

Office of the Secretary of Defense
Leadership Stand-Down to Address Extremism in the Force

“All Hands” (COVID Mitigated) Discussion

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Suggested Talking Points

- On February 5, 2021, the Secretary of Defense directed unit commanders and supervisors at all levels to conduct a leadership “stand down” within 60 days to address the issues of extremist ideology in our ranks.
- As you heard in the Secretary’s video remarks, extremist ideologies, particularly those that undermine the oath we each took to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic, have no place within the Department of Defense.
- Actively espousing ideologies that encourage discrimination, hate, and harassment against others will not be tolerated within our *(unit/command/etc)*. I expect the core principles of dignity and mutual respect to guide the actions of the personnel in this unit/organization at all times, to include our conversations here today.
- The vast majority of the men and women in the United States military and those who serve the Department of Defense as civilian employees perform their duties and responsibilities with integrity, and do not support racially and ethnically motivated violent extremists, including white supremacists, and other domestic terrorists such as anti-government violent extremists. However, recent events have shown that we must be ever vigilant in our efforts to identify and combat such ideology within the ranks and organizations.
- As such, we have four goals for today’s discussion.
 - The first is to review the meaning of the Oath we each took on becoming a member of the United States Military or a Department of Defense civilian employee;
 - The second is to review impermissible behaviors – those actions prohibited under applicable law or under DoD, Military Department or Military Service policy;
 - We’ll spend some time reviewing the responsibilities on us all for reporting to our chain of command when we observe or learn of prohibited actions, or those that cause us concern as “signs” of potential future problems; and,
 - We’ll finish with listening sessions – the Secretary wants your feedback on what actions he should consider in combating this issue, and I want it too.
- Thank you in advance for your attention. While I understand this can be a sensitive subject, it’s important that we take on this significant challenge together.

Meaning of the Oath of Office / Oath of Enlistment

Focus: Responsibilities inherent in the Oath

Certain limitations for military members in the national interest and public trust

- As Service members or Department of Defense civilian employees, we each take an Oath of Office upon entering into public service. The framers of the Constitution included the requirement to take an oath in the Constitution itself.
- While the specific wording of that oath may vary depending on the individual role in which you serve, all of our oaths include the commitment to support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies foreign and domestic, and to well and faithfully discharge our duties.
- Because we each took an oath to support and defend the Constitution, and to do our jobs to the best of our ability, we expect military Service members and DoD civilian employees to be guided in their actions by a professional ethic that prioritizes the team, the mission, and the Nation. You are essential to our success and we need you on our team.
- Never forget that being on our team is an honor and a privilege. You serve one of the most-respected institutions in America and that comes with added responsibilities and obligations. You are held to a higher professional standard and must set the example in all that you say and do. Many of you serve in positions of trust, with access to classified information or in sensitive positions. Those of you in leadership and supervisory positions are entrusted with the well-being of individual Service members and civilian employees as well as the well-being of the organization. All of you are expected to do the right thing, to look after each other, and to work together to overcome whatever challenges the mission presents.
- Those of you in the military are held to even higher standards. Service members are subject to the Uniform Code of Military Justice and the added appropriate accountability inherent in maintaining the good order and discipline essential for a fighting force.
- Although Service members enjoy the right to free speech protected by the First Amendment, the unique character of the military community and of the military mission requires a balancing of those rights with the important purpose of the military. In fact, the Supreme Court of the United States noted as follows: “[t]his Court has long recognized that the military is, by necessity, a specialized society separate from civilian society. We have also recognized that the military has, again by necessity, developed laws and traditions of its own during its long history. The differences between the military and civilian

communities result from the fact that ‘it is the primary business of armies and navies to fight or be ready to fight wars should the occasion arise.’”

The Supreme Court went on to note that: “[w]hile the members of the military are not excluded from the protection granted by the First Amendment, the different character of the military community and of the military mission requires a different application of those protections. The fundamental necessity for obedience, and the consequent necessity for imposition of discipline, may render permissible within the military that which would be constitutionally impermissible outside it.” (Parker v. Levy, 417 U.S. 733 (1974))

- For all of us, Service members and DoD civilian employees alike, who enjoy the great privilege of serving in our nation’s defense, we recognize that due to the unique character of the military community and mission, speech that interferes with or prevents the orderly accomplishment of the mission or presents a clear danger to loyalty, discipline, mission, or morale of the troops may be restricted under some circumstances. Similarly, speech in the workplace that interferes with the mission, espouses extremist or discriminatory doctrine, or is disrespectful and harmful to colleagues, will have consequences.
- The DoD has a compelling interest in preventing the advent and spread of hate groups and activities within the Department; in guarding against illegal discrimination; in fostering a military that is politically-neutral and disciplined; and in recruiting and sustaining an all-volunteer force of sufficient strength and quality to provide for the Nation’s security and to sustain that security over time.
- DoD and Military Department and Service regulations help in balancing these interests. For example, there are regulations requiring the security review of information to be released to the public by Service members and civilian employees to the public, such as articles for publication on matters related to the military or your job and duties, and prior approval is required to distribute or post material on a military installation.
- You can always seek advice from your chain of command, supervisors, public affairs, or the legal office before making public statements or publishing materials. Whether it’s a letter to an editor or a social media post, if you have questions about what you want to say, your chain of command, supervisors, public affairs, or legal office can also help you ensure you’re not violating regulations.

Prohibited Activities

Focus: Guiding Principles for the Total Force

DoD Policy on Extremist Activities, DoDI 1325.06, "Handling Dissident and Protest Activities Among Members of the Armed Forces"

- **Dignity and Respect:** The Department of Defense places the highest importance on treating all personnel with dignity and respect, in an inclusive environment, free from impermissible discrimination, harassment, and hate. And as such, DoD policy expressly prohibits Service members from actively advocating supremacist, extremist, or criminal gang doctrine, ideology and causes. The Department of Defense also holds its civilian workforce to the highest standards of character and conduct required to protect and promote the public trust.
- Service members must reject active participation in organizations that advance supremacist or extremist ideology, which includes 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. (DoDI 1325.06, Encl. 3, para 8.b.)
- **Recruitment:** Extremist organizations and individuals often target current or former military members or DoD civilian employees for recruitment because of their unique military skills, knowledge, and abilities, as well as to gain legitimacy for their cause. Service members and DoD civilian employees must be vigilant of these efforts.
- **Active Participation:** Active participation includes, but is not limited to: "Fundraising, demonstrating, rallying, recruiting, training, organizing, leading members, distributing material (including posting online), or knowingly wearing gang colors or clothing, having tattoos or body markings associated with such gangs or organizations; or otherwise engaging in activities in furtherance of objectives of such gangs or organizations that are detrimental to good order, discipline, or mission accomplishment or are incompatible with military service." (DoDI 1325.06, Encl. 3, para 8.b.) Active participation in such activities may also affect determinations of suitability or fitness for civilian employment or continued employment in the DoD and eligibility for National Security positions and/or access to classified information.
- **Indicators:** Participation may lead to violence. Some indicators of individual escalation toward extremism include clear identification with or support for extremist or hate-based ideology; making or attempting to make contact with extremist groups; the possession and/or distribution of extremist literature or paraphernalia; and threatening, intimidating, harassing, or harming of others consistent with extremism or hate-based ideology. While

such conduct may not constitute “active participation,” such signs offer an indicator for commands, prompting action and intervention that can avoid active participation down the road.

- **Duty to Reject:** Service members and DoD civilian employees must reject participation in such activities. With regard to Service members, Department policy makes clear that commanders have the authority to employ the full range of administrative and disciplinary actions, including involuntary separation, dismissal, or even appropriate criminal prosecution against those who actively engage in such activity. Supervisors and leaders of all ranks must also take action to maintain good order and discipline and root out extremism.

Responsibility to Report

Focus: Procedures for Reporting Suspect Behaviors;

Articles of the UCMJ and Administrative Options Available to Leaders

- Reporting: If you observe a co-worker exhibiting concerning behaviors, you have a responsibility to report it through the chain of command or supervision to your local security manager, and/or directly to the Insider Threat program office. Report issues of imminent threats or activity that may constitute criminal conduct to local law enforcement immediately.
 - If you observe a Service member actively participating in an extremist organization in a manner that you suspect violates the UCMJ or the Department of Defense's, a Military Department's, or Service's extremism policies, report the Service member to a supervisor, commander, or military criminal investigator.
 - Extremist behavior by Department personnel that does not rise to the level of a violation of the UCMJ or other applicable laws, or the Department of Defense's, Military Department's, or Military Service's extremism policies may still be a concern under the U.S. Government's national security adjudicative guidelines, used to assess eligibility for access to classified information or to hold a sensitive position. Creditable allegations of actions addressed in the guidelines found in Security Executive Agent Directive 4, "National Security Adjudicative Guidelines," June 8, 2017, must be reported to security management personnel. (Mention who this is for your unit/organization and provide contact information if possible).
 - Statements showing association with violent extremist behavior by Department personnel or contractors may also be considered a risk factor by the Insider Threat Program. If you observe any behaviors of concern (including extremist activity or anomalous behavior out of character) within your unit, ranks, or organization, report it through your chain of command or supervision, local security manager, or directly to the component insider threat program office. (Mention who this is for your particular unit/organization and provide contact information if possible.)
- Duty to Self-Report: All military personnel or civilians/contractors with a security clearance or in sensitive positions, as a condition of continued eligibility must self-report any personal arrests or any behaviors from counterparts that are either criminal in nature or call into question their character and trustworthiness to continue serving in such a position.

- Failure to Report: Failure to report concerning behaviors removes an opportunity for the Department to help a Service member or civilian employee, and could place themselves, the Department, and others at risk. A report of concerning behavior does not necessarily result in punitive actions against an individual.

- Command Options regarding Service members: Depending on the nature of the incident or behavior, commanders have several options when evaluating the most appropriate response given individual circumstances, and in consultation with their local legal office. These may include:
 - Counseling and corrective training
 - Removal from certain duties, such as restricted area badge access, flying status, or duties involving firearms
 - Reclassification
 - Suspension of eligibility to occupy a sensitive position
 - Denial of reenlistment or involuntary separation
 - Adverse evaluations and position reassignments
 - Designating off-limits areas
 - Ordering non-participation in specific activities, or removal of inappropriate materials
 - UCMJ Article 15 and Courts-Martial
 - Article 92: Violation or Failure to Obey a Lawful Order or Regulation
 - Article 116: Riot or Breach of Peace
 - Article 117: Provoking Speeches or Gestures
 - Article 133: Conduct Unbecoming
 - Article 134: General Article (Good Order and Discipline)

- Remember, failure to report has a negative impact on the unit or organization. Command climate suffers, groups become polarized, corrosive behaviors undermine confidence in the unit, and readiness is degraded.

Case Studies

Focus: Use Examples to Illustrate Problematic Behaviors

Example One: Paramilitary Activity

In September 2019, as a result of an FBI investigation, an Army junior enlisted member was arrested and charged in the federal criminal justice system with one count of distributing information related to explosives and weapons of mass destruction. During the investigation, it was discovered that the Service member had “disseminated guidance on how to construct improvised explosive devices” and had spoken about his desire to travel to Ukraine to fight with the Azov Battalion, a paramilitary group with neo-Nazi sympathies. At the time of his arrest, the Service member stated that he did this to cause “chaos.” He was administratively discharged from the Army and sentenced to 30 months in federal prison.

Example Two: Domestic Extremism

In February 2019, the FBI arrested a junior officer in the U.S. Coast Guard after uncovering a stockpile of weapons, ammunition, and opioids in his home. The member planned to conduct a widespread domestic terror attack targeting politicians and journalists in the Washington, D.C. area. The officer was a self-described white nationalist and conducted thousands of internet searches on neo-Nazi and neo-fascist websites using his government computer. The officer was dropped from the Coast Guard rolls and sentenced in federal court to 13 years in prison.

Example Three: Organizing and Recruiting

In May 2019, an Air Force senior enlisted member was alleged to have been a member of Identity Evropa, a neo-Nazi and white supremacist organization. The Service member also allegedly physically posted supremacist propaganda on several occasions. Furthermore, he allegedly served as an organizer with Identity Evropa, recruited other members, and appeared in photographs wearing clothes with the Identity Evropa logo and taking part in a protest sponsored by the group. He was demoted in grade and administratively separated from the Air Force.

Example Four: Racist and Supremacist Statements

In 2019, an enlisted Marine shared a number of racist social media posts, including one of himself in blackface and with Nazi propaganda. One of the posts depicted military explosives placed in the shape of a Swastika. The member was administratively discharged from the Service.

Resources and References

- AFI 16-1402, "Counter-Insider Threat Program Management," 17 June 2020
- AFI 51-508, "Political Activities, Free Speech and Freedom of Assembly of Air Force Personnel," 12 October 2018
- AR 600-20, "Army Command Policy," 24 July 2020
- Director of National Intelligence Directive, "Security Executive Agent Directive 4: National Security Adjudicative Guidelines," 8 June 2017
- DoDD 5205.16, "The DoD Insider Threat Program," 28 August 2017, as amended
- DoDI 1325.06, "Handling Dissident and Protest Among Members of the Armed Forces," 27 November 2009
- DoDM 5200.02, "Procedures for the DoD Personnel Security Program (PSP)," 29 October 2020, Change 1
- MARADMIN 016/21, "Permissible and Prohibited Conduct Related to Public Demonstrations," 12 January 2021
- MCO 5354.1E-V2, "Prohibited Activities and Conduct," 15 June 2018
- MILPERSMAN 1910-160, "Separation by Reason of Supremacist or Extremist Conduct," 28 May 2008
- MILPERSMAN 1920-070, "Separation of Officer Personnel by Reason of Supremacist or Extremist Conduct," 3 September 2019
- Navy Regulation 1167, "Supremacist Activities," 14 September 1990
- OPNAVINST 5354.1G, "Navy Equal Opportunity Program Manual," 24 July 2017
- Secretary of Defense Memorandum, "Stand-Down to Address Extremism in the Ranks," 5 February 2021
- Task Force One Navy (TF1N), "Final Report," 2 February 2021
- Uniform Code of Military Justice, Articles 92 (Failure to Obey an Order or Regulation), 116 (Riot or Breach of Peace), 117 (Provoking Speeches or Gestures), 133 (Conduct Unbecoming), and 134 (General Article)

Common Questions & Answers

Q: If there have been issues with extremism inside the Department of Defense for a long time, why is the Secretary of Defense so focused on this now?

A: The increased level of domestic protests around the country in the past several months has emboldened some violent extremist groups to take more aggressive anti-government and racially motivated actions. These groups are known to actively target current and former military personnel. In light of current events, the Secretary wants DoD personnel at all levels to understand the threat and be trained and educated to take appropriate actions when they see indicators of extremism.

Q: Does DoD actually have a problem with extremist groups?

A: We are seeing an increase in concerning behavior. We believe this is based on societal increases, but there's also an increase in the reporting of suspect behavior. We are actively tracking down these leads and identifying any other associations with these sorts of groups. That's why we need all DoD personnel to report concerning behaviors appropriately so we can thoroughly review all credible reports.

Q: Does DoD check the social media records of Service members, DoD civilian employees, and prospective recruits?

A: Consent for obtaining publicly available social media information is provided when Service members and DoD civilian employees submit their Personnel Security Questionnaire (SF-86) to initiate the background investigation process. DoD is examining a scalable means of implementing social media screening in conjunction with background investigations. Furthermore, the FBI currently screens social media for extremism and criminal activity.

Q: I thought Service members retained their Constitutional rights when they joined the military. Are you telling me I no longer have the right to Free Speech or Peaceful Assembly?

A: "We're entrusted with the security of our nation. The tools of our trade are lethal, and we engage in operations that involve risk to human life and untold national treasure. Because of what we do, our standards must be higher than those of society at large." (General Ronald R. Fogleman, 15th CSAF, quotation on the Air Force Memorial)

Remember that military members and DoD civilian employees have access to classified information and occupy sensitive positions with access to lethal equipment, training, and tactics. Everyone with access to classified information or in a sensitive position is evaluated continuously, using government-wide guidelines to assess their strength of character, honesty, discretion, sound judgment, reliability to protect classified or sensitive information, and trustworthiness. Any doubt is resolved in favor of the national security.

Potentially disqualifying conditions include:

- involvement in, support of, or association/sympathy with persons attempting to or training to commit, or advocacy of any act of sabotage, espionage, treason, terrorism, or sedition against the United States;
- association or sympathy with persons or organizations that advocate, threaten, or use force or violence, or use any other illegal or unconstitutional means, in an effort to:
 - attempt to overthrow the U.S. Government or any state government;
 - prevent Federal, state, or local government personnel from performing their official duties;
 - gain retribution for perceived wrongs caused by the Federal, state, or local government; or prevent others from exercising their rights under the Constitution or laws of the United States or any state.