to deprive individuals of their civil rights.[32]

Furthermore, the policy instructs personnel to reject active participation in criminal gangs or other organizations that advocate such prohibited views, activities, and illegal discrimination. Some examples of active participation include fundraising, demonstrating or rallying, recruiting, training, and wearing gang colors, clothing, or tattoos. The policy gives commanders authority to use a variety of administrative and disciplinary actions:

> The functions of command include vigilance about the existence of such activities; active use of investigative authority to include a prompt and fair complaint process; and use of administrative powers such as counseling, reprimands, orders, and performance evaluations to deter such activities.[33]

Second, DoD policy requires actions to prevent extremist activities. Specifically, the policy instructs commanders to intervene early (primarily with counseling) when they observe signs of potential future policy violations or actions

Current policy places a significant amount of responsibility on commanders to not only identify current violations of policies that prohibit extremist activities but also anticipate when behaviors might suggest a future policy violation.

that could undermine good order and discipline. For example, the policy states that possessing literature associated with extremist causes, ideology, doctrine, or organizations is not necessarily prohibited, but it signals that further investigations or counseling might be warranted.

Put simply, *current policy places a significant amount of responsibility on commanders to not only identify current violations of policies that prohibit extremist activities but also anticipate when behaviors might suggest a future policy violation.*

Military Departments

Military department policies reiterate key elements of the DoD policy and provide more detail for specific implementation. For example, guidance from the U.S. Department of the Air Force (DAF) prohibits personnel from active advocacy of "supremacist, extremist, or criminal gang doctrine, ideology, or causes."[34] These causes include the advocacy of "illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, ethnicity, or national origin." Furthermore, prohibited causes include advocacy for "the use of force,

violence, or criminal activity" that deprive the civil rights of others. DAF policy also highlights that efforts to counter violent extremism must be balanced, because "commanders must preserve the service member's constitutional right of expression to the maximum extent possible, consistent with good order, discipline, and national security."[35]

The U.S. Department of the Army policy on extremist organizations and activities, Army Regulation 600–20, which was revised in July 2020, is designed to be used in conjunction with DoD Instruction 1325.06. This Army policy prohibits extremist activities. Specifically, the revised policy clearly states that "it is the commander's responsibility to maintain good order and discipline" and notes that "every commander has the inherent authority to take appropriate actions to accomplish this goal."[36] The Army defines extremism by a variety of views that groups are advocating for, including hatred, intolerance, or discrimination based on race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. It also includes the use of violence to deprive people of their individual rights; support for terrorism, sedition, and violence against the United States or

DoD; and unlawful violence to achieve political, religious, discriminatory, and ideological goals.

Furthermore, Army policy prohibits a wide variety of activities if associated with extremist groups; for instance, policy prohibits participating in public demonstrations or rallies, attending meetings on or off duty, fundraising activities, recruiting or training others to join such groups, holding apparent leadership roles, distributing literature on or off military installations, or receiving financial assistance from others associated with extremist groups.

Similarly, the U.S. Department of the Navy's policy prohibits participation in organizations that espouse supremacist causes. It also prohibits participation in organizations that create illegal discrimination based on race, creed, sex, religion, or national origin; advocate the use of force against the United States or subdivisions of the government; or seek to deprive individuals of their civil rights. This policy defines *participation* as conduct that is performed alone or with others (e.g., rallies, fundraising, recruiting, training) and describes the link between prohibited activities and impacts on good order, discipline, or mission accomplishment.[37]

Furthermore, the Navy's military personnel policy outlines a process for administrative or disciplinary actions for personnel who are involved in "any substantiated incident of serious misconduct resulting from participation in supremacist or extremist activities."[38] This policy describes relevant prescribed misconduct that relates to "illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, or national origin" or "advocating the use of force or violence against any federal, state, or local government[s]."[39] The policy also lists various types of violations (e.g., insubordinate conduct, maltreatment of subordinates, rioting, provoking speech or

gesture, assault, disloyal statements), noting this list is not exhaustive. More recently, the U.S. Marine Corps issued an order that consolidates various policies to prohibit a variety of activities, including "hazing, bullying, ostracism, retaliation, wrongful distribution, or broadcasting of intimate images, and certain dissident and protest activities (to include supremacist activity)."[40]

To summarize, the department-level policies share many of the same features, including prohibitions on extremist and supremacist ideology and active advocacy of these beliefs. These policies primarily focus on service members. All policies focus on illegal discrimination or depriving personnel of civil rights and prohibit violence against others or the government. The list of groups mentioned in these policy documents are not exhaustive, and there are a variety of potentially marginalized groups who might become targets. The policies also rely on the judgments of commanders to adjudicate policy violations, but there appears to be less guidance for commanders on how best to identify future violations and preserve service members' right of expression. We conclude that DoD, military department, and Service policies should maintain a standard definition of extremism and provide more guidance for commanders on how best to balance the rights of service members with unit functioning and national security interests. Furthermore, policy should also include guidance on a broader variety of members within the military community who might exhibit extremist behaviors (e.g., military families, military dependents, civilian employees, and contractors).

Part 2: Prevent Future Extremist Views and Activities

The second part of our proposed framework is to design programs to prevent members of the military community from associating with extremist groups or beliefs. Figure 2 outlines some of the features of extremism and proposed corresponding types of interventions. This encompasses activities within narrow definitions of extremism (labeled here as "extremist manifestations") and broader emotions, beliefs, and activities (characterized as "initial states" and "initial manifestations") that might be precursors to those extremist manifestations. The features displayed in Figure 2 are not necessarily linked as a linear process. The goal of these prevention programs should be to counsel individuals when they exhibit initial states or manifestations of extremism—two of the three attributes of extremism that are displayed in Figure 2—and to alert leaders to signs of misinformation, recruitment, and emerging groups that might be posing a threat to the military community.

The initial states of extremism include feelings and emotions, such as frustration and anger, that might not be noticed by others because they might be kept internal and are also common human emotions.[41] In the case of

FIGURE 2

Features of Extremism and Levels of Intervention

Initial states	Initial manifestations	Extremist manifestations
Internal emotions about society, institutions, culture	Beliefs and actions more visible to friends, families, colleagues	Activities often shared with like-minded others
• Anger, frustration, outrage • Dissatisfaction, distancing • Alienation, "otherness" • Revenge, hatred • Grievance, distrust, rejection of authorities and society • Disempowerment, lowered resilience to radicalization	• Lack of participation in political processes • Negative feelings at lack of status, recognition in mainstream society • Acceptance of views that violence is acceptable, justifiable, necessary • Online interactions with extremists • Involvement in sharing extremist material	• Recruitment, radicalization, mobilization of others • Criminality to aid extremist groups • Membership, indoctrination, training in extremist groups • Terrorism, traveling to commit an act of terrorism
Prevention	**Early intervention**	**Aggressive intervention**
Preliminary prevention and detection by military community	Early and intensive intervention by military community	Aggressive intervention using law enforcement

SOURCE: Adapted from Baruch et al., 2018.
NOTE: This figure organizes three broad sets of features. It is not a linear progression of stages, and one might exhibit some or all of these features simultaneously.

extremism, however, the risk is that these intense, hostile feelings can be directed toward the wider society, culture, and authorities. Mentors and service providers, such as counselors and chaplains, can help members manage these feelings in productive ways and find legitimate channels for members to register their grievances.

Initial extremist manifestations are more-clearly visible identifiers of violent extremism—for example, dropping out of political processes and mainstream cultures, accepting extremist group narratives regarding the justification of and need for violence, and interacting with extremist groups and materials.[42] These attributes might be cause for concern for family members, military peers, or commanders, but to preserve the rights of service members, a sophisticated approach to addressing them will be needed, particularly when no policy has been violated.

Finally, extremist activities might be shared with wider groups of individuals who also hold similar beliefs. And, in some cases, these activities may cross into support, or justification, of violence that includes criminal activities.[43] These are the more clear-cut activities for which law enforcement should be contacted.

Existing military programs could augment commanders' efforts, particularly with the initial states and initial manifestations of extremism. These resources include but are not limited to chaplains; mental health counselors; Family Readiness Groups (FRGs); the Military Crisis Line; Military OneSource; the U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) program; and Air Force Community Action Boards. Behavioral and mental health resources and counseling are indispensable for identifying and countering extremism, and a majority of these programs might embrace psychosocial approaches that examine a combination of psychological and environmental factors.

Chaplains are a key line of defense for service members' existential, spiritual, or moral concerns.[44] They can be a point of referral for those in need of behavioral health care services and also provide privileged communication that other service providers would often be required to report.[45] Furthermore, perceived stigma associated with mental health treatment is a complicated barrier to seeking behavioral health interventions,[46] so some service members might be more inclined to seek out the support of military chaplains instead of counselors.

Extremist activities might be shared with wider groups of likeminded individuals and sometimes cross the line by supporting and justifying the use of violence, up to and including committing a criminal offense.

Rather than deciding to seek counseling on their own, service members might be encouraged or required to do so by their commander or other relevant personnel. One study examined how active-duty military personnel choose between options for help with emotional or mental health concerns and reported that soldiers generally seek out *civilian* mental health professionals for family and substance abuse problems, whereas *military* mental health professionals are primarily consulted for stress management, depression, anxiety, combat or operational stress, or anger management.[47]

Established in 2012, DoD's Military Family Readiness System comprises a diverse set of policies, programs, services, resources, and practices to support and promote family well-being. Commanders are supposed to work within this system when addressing many of the service member attitudes and behaviors that fall within the initial states and initial manifestations of extremism. Service member and family well-being fosters family readiness, which in turn enhances service members' readiness.[48] DoD's Military Family Readiness System includes such resources as FRGs (and their equivalents in the Services), the Military Crisis Line, and Military OneSource. As official command-sponsored and command-resourced organizations, FRGs offer assistance, mutual support, and a network of communications between family members, the chain of command, and community resource providers.[49] The Military Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource for service members. Military OneSource offers support for nonmedical counseling (e.g., marriage counseling, stress management) and referrals to other types of resources. Military mental health professionals address such issues as suicidal and homicidal thoughts; experiences of sexual assault, child abuse, or domestic violence; alcohol and substance abuse; and serious mental health conditions that require medical treatment. MWR and its partners offer education and counseling services for such issues as suicide prevention and survivor outreach.[50]

Air Force Community Action Boards and Community Action Teams (CATs) are another viable resource for coordinating strategies to identify and address patterns related to signs of initial states or initial manifestations of extremism. These are entities at the installation, major command, and headquarters level composed of representatives from diverse organizations (e.g., leadership, law enforcement, service providers) who coordinate periodically to identify and monitor the needs of the various populations within the military community (i.e., service members, their families, Air Force employees) and develop strategies to address them. For example, Air Force Instruction 90-5001 encourages commanders to consult with CAT members, Community Support Coordinators, and Violence Prevention Integrators to enhance well-being and resilience within their units.[51]

Part 3: Detect and Intervene When Observing Extremism

The third part of our proposed framework is to detect early trends of extremist activity at the installation level and then intervene at these installations, accordingly.[52] Coordination between military and civilian law enforcement and collection of open-source intelligence are two strategies for detecting these trends.

First, civilian and military law enforcement agencies have useful information they could share on which groups

pose the greatest threats for service members online and in the areas surrounding particular installations, as well as whether they observe indicators of extremist affiliations, such as symbols or slogans.[53] Military leaders, educators, and service providers could draw upon these resources for education, training, and informational awareness activities. For example, installation-level Air Force CATs (or equivalents in other Services) could develop a toolkit to provide access to videos, reports, bulletins, or other materials that could inform unit or community programming. The toolkit could offer ideas on organizations to contact for guest speakers who could educate and warn members about particular extremist groups and their beliefs, activities, and recruitment tactics. This information could help provide counter-messaging or inoculation against narratives and propaganda by extremist groups.

There are various criminal investigative services across DoD that might encounter evidence of extremist activities during investigations, either directly or indirectly. These include the Defense Criminal Investigation Services,[54] Air Force Office of Special Investigations,[55] U.S. Army Criminal Investigations Command,[56] and Naval Criminal Investigation Service.[57] Although they need to preserve the integrity of their investigations, there might be patterns or broader trends they could then share with military leaders and service providers to aid in detection, stop the spread of harmful information, and engage in other countermeasures. The Office of Law Enforcement Policy and Support within the Defense Human Resources Activity could also help coordinate the detection of extremist activities and sharing of information across DoD.

Second, the internet has made it easier for extremist groups to interact with a broader variety of potential members. New machine learning techniques can aid in searching for online trends of extremist involvement.[58] For example, models can be trained to detect extremist communities on such social media platforms as Twitter and to infer the degree to which users who appear to have current or past associations with the military are engaging with these extremist groups. From these online discussions, insights could be drawn to inform headquarters-prepared materials targeting misinformation, recruitment language, and so on for broader use by the military community. However, there are risks associated with the use of artificial intelligence and machine-learning tools, including privacy concerns, false positive or negative results, and algorithmic bias that require continuous recalibration by a human-in-the-loop.[59]

Detection and intervention are not solely the domain of law enforcement or data analysts. Service providers might have information about potential risks for extremist activity, although they might not always recognize it as such. Chaplains, psychologists, social workers, Military and Family Life counselors, psychiatrists, and health care providers might be providing support for individuals exhibiting the initial states or initial manifestations of extremism. These support service providers must preserve their professional and ethical obligations regarding confidentiality and act in ways that promote rather than undermine help-seeking behaviors and treatment. We do not imply that these professionals should report every individual who feels frustrated with the government, feels alienated from others, or is withdrawing from political processes, for example, but in the course of their work they might become aware of information that could be impor-

tant for detecting and intervening to counter extremism. Such information might include

- extremist materials appearing on the installation (e.g., left in the chapel or hospital waiting rooms)
- emerging extremist groups, movements, or causes
- rumors or misinformation being spread that could stoke the flames of social conflicts (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation)
- justifications of extremist activities that resonate with members
- poor reputation of military channels for filing complaints or appeals, or service members' lack of awareness of these channels.

Sharing this type of information—not tied to any particular individuals—could inform efforts to keep abreast of ever-evolving groups and social movements, to actively dispel myths and misinformation or dismantle justifications that could increase the risk of adopting extremist views, and to improve the awareness and functioning of complaint channels to encourage people to work within them.

It is important that providers (1) understand the types of aggregate information that they could share with commanders that would be helpful and (2) have a safe way to share this information.

Part 4. Measure Extremist Trends and Evaluate Interventions

The last part of our proposed four-part framework involves the measurement of extremist trends and subsequent evaluation of the early interventions previously described. DoD already collects some data on extremism using the DIBRS, which records law enforcement activities and statistics within the military and reports criminal data to the FBI as required by the Uniform Federal Crime Reporting Act of 1988.[60]

One data element in DIBRS is "bias motivation." *Bias* is defined as "a performed negative opinion or attitude toward a group of persons" (e.g., racial, religious, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation, or disability groups).[61] Table 1 displays some of these codes in DIBRS.

There are several potential areas of improvement for data collection related to extremism in the military. First, the codes used in DIBRS might not always align with those used in the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).[62] For example, NIBRS has a code for "Anti-Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander" while DIBRS has a separate code just for "Anti-Pacific Islander." DIBRS has separate bias motivation codes for seven religions, while NIBRS has 14 codes for religious bias. Furthermore, NIBRS has a code for "Anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (mixed group)" while DIBRS has no code for transgender bias.

Second, there might be biases in how incidents are reported to DIBRS. For example, incidents in the FBI's NIBRS are not necessarily representative of all incidents among the U.S. population,[63] and some have reported a nonresponse rate in reporting by law enforcement agencies to the FBI.[64] The same might hold true for DIBRS. Furthermore, some have raised concerns in the past about the reliability of data from the DIBRS.[65] Thus, there might be a need to continuously review what is reported to DIBRS (i.e., consistent use of correct motivation bias codes), the frequency of reporting (i.e., consistent reporting by the Services over time), and the sharing of data with the FBI to ensure that broad trends related to

TABLE 1
Bias Motivation Codes in the Defense Incident-Based Reporting System

Race and Ethnicity	Religion	Sexual Orientation	Mental and Physical Disabilities	Unknown Bias
• AW = Anti-White • AH = Anti-Black • AD = Anti-Arab • AM = Anti-Hispanic • AC = Anti-American Indian • AB = Anti-Alaskan • AE = Anti-Asian • AT = Anti-Pacific Islander • AR = Anti-Multi-Racial Group • AZ = Anti-Other Ethnicity	• AO = Anti-Jewish • AI = Anti-Catholic • AN = Anti-Islamic (Moslem) • AU = Anti-Protestant • AS = Anti-Multi-Religious Group • AA = Anti-Agnostic • AY = Anti-Other Religions	• AQ = Anti-Male Homosexual • AK = Anti-Female Homosexual • AL = Anti-Heterosexual • AG = Anti-Bisexual	• BA = Anti-Mental Disability • BB = Anti-Physical Disability	• AX = Unknown Bias

SOURCE: DoD, 2020, p. 26.
NOTE: Table 1 does not display the code "NB = None (no bias)."

extremism are captured between civilian and military law enforcement organizations.

Third, there could be alternative ways to collect data on trends related to extremism and how they might relate to intervention activities. For example, the Army's iSALUTE program is an online reporting tool for members of the Army community to report suspected extremist activities.[66] As military leaders release new tools, there will be a need to continuously evaluate these data sources and subsequent interventions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This Perspective outlines a framework for reducing the risk of extremism in the U.S. military. It provides a brief review of relevant background information about extrem-

ism and presents a four-part framework for mitigating such activities. The first part is recognizing and defining the problem of extremism, which the military has already done. The second part is preventing future extremist activities from occurring across the ranks, and the framework outlines ways for the military to accomplish this. The third part involves using strategies to detect what might be precursors of extremism and helping commanders intervene accordingly. The fourth part describes ways for the military to measure extremist trends and evaluate interventions using an evidence-based approach.

Conclusions

We have identified four conclusions using this framework.

First, current DoD policies clearly prohibit extremism in the military and place significant responsibilities on commanders to implement this policy. Specifically, policy requires commanders to take corrective action when they observe active forms of extremist activities. It also requires commanders to intervene when they observe behaviors that *might* lead to a future violation of policies that prohibit extremism. This is a tremendous responsibility, particularly given that commanders are not subject-matter experts in extremism and that, even for experts, this would be difficult, because many of the precursors to extremism are common (e.g., frustration with society, institutions, and culture) and do not lead to extremism.

Second, there is no widely accepted definition of extremism that delineates where to draw the line between *extremism* and beliefs and behaviors that are simply *outside the norm*. That presents challenges for commanders in trying to balance the rights of service members with detection of current extremist policy violations or problematic behaviors that have a high probability of leading to extremist activity in the future.

Third, policy largely focuses on extremist activities by service members. The problem of extremism emerges from and affects the broader military community, meaning not only service members but also their families and civilian employees.

Fourth, DoD has several existing support programs that could be better leveraged to support commanders in implementing DoD's ban on extremist activities while protecting the rights and needs of those they serve. Such programs could also help a broader variety of members of the military community (e.g., military spouses, dependents, civilian employees, contractors) to detect and intervene

earlier rather than later when they observe extremist activities that affect the military.

Recommendations

We offer five recommendations that inform a strategy to support commanders in mitigating extremism within the military.

DoD efforts to combat extremism should engage the wider military community, not focus solely on service members. Given the diversity of the U.S. military community, any policies or programs designed to prevent or detect extremism should consider *all* members of the military community—in partnership with relevant civilian community members—as potential partners in the fight against extremism. In 2019, there were more than 1.3 million members on active duty, but also more than 1 million members of the Ready Reserve, more than 200,000 members of the Standby or Retired Reserve, almost 900,000 DoD civilian employees, more than 965,000 military spouses, and more than 1.6 million children of members.[67] Additionally, military installations and deployed environments can include contractors, personnel from other agencies, and members of other nations' militaries. Any member of these groups might adopt and promote extremist beliefs and act upon them, including becoming active or passive members of extremist groups promoting racial supremacy, religious extremism, or specific social or political issues. Commanders and supervisors face major challenges detecting early signs of extremism across the various members in the broader military community, many of whom commanders will rarely if ever directly meet. Anti-extremism efforts focused just on active-duty personnel will miss key sources of information and opportu-

nities for influence. Such military activities and resources as stand-downs, town halls, information campaigns, and channels to share tips with leaders should also engage the broader community, including active and reserve component personnel, spouses and partners, children, civilian employees, and contractors.

Efforts to address extremism should take a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs. Responding to early signs of extremism is preferable to waiting until initial extremist states manifest in ways that directly affect military readiness or preparedness. Service providers from the various support agencies already do help individuals find more-acceptable ways to manage emotions, such as frustration and anger directed toward authority figures or certain segments of society. Community service providers could also think about broader ways to counter the influence and impact of extremist groups. For example, they could

- provide general guidance on how to break cycles of outrage and hate and to manage personal relationships with any friends or relatives who hold extremist views or are involved in violent extremist groups
- organize activities to dispel stereotypes and myths promulgated by hate groups and to illuminate the harm of hate speech, targeted threats, and other extremist activities
- organize real-time live or virtual question-and-answer sessions with reformed extremists to understand the impacts of extremism and how people disengage from these groups.

Service providers could also alert leaders to signs of misinformation, recruitment, and emerging groups that might be posing a threat to the military community.

A community-based approach would also emphasize the need to support unit and broader installation-wide morale, welfare, and recreational activities to strengthen the military identity, community, and sense of belonging. These may counterbalance extremist recruitment strategies, which seek to build rapport, camaraderie, and loyalty at the small-group level as a bridge to introducing extreme beliefs and actions. A stronger sense of unit cohesion and community well-being can make personnel and their families more resistant to these strategies within the military community.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) should continue to coordinate information-sharing between civilian and military law enforcement agencies. Extremist groups are volatile by nature. Such groups might form, evolve, splinter, or disintegrate relatively quickly, only to reemerge later in new forms. The tracking of these trends will require cooperation among federal law enforcement agencies (e.g., FBI), state and local law enforcement agencies, military law enforcement organizations (e.g., Army Criminal Investigation Command), and domestic intelligence and security agencies (e.g., DHS and the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency).

OSD and the military departments should employ machine-learning technologies to help detect broad, emerging trends of extremism that might affect members of the military community. The internet and social media have reduced the costs of creating, sustaining, and growing extremist organizations—not only in the United States but also around the world. Many of these online data are publicly available, and recent advances in machine-learning methods would allow trained professionals within OSD and the military departments to spot early patterns of extrem-

ist activities that might target members of the military community.[68] Such tools are useful for identifying broad trends at the installation level, using de-identified data. We distinguish this approach from law enforcement analyses of individual-level identifiable data for investigation purposes. The use of these machine-learning tools does carry risks, including privacy concerns, false positive or negative results, and algorithmic bias. Thus, we recommend continuous recalibration of these tools that involves a human-in-the-loop.

OSD should continually measure existing extremist trends and evaluate programs designed to prevent, detect, and intervene when members of the military community express extremist views. There is a paucity of data on trends surrounding the prevalence of extremist activities in the military. For example, extremism might occur at the nexus of civil-military relations, whereby civilian extremist groups attempt to recruit members of the military community; but civilian and military law enforcement agencies might not always share information about possible extremism. The bias motivation codes used in DIBRS and the process for collecting and reporting bias-motivated incidents should align with the FBI's NIBRS. This integration would ensure that trends in extremism are shared between civilian and military law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, as the Services and OSD develop new tools for collecting data on extremism,

opportunities will arise to identify best practices for measuring extremist activities over time.

Cautionary Points on Implementation

This section discusses four cautionary points on the issue of scope creep when implementing policies designed to reduce the risk of extremism in the U.S. military. First, policy should avoid loosely applying the label of *extremist* to *all* people who exhibit initial states of extremism. Not all people who express anger, frustration, outrage, or feelings of alienation are or will become extremists. Second, we are not suggesting that the military should assign the mission of combating extremism to any of its existing community support services. These services are a set of tools out of many (e.g., law enforcement entities, counterintelligence efforts, mental health services) and should be part of a comprehensive strategy to combat extremism.

Third, the military should avoid using its community support services as an extension of law enforcement. Chaplains, mental health counselors, and FRGs should support personnel and their families versus collecting evidence on individuals for future law enforcement actions.[69] These services can help provide information about misinformation, patterns, and external groups but must not undermine their

Community support services are a set of tools out of many that should be part of a comprehensive strategy to combat extremism.

own efforts, ethics, or professional standards. Finally, "early interventions" refer to leveraging existing support services to prevent people from ever taking up active involvement in extremism that requires disciplinary actions. Preventive work can be achieved through helping individuals manage difficult feelings and life experiences and guiding them to more-productive channels for expressing their grievances and bringing about change.

Closing Thoughts

The vast majority of military personnel and their families are not extremists. But even a small number of people engaged in extremist activities could damage the U.S. military's reputation, its force, its members, and the larger community. Extremist activities can also be harmful to the individuals who are radicalized and their friends and family. DoD has existing programs that support personnel and their families, promote diversity and inclusion, and prevent violence. A community-based approach that leverages these existing programs could help the military to prevent service members and their families from associating with extremist groups and to respond sooner—and more effectively—when they do.

Notes

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DAF—*See* U.S. Department of the Air Force.

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Laura L. Miller is a senior social scientist at the RAND Corporation. For nearly 30 years, she has studied the lives of military personnel and their families through surveys, observations, discussion groups, interviews, and analyses of military policy and personnel data. Research topics include military culture and organization, deployment experiences, social integration, social problems, health and well-being, military spouse education and employment, unit cohesion and morale, and civil-military relations. Miller holds a Ph.D. in sociology.

About This Perspective

In recent years, news headlines have highlighted the involvement of current or former U.S. military personnel in protest violence; supremacist groups; the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol; and other forms of violent extremism spanning different political and ideological spectra. The threat of extremism is not new, but the proliferation of social media has made it easier for radical ideas to spread quickly and for extremist groups to organize, even reaching into the military community (e.g., service members, military spouses, military dependents, civilian employees, and contractors) to expand membership and gain operational capabilities.

This Perspective outlines a framework to help commanders reduce the risk of extremism in the military. First, we provide highlights from research on extremism, including a framework for understanding these types of activities. Second, we use this framework to outline four strategies for reducing the risk of extremism in the military. Third, we recommend a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs to better support commanders as they carry out their responsibilities to prevent and mitigate exposure to extremism by members of the military community.

RAND National Security Research Division

Acknowledgments

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Hi Kelly:

SD asked for an executive summary of the attached RAND report on extremism, released 16 Sept. A one-pager is attached. Of note, DoD did not commission this study. Rather, we have a study underway with IDA, which will be complete in Spring FY22.

Standing by if there are any questions.

Julie Blanks
OUSD(P&R)
(b) (6)

RAND Extremism Report EXSUM

On September 16, 2021 RAND released a RAND Perspective Report entitled "Reducing the Risk of Extremist Activity in the U.S. Military." RAND conducted this report *without* direct oversight or sponsorship from OSD but rather by using National Defense Research Institute (NDRI) support funds, which is independent exploratory research funding provided for in the federally-funded research and development center (FFRDC) OSD contract.

The report offers a 4-step framework for reducing the risk of extremism within DoD. These are: 1) Recognize and scope the problem of extremism, 2) Prevent future extremist views and activities, 3) Detect and intervene when observing extremism, and 4) Measure extremist trends and evaluate interventions.

The RAND report cites research that identified at least four types of experiences that people tend to follow into extremism:

- *life events*: traumatic life events that prompt people to consider extremist views as a framework to understand their trauma;
- *propaganda*: consumption of extremist material, including books, music, or online content;
- *recruitment*: interactions with members of extremist groups that either reach out to individuals or that individuals seek out after self-radicalizing; and
- *social bonds*: social interactions with other members of extremist groups, especially if individuals are feeling lonely or isolated."

RAND presented 5 recommendations to counter prohibited extremist activity:

1. DoD efforts to combat extremism should engage the wider military community, not focus solely on Service members.
2. OSD should continue to coordinate information-sharing between civilian and military law enforcement agencies.
3. Efforts to address extremism should take a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs.
4. OSD and the military departments should employ machine-learning technologies to help detect broad, emerging trends of extremism that might affect members of the military community.
5. OSD should continually measure existing extremist trends and evaluate programs designed to prevent, detect, and intervene when members of the military community express extremist views. There is a paucity of data on trends.

Related, the internal report by the SecDef-directed Countering Extremist Activity Working Group (CEAWG) submitted in July includes similar findings and associated recommendations to further combat extremism within DoD and in some respects even exceed the suggestions in the RAND report. Additionally, OSD commissioned an extremist study with another FFRDC, the Institute for Defense Analysis (IDA) with results anticipated Spring of FY22.

(b) (5)

MAREK N. POSARD, LESLIE ADRIENNE PAYNE, LAURA L. MILLER

Reducing the Risk of Extremist Activity in the U.S. Military

In recent years, news headlines have highlighted the involvement of current or former U.S. military personnel in protest violence;[1] supremacist groups;[2] the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol;[3] and other forms of violent extremism spanning different political and ideological spectra.[4] The threat of extremism is not new, but the proliferation of social media has made it easier for radical ideas to spread quickly and for extremist groups to organize, even reaching into the military community (e.g., service members, military spouses, military dependents, civilian employees, and contractors) to expand membership and gain operational capabilities.

The U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) has long prohibited service members from actively advocating for extremist activities.[5] DoD policy establishes the expectation that commanders detect prohibited activities, investigate them, and take corrective action. It also relies on commanders to help minimize the risk by intervening early, "primarily through counseling" when they observe "signs of future prohibited activities."[6] Thus, commanders have a dual mandate to enforce current policy violations and anticipate future violations by personnel. DoD policy also places great responsibility on commanders to appropriately weigh the

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potentially competing interests of national security; service members' right of expression; and good unit order, discipline, and effectiveness.[7]

In this Perspective, we outline a framework to help commanders reduce the risk of extremism in the military. First, we provide highlights from research on extremism, including a framework for understanding these types of activities. Second, we use this framework to outline four strategies for reducing the risk of extremism in the military. Third, we recommend a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs to better support commanders as they carry out their responsibilities to prevent and mitigate exposure to extremism within the military.

Seeking Identity, Meaning, and Social Bonds, Service Members Might Find Them in Extremist Movements

Recent news headlines raise questions about the extent to which and the reasons why current and former members of the U.S. military would associate with extremist movements. For example, in 2017, U.S. Marine Corps Lance Corporal Vasillios Pistolis was imprisoned over his participation in the violent white supremacist "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia.[8] In another case, the government charged U.S. Army Private Ethan Melzer with conspiring to murder his fellow soldiers by allegedly sharing sensitive details about his unit's upcoming deployment with a neo-Nazi and white supremacist group to facilitate an attack.[9] In January 2021, the government arrested ousted ex-soldier and self-proclaimed "hardcore leftist" Daniel Baker,

Key Points

- *Extremism* is a term used to characterize a variety of attitudes, beliefs, and behaviors that often are on the extreme end of the political, religious, or ideological spectrum within society (e.g., white nationalist, anarchist).
- Extremist beliefs, affiliations, and activities are constantly evolving.
- Service members, military families, and civilian employees might actively or passively associate with extremist groups.
- DoD prohibits active involvement in extremist activities, but laws place limits on what activities the military can and cannot restrict or punish.
- Current policy requires commanders to intervene when they observe extremist activities or behaviors that might lead to future extremism.
- We present a framework to assist DoD in reducing the risk of extremism in the military.
- We make five recommendations, each focusing on a community-based approach that leverages existing DoD programs to help commanders and their subordinates prevent, detect, intervene, and measure extremist activities earlier rather than later.

who is accused of making online threats and attempting to organize violence against fascists, white supremacists, conservative protestors, and U.S. military officers.[10]

Individuals labeled as *extremists* (1) identify with beliefs and organizations that are on the far end of political, religious, or ideological spectra within a society and (2) advocate for activities that are outside societal norms and laws. These individuals often draw meaning from the

identity that they apply to themselves and others based on their group affiliations (e.g., race, gender, religion, nationality, political beliefs). Studies have identified a variety of factors that lead people to join extremist movements, such as having a passion for political change, looking for a sense of belonging, and seeking excitement.[11] One former leader of a white nationalist group claims that new members are often seeking to form a sense of identity, community, and purpose[12]—some of the same reasons that people join the military.[13] Research has identified at least four types of experiences that people tend to follow into extremism:

- *life events*: traumatic life events that prompt people to consider extremist views as a framework to understand their trauma
- *propaganda*: consumption of extremist material, including books, music, or online content
- *recruitment*: interactions with members of extremist groups that either reach out to individuals or that individuals seek out after self-radicalizing
- *social bonds*: social interactions with other members of extremist groups, especially if individuals are feeling lonely or isolated.[14]

There is no single factor that sufficiently explains why people become active in extremist causes. Often, a combination of factors leads individuals to become increasingly active in extremist activities. This ratcheting up of involvement might help people construct a new identity that is defined by an extremist ideology. Specifically, research has proposed that extremist identities become problematic when they (1) consume a large part of one's life[15] and (2) are defined by extreme hatred or prejudice toward other groups of people.[16]

Current and former military personnel might come into contact with extremist beliefs or groups on their own initiative, be exposed to those beliefs or groups online or through friends or family, or be approached by extremists seeking to recruit them.

Framework for Reducing the Risk of Extremism in the Military

Figure 1 shows a four-part framework we use to categorize the ways in which the military could combat extremism. We first provide an overview of the framework, and then we examine each element more closely. The first part is to recognize the problem of extremism and define *extrem-*

Abbreviations

ACLU	American Civil Liberties Union
CAT	Community Action Team
DAF	U.S. Department of the Air Force
DHS	U.S. Department of Homeland Security
DIBRS	Defense Incident-Based Reporting System
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
FBI	Federal Bureau of Investigation
FRG	Family Readiness Group
MWR	U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation
NIBRS	National Incident-Based Reporting System
OSD	Office of the Secretary of Defense

FIGURE 1

Framework for Reducing the Risk of Extremism Within the U.S. Military Community

Recognize and scope the problem of extremism	Prevent future extremist views and activities	Detect and intervene when observing extremism	Measure extremist trends and evaluate interventions

ist activities. The military has already done this through policy, public statements by military leadership, and a one-day "stand down" of activities to discuss extremism in the military.[17] Some experts argue that the scope of extremism should be narrow, with the goal of isolating the most-dangerous members participating in fringe elements of these movements.[18] Others argue that a broader scope can help identify those supporting extremists or provide an early warning about those at risk of becoming extremists. Our proposed framework focuses on addressing these early warning signs of extremism.

Second, the military could better leverage existing violence prevention programs to prevent service members from becoming involved with extremist groups. Some examples of existing prevention resources within the military are chaplains, mental health counselors, the Family Advocacy Program, and Military OneSource.

Third, this framework focuses on detecting extremist activities and designing interventions to respond to them. The military has existing authorities to detect broad patterns of extremism in its ranks; for instance, the military is authorized to coordinate with civilian law enforcement agencies, conduct defense criminal investigative services, and track extremist activities online. Leveraging existing resources designed to support the military community

could help commanders detect early signals that might lead to future extremist activities, and then the commanders could intervene. People in existing programs, such as chaplains, counselors, and other sources of support, might become aware of emerging extremist groups, ideologies, rumors, and misinformation being circulated. Although those sources cannot violate their professional and ethical codes or standards for confidentiality, privacy, and the protection of sensitive health information, they could be encouraged and provided with a means to share general information about those trends so commanders could address them across the population at large.

Finally, our framework includes measuring extremist activities and using the results to inform the evaluation of programs designed to prevent, detect, and intervene when commanders become aware of signs of extremist activities. DoD currently tracks bias motivations in the Defense Incident-Based Reporting System (DIBRS), but it might need to reevaluate and revise these reporting codes in DIBRS and consider whether alternative forms of data collection would be useful to measure extremist trends in the future.

Part 1. Recognize and Scope the Problem of Extremism

The first part of our proposed framework is to recognize and define the problem of extremism. Military leadership has publicly recognized this problem, as is evident from the policies against it, recent statements made by U.S. Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III and various senior civilian and defense leaders, and the 2021 DoD order for commanders to conduct a one-day "stand-down" to discuss extremism with personnel.[19]

Defining the problem of extremism has been a challenge, however, because there is no widely accepted set of criteria for making that determination. In an attempt to draw the line for legal purposes, U.S. courts have tried to balance freedom of expression with the need to protect the public from disruptions and threats.[20] U.S. military courts have focused on the degree to which extremist behaviors were either damaging the reputation or public esteem of the military ("service discrediting") or harming good order and discipline, two concepts that are outlined in the Uniform Code of Military Justice.[21] The U.S. Department of Homeland Security (DHS) and the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI),[22] however, focus their definitions on how a particular belief system motivates someone to commit acts of violence. There are also definitions of extremism employed by private and nonprofit organizations. The Anti-Defamation League, for example, uses a broad definition of extremism that includes any "religious, social, or political belief systems that exist substantially outside of belief systems more broadly accepted in society."[23]

Historically, the military has struggled to identify and manage personnel whose beliefs might lead to future prob-lems. During World War II, for example, the Army created the 620th Engineer General Services Company as a holding unit for personnel, many of them German-born, whom commanders suspected of being disloyal to the United States.[24] During the Vietnam War, basic military functioning was undermined by racial conflict within the ranks, some of which involved violence—including attacks against officers and enlisted leaders.[25] During the 1980s, following reports of service members involved in Ku Klux Klan activities, then–Secretary of Defense Caspar Weinberger released a memo broadening the policy against participation in hate groups, stating that active participation in white supremacy groups was "utterly incompatible" with military service, and authorizing commanders to discipline or even discharge those involved in disruptive activities.[26] Although the memo did not forbid joining these groups, the American Civil Liberties Union (ACLU) criticized the policy as overly broad.[27] In 2013, the ACLU also criticized U.S. Army Equal Opportunity training materials that characterized a variety of beliefs as extremism, including some held by evangelical Christian, ultra-Orthodox Jewish, and Ku Klux Klan groups.[28]

It is beyond the scope of this effort to develop a standardized definition of extremism. However, to further illuminate the complexity, we review select definitions from federal law enforcement agencies, DoD, and the military Services.

How Law Enforcement Agencies, the Department of Defense, and the Military Services Define Extremism

This section focuses on definitions of extremism used by selected federal law enforcement agencies, DoD, and each of the military departments as of the date this document was written. These definitions varied in scope. For example, some federal law enforcement agencies narrowly focus on the link between ideological beliefs and unlawful actions. In the U.S. military, however, the focus more broadly includes participation in activities that undermine good order and discipline or are service discrediting.

Federal Law Enforcement

As required by law, the FBI and DHS, in consultation with the Director of National Intelligence, developed definitions for terms related to domestic terrorism.[29] Their definitions for extremism are not identical to one another, but both the DHS and FBI define *domestic violent extremist* as

> an individual based and operating primarily within the territorial jurisdiction of the United States who seeks to further their ideological goals wholly or in part through unlawful acts of force or violence. It is important to remember that the mere advocacy of ideological positions and/or the use of strong rhetoric does not constitute violent extremism, and in some cases direct or specific threats of violence must be present to constitute a violation of federal law.[30]

Department of Defense

DoD policy related to extremism recognizes that "a service member's right of expression should be preserved to the

maximum extent possible."[31] Furthermore, it notes that, while balancing the rights of service members, no commander should be indifferent to conduct that undermines unit effectiveness.

The policy also delimits prohibited and preventive activities. First, DoD policy states,

> Military personnel must not actively advocate supremacist, extremist, or criminal gang doctrine, ideology, or causes, including those that advance, encourage, or advocate illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, ethnicity, or national origin or those that advance, encourage, or advocate the use of force, violence, or criminal activity or otherwise advance efforts to deprive individuals of their civil rights.[32]

Furthermore, the policy instructs personnel to reject active participation in criminal gangs or other organizations that advocate such prohibited views, activities, and illegal discrimination. Some examples of active participation include fundraising, demonstrating or rallying, recruiting, training, and wearing gang colors, clothing, or tattoos. The policy gives commanders authority to use a variety of administrative and disciplinary actions:

> The functions of command include vigilance about the existence of such activities; active use of investigative authority to include a prompt and fair complaint process; and use of administrative powers such as counseling, reprimands, orders, and performance evaluations to deter such activities.[33]

Second, DoD policy requires actions to prevent extremist activities. Specifically, the policy instructs commanders to intervene early (primarily with counseling) when they observe signs of potential future policy violations or actions

Current policy places a significant amount of responsibility on commanders to not only identify current violations of policies that prohibit extremist activities but also anticipate when behaviors might suggest a future policy violation.

that could undermine good order and discipline. For example, the policy states that possessing literature associated with extremist causes, ideology, doctrine, or organizations is not necessarily prohibited, but it signals that further investigations or counseling might be warranted.

Put simply, *current policy places a significant amount of responsibility on commanders to not only identify current violations of policies that prohibit extremist activities but also anticipate when behaviors might suggest a future policy violation.*

Military Departments

Military department policies reiterate key elements of the DoD policy and provide more detail for specific implementation. For example, guidance from the U.S. Department of the Air Force (DAF) prohibits personnel from active advocacy of "supremacist, extremist, or criminal gang doctrine, ideology, or causes."[34] These causes include the advocacy of "illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, ethnicity, or national origin." Furthermore, prohibited causes include advocacy for "the use of force,

violence, or criminal activity" that deprive the civil rights of others. DAF policy also highlights that efforts to counter violent extremism must be balanced, because "commanders must preserve the service member's constitutional right of expression to the maximum extent possible, consistent with good order, discipline, and national security."[35]

The U.S. Department of the Army policy on extremist organizations and activities, Army Regulation 600–20, which was revised in July 2020, is designed to be used in conjunction with DoD Instruction 1325.06. This Army policy prohibits extremist activities. Specifically, the revised policy clearly states that "it is the commander's responsibility to maintain good order and discipline" and notes that "every commander has the inherent authority to take appropriate actions to accomplish this goal."[36] The Army defines extremism by a variety of views that groups are advocating for, including hatred, intolerance, or discrimination based on race, sex, gender identity, sexual orientation, or ethnicity. It also includes the use of violence to deprive people of their individual rights; support for terrorism, sedition, and violence against the United States or

DoD; and unlawful violence to achieve political, religious, discriminatory, and ideological goals.

Furthermore, Army policy prohibits a wide variety of activities if associated with extremist groups; for instance, policy prohibits participating in public demonstrations or rallies, attending meetings on or off duty, fundraising activities, recruiting or training others to join such groups, holding apparent leadership roles, distributing literature on or off military installations, or receiving financial assistance from others associated with extremist groups.

Similarly, the U.S. Department of the Navy's policy prohibits participation in organizations that espouse supremacist causes. It also prohibits participation in organizations that create illegal discrimination based on race, creed, sex, religion, or national origin; advocate the use of force against the United States or subdivisions of the government; or seek to deprive individuals of their civil rights. This policy defines *participation* as conduct that is performed alone or with others (e.g., rallies, fundraising, recruiting, training) and describes the link between prohibited activities and impacts on good order, discipline, or mission accomplishment.[37]

Furthermore, the Navy's military personnel policy outlines a process for administrative or disciplinary actions for personnel who are involved in "any substantiated incident of serious misconduct resulting from participation in supremacist or extremist activities."[38] This policy describes relevant prescribed misconduct that relates to "illegal discrimination based on race, creed, color, sex, religion, or national origin" or "advocating the use of force or violence against any federal, state, or local government[s]."[39] The policy also lists various types of violations (e.g., insubordinate conduct, maltreatment of subordinates, rioting, provoking speech or

gesture, assault, disloyal statements), noting this list is not exhaustive. More recently, the U.S. Marine Corps issued an order that consolidates various policies to prohibit a variety of activities, including "hazing, bullying, ostracism, retaliation, wrongful distribution, or broadcasting of intimate images, and certain dissident and protest activities (to include supremacist activity)."[40]

To summarize, the department-level policies share many of the same features, including prohibitions on extremist and supremacist ideology and active advocacy of these beliefs. These policies primarily focus on service members. All policies focus on illegal discrimination or depriving personnel of civil rights and prohibit violence against others or the government. The list of groups mentioned in these policy documents are not exhaustive, and there are a variety of potentially marginalized groups who might become targets. The policies also rely on the judgments of commanders to adjudicate policy violations, but there appears to be less guidance for commanders on how best to identify future violations and preserve service members' right of expression. We conclude that DoD, military department, and Service policies should maintain a standard definition of extremism and provide more guidance for commanders on how best to balance the rights of service members with unit functioning and national security interests. Furthermore, policy should also include guidance on a broader variety of members within the military community who might exhibit extremist behaviors (e.g., military families, military dependents, civilian employees, and contractors).

Part 2: Prevent Future Extremist Views and Activities

The second part of our proposed framework is to design programs to prevent members of the military community from associating with extremist groups or beliefs. Figure 2 outlines some of the features of extremism and proposed corresponding types of interventions. This encompasses activities within narrow definitions of extremism (labeled here as "extremist manifestations") and broader emotions, beliefs, and activities (characterized as "initial states" and "initial manifestations") that might be precursors to those extremist manifestations. The features displayed in Figure 2 are not necessarily linked as a linear process. The goal of these prevention programs should be to counsel individuals when they exhibit initial states or manifestations of extremism—two of the three attributes of extremism that are displayed in Figure 2—and to alert leaders to signs of misinformation, recruitment, and emerging groups that might be posing a threat to the military community.

The initial states of extremism include feelings and emotions, such as frustration and anger, that might not be noticed by others because they might be kept internal and are also common human emotions.[41] In the case of

FIGURE 2

Features of Extremism and Levels of Intervention

Initial states	Initial manifestations	Extremist manifestations
Internal emotions about society, institutions, culture	**Beliefs and actions more visible to friends, families, colleagues**	**Activities often shared with like-minded others**
• Anger, frustration, outrage • Dissatisfaction, distancing • Alienation, "otherness" • Revenge, hatred • Grievance, distrust, rejection of authorities and society • Disempowerment, lowered resilience to radicalization	• Lack of participation in political processes • Negative feelings at lack of status, recognition in mainstream society • Acceptance of views that violence is acceptable, justifiable, necessary • Online interactions with extremists • Involvement in sharing extremist material	• Recruitment, radicalization, mobilization of others • Criminality to aid extremist groups • Membership, indoctrination, training in extremist groups • Terrorism, traveling to commit an act of terrorism
Prevention	**Early intervention**	**Aggressive intervention**
Preliminary prevention and detection by military community	Early and intensive intervention by military community	Aggressive intervention using law enforcement

SOURCE: Adapted from Baruch et al., 2018.
NOTE: This figure organizes three broad sets of features. It is not a linear progression of stages, and one might exhibit some or all of these features simultaneously.

extremism, however, the risk is that these intense, hostile feelings can be directed toward the wider society, culture, and authorities. Mentors and service providers, such as counselors and chaplains, can help members manage these feelings in productive ways and find legitimate channels for members to register their grievances.

Initial extremist manifestations are more-clearly visible identifiers of violent extremism—for example, dropping out of political processes and mainstream cultures, accepting extremist group narratives regarding the justification of and need for violence, and interacting with extremist groups and materials.[42] These attributes might be cause for concern for family members, military peers, or commanders, but to preserve the rights of service members, a sophisticated approach to addressing them will be needed, particularly when no policy has been violated.

Finally, extremist activities might be shared with wider groups of individuals who also hold similar beliefs. And, in some cases, these activities may cross into support, or justification, of violence that includes criminal activities.[43] These are the more clear-cut activities for which law enforcement should be contacted.

Existing military programs could augment commanders' efforts, particularly with the initial states and initial manifestations of extremism. These resources include but are not limited to chaplains; mental health counselors; Family Readiness Groups (FRGs); the Military Crisis Line; Military OneSource; the U.S. Army Family and Morale, Welfare and Recreation (MWR) program; and Air Force Community Action Boards. Behavioral and mental health resources and counseling are indispensable for identifying and countering extremism, and a majority of these programs might embrace psychosocial approaches that examine a combination of psychological and environmental factors.

Chaplains are a key line of defense for service members' existential, spiritual, or moral concerns.[44] They can be a point of referral for those in need of behavioral health care services and also provide privileged communication that other service providers would often be required to report.[45] Furthermore, perceived stigma associated with mental health treatment is a complicated barrier to seeking behavioral health interventions,[46] so some service members might be more inclined to seek out the support of military chaplains instead of counselors.

Extremist activities might be shared with wider groups of likeminded individuals and sometimes cross the line by supporting and justifying the use of violence, up to and including committing a criminal offense.

Rather than deciding to seek counseling on their own, service members might be encouraged or required to do so by their commander or other relevant personnel. One study examined how active-duty military personnel choose between options for help with emotional or mental health concerns and reported that soldiers generally seek out *civilian* mental health professionals for family and substance abuse problems, whereas *military* mental health professionals are primarily consulted for stress management, depression, anxiety, combat or operational stress, or anger management.[47]

Established in 2012, DoD's Military Family Readiness System comprises a diverse set of policies, programs, services, resources, and practices to support and promote family well-being. Commanders are supposed to work within this system when addressing many of the service member attitudes and behaviors that fall within the initial states and initial manifestations of extremism. Service member and family well-being fosters family readiness, which in turn enhances service members' readiness.[48] DoD's Military Family Readiness System includes such resources as FRGs (and their equivalents in the Services), the Military Crisis Line, and Military OneSource. As official command-sponsored and command-resourced organizations, FRGs offer assistance, mutual support, and a network of communications between family members, the chain of command, and community resource providers.[49] The Military Crisis Line is a free, confidential resource for service members. Military OneSource offers support for nonmedical counseling (e.g., marriage counseling, stress management) and referrals to other types of resources. Military mental health professionals address such issues as suicidal and homicidal thoughts; experiences of sexual

assault, child abuse, or domestic violence; alcohol and substance abuse; and serious mental health conditions that require medical treatment. MWR and its partners offer education and counseling services for such issues as suicide prevention and survivor outreach.[50]

Air Force Community Action Boards and Community Action Teams (CATs) are another viable resource for coordinating strategies to identify and address patterns related to signs of initial states or initial manifestations of extremism. These are entities at the installation, major command, and headquarters level composed of representatives from diverse organizations (e.g., leadership, law enforcement, service providers) who coordinate periodically to identify and monitor the needs of the various populations within the military community (i.e., service members, their families, Air Force employees) and develop strategies to address them. For example, Air Force Instruction 90-5001 encourages commanders to consult with CAT members, Community Support Coordinators, and Violence Prevention Integrators to enhance well-being and resilience within their units.[51]

Part 3: Detect and Intervene When Observing Extremism

The third part of our proposed framework is to detect early trends of extremist activity at the installation level and then intervene at these installations, accordingly.[52] Coordination between military and civilian law enforcement and collection of open-source intelligence are two strategies for detecting these trends.

First, civilian and military law enforcement agencies have useful information they could share on which groups

pose the greatest threats for service members online and in the areas surrounding particular installations, as well as whether they observe indicators of extremist affiliations, such as symbols or slogans.[53] Military leaders, educators, and service providers could draw upon these resources for education, training, and informational awareness activities. For example, installation-level Air Force CATs (or equivalents in other Services) could develop a toolkit to provide access to videos, reports, bulletins, or other materials that could inform unit or community programming. The toolkit could offer ideas on organizations to contact for guest speakers who could educate and warn members about particular extremist groups and their beliefs, activities, and recruitment tactics. This information could help provide counter-messaging or inoculation against narratives and propaganda by extremist groups.

There are various criminal investigative services across DoD that might encounter evidence of extremist activities during investigations, either directly or indirectly. These include the Defense Criminal Investigation Services,[54] Air Force Office of Special Investigations,[55] U.S. Army Criminal Investigations Command,[56] and Naval Criminal Investigation Service.[57] Although they need to preserve the integrity of their investigations, there might be patterns or broader trends they could then share with military leaders and service providers to aid in detection, stop the spread of harmful information, and engage in other countermeasures. The Office of Law Enforcement Policy and Support within the Defense Human Resources Activity could also help coordinate the detection of extremist activities and sharing of information across DoD.

Second, the internet has made it easier for extremist groups to interact with a broader variety of potential members. New machine learning techniques can aid in searching for online trends of extremist involvement.[58] For example, models can be trained to detect extremist communities on such social media platforms as Twitter and to infer the degree to which users who appear to have current or past associations with the military are engaging with these extremist groups. From these online discussions, insights could be drawn to inform headquarters-prepared materials targeting misinformation, recruitment language, and so on for broader use by the military community. However, there are risks associated with the use of artificial intelligence and machine-learning tools, including privacy concerns, false positive or negative results, and algorithmic bias that require continuous recalibration by a human-in-the-loop.[59]

Detection and intervention are not solely the domain of law enforcement or data analysts. Service providers might have information about potential risks for extremist activity, although they might not always recognize it as such. Chaplains, psychologists, social workers, Military and Family Life counselors, psychiatrists, and health care providers might be providing support for individuals exhibiting the initial states or initial manifestations of extremism. These support service providers must preserve their professional and ethical obligations regarding confidentiality and act in ways that promote rather than undermine help-seeking behaviors and treatment. We do not imply that these professionals should report every individual who feels frustrated with the government, feels alienated from others, or is withdrawing from political processes, for example, but in the course of their work they might become aware of information that could be impor-

tant for detecting and intervening to counter extremism. Such information might include

- extremist materials appearing on the installation (e.g., left in the chapel or hospital waiting rooms)
- emerging extremist groups, movements, or causes
- rumors or misinformation being spread that could stoke the flames of social conflicts (e.g., race, gender, sexual orientation)
- justifications of extremist activities that resonate with members
- poor reputation of military channels for filing complaints or appeals, or service members' lack of awareness of these channels.

Sharing this type of information—not tied to any particular individuals—could inform efforts to keep abreast of ever-evolving groups and social movements, to actively dispel myths and misinformation or dismantle justifications that could increase the risk of adopting extremist views, and to improve the awareness and functioning of complaint channels to encourage people to work within them.

It is important that providers (1) understand the types of aggregate information that they could share with commanders that would be helpful and (2) have a safe way to share this information.

Part 4. Measure Extremist Trends and Evaluate Interventions

The last part of our proposed four-part framework involves the measurement of extremist trends and subsequent evaluation of the early interventions previously described. DoD already collects some data on extremism using the DIBRS, which records law enforcement activities and statistics within the military and reports criminal data to the FBI as required by the Uniform Federal Crime Reporting Act of 1988.[60]

One data element in DIBRS is "bias motivation." *Bias* is defined as "a performed negative opinion or attitude toward a group of persons" (e.g., racial, religious, ethnic or national origin, sexual orientation, or disability groups).[61] Table 1 displays some of these codes in DIBRS.

There are several potential areas of improvement for data collection related to extremism in the military. First, the codes used in DIBRS might not always align with those used in the FBI's National Incident-Based Reporting System (NIBRS).[62] For example, NIBRS has a code for "Anti-Native Hawaiian or Other Pacific Islander" while DIBRS has a separate code just for "Anti-Pacific Islander." DIBRS has separate bias motivation codes for seven religions, while NIBRS has 14 codes for religious bias. Furthermore, NIBRS has a code for "Anti-lesbian, gay, bisexual, or transgender (mixed group)" while DIBRS has no code for transgender bias.

Second, there might be biases in how incidents are reported to DIBRS. For example, incidents in the FBI's NIBRS are not necessarily representative of all incidents among the U.S. population,[63] and some have reported a nonresponse rate in reporting by law enforcement agencies to the FBI.[64] The same might hold true for DIBRS. Furthermore, some have raised concerns in the past about the reliability of data from the DIBRS.[65] Thus, there might be a need to continuously review what is reported to DIBRS (i.e., consistent use of correct motivation bias codes), the frequency of reporting (i.e., consistent reporting by the Services over time), and the sharing of data with the FBI to ensure that broad trends related to

TABLE 1

Bias Motivation Codes in the Defense Incident-Based Reporting System

Race and Ethnicity	Religion	Sexual Orientation	Mental and Physical Disabilities	Unknown Bias
• AW = Anti-White • AH = Anti-Black • AD = Anti-Arab • AM = Anti-Hispanic • AC = Anti-American Indian • AB = Anti-Alaskan • AE = Anti-Asian • AT = Anti-Pacific Islander • AR = Anti-Multi-Racial Group • AZ = Anti-Other Ethnicity	• AO = Anti-Jewish • AI = Anti-Catholic • AN = Anti-Islamic (Moslem) • AU = Anti-Protestant • AS = Anti-Multi-Religious Group • AA = Anti-Agnostic • AY = Anti-Other Religions	• AQ = Anti-Male Homosexual • AK = Anti-Female Homosexual • AL = Anti-Heterosexual • AG = Anti-Bisexual	• BA = Anti-Mental Disability • BB = Anti-Physical Disability	• AX = Unknown Bias

SOURCE: DoD, 2020, p. 26.
NOTE: Table 1 does not display the code "NB = None (no bias)."

extremism are captured between civilian and military law enforcement organizations.

Third, there could be alternative ways to collect data on trends related to extremism and how they might relate to intervention activities. For example, the Army's iSALUTE program is an online reporting tool for members of the Army community to report suspected extremist activities.[66] As military leaders release new tools, there will be a need to continuously evaluate these data sources and subsequent interventions.

Conclusions and Recommendations

This Perspective outlines a framework for reducing the risk of extremism in the U.S. military. It provides a brief review of relevant background information about extrem-

ism and presents a four-part framework for mitigating such activities. The first part is recognizing and defining the problem of extremism, which the military has already done. The second part is preventing future extremist activities from occurring across the ranks, and the framework outlines ways for the military to accomplish this. The third part involves using strategies to detect what might be precursors of extremism and helping commanders intervene accordingly. The fourth part describes ways for the military to measure extremist trends and evaluate interventions using an evidence-based approach.

Conclusions

We have identified four conclusions using this framework.

First, current DoD policies clearly prohibit extremism in the military and place significant responsibilities on commanders to implement this policy. Specifically, policy requires commanders to take corrective action when they observe active forms of extremist activities. It also requires commanders to intervene when they observe behaviors that *might* lead to a future violation of policies that prohibit extremism. This is a tremendous responsibility, particularly given that commanders are not subject-matter experts in extremism and that, even for experts, this would be difficult, because many of the precursors to extremism are common (e.g., frustration with society, institutions, and culture) and do not lead to extremism.

Second, there is no widely accepted definition of extremism that delineates where to draw the line between *extremism* and beliefs and behaviors that are simply *outside the norm*. That presents challenges for commanders in trying to balance the rights of service members with detection of current extremist policy violations or problematic behaviors that have a high probability of leading to extremist activity in the future.

Third, policy largely focuses on extremist activities by service members. The problem of extremism emerges from and affects the broader military community, meaning not only service members but also their families and civilian employees.

Fourth, DoD has several existing support programs that could be better leveraged to support commanders in implementing DoD's ban on extremist activities while protecting the rights and needs of those they serve. Such programs could also help a broader variety of members of the military community (e.g., military spouses, dependents, civilian employees, contractors) to detect and intervene

earlier rather than later when they observe extremist activities that affect the military.

Recommendations

We offer five recommendations that inform a strategy to support commanders in mitigating extremism within the military.

DoD efforts to combat extremism should engage the wider military community, not focus solely on service members. Given the diversity of the U.S. military community, any policies or programs designed to prevent or detect extremism should consider *all* members of the military community—in partnership with relevant civilian community members—as potential partners in the fight against extremism. In 2019, there were more than 1.3 million members on active duty, but also more than 1 million members of the Ready Reserve, more than 200,000 members of the Standby or Retired Reserve, almost 900,000 DoD civilian employees, more than 965,000 military spouses, and more than 1.6 million children of members.[67] Additionally, military installations and deployed environments can include contractors, personnel from other agencies, and members of other nations' militaries. Any member of these groups might adopt and promote extremist beliefs and act upon them, including becoming active or passive members of extremist groups promoting racial supremacy, religious extremism, or specific social or political issues. Commanders and supervisors face major challenges detecting early signs of extremism across the various members in the broader military community, many of whom commanders will rarely if ever directly meet. Anti-extremism efforts focused just on active-duty personnel will miss key sources of information and opportu-

nities for influence. Such military activities and resources as stand-downs, town halls, information campaigns, and channels to share tips with leaders should also engage the broader community, including active and reserve component personnel, spouses and partners, children, civilian employees, and contractors.

Efforts to address extremism should take a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs. Responding to early signs of extremism is preferable to waiting until initial extremist states manifest in ways that directly affect military readiness or preparedness. Service providers from the various support agencies already do help individuals find more-acceptable ways to manage emotions, such as frustration and anger directed toward authority figures or certain segments of society. Community service providers could also think about broader ways to counter the influence and impact of extremist groups. For example, they could

- provide general guidance on how to break cycles of outrage and hate and to manage personal relationships with any friends or relatives who hold extremist views or are involved in violent extremist groups
- organize activities to dispel stereotypes and myths promulgated by hate groups and to illuminate the harm of hate speech, targeted threats, and other extremist activities
- organize real-time live or virtual question-and-answer sessions with reformed extremists to understand the impacts of extremism and how people disengage from these groups.

Service providers could also alert leaders to signs of misinformation, recruitment, and emerging groups that might be posing a threat to the military community.

A community-based approach would also emphasize the need to support unit and broader installation-wide morale, welfare, and recreational activities to strengthen the military identity, community, and sense of belonging. These may counterbalance extremist recruitment strategies, which seek to build rapport, camaraderie, and loyalty at the small-group level as a bridge to introducing extreme beliefs and actions. A stronger sense of unit cohesion and community well-being can make personnel and their families more resistant to these strategies within the military community.

The Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) should continue to coordinate information-sharing between civilian and military law enforcement agencies. Extremist groups are volatile by nature. Such groups might form, evolve, splinter, or disintegrate relatively quickly, only to reemerge later in new forms. The tracking of these trends will require cooperation among federal law enforcement agencies (e.g., FBI), state and local law enforcement agencies, military law enforcement organizations (e.g., Army Criminal Investigation Command), and domestic intelligence and security agencies (e.g., DHS and the Defense Counterintelligence and Security Agency).

OSD and the military departments should employ machine-learning technologies to help detect broad, emerging trends of extremism that might affect members of the military community. The internet and social media have reduced the costs of creating, sustaining, and growing extremist organizations—not only in the United States but also around the world. Many of these online data are publicly available, and recent advances in machine-learning methods would allow trained professionals within OSD and the military departments to spot early patterns of extrem-

ist activities that might target members of the military community.[68] Such tools are useful for identifying broad trends at the installation level, using de-identified data. We distinguish this approach from law enforcement analyses of individual-level identifiable data for investigation purposes. The use of these machine-learning tools does carry risks, including privacy concerns, false positive or negative results, and algorithmic bias. Thus, we recommend continuous recalibration of these tools that involves a human-in-the-loop.

OSD should continually measure existing extremist trends and evaluate programs designed to prevent, detect, and intervene when members of the military community express extremist views. There is a paucity of data on trends surrounding the prevalence of extremist activities in the military. For example, extremism might occur at the nexus of civil-military relations, whereby civilian extremist groups attempt to recruit members of the military community; but civilian and military law enforcement agencies might not always share information about possible extremism. The bias motivation codes used in DIBRS and the process for collecting and reporting bias-motivated incidents should align with the FBI's NIBRS. This integration would ensure that trends in extremism are shared between civilian and military law enforcement agencies. Furthermore, as the Services and OSD develop new tools for collecting data on extremism,

opportunities will arise to identify best practices for measuring extremist activities over time.

Cautionary Points on Implementation

This section discusses four cautionary points on the issue of scope creep when implementing policies designed to reduce the risk of extremism in the U.S. military. First, policy should avoid loosely applying the label of *extremist* to *all* people who exhibit initial states of extremism. Not all people who express anger, frustration, outrage, or feelings of alienation are or will become extremists. Second, we are not suggesting that the military should assign the mission of combating extremism to any of its existing community support services. These services are a set of tools out of many (e.g., law enforcement entities, counterintelligence efforts, mental health services) and should be part of a comprehensive strategy to combat extremism.

Third, the military should avoid using its community support services as an extension of law enforcement. Chaplains, mental health counselors, and FRGs should support personnel and their families versus collecting evidence on individuals for future law enforcement actions.[69] These services can help provide information about misinformation, patterns, and external groups but must not undermine their

Community support services are a set of tools out of many that should be part of a comprehensive strategy to combat extremism.

own efforts, ethics, or professional standards. Finally, "early interventions" refer to leveraging existing support services to prevent people from ever taking up active involvement in extremism that requires disciplinary actions. Preventive work can be achieved through helping individuals manage difficult feelings and life experiences and guiding them to more-productive channels for expressing their grievances and bringing about change.

Closing Thoughts

The vast majority of military personnel and their families are not extremists. But even a small number of people engaged in extremist activities could damage the U.S. military's reputation, its force, its members, and the larger community. Extremist activities can also be harmful to the individuals who are radicalized and their friends and family. DoD has existing programs that support personnel and their families, promote diversity and inclusion, and prevent violence. A community-based approach that leverages these existing programs could help the military to prevent service members and their families from associating with extremist groups and to respond sooner—and more effectively—when they do.

Notes

[1] Thompson, Winston, and Hanrahan, 2018.

[2] Wilkinson, 2020.

[3] Dreisbach and Anderson, 2021.

[4] Shammas and De Vynck, 2021.

[5] DoD Directive 1325.6, 1996; DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012.

[6] DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012, p. 10.

[7] DoD Instruction 1325.06, 2012.

[8] Thompson and Winston, 2018.

[9] U.S. Department of Justice, 2020.

[10] Shammas and De Vynck, 2021; *United States v. Baker*, 2021.

[11] Helmus, 2009.

[12] Picciolini, 2020.

[13] Helmus et al., 2018.

[14] Brown et al., 2021.

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About the Authors

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About This Perspective

In recent years, news headlines have highlighted the involvement of current or former U.S. military personnel in protest violence; supremacist groups; the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the U.S. Capitol; and other forms of violent extremism spanning different political and ideological spectra. The threat of extremism is not new, but the proliferation of social media has made it easier for radical ideas to spread quickly and for extremist groups to organize, even reaching into the military community (e.g., service members, military spouses, military dependents, civilian employees, and contractors) to expand membership and gain operational capabilities.

This Perspective outlines a framework to help commanders reduce the risk of extremism in the military. First, we provide highlights from research on extremism, including a framework for understanding these types of activities. Second, we use this framework to outline four strategies for reducing the risk of extremism in the military. Third, we recommend a community-based approach that leverages existing military programs to better support commanders as they carry out their responsibilities to prevent and mitigate exposure to extremism by members of the military community.

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Acknowledgments

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Date:	Monday, October 25, 2021 5:58:00 PM
Attachments:	RAND Extremism Report #2 EXSUM (20211021) v5.docx
	RAND_RRA1226-1.pdf_safe.pdf
	EXSUM RAND report on Extremism (734 KB).msg

Hi, several weeks ago, RAND published the first of three reports (not solicited by the Department) on extremism. At one of his Direct Reports meetings, SD asked for an EXSUM of the report, which we provided to Kelly Magsamen (email attached). Part two in the RAND series was published today, and Mr. Cisneros wanted to offer SD a similar EXSUM. I've attached it, and the new RAND report as well. This doesn't seem like something that should be a formal package, nor am I sure anyone will ask for anything, but I did want to share the EXSUM in the event the study comes up.

Can you make sure the right folks see this?? Thank you!

Julie Blanks
OUSD(P&R)
(b) (6)

RAND Extremism Report #2 EXSUM

On October 25, 2021 RAND released a "RAND Research Report" entitled "Countering Violent Extremism in the U.S. Military." This report functions as a follow-on to the "RAND Perspective Report" released approximately six weeks prior. RAND conducted both reports *without* direct oversight from OSD but rather by using National Defense Research Institute (NDRI) support funds, which is an independent exploratory research funding provided for in the federally-funded research and development center (FFRDC) OSD contract and RAND uses to support independent research efforts. This RAND report reinforces results found by DoD over the last several years and adds minimally to ongoing efforts.

The report recommends DoD develop "a plan to counter violent extremism using a terrorism prevention framework [which] might offer. . .a way to address current forms of extremism in the ranks." This framework is derived "from a model contained in a 2019 RAND report that highlights how different audiences are drawn into extremist beliefs and groups in three phases." These phase interventions are described as early, middle, and late. "Early phase interventions are directed at a vulnerable population, or one that is in the early phases of radicalization; middle phase interventions seek to influence those who are already radicalized and possibly becoming violent; and finally, late phase interventions seek to redirect individuals who are in the midst of planning violent activities or have already done so."

The authors believe that "specific terrorism prevention initiatives could be considered and adapted by DoD." For example, "early phase initiatives include inoculation warnings, media literacy programs, social media and internet search redirection, Community Awareness Briefings, and Community Resilience Exercises. Middle phase initiatives include perception assessment of DoD extremism policies, off-ramping interventions, and military law enforcement training." They "did not find any late phase interventions that might be considered by DoD" noting that "to date, most programming options generally focus on prison-based mental health care and support services, and the evidence of their effectiveness is limited."

In general, the report makes recommendations that align with proposals developed by the SecDef's Countering Extremist Activity Working Group (CEAWG) which evaluated the presence of extremist activity and associated mitigation measures along the human resources continuum of accessions, in-service/retention, and separation/Veteran status. The report to the SecDef also includes plans focused on training and education at various points throughout a Service member's career and among certain key groups (e.g. legal advisors, law enforcement, etc). In addition to the 20+ recommendations advanced to the SecDef as part of the report, OUSD(P&R) also commissioned an external review of extremist activity per SecDef's direction on April 9, 2021. Results from that study, currently under contract with the Institute of Defense Analysis (IDA), are expected in mid-FY22.

It is important to note that the RAND report only considers far-right extremism and does not mention or take into account other forms of extremism, including groups criminally advocating socialism, Black Nationalism, Antifa, religious extremism, etc. (b) (5)

RAND CORPORATION

TODD C. HELMUS, HANNAH JANE BYRNE, KING MALLORY

Countering Violent Extremism in the U.S. Military

Following the riot on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, reports began to emerge of the seemingly disproportionate role played by current and former members of the U.S. military. Most recent data suggest that 12 percent of those arrested and charged with participation in the riot were current or former members of the U.S. military (Milton and Mines, 2021). In addition, two members of the U.S. Army National Guard contingent charged with protecting the Capitol and the inauguration of President Joseph R. Biden were removed from duty specifically for

KEY FINDINGS

- A plan to counter violent extremism using a terrorism prevention framework might offer the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) a way to address current forms of extremism in the ranks.

- The terrorism prevention framework is derived from a model that highlights how different audiences are drawn into extremist beliefs and groups in three phases.

- Early phase interventions are directed at a vulnerable population, or one that is in the early phases of radicalization; middle phase interventions seek to influence those who are already radicalized and possibly becoming violent; and finally, late phase interventions seek to redirect individuals who are in the midst of planning violent activities or have already done so.

- Specific terrorism prevention initiatives could be considered and adapted by DoD.

- A review of related programs and initiatives suggests that there are early and middle phase initiatives that might be helpful in countering white nationalism and other forms of right-wing extremism (RWE) going forward.

- Early phase initiatives include inoculation warnings, media literacy programs, social media and internet search redirection, Community Awareness Briefings (CABs), and Community Resilience Exercises (CREXs). See Boxes 1–5 for more information.

- Middle phase initiatives include perception assessment of DoD extremism policies, off-ramping interventions, and military law enforcement training. See Boxes 6–8 for more information.

- We did not find any late phase interventions that might be considered by DoD; to date, most programming options generally focus on prison-based mental health care and support services, and the evidence of their effectiveness is limited.

expressing anti-government sentiments (Schmitt and Cooper, 2021). In April of 2021, Seth Jones and colleagues at the Center for Strategic and International Studies presented data showing that the percentage of terrorist attacks and plots perpetrated by active-duty or reserve service members went from zero in 2018 to more than 6 percent in 2020 (Jones et al., 2021). Anecdotes also abound of active-duty service personnel engaged in extremist activities.[1]

Furthermore, these events have occurred against a backdrop of rising far-right extremism in the United States. *Far-right extremism* has been defined as

> the use or threat of violence by subnational or nonstate entities whose goals may include racial or ethnic supremacy [including white supremacy]; opposition to government authority; anger at women, including from the involuntary celibate (or "incel") movement; belief in certain conspiracy theories, such as QAnon; and outrage against certain policies, such as abortion. (Jones et al., 2020, p. 2)

Far-right extremism (in this report, referred to as RWE), should be distinguished from other forms of terrorism, such as religious terrorism, which has most recently been Islamic-inspired in the United States, and far-left terrorism, which has emanated from anti-capitalism, black nationalism, environmental or animal rights, pro-socialism, and anti-fascism belief systems (Jones et al., 2020). Data suggest that violence emanating from far-right movements is on a dramatic rise (Jones et al., 2020). For example, five right-wing plots were documented in 2013, but that number grew to 53 in 2017, 44 in 2019, and 72 in 2020 (Jones et al., 2020; Jones at al., 2021). Of all such terrorist events in 2020, 66 percent were right-wing

attacks and plots; far-left extremists accounted for 23 percent, and Islamic-inspired attacks accounted for 5 percent (Jones, 2021).

As a result of these events, in February 2021, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Lloyd J. Austin III, called for a DoD-wide stand-down on extremism, which was intended in part to reinforce values—and more specifically, the oath taken by all service personnel to the U.S. Constitution (Lopez, 2021). In addition, the Pentagon announced tougher screenings of new military recruits, which included the addition of accession screening questions that ask about extremist affiliations. The Pentagon also established a new anti-extremism working group to study the prevalence of extremist behavior in the force and is also seeking to update regulations prohibiting extremist activity. Finally, the services will begin to alert newly retiring or separating service personnel that they might be targeted by extremist groups for recruitment (Losey, 2021b).

These efforts represent important first steps in combating extremist infiltration of the U.S. military and recruitment of current service members, although more efforts will likely be required depending on the results of future research assessing the prevalence of extremist behavior in the force.[2] Posard, Payne, and Miller's (2021) RAND Perspective outlines a framework with four broad parts that specify actions the military can take to reduce the risk of extremism in military personnel:

- Recognize and scope the problem.
- Prevent future extremist views and activities.
- Detect and intervene when observing extremism.
- Measure and evaluate extremist trends.

For each of these parts, the authors offer several suggested policies that could help achieve the strategy goals.

In highlighting the need to prevent future extremist views and activities, Posard, Payne, and Miller pay credence to the need to develop counter–violent extremism and counterterrorism programs and policies that seek to undercut extremist efforts to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize followers to violence and that address factors that promote recruitment and radicalization to violence. Indeed, the U.S. focus on

Abbreviations

CAB	Community Awareness Briefing
CREX	Community Resilience Exercise
CVE	countering violent extremism
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
RWE	right-wing extremism
SLATT	State and Local Anti-Terrorism Training

countering Islamic strains of extremism since the September 11, 2001, attacks has yielded a wide variety of initiatives that seek to prevent individuals from radicalizing, turn those radicalizing away from violence, and educate and equip a variety of audiences to identify and respond to the threat of violent extremism.

To support DoD in its efforts to counter extremism among its ranks, our research team sought to explore U.S. countering violent extremism (CVE) programs more deeply and understand how such efforts may or may not apply to the DoD and RWE context. We offer a series of terrorism prevention–based intervention initiatives that DoD can consider adopting for its specific context. We recognize that DoD is a unique institution and that interventions identified in the civilian space will not translate wholesale to the DoD context. Our hope is that this analysis offers DoD planners insights for consideration and provides a way for the public to—at least in part—consider the merits of DoD plans.

We also review the terrorism prevention framework as it is has been applied in the U.S. civilian sector and focus on the initiatives that might be both relevant and adaptable to the military context based on evidence that we present.

Applying Terrorism Prevention Programming to Countering Extremism in the U.S. Military

The United States, like many allied countries, has sought to stanch violent extremism and radicalization that might lead to terrorism. In the search for effective measures to prevent and combat both, the U.S. government has worked directly and indirectly within a framework known as CVE, or more recently, *terrorism prevention*. Terrorism prevention interventions are based on an understanding that the internalization of extremist beliefs happens incrementally, in phases. Thus, designers of terrorism prevention and intervention policies and programs can develop a plan that has multiple ways to address violent extremism that are particular to each stage of a person or group's internalization of extremist beliefs.

In this report, we first briefly review the tenets of CVE and propose a terrorism prevention implementation plan that can be considered by U.S. military leaders who are striving to combat RWE in the ranks. We next describe programs that have been applied in the domestic U.S. context. We then offer ideas as to how the measure might be adopted specifically for the U.S. military.
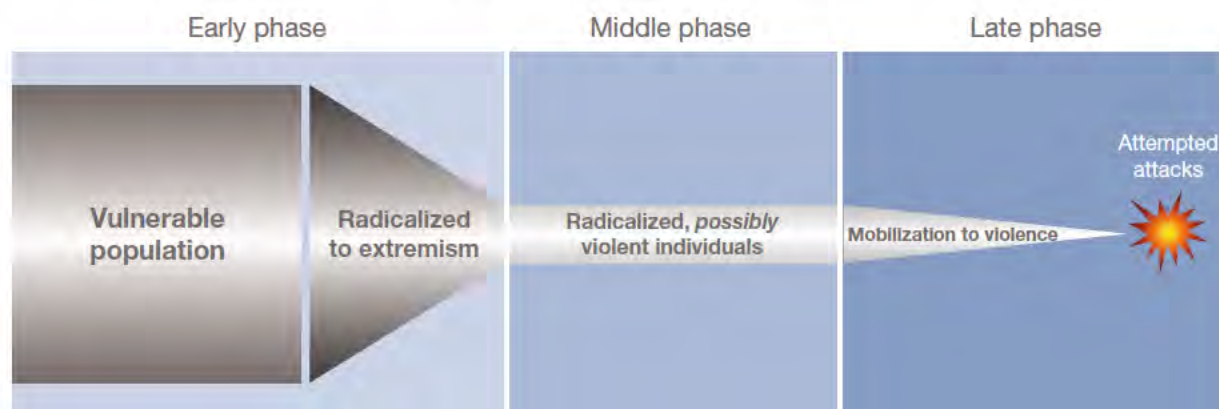
We recognize that some of these ideas are not wholly new to the U.S. military and in fact might have been plied in DoD settings either currently or in the past. However, even in cases where DoD is implementing such recommendations, we believe that this review is still valuable because it highlights the broader evidence for such initiatives, places the initiatives in the context of the radicalization process and in the context of other such initiatives, and offers at least a cursory review of the evidence base for interventions.

Developing a Terrorism Prevention Model

Terrorism prevention represents a class of initiatives, programs, and interventions that seek to "counter efforts by violent extremists to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize followers to violence and to address specific factors that facilitate violent extremist recruitment and radicalization to violence" (Kerry, 2016, p. 4). Figure 1, which is drawn from Jackson and colleagues' 2019 report on U.S. terrorism prevention policy, highlights the different audiences that a CVE intervention might target and seek to influence. In the *early phase*, CVE interventions are directed at a *vulnerable population,* or one that is in the early phases of radicalization. In the *middle phase*, interventions seek to influence those who are already radicalized and possibly becoming violent. Finally, a *late phase* intervention seeks to redirect individuals who are in the midst of planning violent activities or have already done so. As one can imagine, the type of CVE intervention would vary considerably depending on the audience it is attempting to reach.

We draw on this model and Jackson and colleagues' 2019 characterization of different programs to consider interventions that might be appropriate for DoD.

FIGURE 1

The Three Phases of Countering Violent Extremism Interventions

SOURCE: Jackson et al., 2019, p. 40.

Terrorism Prevention: Phased Interventions

Here we describe a phased approach to addressing terrorism prevention in the U.S. military context. This CVE approach allowed us to isolate the effects of the different stages of extremism and collect and review feasible interventions for each. We highlight the interventions that we believe merit serious consideration in Boxes 1–8. In these, we describe individual interventions, present evidence pertaining to their effectiveness, and discuss how they might be adopted by the U.S. military to stanch the proliferation of extremism among the ranks.

Early Phase Interventions

There are at least three critical intervention efforts relevant to early phase terrorism prevention interventions: online messaging, community education and community resilience, and risk reduction (Jackson et al., 2019).

Online messaging programs vary by target audience, objectives, and medium. Some campaigns are broad-based and seek to reach a large population and dissuade those people from turning extremist. The U.S. government, for example, sponsored a social media campaign in Indonesia that disseminated CVE-themed Facebook posts to the country's young adult population (Bodine-Baron et al., 2020). In contrast, a private firm, Moonshot, takes a more targeted

approach with the Redirect Method. It uses Google ads to place advertisement links in front of individuals searching for extremist content on Google. A user who clicks on the ad link might, for example, see a specially curated video that attempts to cast a negative light on the extremist group of interest (Helmus and Klein, 2018). Other campaigns seek to inform rather than persuade audiences. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, for example, previously sponsored a website called "Don't Be a Puppet," which sought to teach youth about violent extremism, extremist groups, recruitment tactics, propaganda methods, etc.[3]

There are also campaigns that seek to educate or inculcate important skills. A recent RAND Corporation report, for example, argued for the need for media literacy education that can help at-risk audiences better assess the credibility of and think critically about online and other types of information. In theory, such education might help audiences more critically weigh propaganda content or consider the merit of misinformation that drives extremist ideology (Brown et al., 2021). Warning audiences of impending or ongoing radicalization campaigns could be another educational tool. Such warnings can take the place of generic government warnings or more-targeted education efforts. A related strategy is to pair a warning with directions on how to refute the argument or message embedded in the disinformation content (Braddock, 2019). The strategy is referred to as an *inoculation intervention*. Previous

research has demonstrated that audiences who were exposed to the intervention experienced some protection against extremist propaganda.

Finally, campaigns vary with respect to the chosen medium, which can include videos, social media, radio, or even personal engagement. The Center for Strategic Dialogue, for example, developed a model for direct outreach that involves renounced or former extremists reaching out to and attempting to deradicalize online extremists via Facebook direct messaging (Frenett and Dow, 2014).

Community education efforts in the United States have focused on improving threat awareness in the community at large. Some aspects of this are less relevant for an RWE-focused policy, as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has, for example, sought to use such outreach to help build relationships with and address civil rights concerns of the Muslim-American community. That need aside, DHS has used a tool called the Community Awareness Briefing (CAB) to educate local audiences, including religious and civic institutions and parents and youth, about the threat and signs of radicalization, risk factors for extremist ideology, and steps that parents and leaders can take to reduce risk. Another tool is the CREX, which involves local government and community members working together to address unfolding scenarios of possible violent extremist activity. Like a wargame exercise, such efforts help improve trust and coordination between critical actors, and they can help empower local communities to address emergent threats more effectively (Jackson et al., 2019; Schanzer and Eyerman, 2019).

Finally, resilience and risk factor approaches seek to target risk factors associated with extremism. The number of reputed risk factors are many and can include fractured families, substance use, and mental health problems. RAND recently analyzed the radicalization and deradicalization trajectories of 32 U.S.-based extremists and found particularly high rates of past mental health problems in the sample, an observation documented in other related research (Brown et al., 2021). Although we do not know if this link is causal, there is an ongoing debate in extremism-related academic circles as to whether or not treating an extremist's mental health problems can lead to a

reduction in extremist ideology or behavior (Weine et al., 2017).

Department of Defense Application of Early Phase Interventions

How might such strategies apply to DoD? First, it remains unclear whether DoD should use broad-based messaging campaigns to dissuade audiences from extremist radicalization. The evidence showing the success of such efforts is too limited, and some indicators suggest that messaging campaigns can produce effects that are the opposite of what was intended (see, for example, campaigns risking what is called a *boomerang effect*, or the hardening of views inflaming extremist beliefs).[4]

That said, several options might be prudent. First, there might be value in explicitly warning U.S. service personnel that they are the target of extremist recruitment efforts. Such efforts can go even further and use inoculation procedures to help service personnel develop strategies for rebuffing extremist arguments and recruitment activities (see Box 1). Second, media literacy efforts might be relevant. Media literacy interventions, for example, have been shown to improve audience discernment between mainstream and false news content and hence might

There is an ongoing debate in extremism-related academic circles as to whether or not treating an extremist's mental health problems can lead to a reduction in extremist ideology or behavior.

reduce the risk that those who receive the training adopt conspiratorial or extremist views (see Box 2).

Moonshot's approach to using Google advertisements to reach extremist audiences might also provide a unique opportunity to reach audiences at the point of radicalization. Moonshot has used—and to some extent, continues to use—such ads to place counter-radicalization videos in front of audiences. Although the impact of such videos on audience attitudes and behavior is unknown, Moonshot has experimented with alternatives. One such initiative, which intersects with a resilience and risk factor approach, is to advertise a crisis counseling phone line that audience members can call for free counseling (see Box 3).

Second, drawing on the terrorism prevention program of the CAB and other related initiatives, DoD will need to develop a force-wide training curriculum to educate both broad and at-risk audiences about ongoing extremist threats, radicalization, and mitigation strategies (see Box 4).

Third, it might make sense for DoD authorities to sponsor a type of CREX to help law enforcement authorities, installation leadership, and varied commanders plan and prepare for contingencies associated with radicalized service members (see Box 5).

BOX 1

Using Generalized and Inoculation Warnings to Protect Audiences from Violent Extremism

What is it? Providing generalized warnings is one possible approach to preparing DoD audiences for radicalization risk. Specifically, there might be utility in warning audiences that white supremacy, anti-government, and other extremist groups might target U.S. military personnel with propaganda and other recruitment efforts and that audiences should be highly suspicious of such sources and their intent.

How effective is it? Clayton and colleagues, 2020, for example, demonstrated that providing participants with a general warning that subsequent content might contain false or misleading information increases the likelihood that participants see false headlines as less accurate. This effect, which was deemed "relatively modest" in size, still held true when participants were confronted with attitude-congruent political content. Whether this effect extends to propagandistic content is unclear.

The issuance of a generalized warning could be enhanced by adding what is called an *inoculation* intervention. Applied to countering white nationalist extremism, in an inoculation intervention, the warning is paired with what is described as a "weakened" example of white supremacist propaganda efforts, and audiences are provided directions on how to refute that propaganda. Studies have shown inoculation procedures to effectively induce resistance to conspiracy theories, extremist propaganda, and climate change misinformation (Cook, Lewandowsky, and Ecker, 2017; Braddock, 2019; Banas and Miller, 2013; van der Linden et al., 2017).

How might it be applied in DoD? DoD could study and use such intervention techniques to help protect audiences who are particularly at risk. As noted in the introduction, DoD is developing a process to alert newly retiring or separating service personnel that they might be targeted by extremist groups for recruitment (Losey, 2021b). Adapting this warning to include an inoculation-like opportunity to practice refuting sample propaganda could significantly strengthen the intervention. Beyond separation, DoD could also implement an inoculation-type training to service personnel during specialty training and education programs that take place early in a service person's career.

BOX 2

Using Media Literacy to Protect Department of Defense Audiences Against Violent Extremism

What is it? Media literacy programs seek, in part, to help audiences be curious about sources of information, assess their credibility, and think critically about the material presented (Stamos et al., 2019). Policymakers and educators have focused on media literacy as an approach to protect audiences against foreign disinformation or domestic misinformation campaigns. However, misinformation also appears to play a role in radicalization to violent extremism. Rioters who stormed the U.S. Capitol, for example, were misled into believing that the U.S. presidential election was stolen from President Donald J. Trump. Likewise, white supremacists follow various racist tropes that help feed their extremist ideology. To the extent that media literacy educational content helps audiences think more critically about the credibility of information and its sources, then it might help protect audiences from content that feeds extremist ideation.

How effective is it? Research increasingly suggests that media literacy interventions have a moderate and positive impact in improving participants' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors related to media (Jeong, Cho, and Hwang, 2012). Such positive effects have been shown for stand-alone educational courses (International Research & Exchanges Board, undated) and social media–based media literacy content (Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler, 2020; Helmus et al., 2020). The role of media literacy training in reducing the risk of racist or extremist views is woefully under-studied, and a small number of studies suggest mixed effects (Ramasubramanian, 2007; Ramasubramanian and Oliver, 2007).

How might it be applied in DoD? Given the growth of misinformation and the risk of military audiences' exposure to foreign disinformation efforts, it is likely a worthwhile effort to develop, test, and disseminate media literacy training content to U.S. service personnel. It might be wise to develop and adapt this media literacy content to counter general misinformation risks unique to the DoD mission rather than focus on countering racism directly. In fact, Section 589E of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act stipulates that DoD establish a program to train its personnel on "foreign malign influence campaigns," including those "carried out through social media" (Pub. L. 116-283, 2021). While meeting this requirement of the National Defense Authorization Act, DoD should consider adapting the content of the training curriculum to also address extremist online recruitment practices. We recommend that the developed educational content be rigorously tested to ensure that it is effective and that DoD consider different approaches for dissemination, such as class-based instruction, if feasible, and online courses or even social media content directly targeted via social media–based ads (Helmus et al., 2020).

BOX 3

Using Social Media and Search to Reach and Possibly Influence Those Radicalizing Near U.S. Military Installations

What is it? Numerous research reports on extremism have noted that the internet serves as a central repository for extremist propaganda and that it is the avid consumption of this online propaganda that drives radicalization (Jensen et al., 2018). Given this reality, CVE initiatives have been increasingly directed to the online space, and several noteworthy programs are now able to reach audiences at the point of a Google search. As previously mentioned, Moonshot implements a program called the Redirect Method that uses Google advertisements to place ad links at the top of the search results of people Googling extremist content. Typically, these ad links are connected to video and other curated content that "responds to and counters socially harmful narratives, arguments and beliefs espoused by the content for which they were originally searching" (Moonshot, undated). Moonshot has found that individuals searching for armed groups online were disproportionately more likely than typical audiences to click on ads encouraging "calmness and mindfulness" (Pasternack, 2021). They also found that violent far-right audiences were more likely to click on mental health ads than a comparison group (Moonshot, 2019). Moonshot is currently working with a U.S.-based nongovernmental organization, Life After Hate, experimenting with ways to turn online connections to offline engagement opportunities that can support disengagement and deradicalization efforts. Facebook has also sought a targeted approach with a campaign that presented educational resources and opportunities for off-platform support to individuals making extremist-related searches on Facebook (Moonshot, 2020).

How effective is it? Overall, the evidence documenting the effectiveness of the Redirect Method is limited. Previous RAND research has shown that audiences engage with the ads and the corresponding web content at rates on par with industry standards, but little is known about how the CVE content affects audience attitudes, behavior, or knowledge (Helmus and Klein, 2018). Little is also known about the impact of the crisis counseling or offline connections to deradicalization, although the personalized nature of these interventions at least appears to engender less risk of a boomerang effect than online video content does.

How might it be applied in DoD? The highly targeted nature of the Redirect Method offers a unique opportunity for DoD to address the presence of extremism in the ranks. The ads used in the method can be applied at the county level, thus allowing the program to be implemented only in counties where U.S. military installations are present. The program—especially to the extent that it can connect individuals to crisis hotlines, offer other mental health care, or possibly establish offline connections with a mentor who can support deradicalization— might provide a means to reach out and offer support to extremist military members. The program also has the added benefit of being able to track—at the county level or below—the number of extremist-related searches, which could provide a key measure of extremist activity in the military.[a]

[a] In addition, given the degree to which social media channels can be used to facilitate radicalization and recruitment (Jensen et al., 2018), it might be wise for DoD to limit access to at-risk platforms on DoD internet and Wi-Fi systems. Such platforms could include 8chan, Telegram, and other platforms frequently used for extremist recruitment.

Educating Department of Defense Audiences on Extremism Threats and Policies Using the Community Awareness Briefing and Other Methods

What is it? Providing audiences critical information about emerging trends in extremism is a key feature of terrorism prevention policies. In U.S. terrorism prevention, this is done in several ways. First, the CAB is a PowerPoint briefing created by the National Counterterrorism Center and the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. Routinely updated to reflect current events, the CAB generally offers information on terrorism threats confronting the United States and local communities, tactics used by extremist organizations to radicalize and recruit new entrants, and factors that motivate youths to join extremist groups, and it identifies steps that communities can take to prevent radicalization of local youth. The briefing has been delivered by representatives of the National Counterterrorism Center and DHS, as well as other trained representatives, such as U.S. attorneys and local law enforcement. In 2015 and 2016, for example, such briefings were delivered in 10 to 20 cities to more than 1,000 attendees each year (Jackson et al., 2019). CABs have addressed particular issues, focusing on different types of extremist groups and different components of radicalization, such as social media–based propaganda. In addition, as previously mentioned, the Federal Bureau of Investigation had sponsored the website "Don't Be a Puppet," which aimed to raise young people's awareness of violent extremist groups and their recruitment strategies.

How effective is it? Interviews with government experts and community leaders suggest that the CAB has been well received. Local community demand for the CABs outstrips the ability of the U.S. government to deliver them (Schanzer and Eyerman, 2019). It has been noted that the CAB and the CREX "generate opportunities for interaction and engagement" among varied government and community leaders (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 149). The effectiveness or reach of the "Don't Be a Puppet" site is unclear, although it did receive criticism for its stereotypical treatment of Muslims as extremists (Camera, 2016).

How might it be applied in DoD? DoD will need to develop a force-wide training curriculum to educate personnel on the threat that extremist groups pose to U.S. military personnel, information on specific extremist groups and recruitment tactics, information on DoD policies with respect to extremism, and expectations for U.S. military personnel with respect to those policies. The DoD-wide stand-down on extremism sought in part to address this critical requirement. The need for more in-depth training was also addressed in a 1996 report by the Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities, which recommended that the Army "Develop a state of the art, interactive, discussion-based set of training support packages for use at each level of professional military education" (U.S. Department of the Army, Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities, 1996, p. 28). In 2000, the U.S. Department of the Army issued Pamphlet 600–15, which offered an outline for the contents of a proposed "Extremism Lesson Plan" that could be implemented in one-hour small-group settings (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2000, p. 7).[a]

Although we do not know the extent to which DoD has already developed such training initiatives, it seems clear that they are necessary. In addition to developing such efforts for professional military education, options include a CAB-like briefing that can be delivered in person to special audiences, such as those in a high-risk unit or installation, or to establish trust with a skeptical audience. There might also be value in disseminating training content via online courses or other online means, such as social media or social media–based ads. Finally, it is critical that this education reach and influence the U.S. military's commissioned and noncommissioned officer corps, whose enlistment in the counter-extremist fight will be crucial to DoD's success.

[a] The pamphlet explains that the objectives for such training include explaining restrictions on participation in extremist organizations, describing the definitions of terms related to extremism, explaining the prohibitions with regard to extremism, and explaining the training responsibilities of the commander with regard to extremist organizations and activities (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2000, p. 7).

Adopting the Community Resilience Exercise for Department of Defense Needs

What is it? The CREX is a tabletop half-day exercise hosted by federal officials for local community leaders and law enforcement officials. It presents scenarios about individuals who show signs of violent radicalization and fosters discussions among participants about who should do what in such circumstances. The goal is to improve understanding and communication between the community and law enforcement and highlight necessary steps that different parties should take when someone in the community shows signs of radicalization.

How effective is it? Overall, interviews with participants of CREX events suggest that the event is well received. Government officials report that the events improve understanding between different players. They also reportedly help community members realize their role and responsibility in a space that is considered "pre-crime" (Schanzer and Eyerman, 2019, p. 20). Government officials also note that after-action evaluation of community members was "usually off the charts positive"; law enforcement evaluations were more "mixed" (Schanzer and Eyerman, 2019, p. 21).

How might it be applied in DoD? Depending on the overall extremism threat to DoD, it is conceivable that DoD might develop a CREX-type initiative to help parties in at-risk installations or units better understand how to address that local radicalization threat. Bringing together law enforcement, installation commanders, unit commanders, and noncommissioned officers could open channels of communication that would be needed in the event that threat indicators suggest a need for a more robust response.

Middle Phase Interventions

During the *middle phase*, terrorism prevention interventions are used to influence those who are already radicalized and possibly violent. The key interventions during this phase address referral promotion, law enforcement training, and intervention programming.

Given that individuals in this stage are well into the process of extremist radicalization and tending toward violence, it is critical that they be identified and interdicted before they can commit violent acts. *Referral promotion* refers to the process by which community members identify such individuals and the risk they pose and then make a referral to either law enforcement or some other established remediation program. At its face, the process is simple: Disseminate a phone number for people to call. But successful implementation of a referral policy must address a variety of issues and questions. In particular, the community needs to know what behaviors merit reporting, and it must know where and how to make such a report. Motivations must also be addressed, as those reporting might consider the consequences of making a report. In the United States, some community members were reluctant to refer identified youth, given concerns that such a

call would ultimately lead to the youth's arrest and incarceration (Jackson et al., 2019). U.S. authorities have used the CAB as a means to address such critical questions.

Law enforcement officers, especially those who might encounter violent extremists in their job or be called upon to investigate such extremists, also require training. To address this training gap, the United States has funded the State and Local Anti-Terrorism Training Program, or SLATT, which offers training to state and local law enforcement personnel (Davis et al., 2016). The U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center has also offered its own version of a Law Enforcement Awareness Brief (Jackson et al., 2019).

Finally, once a referral is made, a key question concerns what to do with the individual who is being referred. In the U.S. fight against Islamic extremism, the answer to this question often involved a criminal investigation with a goal of prosecuting the suspect on terrorism-related charges. At times, the Federal Bureau of Investigation would even use undercover agents to facilitate a suspect's participation in a seemingly real terror plot, which would enable the investigating agents to arrest the suspect and refer the person to prosecution more quickly. However,

the approach heightened suspicions among members of the Muslim community, who were reluctant to submit their loved ones to aggressive police tactics (Warikoo, 2016). Hence, demand grew for some alternative intervention that could help identified individuals deradicalize and avoid the fate of criminal investigation and prosecution. Various private organizations, such as Life After Hate and Beyond Barriers, which are founded and created by former extremists, have sought to address this need by creating deradicalizing interventions. Parents for Peace also supports intervention work and offers a 24-hour crisis line (Parents for Peace, undated). There is also a federal program called Shared Responsibilities Committees, which promotes voluntary collaboration of law enforcement, mental health, and religious leaders, who work together to help identified individuals. Various challenges exist with such programming, but the programs might be helpful to individuals who earnestly want such assistance.

Department of Defense Application of Middle Phase Interventions

If DoD crafts a zero-tolerance policy for extremist group affiliation in the military, then it will need to draft a commensurate mechanism to disseminate that policy and educate installation and unit commanders on how to report violations. It will also have to consider how audiences perceive of DoD's planned adjudication policies for such infractions. If audiences consider such plans as overly strict or unfair, then they might think twice before making a report, or they might avoid making a report in all but the most-obvious cases (see Boxes 4 and 6).[5]

Here the plan for adjudication of referred individuals is critical. Ultimately, DoD will need to craft policies that govern the consequences for service members who are shown to have joined an extremist organization. One result might be discharge from service. DoD might want to consider other alternatives that offer some sort of intervention designed to help individuals walk away from extremism. To this end, DoD might consider drawing on previously established interventions and make such services available if and when needed (see Box 7).

DoD might also need to develop and disseminate enhanced training on extremism to the service's criminal investigative agencies (see Box 8).

BOX 6

Assessing Rank-and-File Perceptions of Department of Defense Extremism Policies

What is it? Box 4 highlights the need for DoD to vigorously communicate its policies and educate audiences on the risks of extremism and extremist recruitment efforts. Such messaging would include expectations for reporting service personnel who violate DoD extremism policies. Beyond this, it will be critical for DoD to monitor how service personnel perceive its extremism policies. Service personnel and commanders will ultimately be the first ones to see extremism in the ranks, and they will be confronted with a decision of whether or not to report such suspicions to their chain of command. These individuals will likely consider several factors in making this report, including the degree to which they are confident that the individual in question violated DoD policy and the degree to which they think that the investigation process and outcome will be fair. The more heavy-handed and unfair they consider the investigation process and outcome, the less likely they might be to report suspicions. Consequently, DoD will need to develop its policies with this in mind and monitor rank-and-file views about the policy.[a]

[a] One past example of such an assessment is the 1995 Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities. More than 1,000 interviews with Army personnel were conducted, and it was observed that many junior officers and noncommissioned officers were confused about the definition of *extremism*. Some were afraid to take "preemptive action" against extremism for fear that doing so would go against other contemporaneous Army policies (such as the Single Soldier Initiative) that sought to give soldiers more leeway for free-time activities (U.S. Department of the Army, Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities, 1996, p. 11). The assessment also found that small-unit leaders often fail to receive appropriate information on how to make corrective actions or how to educate soldiers on extremist threats.

BOX 7
Using Interventions to Off-Ramp Military Extremists

What is it? Off-ramp interventions are those that seek to help radicalized individuals disengage from extremist organizations and desist from extremist activities. The interventions also seek to possibly deradicalize these individuals' ideology. Life After Hate, for example, is an organization created by a former white supremacist and has the mission to help "people leave the violent far-right to connect with humanity and lead compassionate lives" (Life After Hate, undated). It draws on a cadre of *formers*, individuals who were part of but have left the white supremacy movement, who offer support and education to those seeking to leave far-right groups. Another organization, Parents for Peace, seeks to empower families, friends, and communities to prevent radicalization and extremist violence. The organization offers intervention and rehabilitation services and a support network for families and friends of those involved in extremism. It also offers a 24-hour hotline that affected individuals and family members can call to receive help.

How effective is it? The evidence supporting such interventions is largely anecdotal, and there is little in the way of prospective evidence on the effectiveness of third-party disengagement strategies. However, many people who join extremist organizations leave them and desist from extremist activities. A recent RAND report on extremism in the United States documented the radicalization and deradicalization trajectories of extremists and found that many who left extremism did so because of support they received from a friend, life partner, or religious authority (Brown et al., 2021).

How might it be applied to DoD? In cases where the military authorities become formally aware that a service member is engaged in extremist activities, then it likely makes sense to make off-ramp services available to that service member if the person is interested in receiving them. In cases where the military seeks to discharge a service member for extremist-related ties, then an off-ramp service would be advantageous because the discharge process might risk inflaming the individual's state of radicalization further, and it could push the service member to a more violent state (Helmus, Brown, and Ramchand, 2021a). In theory, individuals identified as having extremist ties could be given access to an off-ramp counselor who could help motivate the individual to participate in treatment or initiate that treatment if the individual was so inclined. Military medical authorities, with support from mental health practitioners, chaplain services, law enforcement authorities, and the chain of command could potentially develop the intervention treatment. It might make even more sense to engage civil society organizations that have relevant experience in such matters and offer credibility, given the former extremist status of counselors.[a]

The military might also wish to make intervention support services available directly to family members and friends of extremist service members (see Helmus, Brown, and Ramchand, 2021b). The support offered by Parents for Peace might be particularly valuable because family members can contact the available crisis support line and receive direct emotional support, as well as support for any attempt at engagement and intervention. Service members looking to disengage from extremist ties might also benefit from being able to directly seek support. Family and service members should be able to anonymously engage these services. DoD would have to promote the availability of these services to family members and the broader force.

[a] However, DoD would need to ensure that any formal or contractual relationship with civil society organizations does not ultimately harm said organization's reputation or breed suspicion if a service member or the person's family member contacts the organization directly for support.

Providing Military Law Enforcement Training

What is it? There is a recognition in the civilian sector that it is important that law enforcement authorities have some requisite training in violent extremism and terrorism if they are to respond to acts of extremist violence and identify and respond to individuals who are at risk of extremist-related violence (Jackson et al., 2019). The SLATT Program, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, provides terrorism-related on-site training to state and local law enforcement. It specifically offers training in such topics as emergency preparedness and readiness, prevention and response, detection and interdiction, and train the trainer (State and Local Anti-Terrorism Training Program, undated). Various other entities also offer training, including the U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center and the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center.

How effective is it? Such trainings have received positive evaluations. Interviews by Jackson and colleagues, 2019, revealed that the trainings have been positively reviewed and that there remained an unmet demand for such training efforts. Davis and colleagues, 2016, assessed SLATT and found that the trainings were positively reviewed by participants and that a majority of surveyed participants said that the training changed the way they would approach terror threats and investigations.

How might it be applied to DoD? If DoD seeks to root out participation in extremist organizations from the ranks, then a heavy responsibility will fall on the service branch law enforcement organizations to investigate possible cases of extremist membership. Assuming that such an effort will be a new focus for these agencies, they will likely require some training to reorient them to this particular problem set. Personnel in the agencies will need to develop knowledge about specific extremist groups and organizations, their recruitment strategies, signs and indications of service member participation, investigative tactics, and critical incident response tactics.

Late Phase Interventions

The focus of late phase terrorism prevention interventions is on recidivism reduction. Once an individual is arrested and charged with criminal or terrorism-related offenses, then terrorism prevention efforts seek to reduce the likelihood that the individual will return to extremism upon release from prison or parole. Programming options are limited in this regard and generally focus on prison-based mental health care and support services. As Jackson et al., 2019, notes though, the evidence of the effectiveness of such programming is limited, and it is constrained by a lack of assessment tools.

Department of Defense Application of Late Phase Interventions

It remains unclear to what extent the U.S. military will need to incarcerate individuals on extremism-related charges. It is not known whether the military would seek to prosecute and imprison individuals for membership in an extremist organization, although such incarceration would most certainly occur if an individual committed an act of extremist violence, as has happened in previous instances. If extremism incarceration rates did rise to some relevant level, then it might be feasible for DoD to use a CAB of sorts to educate prison staff or offer prison- and parole-based counseling and support services.

Conclusions

This report provides a general framework for terrorism prevention practices and programs as implemented in the United States and identifies how some of these programs could be applied to the U.S. military context. Such programs as generalized or inoculation warnings, media literacy education, Google ads, education programming, CREXs, monitoring of military personnel attitudes toward DoD extremism policies, off-ramping interventions, and military law enforcement training are examples of programs that

Different programs and interventions are suitable for different audiences, and an individual's position on the "pathway" to extremism represents one critical variable to consider.

DoD should consider implementing as it weighs its approach to the rising extremist threat.

Beyond specific programs, however, DoD should recognize a key lesson imparted in the three phases of interventions (Figure 1). Different programs and interventions are suitable for different audiences, and an individual's position on the "pathway" to extremism is one critical variable to consider. Separate programs should be geared toward audiences at different stages in the radicalization process: those who are vulnerable but not yet radicalized, those who are beginning to radicalize, those who are radicalized and moving toward violence, and those who are mobilizing or have already mobilized toward violence. And although DoD might or might not wish to implement our suggested menu of interventions, or in cases for which it is already implementing these interventions, there is value in showing how the adopted interventions fit along the radicalization pathway and how they work and complement one another.

It should also be noted that there are several challenges in trying to directly apply the aforementioned programs to address extremism in the DoD context. First, many of these programs have been designed to counter Islamic strains of extremism and might not suitably address RWE, which often takes

the form of white supremacy and anti-government violence. Second, not all terrorism prevention programs are equal in effectiveness, and emerging evidence suggests that some types of initiatives can risk inflaming extremist viewpoints. Of course, one strength of the DoD context is that it has its own governing laws and regulations and rank and command structure; thus, in theory, programs can be implemented with the weight of command and institutional orders.

Terrorism prevention is not the only applicable model to addressing extremism in the military. One of the most-obvious alternative approaches is to incorporate insider threat programs. Insider threat programs are "designed to deter, detect, and mitigate actions by insiders who represent a threat to national security" (Center for Development of Security Excellence, undated). Such programs are often focused on protecting unauthorized disclosure of classified information by insiders, although the monitoring and detection practices can be extended to address extremism. Efforts that can detail such programs and guide how DoD can better identify right-wing extremists at the point of accession or monitor for extremism-related behaviors as part of the security clearance process would be of great value. A major focus, for example, has been how the Department can review social media and other open-source data to determine fitness for duty of new recruits (Losey, 2021a). Another potential area of study relates to efforts to eradicate extremism from the ranks of U.S. police departments. Police departments across the United States are currently working to identify and remove violent extremists from the police payrolls and prevent the radicalization of police officers. Lessons learned from such efforts might inform DoD policies and programs (and lessons from DoD might likewise inform screening and prevention in law enforcement).[6]

One critical challenge in offering recommendations from the terrorism prevention space is that, although significant advancements have been made in developing terrorism prevention interventions and understanding the potential effects of such interventions, *relatively little is known about the military context of extremism*. Without an adequate understanding of the prevalence of right-wing extremist affiliations in the military, it is difficult to identify

the level of effort that DoD planners should invest in terrorism prevention. For example, higher prevalence rates and higher threat risk would likely merit more funds and programmatic investment. In addition, a fuller understanding of the dynamics and manifestation of extremism will be critical to forming specific programmatic responses. Actionable and specific policy recommendations can come from, for example, an understanding of tolerance among rank-and-file troops for extremist views and affiliations, identifying the factors that weigh on those who consider reporting or acting on observed extremist activities, and assessing the impact of extremist views and activities on unit cohesion. Future research should seek to address these critical questions.

With this in mind, we conclude this report by offering the following recommendations for research that DoD can undertake in expanding actionable knowledge of extremism and informing policy:

- **Continue with the intention of assessing the overall prevalence of extremism in the military.** DoD currently intends to go ahead with such an assessment, which will be helpful to designing targeted responses for specific services. In addition, it will be useful to know how prevalence varies in different career fields and installations. Knowing the number of years of service of individual members might also provide insight.
- **Seek to understand how extremism manifests itself in the military.** Do those with extremist views openly or surreptitiously

(using coded language) talk about their extremist views? Do they attempt to recruit new members? What effect does it have on unit cohesion and other in-unit dynamics?
- **Seek to understand the in-unit dynamics related to extremism.** Critical questions include, *To what extent are such views and related behaviors tolerated among rank-and-file troops? What considerations weigh on those who are considering reporting on an identified extremist?*
- **Conduct a stream of research that can inform the creation of terrorism prevention interventions and assess their impact.** Any existing intervention, such as a media literacy program, will have to be developed in such a way that it speaks to the U.S. military audience. Initial tests and more-substantive impact evaluations should suggest that such interventions are effective (see Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler, 2020, for an example of how such testing can be conducted) and do not spark a boomerang effect that would actually heighten or worsen extremist reactions (Helmus et al., 2017). It might also be fruitful to examine the success of past terrorism prevention interventions, such as any educational efforts previously developed as a result of the 1996 Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities (U.S. Department of the Army, Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities, 1996, p. 28).

Notes

[1] For example, in 2012, a member of the Missouri National Guard was arrested for providing weapons and command to a neo-Nazi paramilitary training camp in Florida, a ten-member Marine Corps sniper team posed in front of a Nazi flag in Afghanistan, and two soldiers murdered a veteran and his girlfriend to cover up their plans to assassinate President Barack Obama (Jones, 2019). In 2019, U.S. Coast Guard LT Christopher Hasson, who had spent five years in the U.S. Marine Corps and two years in the U.S. Army National Guard, was discovered to be a neo-Nazi who was stockpiling weapons in preparation for an attack on politicians in Washington, D.C. (McCausland, 2019).

[2] Overall, recent survey data identifying the prevalence of extremism in the force are limited. Following the murder of an African American couple in Fayetteville, North Carolina, by neo-Nazi-affiliated members of the 82nd Airborne Division, the Department of the Army released a 1996 study on extremist activities (U.S. Department of the Army, Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities, 1996). The report presented results of more than 7,000 interviews with soldiers and Army civilians, and 0.5 percent attested to being an active participant in an extremist group. Results of a separate and written survey of more than 17,000 soldiers and Army civilians suggested that 7 percent of respondents "reported they knew another soldier whom they believed to be a member of an extremist organization" (U.S. Department of the Army, Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities, 1996, p. i).

More-recent data suggest this problem might have worsened. *Military Times* surveyed its active-duty readership on exposure to extremism and racism in the force (Shane, 2020). The findings are not published in a peer-reviewed journal or report, but the publication says that 36 percent of the 1,630 surveyed individuals reported "evidence of white supremacist and racist ideologies in the military," a figure that the author notes is up from 22 percent in a previous year's survey (Shane, 2019). It was noted, for example, that participants reported

> witnessing incidents including racist language and discriminatory attitudes from peers, but also more specific examples like swastikas being drawn on servicemembers' cars, tattoos affiliated with white supremacist groups, stickers supporting the Ku Klux Klan and Nazi-style salutes between individuals. (Shane, 2020)

[3] This website, while serving as an example of an educational campaign, received significant criticism for stereotyping Muslims as extremists (Camera, 2016).

[4] Evidence supporting CVE-focused persuasion campaigns is limited. RAND recently evaluated two such campaigns and documented mixed effects for a radio campaign in Nigeria and a relatively unsuccessful social media campaign in Indonesia (Bodine-Baron et al., 2020; Marrone et al., 2020). Aspects of both campaigns showed what is often called a boomerang effect, in which a media campaign that seeks to positively change hard-worn attitudes actually produces an opposite effect. Given the limited evidence for effectiveness and the limited knowledge about the prevalence of extremism in the ranks, it is difficult to recommend a DoD-sponsored messaging campaign that seeks to reduce appeal for RWE ideology.

[5] Even with personnel for which reporting would be deemed mandatory, such as chain of command or those holding security clearances, decisions on whether to report extremist behavior in the ranks might be highly personal and complex.

[6] We did investigate the potential utility of one police department program to determine whether it was suitable to the U.S. military context. Specifically, the vast majority of police departments across the country implement a form of implicit bias training that seeks to help officers recognize unconscious prejudices and stereotypes and provide tools to counter such automatic patterns of thinking and acting (Worden et al., 2020; Green and Hagiwara, 2020). Implicit bias is not violent extremism. However, it might constitute a lesser form of racism; hence, efforts that can successfully address implicit bias might reduce the risk that someone will subsequently form more-extremist attitudes. Unfortunately, the only major randomized control trial conducted on the training's effectiveness found that, although the training can change officer attitudes and knowledge, it did not change enforcement behavior (Worden et al., 2020).

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Acknowledgments

About This Report

Only days after the U.S Capitol riots on January 6, 2021, a chilling discovery was made: Participants included current and former U.S. military members. In early February, the Secretary of Defense implemented a Department of Defense (DoD)-wide stand-down on extremism, instituting various policies designed to limit right-wing extremism in the ranks. These efforts represent important first steps in combating the infiltration of violent extremism in the U.S. military.

To support DoD in its efforts for the longer term, RAND Corporation researchers sought to understand how extremism in the U.S. military has been addressed in the past and how it could be addressed in the near future. To do this, the team conducted a review of the history of extremism in the U.S. military and then reviewed terrorism prevention policies as practiced in the United States, identifying policies that might have utility for DoD. The authors also recommend that DoD work to find out more about the dynamics and manifestation of extremism in the U.S. military before investing in, designing, and conducting large anti-extremist efforts.

Because relatively little is known about extremism in the U.S. military context to date, the current investigation does not lead to recommendations of a single program or policy to institute in the near term. Rather, the report offers DoD several directions to continue investigating before attempting to institute a particular program or action plan and related policy.

RAND National Security Research Division

The research reported here was completed in July 2021 and underwent security review with the sponsor and the Defense Office of Prepublication and Security Review before public release.

www.rand.org

Hi Kelly:

SD asked for an executive summary of the attached RAND report on extremism, released 16 Sept. A one-pager is attached. Of note, DoD did not commission this study. Rather, we have a study underway with IDA, which will be complete in Spring FY22.

Standing by if there are any questions.

Julie Blanks
OUSD(P&R)
(b) (6)

From:	Blanks, Julie A SES OSD OUSD P-R (USA)
To:	Cisneros, Gilbert R Jr HON (USA)
Cc:	(b) (6)
Subject:	FW: EXSUM on second RAND extremism report
Date:	Tuesday, October 26, 2021 5:43:00 PM
Attachments:	RAND Extremism Report #2 EXSUM (20211021) v5.docx
	RAND_RRA1226-1.pdf_safe.pdf
	EXSUM RAND report on Extremism (734 KB).msg

Sir, FYSA, I forwarded the second EXSUM from part 2 of the RAND series on extremism.

Julie Blanks
OUSD(P&R)
(b) (6)

From: Blanks, Julie A SES OSD OUSD P-R (USA)
Sent: Monday, October 25, 2021 5:58 PM
To: Kagawa, Carrie CIV SD (b) (6) ; Garrison, Bishop SES SD
<B(b) (6)
Cc: (b) (6) Foster, Elizabeth B SES (USA)
(b) (6)
Subject: EXSUM on second RAND extremism report

Hi, several weeks ago, RAND published the first of three reports (not solicited by the Department) on extremism. At one of his Direct Reports meetings, SD asked for an EXSUM of the report, which we provided to Kelly Magsamen (email attached). Part two in the RAND series was published today, and Mr. Cisneros wanted to offer SD a similar EXSUM. I've attached it, and the new RAND report as well. This doesn't seem like something that should be a formal package, nor am I sure anyone will ask for anything, but we did want to share the EXSUM in the event the study comes up.

Can you make sure the right folks see this?? Thank you!

Julie Blanks
OUSD(P&R)
(b) (6)

RAND Extremism Report #2 EXSUM

On October 25, 2021 RAND released a "RAND Research Report" entitled "Countering Violent Extremism in the U.S. Military." This report functions as a follow-on to the "RAND Perspective Report" released approximately six weeks prior. RAND conducted both reports *without* direct oversight from OSD but rather by using National Defense Research Institute (NDRI) support funds, which is an independent exploratory research funding provided for in the federally-funded research and development center (FFRDC) OSD contract and RAND uses to support independent research efforts. This RAND report reinforces results found by DoD over the last several years and adds minimally to ongoing efforts.

The report recommends DoD develop "a plan to counter violent extremism using a terrorism prevention framework [which] might offer. . .a way to address current forms of extremism in the ranks." This framework is derived "from a model contained in a 2019 RAND report that highlights how different audiences are drawn into extremist beliefs and groups in three phases." These phase interventions are described as early, middle, and late. "Early phase interventions are directed at a vulnerable population, or one that is in the early phases of radicalization; middle phase interventions seek to influence those who are already radicalized and possibly becoming violent; and finally, late phase interventions seek to redirect individuals who are in the midst of planning violent activities or have already done so."

The authors believe that "specific terrorism prevention initiatives could be considered and adapted by DoD." For example, "early phase initiatives include inoculation warnings, media literacy programs, social media and internet search redirection, Community Awareness Briefings, and Community Resilience Exercises. Middle phase initiatives include perception assessment of DoD extremism policies, off-ramping interventions, and military law enforcement training." They "did not find any late phase interventions that might be considered by DoD" noting that "to date, most programming options generally focus on prison-based mental health care and support services, and the evidence of their effectiveness is limited."

In general, the report makes recommendations that align with proposals developed by the SecDef's Countering Extremist Activity Working Group (CEAWG) which evaluated the presence of extremist activity and associated mitigation measures along the human resources continuum of accessions, in-service/retention, and separation/Veteran status. The report to the SecDef also includes plans focused on training and education at various points throughout a Service member's career and among certain key groups (e.g. legal advisors, law enforcement, etc). In addition to the 20+ recommendations advanced to the SecDef as part of the report, OUSD(P&R) also commissioned an external review of extremist activity per SecDef's direction on April 9, 2021. Results from that study, currently under contract with the Institute of Defense Analysis (IDA), are expected in mid-FY22.

It is important to note that the RAND report only considers far-right extremism and does not mention or take into account other forms of extremism, including groups criminally advocating socialism, Black Nationalism, Antifa, religious extremism, etc. (b) (5)

TODD C. HELMUS, HANNAH JANE BYRNE, KING MALLORY

Countering Violent Extremism in the U.S. Military

Following the riot on the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, reports began to emerge of the seemingly disproportionate role played by current and former members of the U.S. military. Most recent data suggest that 12 percent of those arrested and charged with participation in the riot were current or former members of the U.S. military (Milton and Mines, 2021). In addition, two members of the U.S. Army National Guard contingent charged with protecting the Capitol and the inauguration of President Joseph R. Biden were removed from duty specifically for

KEY FINDINGS

- A plan to counter violent extremism using a terrorism prevention framework might offer the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) a way to address current forms of extremism in the ranks.

- The terrorism prevention framework is derived from a model that highlights how different audiences are drawn into extremist beliefs and groups in three phases.

- Early phase interventions are directed at a vulnerable population, or one that is in the early phases of radicalization; middle phase interventions seek to influence those who are already radicalized and possibly becoming violent; and finally, late phase interventions seek to redirect individuals who are in the midst of planning violent activities or have already done so.

- Specific terrorism prevention initiatives could be considered and adapted by DoD.

- A review of related programs and initiatives suggests that there are early and middle phase initiatives that might be helpful in countering white nationalism and other forms of right-wing extremism (RWE) going forward.

- Early phase initiatives include inoculation warnings, media literacy programs, social media and internet search redirection, Community Awareness Briefings (CABs), and Community Resilience Exercises (CREXs). See Boxes 1–5 for more information.

- Middle phase initiatives include perception assessment of DoD extremism policies, off-ramping interventions, and military law enforcement training. See Boxes 6–8 for more information.

- We did not find any late phase interventions that might be considered by DoD; to date, most programming options generally focus on prison-based mental health care and support services, and the evidence of their effectiveness is limited.

expressing anti-government sentiments (Schmitt and Cooper, 2021). In April of 2021, Seth Jones and colleagues at the Center for Strategic and International Studies presented data showing that the percentage of terrorist attacks and plots perpetrated by active-duty or reserve service members went from zero in 2018 to more than 6 percent in 2020 (Jones et al., 2021). Anecdotes also abound of active-duty service personnel engaged in extremist activities.[1]

Furthermore, these events have occurred against a backdrop of rising far-right extremism in the United States. *Far-right extremism* has been defined as

> the use or threat of violence by subnational or nonstate entities whose goals may include racial or ethnic supremacy [including white supremacy]; opposition to government authority; anger at women, including from the involuntary celibate (or "incel") movement; belief in certain conspiracy theories, such as QAnon; and outrage against certain policies, such as abortion. (Jones et al., 2020, p. 2)

Far-right extremism (in this report, referred to as RWE), should be distinguished from other forms of terrorism, such as religious terrorism, which has most recently been Islamic-inspired in the United States, and far-left terrorism, which has emanated from anti-capitalism, black nationalism, environmental or animal rights, pro-socialism, and anti-fascism belief systems (Jones et al., 2020). Data suggest that violence emanating from far-right movements is on a dramatic rise (Jones et al., 2020). For example, five right-wing plots were documented in 2013, but that number grew to 53 in 2017, 44 in 2019, and 72 in 2020 (Jones et al., 2020; Jones at al., 2021). Of all such terrorist events in 2020, 66 percent were right-wing

attacks and plots; far-left extremists accounted for 23 percent, and Islamic-inspired attacks accounted for 5 percent (Jones, 2021).

As a result of these events, in February 2021, the U.S. Secretary of Defense, Lloyd J. Austin III, called for a DoD-wide stand-down on extremism, which was intended in part to reinforce values—and more specifically, the oath taken by all service personnel to the U.S. Constitution (Lopez, 2021). In addition, the Pentagon announced tougher screenings of new military recruits, which included the addition of accession screening questions that ask about extremist affiliations. The Pentagon also established a new anti-extremism working group to study the prevalence of extremist behavior in the force and is also seeking to update regulations prohibiting extremist activity. Finally, the services will begin to alert newly retiring or separating service personnel that they might be targeted by extremist groups for recruitment (Losey, 2021b).

These efforts represent important first steps in combating extremist infiltration of the U.S. military and recruitment of current service members, although more efforts will likely be required depending on the results of future research assessing the prevalence of extremist behavior in the force.[2] Posard, Payne, and Miller's (2021) RAND Perspective outlines a framework with four broad parts that specify actions the military can take to reduce the risk of extremism in military personnel:

- Recognize and scope the problem.
- Prevent future extremist views and activities.
- Detect and intervene when observing extremism.
- Measure and evaluate extremist trends.

For each of these parts, the authors offer several suggested policies that could help achieve the strategy goals.

In highlighting the need to prevent future extremist views and activities, Posard, Payne, and Miller pay credence to the need to develop counter–violent extremism and counterterrorism programs and policies that seek to undercut extremist efforts to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize followers to violence and that address factors that promote recruitment and radicalization to violence. Indeed, the U.S. focus on

Abbreviations

CAB	Community Awareness Briefing
CREX	Community Resilience Exercise
CVE	countering violent extremism
DHS	Department of Homeland Security
DoD	U.S. Department of Defense
RWE	right-wing extremism
SLATT	State and Local Anti-Terrorism Training

countering Islamic strains of extremism since the September 11, 2001, attacks has yielded a wide variety of initiatives that seek to prevent individuals from radicalizing, turn those radicalizing away from violence, and educate and equip a variety of audiences to identify and respond to the threat of violent extremism.

To support DoD in its efforts to counter extremism among its ranks, our research team sought to explore U.S. countering violent extremism (CVE) programs more deeply and understand how such efforts may or may not apply to the DoD and RWE context. We offer a series of terrorism prevention–based intervention initiatives that DoD can consider adopting for its specific context. We recognize that DoD is a unique institution and that interventions identified in the civilian space will not translate wholesale to the DoD context. Our hope is that this analysis offers DoD planners insights for consideration and provides a way for the public to—at least in part—consider the merits of DoD plans.

We also review the terrorism prevention framework as it is has been applied in the U.S. civilian sector and focus on the initiatives that might be both relevant and adaptable to the military context based on evidence that we present.

Applying Terrorism Prevention Programming to Countering Extremism in the U.S. Military

The United States, like many allied countries, has sought to stanch violent extremism and radicalization that might lead to terrorism. In the search for effective measures to prevent and combat both, the U.S. government has worked directly and indirectly within a framework known as CVE, or more recently, *terrorism prevention*. Terrorism prevention interventions are based on an understanding that the internalization of extremist beliefs happens incrementally, in phases. Thus, designers of terrorism prevention and intervention policies and programs can develop a plan that has multiple ways to address violent extremism that are particular to each stage of a person or group's internalization of extremist beliefs.

In this report, we first briefly review the tenets of CVE and propose a terrorism prevention implementation plan that can be considered by U.S. military leaders who are striving to combat RWE in the ranks. We next describe programs that have been applied in the domestic U.S. context. We then offer ideas as to how the measure might be adopted specifically for the U.S. military.
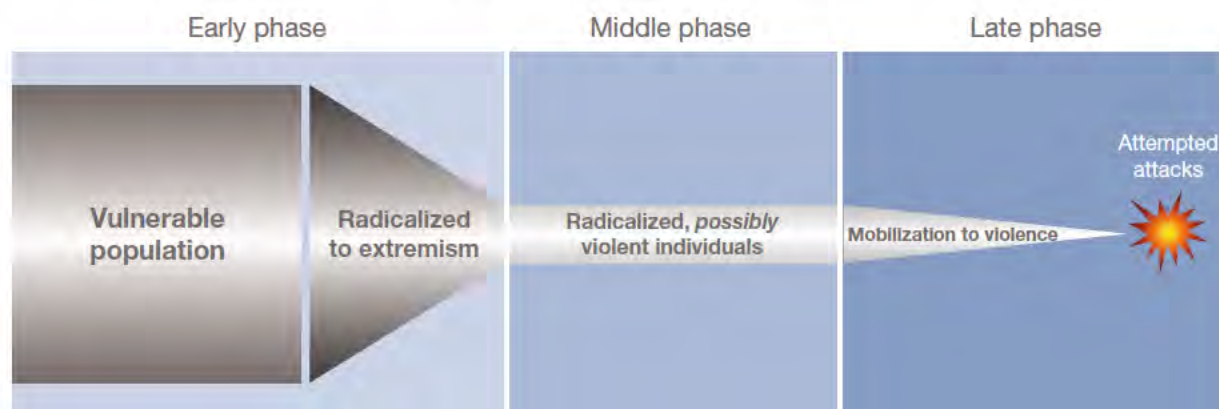
We recognize that some of these ideas are not wholly new to the U.S. military and in fact might have been plied in DoD settings either currently or in the past. However, even in cases where DoD is implementing such recommendations, we believe that this review is still valuable because it highlights the broader evidence for such initiatives, places the initiatives in the context of the radicalization process and in the context of other such initiatives, and offers at least a cursory review of the evidence base for interventions.

Developing a Terrorism Prevention Model

Terrorism prevention represents a class of initiatives, programs, and interventions that seek to "counter efforts by violent extremists to radicalize, recruit, and mobilize followers to violence and to address specific factors that facilitate violent extremist recruitment and radicalization to violence" (Kerry, 2016, p. 4). Figure 1, which is drawn from Jackson and colleagues' 2019 report on U.S. terrorism prevention policy, highlights the different audiences that a CVE intervention might target and seek to influence. In the *early phase*, CVE interventions are directed at a *vulnerable population,* or one that is in the early phases of radicalization. In the *middle phase*, interventions seek to influence those who are already radicalized and possibly becoming violent. Finally, a *late phase* intervention seeks to redirect individuals who are in the midst of planning violent activities or have already done so. As one can imagine, the type of CVE intervention would vary considerably depending on the audience it is attempting to reach.

We draw on this model and Jackson and colleagues' 2019 characterization of different programs to consider interventions that might be appropriate for DoD.

FIGURE 1

The Three Phases of Countering Violent Extremism Interventions

SOURCE: Jackson et al., 2019, p. 40.

Terrorism Prevention: Phased Interventions

Here we describe a phased approach to addressing terrorism prevention in the U.S. military context. This CVE approach allowed us to isolate the effects of the different stages of extremism and collect and review feasible interventions for each. We highlight the interventions that we believe merit serious consideration in Boxes 1–8. In these, we describe individual interventions, present evidence pertaining to their effectiveness, and discuss how they might be adopted by the U.S. military to stanch the proliferation of extremism among the ranks.

Early Phase Interventions

There are at least three critical intervention efforts relevant to early phase terrorism prevention interventions: online messaging, community education and community resilience, and risk reduction (Jackson et al., 2019).

Online messaging programs vary by target audience, objectives, and medium. Some campaigns are broad-based and seek to reach a large population and dissuade those people from turning extremist. The U.S. government, for example, sponsored a social media campaign in Indonesia that disseminated CVE-themed Facebook posts to the country's young adult population (Bodine-Baron et al., 2020). In contrast, a private firm, Moonshot, takes a more targeted

approach with the Redirect Method. It uses Google ads to place advertisement links in front of individuals searching for extremist content on Google. A user who clicks on the ad link might, for example, see a specially curated video that attempts to cast a negative light on the extremist group of interest (Helmus and Klein, 2018). Other campaigns seek to inform rather than persuade audiences. The Federal Bureau of Investigation, for example, previously sponsored a website called "Don't Be a Puppet," which sought to teach youth about violent extremism, extremist groups, recruitment tactics, propaganda methods, etc.[3]

There are also campaigns that seek to educate or inculcate important skills. A recent RAND Corporation report, for example, argued for the need for media literacy education that can help at-risk audiences better assess the credibility of and think critically about online and other types of information. In theory, such education might help audiences more critically weigh propaganda content or consider the merit of misinformation that drives extremist ideology (Brown et al., 2021). Warning audiences of impending or ongoing radicalization campaigns could be another educational tool. Such warnings can take the place of generic government warnings or more-targeted education efforts. A related strategy is to pair a warning with directions on how to refute the argument or message embedded in the disinformation content (Braddock, 2019). The strategy is referred to as an *inoculation intervention*. Previous

research has demonstrated that audiences who were exposed to the intervention experienced some protection against extremist propaganda.

Finally, campaigns vary with respect to the chosen medium, which can include videos, social media, radio, or even personal engagement. The Center for Strategic Dialogue, for example, developed a model for direct outreach that involves renounced or former extremists reaching out to and attempting to deradicalize online extremists via Facebook direct messaging (Frenett and Dow, 2014).

Community education efforts in the United States have focused on improving threat awareness in the community at large. Some aspects of this are less relevant for an RWE-focused policy, as the Department of Homeland Security (DHS) has, for example, sought to use such outreach to help build relationships with and address civil rights concerns of the Muslim-American community. That need aside, DHS has used a tool called the Community Awareness Briefing (CAB) to educate local audiences, including religious and civic institutions and parents and youth, about the threat and signs of radicalization, risk factors for extremist ideology, and steps that parents and leaders can take to reduce risk. Another tool is the CREX, which involves local government and community members working together to address unfolding scenarios of possible violent extremist activity. Like a wargame exercise, such efforts help improve trust and coordination between critical actors, and they can help empower local communities to address emergent threats more effectively (Jackson et al., 2019; Schanzer and Eyerman, 2019).

Finally, resilience and risk factor approaches seek to target risk factors associated with extremism. The number of reputed risk factors are many and can include fractured families, substance use, and mental health problems. RAND recently analyzed the radicalization and deradicalization trajectories of 32 U.S.-based extremists and found particularly high rates of past mental health problems in the sample, an observation documented in other related research (Brown et al., 2021). Although we do not know if this link is causal, there is an ongoing debate in extremism-related academic circles as to whether or not treating an extremist's mental health problems can lead to a

reduction in extremist ideology or behavior (Weine et al., 2017).

Department of Defense Application of Early Phase Interventions

How might such strategies apply to DoD? First, it remains unclear whether DoD should use broad-based messaging campaigns to dissuade audiences from extremist radicalization. The evidence showing the success of such efforts is too limited, and some indicators suggest that messaging campaigns can produce effects that are the opposite of what was intended (see, for example, campaigns risking what is called a *boomerang effect*, or the hardening of views inflaming extremist beliefs).[4]

That said, several options might be prudent. First, there might be value in explicitly warning U.S. service personnel that they are the target of extremist recruitment efforts. Such efforts can go even further and use inoculation procedures to help service personnel develop strategies for rebuffing extremist arguments and recruitment activities (see Box 1). Second, media literacy efforts might be relevant. Media literacy interventions, for example, have been shown to improve audience discernment between mainstream and false news content and hence might

There is an ongoing debate in extremism-related academic circles as to whether or not treating an extremist's mental health problems can lead to a reduction in extremist ideology or behavior.

reduce the risk that those who receive the training adopt conspiratorial or extremist views (see Box 2).

Moonshot's approach to using Google advertisements to reach extremist audiences might also provide a unique opportunity to reach audiences at the point of radicalization. Moonshot has used—and to some extent, continues to use—such ads to place counter-radicalization videos in front of audiences. Although the impact of such videos on audience attitudes and behavior is unknown, Moonshot has experimented with alternatives. One such initiative, which intersects with a resilience and risk factor approach, is to advertise a crisis counseling phone line that audience members can call for free counseling (see Box 3).

Second, drawing on the terrorism prevention program of the CAB and other related initiatives, DoD will need to develop a force-wide training curriculum to educate both broad and at-risk audiences about ongoing extremist threats, radicalization, and mitigation strategies (see Box 4).

Third, it might make sense for DoD authorities to sponsor a type of CREX to help law enforcement authorities, installation leadership, and varied commanders plan and prepare for contingencies associated with radicalized service members (see Box 5).

BOX 1

Using Generalized and Inoculation Warnings to Protect Audiences from Violent Extremism

What is it? Providing generalized warnings is one possible approach to preparing DoD audiences for radicalization risk. Specifically, there might be utility in warning audiences that white supremacy, anti-government, and other extremist groups might target U.S. military personnel with propaganda and other recruitment efforts and that audiences should be highly suspicious of such sources and their intent.

How effective is it? Clayton and colleagues, 2020, for example, demonstrated that providing participants with a general warning that subsequent content might contain false or misleading information increases the likelihood that participants see false headlines as less accurate. This effect, which was deemed "relatively modest" in size, still held true when participants were confronted with attitude-congruent political content. Whether this effect extends to propagandistic content is unclear.

The issuance of a generalized warning could be enhanced by adding what is called an *inoculation* intervention. Applied to countering white nationalist extremism, in an inoculation intervention, the warning is paired with what is described as a "weakened" example of white supremacist propaganda efforts, and audiences are provided directions on how to refute that propaganda. Studies have shown inoculation procedures to effectively induce resistance to conspiracy theories, extremist propaganda, and climate change misinformation (Cook, Lewandowsky, and Ecker, 2017; Braddock, 2019; Banas and Miller, 2013; van der Linden et al., 2017).

How might it be applied in DoD? DoD could study and use such intervention techniques to help protect audiences who are particularly at risk. As noted in the introduction, DoD is developing a process to alert newly retiring or separating service personnel that they might be targeted by extremist groups for recruitment (Losey, 2021b). Adapting this warning to include an inoculation-like opportunity to practice refuting sample propaganda could significantly strengthen the intervention. Beyond separation, DoD could also implement an inoculation-type training to service personnel during specialty training and education programs that take place early in a service person's career.

BOX 2

Using Media Literacy to Protect Department of Defense Audiences Against Violent Extremism

What is it? Media literacy programs seek, in part, to help audiences be curious about sources of information, assess their credibility, and think critically about the material presented (Stamos et al., 2019). Policymakers and educators have focused on media literacy as an approach to protect audiences against foreign disinformation or domestic misinformation campaigns. However, misinformation also appears to play a role in radicalization to violent extremism. Rioters who stormed the U.S. Capitol, for example, were misled into believing that the U.S. presidential election was stolen from President Donald J. Trump. Likewise, white supremacists follow various racist tropes that help feed their extremist ideology. To the extent that media literacy educational content helps audiences think more critically about the credibility of information and its sources, then it might help protect audiences from content that feeds extremist ideation.

How effective is it? Research increasingly suggests that media literacy interventions have a moderate and positive impact in improving participants' beliefs, attitudes, and behaviors related to media (Jeong, Cho, and Hwang, 2012). Such positive effects have been shown for stand-alone educational courses (International Research & Exchanges Board, undated) and social media–based media literacy content (Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler, 2020; Helmus et al., 2020). The role of media literacy training in reducing the risk of racist or extremist views is woefully under-studied, and a small number of studies suggest mixed effects (Ramasubramanian, 2007; Ramasubramanian and Oliver, 2007).

How might it be applied in DoD? Given the growth of misinformation and the risk of military audiences' exposure to foreign disinformation efforts, it is likely a worthwhile effort to develop, test, and disseminate media literacy training content to U.S. service personnel. It might be wise to develop and adapt this media literacy content to counter general misinformation risks unique to the DoD mission rather than focus on countering racism directly. In fact, Section 589E of the 2021 National Defense Authorization Act stipulates that DoD establish a program to train its personnel on "foreign malign influence campaigns," including those "carried out through social media" (Pub. L. 116-283, 2021). While meeting this requirement of the National Defense Authorization Act, DoD should consider adapting the content of the training curriculum to also address extremist online recruitment practices. We recommend that the developed educational content be rigorously tested to ensure that it is effective and that DoD consider different approaches for dissemination, such as class-based instruction, if feasible, and online courses or even social media content directly targeted via social media–based ads (Helmus et al., 2020).

Using Social Media and Search to Reach and Possibly Influence Those Radicalizing Near U.S. Military Installations

What is it? Numerous research reports on extremism have noted that the internet serves as a central repository for extremist propaganda and that it is the avid consumption of this online propaganda that drives radicalization (Jensen et al., 2018). Given this reality, CVE initiatives have been increasingly directed to the online space, and several noteworthy programs are now able to reach audiences at the point of a Google search. As previously mentioned, Moonshot implements a program called the Redirect Method that uses Google advertisements to place ad links at the top of the search results of people Googling extremist content. Typically, these ad links are connected to video and other curated content that "responds to and counters socially harmful narratives, arguments and beliefs espoused by the content for which they were originally searching" (Moonshot, undated). Moonshot has found that individuals searching for armed groups online were disproportionately more likely than typical audiences to click on ads encouraging "calmness and mindfulness" (Pasternack, 2021). They also found that violent far-right audiences were more likely to click on mental health ads than a comparison group (Moonshot, 2019). Moonshot is currently working with a U.S.-based nongovernmental organization, Life After Hate, experimenting with ways to turn online connections to offline engagement opportunities that can support disengagement and deradicalization efforts. Facebook has also sought a targeted approach with a campaign that presented educational resources and opportunities for off-platform support to individuals making extremist-related searches on Facebook (Moonshot, 2020).

How effective is it? Overall, the evidence documenting the effectiveness of the Redirect Method is limited. Previous RAND research has shown that audiences engage with the ads and the corresponding web content at rates on par with industry standards, but little is known about how the CVE content affects audience attitudes, behavior, or knowledge (Helmus and Klein, 2018). Little is also known about the impact of the crisis counseling or offline connections to deradicalization, although the personalized nature of these interventions at least appears to engender less risk of a boomerang effect than online video content does.

How might it be applied in DoD? The highly targeted nature of the Redirect Method offers a unique opportunity for DoD to address the presence of extremism in the ranks. The ads used in the method can be applied at the county level, thus allowing the program to be implemented only in counties where U.S. military installations are present. The program—especially to the extent that it can connect individuals to crisis hotlines, offer other mental health care, or possibly establish offline connections with a mentor who can support deradicalization— might provide a means to reach out and offer support to extremist military members. The program also has the added benefit of being able to track—at the county level or below—the number of extremist-related searches, which could provide a key measure of extremist activity in the military.[a]

[a] In addition, given the degree to which social media channels can be used to facilitate radicalization and recruitment (Jensen et al., 2018), it might be wise for DoD to limit access to at-risk platforms on DoD internet and Wi-Fi systems. Such platforms could include 8chan, Telegram, and other platforms frequently used for extremist recruitment.

Educating Department of Defense Audiences on Extremism Threats and Policies Using the Community Awareness Briefing and Other Methods

What is it? Providing audiences critical information about emerging trends in extremism is a key feature of terrorism prevention policies. In U.S. terrorism prevention, this is done in several ways. First, the CAB is a PowerPoint briefing created by the National Counterterrorism Center and the DHS Office for Civil Rights and Civil Liberties. Routinely updated to reflect current events, the CAB generally offers information on terrorism threats confronting the United States and local communities, tactics used by extremist organizations to radicalize and recruit new entrants, and factors that motivate youths to join extremist groups, and it identifies steps that communities can take to prevent radicalization of local youth. The briefing has been delivered by representatives of the National Counterterrorism Center and DHS, as well as other trained representatives, such as U.S. attorneys and local law enforcement. In 2015 and 2016, for example, such briefings were delivered in 10 to 20 cities to more than 1,000 attendees each year (Jackson et al., 2019). CABs have addressed particular issues, focusing on different types of extremist groups and different components of radicalization, such as social media–based propaganda. In addition, as previously mentioned, the Federal Bureau of Investigation had sponsored the website "Don't Be a Puppet," which aimed to raise young people's awareness of violent extremist groups and their recruitment strategies.

How effective is it? Interviews with government experts and community leaders suggest that the CAB has been well received. Local community demand for the CABs outstrips the ability of the U.S. government to deliver them (Schanzer and Eyerman, 2019). It has been noted that the CAB and the CREX "generate opportunities for interaction and engagement" among varied government and community leaders (Jackson et al., 2019, p. 149). The effectiveness or reach of the "Don't Be a Puppet" site is unclear, although it did receive criticism for its stereotypical treatment of Muslims as extremists (Camera, 2016).

How might it be applied in DoD? DoD will need to develop a force-wide training curriculum to educate personnel on the threat that extremist groups pose to U.S. military personnel, information on specific extremist groups and recruitment tactics, information on DoD policies with respect to extremism, and expectations for U.S. military personnel with respect to those policies. The DoD-wide stand-down on extremism sought in part to address this critical requirement. The need for more in-depth training was also addressed in a 1996 report by the Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities, which recommended that the Army "Develop a state of the art, interactive, discussion-based set of training support packages for use at each level of professional military education" (U.S. Department of the Army, Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities, 1996, p. 28). In 2000, the U.S. Department of the Army issued Pamphlet 600–15, which offered an outline for the contents of a proposed "Extremism Lesson Plan" that could be implemented in one-hour small-group settings (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2000, p. 7).[a]

Although we do not know the extent to which DoD has already developed such training initiatives, it seems clear that they are necessary. In addition to developing such efforts for professional military education, options include a CAB-like briefing that can be delivered in person to special audiences, such as those in a high-risk unit or installation, or to establish trust with a skeptical audience. There might also be value in disseminating training content via online courses or other online means, such as social media or social media–based ads. Finally, it is critical that this education reach and influence the U.S. military's commissioned and noncommissioned officer corps, whose enlistment in the counter-extremist fight will be crucial to DoD's success.

[a] The pamphlet explains that the objectives for such training include explaining restrictions on participation in extremist organizations, describing the definitions of terms related to extremism, explaining the prohibitions with regard to extremism, and explaining the training responsibilities of the commander with regard to extremist organizations and activities (Headquarters, Department of the Army, 2000, p. 7).

Adopting the Community Resilience Exercise for Department of Defense Needs

What is it? The CREX is a tabletop half-day exercise hosted by federal officials for local community leaders and law enforcement officials. It presents scenarios about individuals who show signs of violent radicalization and fosters discussions among participants about who should do what in such circumstances. The goal is to improve understanding and communication between the community and law enforcement and highlight necessary steps that different parties should take when someone in the community shows signs of radicalization.

How effective is it? Overall, interviews with participants of CREX events suggest that the event is well received. Government officials report that the events improve understanding between different players. They also reportedly help community members realize their role and responsibility in a space that is considered "pre-crime" (Schanzer and Eyerman, 2019, p. 20). Government officials also note that after-action evaluation of community members was "usually off the charts positive"; law enforcement evaluations were more "mixed" (Schanzer and Eyerman, 2019, p. 21).

How might it be applied in DoD? Depending on the overall extremism threat to DoD, it is conceivable that DoD might develop a CREX-type initiative to help parties in at-risk installations or units better understand how to address that local radicalization threat. Bringing together law enforcement, installation commanders, unit commanders, and noncommissioned officers could open channels of communication that would be needed in the event that threat indicators suggest a need for a more robust response.

Middle Phase Interventions

During the *middle phase*, terrorism prevention interventions are used to influence those who are already radicalized and possibly violent. The key interventions during this phase address referral promotion, law enforcement training, and intervention programming.

Given that individuals in this stage are well into the process of extremist radicalization and tending toward violence, it is critical that they be identified and interdicted before they can commit violent acts. *Referral promotion* refers to the process by which community members identify such individuals and the risk they pose and then make a referral to either law enforcement or some other established remediation program. At its face, the process is simple: Disseminate a phone number for people to call. But successful implementation of a referral policy must address a variety of issues and questions. In particular, the community needs to know what behaviors merit reporting, and it must know where and how to make such a report. Motivations must also be addressed, as those reporting might consider the consequences of making a report. In the United States, some community members were reluctant to refer identified youth, given concerns that such a

call would ultimately lead to the youth's arrest and incarceration (Jackson et al., 2019). U.S. authorities have used the CAB as a means to address such critical questions.

Law enforcement officers, especially those who might encounter violent extremists in their job or be called upon to investigate such extremists, also require training. To address this training gap, the United States has funded the State and Local Anti-Terrorism Training Program, or SLATT, which offers training to state and local law enforcement personnel (Davis et al., 2016). The U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center has also offered its own version of a Law Enforcement Awareness Brief (Jackson et al., 2019).

Finally, once a referral is made, a key question concerns what to do with the individual who is being referred. In the U.S. fight against Islamic extremism, the answer to this question often involved a criminal investigation with a goal of prosecuting the suspect on terrorism-related charges. At times, the Federal Bureau of Investigation would even use undercover agents to facilitate a suspect's participation in a seemingly real terror plot, which would enable the investigating agents to arrest the suspect and refer the person to prosecution more quickly. However,

the approach heightened suspicions among members of the Muslim community, who were reluctant to submit their loved ones to aggressive police tactics (Warikoo, 2016). Hence, demand grew for some alternative intervention that could help identified individuals deradicalize and avoid the fate of criminal investigation and prosecution. Various private organizations, such as Life After Hate and Beyond Barriers, which are founded and created by former extremists, have sought to address this need by creating deradicalizing interventions. Parents for Peace also supports intervention work and offers a 24-hour crisis line (Parents for Peace, undated). There is also a federal program called Shared Responsibilities Committees, which promotes voluntary collaboration of law enforcement, mental health, and religious leaders, who work together to help identified individuals. Various challenges exist with such programming, but the programs might be helpful to individuals who earnestly want such assistance.

Department of Defense Application of Middle Phase Interventions

If DoD crafts a zero-tolerance policy for extremist group affiliation in the military, then it will need to draft a commensurate mechanism to disseminate that policy and educate installation and unit commanders on how to report violations. It will also have to consider how audiences perceive of DoD's planned adjudication policies for such infractions. If audiences consider such plans as overly strict or unfair, then they might think twice before making a report, or they might avoid making a report in all but the most-obvious cases (see Boxes 4 and 6).[5]

Here the plan for adjudication of referred individuals is critical. Ultimately, DoD will need to craft policies that govern the consequences for service members who are shown to have joined an extremist organization. One result might be discharge from service. DoD might want to consider other alternatives that offer some sort of intervention designed to help individuals walk away from extremism. To this end, DoD might consider drawing on previously established interventions and make such services available if and when needed (see Box 7).

DoD might also need to develop and disseminate enhanced training on extremism to the service's criminal investigative agencies (see Box 8).

BOX 6

Assessing Rank-and-File Perceptions of Department of Defense Extremism Policies

What is it? Box 4 highlights the need for DoD to vigorously communicate its policies and educate audiences on the risks of extremism and extremist recruitment efforts. Such messaging would include expectations for reporting service personnel who violate DoD extremism policies. Beyond this, it will be critical for DoD to monitor how service personnel perceive its extremism policies. Service personnel and commanders will ultimately be the first ones to see extremism in the ranks, and they will be confronted with a decision of whether or not to report such suspicions to their chain of command. These individuals will likely consider several factors in making this report, including the degree to which they are confident that the individual in question violated DoD policy and the degree to which they think that the investigation process and outcome will be fair. The more heavy-handed and unfair they consider the investigation process and outcome, the less likely they might be to report suspicions. Consequently, DoD will need to develop its policies with this in mind and monitor rank-and-file views about the policy.[a]

[a] One past example of such an assessment is the 1995 Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities. More than 1,000 interviews with Army personnel were conducted, and it was observed that many junior officers and noncommissioned officers were confused about the definition of *extremism*. Some were afraid to take "preemptive action" against extremism for fear that doing so would go against other contemporaneous Army policies (such as the Single Soldier Initiative) that sought to give soldiers more leeway for free-time activities (U.S. Department of the Army, Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities, 1996, p. 11). The assessment also found that small-unit leaders often fail to receive appropriate information on how to make corrective actions or how to educate soldiers on extremist threats.

BOX 7
Using Interventions to Off-Ramp Military Extremists

What is it? Off-ramp interventions are those that seek to help radicalized individuals disengage from extremist organizations and desist from extremist activities. The interventions also seek to possibly deradicalize these individuals' ideology. Life After Hate, for example, is an organization created by a former white supremacist and has the mission to help "people leave the violent far-right to connect with humanity and lead compassionate lives" (Life After Hate, undated). It draws on a cadre of *formers*, individuals who were part of but have left the white supremacy movement, who offer support and education to those seeking to leave far-right groups. Another organization, Parents for Peace, seeks to empower families, friends, and communities to prevent radicalization and extremist violence. The organization offers intervention and rehabilitation services and a support network for families and friends of those involved in extremism. It also offers a 24-hour hotline that affected individuals and family members can call to receive help.

How effective is it? The evidence supporting such interventions is largely anecdotal, and there is little in the way of prospective evidence on the effectiveness of third-party disengagement strategies. However, many people who join extremist organizations leave them and desist from extremist activities. A recent RAND report on extremism in the United States documented the radicalization and deradicalization trajectories of extremists and found that many who left extremism did so because of support they received from a friend, life partner, or religious authority (Brown et al., 2021).

How might it be applied to DoD? In cases where the military authorities become formally aware that a service member is engaged in extremist activities, then it likely makes sense to make off-ramp services available to that service member if the person is interested in receiving them. In cases where the military seeks to discharge a service member for extremist-related ties, then an off-ramp service would be advantageous because the discharge process might risk inflaming the individual's state of radicalization further, and it could push the service member to a more violent state (Helmus, Brown, and Ramchand, 2021a). In theory, individuals identified as having extremist ties could be given access to an off-ramp counselor who could help motivate the individual to participate in treatment or initiate that treatment if the individual was so inclined. Military medical authorities, with support from mental health practitioners, chaplain services, law enforcement authorities, and the chain of command could potentially develop the intervention treatment. It might make even more sense to engage civil society organizations that have relevant experience in such matters and offer credibility, given the former extremist status of counselors.[a]

The military might also wish to make intervention support services available directly to family members and friends of extremist service members (see Helmus, Brown, and Ramchand, 2021b). The support offered by Parents for Peace might be particularly valuable because family members can contact the available crisis support line and receive direct emotional support, as well as support for any attempt at engagement and intervention. Service members looking to disengage from extremist ties might also benefit from being able to directly seek support. Family and service members should be able to anonymously engage these services. DoD would have to promote the availability of these services to family members and the broader force.

[a] However, DoD would need to ensure that any formal or contractual relationship with civil society organizations does not ultimately harm said organization's reputation or breed suspicion if a service member or the person's family member contacts the organization directly for support.

Providing Military Law Enforcement Training

What is it? There is a recognition in the civilian sector that it is important that law enforcement authorities have some requisite training in violent extremism and terrorism if they are to respond to acts of extremist violence and identify and respond to individuals who are at risk of extremist-related violence (Jackson et al., 2019). The SLATT Program, which is administered by the U.S. Department of Justice's Bureau of Justice Assistance, provides terrorism-related on-site training to state and local law enforcement. It specifically offers training in such topics as emergency preparedness and readiness, prevention and response, detection and interdiction, and train the trainer (State and Local Anti-Terrorism Training Program, undated). Various other entities also offer training, including the U.S. Secret Service's National Threat Assessment Center and the Federal Law Enforcement Training Center.

How effective is it? Such trainings have received positive evaluations. Interviews by Jackson and colleagues, 2019, revealed that the trainings have been positively reviewed and that there remained an unmet demand for such training efforts. Davis and colleagues, 2016, assessed SLATT and found that the trainings were positively reviewed by participants and that a majority of surveyed participants said that the training changed the way they would approach terror threats and investigations.

How might it be applied to DoD? If DoD seeks to root out participation in extremist organizations from the ranks, then a heavy responsibility will fall on the service branch law enforcement organizations to investigate possible cases of extremist membership. Assuming that such an effort will be a new focus for these agencies, they will likely require some training to reorient them to this particular problem set. Personnel in the agencies will need to develop knowledge about specific extremist groups and organizations, their recruitment strategies, signs and indications of service member participation, investigative tactics, and critical incident response tactics.

Late Phase Interventions

The focus of late phase terrorism prevention interventions is on recidivism reduction. Once an individual is arrested and charged with criminal or terrorism-related offenses, then terrorism prevention efforts seek to reduce the likelihood that the individual will return to extremism upon release from prison or parole. Programming options are limited in this regard and generally focus on prison-based mental health care and support services. As Jackson et al., 2019, notes though, the evidence of the effectiveness of such programming is limited, and it is constrained by a lack of assessment tools.

Department of Defense Application of Late Phase Interventions

It remains unclear to what extent the U.S. military will need to incarcerate individuals on extremism-related charges. It is not known whether the military would seek to prosecute and imprison individuals for membership in an extremist organization, although such incarceration would most certainly occur if an individual committed an act of extremist violence, as has happened in previous instances. If extremism incarceration rates did rise to some relevant level, then it might be feasible for DoD to use a CAB of sorts to educate prison staff or offer prison- and parole-based counseling and support services.

Conclusions

This report provides a general framework for terrorism prevention practices and programs as implemented in the United States and identifies how some of these programs could be applied to the U.S. military context. Such programs as generalized or inoculation warnings, media literacy education, Google ads, education programming, CREXs, monitoring of military personnel attitudes toward DoD extremism policies, off-ramping interventions, and military law enforcement training are examples of programs that

Different programs
and interventions are
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DoD should consider implementing as it weighs its approach to the rising extremist threat.

Beyond specific programs, however, DoD should recognize a key lesson imparted in the three phases of interventions (Figure 1). Different programs and interventions are suitable for different audiences, and an individual's position on the "pathway" to extremism is one critical variable to consider. Separate programs should be geared toward audiences at different stages in the radicalization process: those who are vulnerable but not yet radicalized, those who are beginning to radicalize, those who are radicalized and moving toward violence, and those who are mobilizing or have already mobilized toward violence. And although DoD might or might not wish to implement our suggested menu of interventions, or in cases for which it is already implementing these interventions, there is value in showing how the adopted interventions fit along the radicalization pathway and how they work and complement one another.

It should also be noted that there are several challenges in trying to directly apply the aforementioned programs to address extremism in the DoD context. First, many of these programs have been designed to counter Islamic strains of extremism and might not suitably address RWE, which often takes

the form of white supremacy and anti-government violence. Second, not all terrorism prevention programs are equal in effectiveness, and emerging evidence suggests that some types of initiatives can risk inflaming extremist viewpoints. Of course, one strength of the DoD context is that it has its own governing laws and regulations and rank and command structure; thus, in theory, programs can be implemented with the weight of command and institutional orders.

Terrorism prevention is not the only applicable model to addressing extremism in the military. One of the most-obvious alternative approaches is to incorporate insider threat programs. Insider threat programs are "designed to deter, detect, and mitigate actions by insiders who represent a threat to national security" (Center for Development of Security Excellence, undated). Such programs are often focused on protecting unauthorized disclosure of classified information by insiders, although the monitoring and detection practices can be extended to address extremism. Efforts that can detail such programs and guide how DoD can better identify right-wing extremists at the point of accession or monitor for extremism-related behaviors as part of the security clearance process would be of great value. A major focus, for example, has been how the Department can review social media and other open-source data to determine fitness for duty of new recruits (Losey, 2021a). Another potential area of study relates to efforts to eradicate extremism from the ranks of U.S. police departments. Police departments across the United States are currently working to identify and remove violent extremists from the police payrolls and prevent the radicalization of police officers. Lessons learned from such efforts might inform DoD policies and programs (and lessons from DoD might likewise inform screening and prevention in law enforcement).[6]

One critical challenge in offering recommendations from the terrorism prevention space is that, although significant advancements have been made in developing terrorism prevention interventions and understanding the potential effects of such interventions, *relatively little is known about the military context of extremism*. Without an adequate understanding of the prevalence of right-wing extremist affiliations in the military, it is difficult to identify

the level of effort that DoD planners should invest in terrorism prevention. For example, higher prevalence rates and higher threat risk would likely merit more funds and programmatic investment. In addition, a fuller understanding of the dynamics and manifestation of extremism will be critical to forming specific programmatic responses. Actionable and specific policy recommendations can come from, for example, an understanding of tolerance among rank-and-file troops for extremist views and affiliations, identifying the factors that weigh on those who consider reporting or acting on observed extremist activities, and assessing the impact of extremist views and activities on unit cohesion. Future research should seek to address these critical questions.

With this in mind, we conclude this report by offering the following recommendations for research that DoD can undertake in expanding actionable knowledge of extremism and informing policy:

- **Continue with the intention of assessing the overall prevalence of extremism in the military.** DoD currently intends to go ahead with such an assessment, which will be helpful to designing targeted responses for specific services. In addition, it will be useful to know how prevalence varies in different career fields and installations. Knowing the number of years of service of individual members might also provide insight.
- **Seek to understand how extremism manifests itself in the military.** Do those with extremist views openly or surreptitiously (using coded language) talk about their extremist views? Do they attempt to recruit new members? What effect does it have on unit cohesion and other in-unit dynamics?
- **Seek to understand the in-unit dynamics related to extremism.** Critical questions include, *To what extent are such views and related behaviors tolerated among rank-and-file troops? What considerations weigh on those who are considering reporting on an identified extremist?*
- **Conduct a stream of research that can inform the creation of terrorism prevention interventions and assess their impact.** Any existing intervention, such as a media literacy program, will have to be developed in such a way that it speaks to the U.S. military audience. Initial tests and more-substantive impact evaluations should suggest that such interventions are effective (see Guess, Nyhan, and Reifler, 2020, for an example of how such testing can be conducted) and do not spark a boomerang effect that would actually heighten or worsen extremist reactions (Helmus et al., 2017). It might also be fruitful to examine the success of past terrorism prevention interventions, such as any educational efforts previously developed as a result of the 1996 Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities (U.S. Department of the Army, Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities, 1996, p. 28).

Notes

[1] For example, in 2012, a member of the Missouri National Guard was arrested for providing weapons and command to a neo-Nazi paramilitary training camp in Florida, a ten-member Marine Corps sniper team posed in front of a Nazi flag in Afghanistan, and two soldiers murdered a veteran and his girlfriend to cover up their plans to assassinate President Barack Obama (Jones, 2019). In 2019, U.S. Coast Guard LT Christopher Hasson, who had spent five years in the U.S. Marine Corps and two years in the U.S. Army National Guard, was discovered to be a neo-Nazi who was stockpiling weapons in preparation for an attack on politicians in Washington, D.C. (McCausland, 2019).

[2] Overall, recent survey data identifying the prevalence of extremism in the force are limited. Following the murder of an African American couple in Fayetteville, North Carolina, by neo-Nazi-affiliated members of the 82nd Airborne Division, the Department of the Army released a 1996 study on extremist activities (U.S. Department of the Army, Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities, 1996). The report presented results of more than 7,000 interviews with soldiers and Army civilians, and 0.5 percent attested to being an active participant in an extremist group. Results of a separate and written survey of more than 17,000 soldiers and Army civilians suggested that 7 percent of respondents "reported they knew another soldier whom they believed to be a member of an extremist organization" (U.S. Department of the Army, Secretary of the Army's Task Force on Extremist Activities, 1996, p. i).

More-recent data suggest this problem might have worsened. *Military Times* surveyed its active-duty readership on exposure to extremism and racism in the force (Shane, 2020). The findings are not published in a peer-reviewed journal or report, but the publication says that 36 percent of the 1,630 surveyed individuals reported "evidence of white supremacist and racist ideologies in the military," a figure that the author notes is up from 22 percent in a previous year's survey (Shane, 2019). It was noted, for example, that participants reported

> witnessing incidents including racist language and discriminatory attitudes from peers, but also more specific examples like swastikas being drawn on servicemembers' cars, tattoos affiliated with white supremacist groups, stickers supporting the Ku Klux Klan and Nazi-style salutes between individuals. (Shane, 2020)

[3] This website, while serving as an example of an educational campaign, received significant criticism for stereotyping Muslims as extremists (Camera, 2016).

[4] Evidence supporting CVE-focused persuasion campaigns is limited. RAND recently evaluated two such campaigns and documented mixed effects for a radio campaign in Nigeria and a relatively unsuccessful social media campaign in Indonesia (Bodine-Baron et al., 2020; Marrone et al., 2020). Aspects of both campaigns showed what is often called a boomerang effect, in which a media campaign that seeks to positively change hard-worn attitudes actually produces an opposite effect. Given the limited evidence for effectiveness and the limited knowledge about the prevalence of extremism in the ranks, it is difficult to recommend a DoD-sponsored messaging campaign that seeks to reduce appeal for RWE ideology.

[5] Even with personnel for which reporting would be deemed mandatory, such as chain of command or those holding security clearances, decisions on whether to report extremist behavior in the ranks might be highly personal and complex.

[6] We did investigate the potential utility of one police department program to determine whether it was suitable to the U.S. military context. Specifically, the vast majority of police departments across the country implement a form of implicit bias training that seeks to help officers recognize unconscious prejudices and stereotypes and provide tools to counter such automatic patterns of thinking and acting (Worden et al., 2020; Green and Hagiwara, 2020). Implicit bias is not violent extremism. However, it might constitute a lesser form of racism; hence, efforts that can successfully address implicit bias might reduce the risk that someone will subsequently form more-extremist attitudes. Unfortunately, the only major randomized control trial conducted on the training's effectiveness found that, although the training can change officer attitudes and knowledge, it did not change enforcement behavior (Worden et al., 2020).

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Acknowledgments

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About This Report

Only days after the U.S Capitol riots on January 6, 2021, a chilling discovery was made: Participants included current and former U.S. military members. In early February, the Secretary of Defense implemented a Department of Defense (DoD)-wide stand-down on extremism, instituting various policies designed to limit right-wing extremism in the ranks. These efforts represent important first steps in combating the infiltration of violent extremism in the U.S. military.

To support DoD in its efforts for the longer term, RAND Corporation researchers sought to understand how extremism in the U.S. military has been addressed in the past and how it could be addressed in the near future. To do this, the team conducted a review of the history of extremism in the U.S. military and then reviewed terrorism prevention policies as practiced in the United States, identifying policies that might have utility for DoD. The authors also recommend that DoD work to find out more about the dynamics and manifestation of extremism in the U.S. military before investing in, designing, and conducting large anti-extremist efforts.

Because relatively little is known about extremism in the U.S. military context to date, the current investigation does not lead to recommendations of a single program or policy to institute in the near term. Rather, the report offers DoD several directions to continue investigating before attempting to institute a particular program or action plan and related policy.

RAND National Security Research Division

The research reported here was completed in July 2021 and underwent security review with the sponsor and the Defense Office of Prepublication and Security Review before public release.

This research was sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense and conducted within the International Security and Defense Policy Center of the RAND National Security Research Division (NSRD), which operates the RAND National Defense Research Institute (NDRI), a federally funded research and development center (FFRDC) sponsored by the Office of the Secretary of Defense, the Joint Staff, the Unified Combatant Commands, the Navy, the Marine Corps, the defense agencies, and the defense intelligence enterprise.

For more information on the RAND International Security and Defense Policy Center, see www.rand.org/nsrd/isdp or contact the director (contact information is provided on the webpage).

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Subject:	EXSUM: RAND report on Extremism
Date:	Monday, September 20, 2021 6:10:00 PM
Attachments:	RAND Extremism Report EXSUM (20210920) v4.docx
	pea1447-1_revcompled_9_2_21.pdf

Hi Kelly:

SD asked for an executive summary of the attached RAND report on extremism, released 16 Sept. A one-pager is attached. Of note, DoD did not commission this study. Rather, we have a study underway with IDA, which will be complete in Spring FY22.

Standing by if there are any questions.

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