DOMESTIC VIOLENT EXTREMISM IN THE UNITED STATES MILITARY

DRAFT BRIEFING MEMORANDUM

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This briefing paper explores the association between domestic violent extremism and the United States military. While the majority of violent extremism is not committed by military service members,[1] the available research on the topic indicates that the problem is growing, particularly among military veterans. This is concerning – although public trust in the military remains higher than any other institution of the federal government, violent extremism by those with military backgrounds may erode this trust. We first outline potential vulnerabilities to violent extremism within the service member population (Section 1), followed by potential protective factors that may guard service members against participation in violent extremism (Section 2). We then synthesize various solutions proposed by different stakeholders working in this field (Section 3), and the ethical considerations pertinent to some of these proposed solutions (Section 4). Based on this discussion, we conclude by providing modest recommendations (Section 5).

Section 1 outlines potential vulnerabilities to violent extremism within the service member population, with a particular focus on risk factors which may be more prevalent among service members than non-service members. We separate these military-oriented vulnerabilities into four categories. First, *pre-enlistment risk factors* include aspects of pre-enlistment life which may expose service members to heightened risk of violent extremism. We note that service members endure elevated rates of adverse childhood experiences, as compared to the general public; additionally, volunteer enlistees may have a pre-existing willingness to engage in violence which exceeds that of the general public. Second, *broad service-related risk factors* include potential causal links between service and extremist activity, considered in light of existing theories of violent extremism. We discuss how service members may morally neutralize violence through combat, engage with radical peers in a tight-knit fraternal environment, and receive access to advanced combat training. Third, *long-term service-related risk factors* include service-related vulnerabilities which take effect primarily in years following separation from the military. We highlight how certain service members may experience a loss of purpose or community following discharge, suffer from the cognitive effects of post-traumatic stress disorder, or face targeted recruitment by violent extremist organizations. Fourth, certain *DoD policies and practices* may increase service members' vulnerability to violent extremism. Some service members may struggle to maintain external support systems due to military assignment practices; others may lose trust in the military as an institution due to dishonest or unethical DoD practices (e.g. coercive recruiting). Additional risk-enhancing DoD practices may include the lowering of recruiting standards during periods of high troop demand and the use of separation as means to remove identified extremists from the ranks.

Section 2 explores factors which may protect service members against participation in violent extremism. Many putative protective factors stem from the same theoretical concerns which suggest vulnerabilities; through the lens of a single theory, one aspect of military service may indicate a heightened risk for violent extremism, while a separate element of service implies protection against the same. We organize protective factors into three distinct categories. First, *selection-based protective factors* include

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[1] Over the course of the briefing paper, the term "service member" is utilized to refer to anyone who has experience in the armed forces of the United States. While, typically, service member is a term that would be reserved for those who are actively serving in the United States military, we expand it to include reservists, guardsmen, veterans, retired service members, and all other former service members. While specific terms exist for each relationship to the services, an approach that analyzes all these relationships is vital to understanding the association between military service and domestic violent extremism. Throughout the paper, the term service member should not be interpreted to include those who are serving in the uniformed services that are not also considered armed forces, for example, the Commissioned Corps National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service.

both a) the military's ability to screen prospective recruits for specific risk factors (e.g. mental illness and prior criminal record) and b) the self-selected nature of a volunteer force, which may yield a servicemember population with greater levels of institutional trust than the general population Second, *service may function as a safety net*, by providing service members with an outlet for violence, a source of purpose, and a sense of community. Third, *government-backed benefits* may function as protective factors for service members. These benefits include preferential hiring practices for federal employment, and various services available through the Department of Veteran Affairs, including mental health care, specialized home loans, and education grants.

Section 3 outlines various potential solutions to violent extremism in the military that have previously been proposed by numerous institutions, from the Department of Defense to non-governmental organizations. We organize these proposed solutions into four thematic categories that focus on: media protection, education, junior leadership intervention, and community build-up. First, solutions related to *media protection* aim to safeguard service members against ideologically extreme media content. Proposed initiatives within this category include efforts to foster media literacy and critical thinking on the part of service members, with the intent of helping them identify sources of extremist misinformation/propaganda. Other interventions, such as Moonshot's "Redirect Method," aim to divert service members away from extremist material by placing links to counter-extremist content at the top of online search results for service members searching extremist keywords. The most drastic proposals within this category involve denying service members access to media sources categorized as extremist. Second, *education-based solutions* broadly seek to provide service members with a more detailed understanding of the extremist landscape – the nature of extremism, the recruitment tactics of extremist organizations, the potential steps of radicalization, and so forth. Both the DoD and the RAND Corporation have recommended initiatives in this area, geared toward the development of more comprehensive training curricula for active-duty service members, along with outreach plans intended to help the general public support at-risk service members. Third, solutions related to *junior leadership intervention* encourage junior military leaders to adopt a role of monitoring, intervening, and reporting potential extremist behavior. These junior leaders may be uniquely capable of filling this role given their proximity to the majority of the force and the non-escalatory methods of intervention that they could employ. Finally, *community build-up* solutions encourage cooperation between NGOs, the DoD, and the Department of Veterans Affairs to create community-based veterans' organizations, intended to provide veterans with firm systems of social support that reduce the allure of extremist organizations.

Section 4 identifies ethical concerns that arise in light of the solutions surveyed in Section 3. To begin, we place particular emphasis on the ethical implications of solutions proposed or advanced by the Department of Defense. Military-led counter-extremism initiatives may alienate particular service members, curtail free expression, limit unit cohesion, and diminish military readiness. Relatedly, any military-led intervention implicates an unavoidable tension between DoD's imperative to remain apolitical and its need to address violent extremism – a topic perceived as highly political. Next, we discuss the ethical implications of mental health interventions. Attempting to mitigate violent extremism by focusing on mental health may exacerbate the stigmatization of mental illness. Additionally, treating violent extremism as primarily a question of mental health risks over-medicalizing the issue, potentially diverting into psychiatric treatment individuals whose behavior could be addressed more appropriately through less restrictive means. Finally, we address ethical concerns related to technology and discrimination. In considering technology-based counter-extremism interventions, we ask whether such interventions can justifiably discriminate against military personnel by hindering only service members' access to certain

technological spaces. Although members of the military sacrifice certain rights as a condition of service, any further curtailment of service members' liberties may require special ethical justification. Moreover, limiting service members' access to online extremist content risks silencing counter-extremist voices within the military and may conflict with the duties of technology companies as stewards of public fora for communication.

Finally, Section 5 offers two of our modest recommendations for countering domestic violent extremism in the military. First, we recommend an initiative to promote more comprehensive civics education within the armed forces. Broadly, our suggested educational intervention seeks to enhance service members' skills in media literacy and critical thinking, rather than focusing on education in democratic political thought. More specifically, we suggest that this civics education program be directed towards junior military leaders, who may be specially positioned to influence their subordinates and peers. Second, we recommend an initiative to encourage veteran participation in social organizations which share values with both the military and certain violent extremist organizations, but which do not endorse the use of violence. This could involve both an expansion of existing organizations (e.g., the Military Officers Association of America) and the creation of new programs which offer veterans the ideological affinity and sense of purpose provided by certain extremist groups without the associated risk of violence. New programs could include, for example, an initiative to employ veterans as research assistants at defense-oriented think tanks, or a program through which veterans provide civics-related lessons to students rooted in their service experience. We acknowledge that no singular intervention will eliminate, or even substantially reduce, violent extremism in the military. Rather, we forward these recommendations with the hope of making a modest contribution to a broader counter-extremism effort.

Introduction

Military service in the United States has historically been a force for uniting the country, as Americans with different backgrounds and beliefs came together to complete a common mission of national defense. According to Gallup polling data, the military is currently the most trusted institution of the federal government, with 64% of those surveyed citing "quite a lot" of trust or a "great deal" of trust.[2] While this level of trust in the military is a decline from previous years,[3] it is high in comparison with the levels of trust for other federal government institutions such as the Supreme Court (25%), the Presidency (23%), and Congress (7%).[4] A high level of trust in the military among the American public is vital, yet, it is possible that the participation of those with military experience in acts of domestic violent extremism (DVE) could erode this trust.

Throughout this briefing paper, we discuss the relevant research that exists on this topic. We introduce the specific vulnerabilities inherent to the active, former, and retired service members of the United States military, as well as the many protective factors that help to prevent the involvement of those with military experience in acts of DVE. We will then look at the proposed solutions of different organizations from the Department of Defense (DoD) to the proposals of non-governmental organizations (NGO) and academic centers. After reviewing the relevant ethical considerations of these proposals we will also include recommendations that we have generated at the Center for Ethics and the Rule of Law (CERL).

Over the course of this briefing paper, the term "service member" is utilized to refer to anyone who has experience in the armed forces of the United States. While service member is a term that would be typically reserved for those who are actively serving in the United States military, we expand it to include reservists, guardsmen, veterans, retired service members, and all other former service members. While specific terms exist for each relationship to the services, an approach that analyzes all these relationships is vital to understanding the association between military service and domestic violent extremism.[5]

In our research, we found no conclusive evidence that service members are more likely overall to engage in DVE than the general public. Rather, available evidence suggests that service members have participated in acts of violent extremism at a level that is somewhat proportional to their portion of the population. According to the Pew Research Center, just under 10% of the United States adult population has military experience.[6] Meanwhile, the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START) calculates that 11.4% of violent extremism is committed by service members. After controlling for relevant variables between the two populations, it seems that military service alone is not associated with increased engagement in violent extremism. Nonetheless, even if service members do not

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[2] For more information on the confidence in the military as an institution, including percentages for levels of trust below a great deal, see: Gallup "Confidence in Institutions" https://news.gallup.com/poll/1597/confidence-institutions.aspx Table 2. (last visited Jul. 24, 2022)

[3] The decline in military support over the last two years demonstrates that 8% of the polled population has dropped below a great deal of trust over the last two years. Ibid.

[4] For a complete picture of all non-governmental institutions, including those with the most trust which are small business at 68% and science which is tied with the military at 64%, Ibid. Tables 1-18.

[5] Throughout the paper, the term service member should not be interpreted to include those who are serving in the uniformed services that are not also considered armed forces, for example, the Commissioned Corps National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration or the Commissioned Corps of the Public Health Service.

[6] Pew Research "The changing face of America's veteran population" https://www.pewresearch.org/fact-tank/2021/04/05/the-changing-face-of-americas-veteran-population/ (last visited Jul. 25 2022) They have also noted a massive decline in living American veterans, which is currently about 7% and is down from 18% of the U.S. adult population in 1980.

engage in DVE at rates higher than the general population, there are several reasons why the current rate of participation by service members may be specifically concerning.

The primary cause for concern is that the rate of participation in DVE by those with military experience is increasing. In recent research by START, the increase in "the number of individuals with military service backgrounds engaging in extremist crime over the past decade has quadrupled compared with past decades."[7] While half of that increase is a direct result of the January 6, 2021 events at the United States Capitol Building, even if these events are removed from the data, the concerning trend of violent extremism committed by those with military experience has still doubled this last decade. Even though veterans– who no longer represent the military in an official capacity– account for approximately 84% of service member involvement in DVE,[8] their actions could nonetheless erode the trust that the American public has in the military as an institution. This could lead to a variety of negative consequences, such as a continued decrease in the rate of recruitment of new service members.

Many additional concerns may stem from the participation of those with military experience in DVE. For example, service members may be more effective at carrying out violent extremist activity given their extensive military training and combat experience that they have gained while serving. Moreover, service members committing ideologically-motivated acts of violence could generate a public perception of the military as tolerating such behavior, damaging the political neutrality that the U.S. military branches must retain to be effective.

1. <u>Potential Vulnerabilities</u>

This section outlines vulnerabilities to violent extremism which may be especially salient in the military context — that is, risk factors that, when considered with respect to the particularities of military service, might be more prevalent among service members than among non-service members. As a cautionary note, we stress that the potential overrepresentation of certain risk factors within military populations does not imply that service members are more likely *overall* to engage in violent extremism than non-service members.

Before moving forward, we also note that existing research proposes myriad risk factors which will not receive detailed discussion in this section; these factors may also apply to service members to the extent that they apply to any individual, but it remains unclear whether such factors are overrepresented in military

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[7] Michael A Jensen, Elizabeth Yates & Sheehan Kane, Radicalization in the Ranks: An Assessment of the Scope and Nature of Criminal Extremism in the United States Military (2022), https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/Final%20Report%20for%20SAF%20CDM.pdf (last visited Jul 24, 2022).

[8] Braniff, William, "Helping Veterans Thrive: The Importance of Peer Support in Preventing Domestic Violent Extremism." START, Mar. 2022 https://www.start.umd.edu/pubs/HHRG-117-VR00-Wstate-BraniffW-20220331-U1.pdf

populations. These generally-applicable risk factors include, for example: exposure to misinformation/propaganda,[9] a tendency to engage in conspiratorial thinking,[10] and others.

With these noted qualifications, this section discusses potential military-oriented vulnerabilities in four parts. The first three parts follow a temporal sequence, according to the moment in a service member's life at which a particular risk factor first arises; the final part focuses exclusively on DoD policy, given the potentially outsized impact of DoD practices on service members' life trajectories. As such, the four parts include:

1) *Pre-enlistment risk factors —* aspects of pre-enlistment life which may expose service members to heightened risk of violent extremism

2) *Broad service-related risk factors —* the potential causal ties between military service itself and extremist activity, considered in light of general social/psychological theories of violent extremism

3) *Long-term service-related risk factors —* service-related vulnerabilities which take effect primarily in years following separation from the military

4) *DoD-specific risk factors —* vulnerabilities to violent extremism generated by the adverse consequences of particular DoD policies and practices.

When used in this section, "violent extremism" refers to violence inspired by a particular system of beliefs, whether political, religious, or otherwise.[11] In some cases, the belief system plays an integral role in motivating an individual to engage in violence[12]; in others, an individual may bear a more nominal

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[9] See, for example: Piazza (2020), "Fake news: the effects of social media disinformation on domestic terrorism," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/17467586.2021.1895263 (significant positive association between disinformation and domestic terrorism at the country level); von Behr et al (2013). "Radicalization in the Digital Era: The Use of the Internet in 15 Cases of Terrorism and Extremism," https://www.rand.org/content/dam/rand/pubs/research_reports/RR400/RR453/RAND_RR453.pdf: 22-30 (case study method).

[10] See, for example: Bartlett and Miller (2010). "The Power of Unreason: Conspiracy Theories, Extremism, and Counterterrorism," https://www.researchgate.net/publication/265309723_the_power_of_unreason_conspiracy_theories_extremism_and_counter-terrorism; Rottweiler and Gill (2010). "Conspiracy Beliefs and Violent Extremist Intentions: The Contingent Effects of Self-Efficacy, Self-Control and Law-Related Morality," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2020.1803288 (significant positive association between conspiratorial thinking and "violent extremist intentions," contingent upon additional individual traits); Imhoff et al (2021). "Resolving the Puzzle of Conspiracy Worldview and Political Activism: Belief in Secret Plots Decreases Normative but Increases Nonnormative Political Engagement, https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/1948550619896491 (significant positive association between conspiratorial thinking and self-reported willingness to participate in "non-normative political engagement").

[11] For a helpful discussion of defining violent extremism, see: Streigher (2015). "Violent-extremism: An examination of a definitional dilemma," https://ro.ecu.edu.au/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1046&context=asi.

[12] See, for example: Rip et al "Passion for a Cause, Passion for a Creed: On Ideological Passion, Identity Threat, and Extremism," Wiley Jul. 2011 https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/j.1467-6494.2011.00743.x ; Meleagrou-Hitchens et al "Antisemitism as an Underlying Precursor to Violent Extremism in American Far-Right and Islamist Contexts," 2020 https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/Antisemitism%20as%20an%20Underlying%20Precursor%20to%20Violent%20Extremism%20in%20American%20Far-Right%20and%20Islamist%20Contexts%20Pdf.pdf (case studies).

attachment to the ideology upon which their violence is ostensibly based.[13] [14] Violent extremism consequently includes (but is not limited to) hate crimes, left-wing anarchist violence, and right-wing anti-government violence.[15] As distinct from common definitions of "terrorism," violent extremism need not be motivated by a desire to effect political change or alter government policy.[16]

The term "radicalization," as used here, refers broadly to the process by which an individual develops a disposition towards violent extremism. This process often involves a gradually increasing attachment to a particular ideology; however, as used here, "radicalization" also entails the various social and psychological influences (not necessarily related to a specific ideology) which contribute to an individual's readiness to engage in violence.[17] Violent extremism and radicalization are related but conceptually distinct.[18] Some individuals may engage in violent extremism without experiencing any substantial process of radicalization[19]; alternatively, some may radicalize without ultimately engaging in violent extremism.[20]

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[13] See, for example: Hemmingsen and Castro "The Trouble with Counter-Narratives," 2017 https://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/784884/DIIS_RP_2017_1.pdf: 19-22 ; Crone, M "Radicalization Revisited: Violence, Politics, and the Skills of the Body," International Affairs Mar. 2016 https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/ia/inta92-3-05-crone.pdf: 597-600 ; Khalil, J (2014). "Radical Beliefs and Violent Actions Are Not Synonymous: How to Place the Key Disjuncture Between Attitudes and Behaviors at the Heart of Our Research into Political Violence," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2014.862902 (especially p. 199-200, 206-7) ; Pascual et al (2008). "Radicalisation Processes Leading to Acts of Terrorism. A concise Report prepared by the European Commission's Expert Group on Violent Radicalisation," https://www.researchgate.net/publication/294430062_Radicalisation_Processes_Leading_to_Acts_of_Terrorism_A_concise_Report_prepared_by_the_European_Commission's_Expert_Group_on_Violent_Radicalisation: 14-15.

[14] For helpful, broader discussions of ideology's role in violent extremism, see: Holbrook and Horgan (2019). "Terrorism and Ideology: Cracking the Nut," https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2019/issue-6/01-holbrook-and-horgan.pdf ; Guhl (2018). "Why beliefs always matter, but rarely help us predict jihadist violence. The role of cognitive extremism as a precursor for violent extremism," https://journals.sfu.ca/jd/index.php/jd/article/view/139.

[15] This conception of violent extremism is consistent with categories of "domestic terrorism" threats used in United States Congressional research. See: Bjelopera (2017). "Domestic Terrorism: An Overview," https://www.americanvoiceforfreedom.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/domestic-terrorism.pdf: 10-35.

[16] See, for example: "Definition of Terrorism by Country in OECD Countries" (undated), https://www.oecd.org/daf/fin/insurance/TerrorismDefinition-Table.pdf. More broadly, the definition of "terrorism" is widely disputed. For a brief perspective on this lack of consensus, see: Schmid et al (2021). "Terrorism Studies," https://www.jstor.org/stable/10.2307/27030887: 142-5.

[17] For discussions of these varying ideological, social, and political influences, see (for example): Schuurman and Taylor (2018). "Reconsidering Radicalization: Fanaticism and the Link Between Ideas and Violence," https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2018/01-reconsidering-radicalization---fanaticism-and-the-link-between-ideas-and.pdf ; della Porta (2018). "Radicalization: A Relational Perspective," https://www.annualreviews.org/doi/10.1146/annurev-polisci-042716-102314.

[18] See, for example: Borum (2011). "Radicalization into violent extremism I: A review of social science theories," https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1139&context=jss: 9-10 ; United Nations Office on Drugs and Crime (2018). "'Radicalization' and 'Violent Extremism'," https://www.unodc.org/e4j/zh/terrorism/module-2/key-issues/radicalization-violent-extremism.html.

[19] *Supra*, Note 13.

[20] See, for example: Bartlett and Miller (2011). "The Edge of Violence: Towards Telling the Difference Between Violent and Non-Violent Radicalization," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09546553.2011.594923 ; Knight et al (2019). "Comparing the Different Behavioral Outcomes of Extremism: A Comparison of Violent and Non-Violent Extremists, Acting Alone or as Part of a Group," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2019.1680192 ; Davies et al (2022). "They're Not All the Same: A Longitudinal Comparison of Violent and Non-Violent Right-Wing Extremist Identities Online," in *Right-Wing Extremism in Canada and the United States*, ed. Barbara Perry, Jeff Gruenewald, and Ryan Scrivens, https://link.springer.com/content/pdf/10.1007/978-3-030-99804-2.pdf: 255-278.

1.1. Pre-Enlistment Risk Factors

For some service members, the path toward violent extremism may begin at a young age. Although scholarly evidence is mixed regarding causal ties between trauma and violent extremism,[21] some research suggests that certain adverse childhood experiences (ACEs) — e.g., parental abuse, parental incarceration, exposure to household drug use— may be positively associated with future participation in violent extremist activity.[22] Service members endure ACEs at a greater rate than the general population,[23] potentially because some individuals enlist specifically to avoid hostile childhood environments.[24] This in turn suggests that service members are disproportionately exposed to early-life risk factors. ACEs may function as a direct causal mechanism for violent extremism by altering a victim's psychology towards thought patterns conducive to violence — for example, youths may cope with ACEs through violence to "prevent feelings of inadequacy and unworthiness,"[25] establishing a psychological "short fuse"[26] which persists later in life.[27] ACEs may also serve as indirect causal mechanisms, by increasing the risk of downstream adverse social outcomes (e.g., unemployment, mental illness) also positively associated with violent extremism in certain populations.[28]

More generally, given the American military's status as a volunteer force, *self-selection* may yield an overrepresentation of certain risk factors within the servicemember population — that is, the type of individual who elects to volunteer for service may be more likely to express certain risk factors for violent extremism than the average individual. As implied above, self-selection effects may explain the overrepresentation of ACEs within the military. Other self-selection effects may pertain to the use of violence. For example, it is possible that those who volunteer for military service may already possess an

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[21] For a helpful review of this evidence, see Lewis and Marsden (2021). "Trauma, Adversity, and Violent Extremism," https://crestresearch.ac.uk/resources/trauma-adversity-and-violent-extremism/: 11-17.

[22] See, for example, Wolfowicz et al (2021). "Cognitive and Behavioral Radicalization: A Systematic Review of the Putative Risk and Protective Factors," https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/cl2.1174: 3 (small but statistically significant positive effect size when examining the relationship between "parental abuse"and radical attitudes/behaviors). See also, Windisch et al (2020). "Measuring the Extent and Nature of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) among Former White Supremacists, Terrorism and Political Violence," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09546553.2020.1767604 ; Simi et al (2016): "Narratives of Childhood Adversity and Adolescent Misconduct as Precursors to Violent Extremism: A Life-Course Criminological Approach," https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0022427815627312.

[23] Blosnich et al (2014). "Disparities in Adverse Childhood Experiences Among Individuals With a History of Military Service," https://jamanetwork.com/journals/jamapsychiatry/fullarticle/1890091.

[24] Ibid, page 1042.

[25] Windisch et al (2020). "Measuring the Extent and Nature of Adverse Childhood Experiences (ACE) among Former White Supremacists, Terrorism and Political Violence," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/09546553.2020.1767604: 13.

[26] Ibid.

[27] Ibid.

[28] For research linking ACEs to future mental illness within servicemember populations, see: Cabrera et al (2007). "Childhood Adversity and Combat as Predictors of Depression and Post-Traumatic Stress in Deployed Troops, https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0749379707002358 ; LeardMann et al (2010). "Do adverse childhood experiences increase the risk of postdeployment posttraumatic stress disorder in US Marines," https://bmcpublichealth.biomedcentral.com/articles/10.1186/1471-2458-10-437. For research tying ACEs to unemployment, see (for example): Liu et al (2013). "Relationship between adverse childhood experiences and unemployment among adults from five US states," https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s00127-012-0554-1 ; Metzler et al (2017). "Adverse childhood experiences and life opportunities: Shifting the narrative," https://www.sciencedirect.com/science/article/pii/S0190740916303449. For an example of a study linking mental illness and unemployment to violent extremism, see: LaFree et al (2018). "Correlates of Violent Political Extremism in the United States," https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1745-9125.12169: 233, 248-55. For more on potential links between mental illness and violent extremism, see notes 59-60. For more on potential links between unemployment and violent extremism, see notes 91, 95.

enhanced willingness to engage in violence, as compared to the general population; depending upon their reasons for enlistment, some volunteers may also already (at the time of enlistment) be willing to engage in violence on behalf a particular ideology — e.g., American democratic ideals. Both a willingness to engage in violence and intense passion for a particular ideology correlate positively with violent extremism.[29] As such, it could be the case that the type of individual who volunteers for service is, prior to enlistment, more likely to express these violence-related risk factors, as compared to the general population. However, insofar as military service itself may also influence one's willingness to engage in violence, these violence-related risk factors will be discussed in more detail below.

1.2. Broad Service-Related Risk Factors: Psychological and Social Theories

Military service itself may also causally contribute to future violent extremist activity. Theories relating "moral neutralization" (also termed "moral disengagement") to violent extremism suggest that "support for violent extremism is higher when actors morally disengage from ethical standards that prohibit violence".[30] Indeed, large-N studies of adolescents have demonstrated statistically significant associations between moral neutralization and support for violent extremism.[31] Military service members might morally neutralize violence as means to justify or cope with the demands of combat service, thereby dampening their aversion to violence writ large.[32] This theory is consistent with preliminary research from START, which indicates elevated rates of deployment to combat zones and past combat experience amongst veterans who also engage in violent extremism.[33] Veterans may be especially susceptible to violent extremist's recruitment efforts if they have morally neutralized violence during their service.

Moreover, in the context of the United States military, which relies on voluntary service, this enhanced willingness to engage in violence may be particularly conducive to radicalization insofar as it represents an enhanced willingness to engage in violence *inspired by a particular set of beliefs*. While not all service members enlist and serve with ideological motivations, many are inspired by a desire to defend American values or patriotism more broadly.[34] A servicemember's willingness to risk their life for patriotic beliefs may lay the foundation for a willingness to risk life for beliefs in future violent extremist acts — especially if the extremist ideology overlaps with the same belief systems underpinning military service. Such is the case, for example, with the Oath Keepers, whose stated ideological commitment to defending the Constitution bears obvious ties to patriotic values embodied by the military.[35]

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[29] For research regarding tying violent extremism to one's willingness to engage in violence, see notes 30-2. For research tying violent extremism to ideological passion, see note 67.

[30] Nivette et al (2017). "Developmental Predictors of Violent Extremist Attitudes: A Test of General Strain Theory," https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0022427817699035: 757.

[31] *Ibid*: 756, 772-9. For additional research tying moral neutralization/disengagement to support for violent extremism or political violence, see: Aly et al (2014). "Moral Disengagement and Building Resilience to Violent Extremism: An Education Intervention," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/1057610X.2014.879379.

[32] See e.g., Elizabeth Stubbins Bates, *Towards Effective Military Training in International Humanitarian Law*, 96 International Review of the Red Cross , 806-9 (2014)(summarizing research on moral disengagement in the context of military training).

[33] *Supra*, Jensen et al (2022): 37.

[34] See, for example, Krebs and Ralston (2022): "Patriotism or Paychecks: Who Believes What About Why Soldiers Serve," https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/full/10.1177/0095327X20917166: 27-8.

[35] For background on the Oath Keepers, see: Eric McQueen (2021). "Examining Extremism: The Oath Keepers," Center for Strategic and International Studies," https://www.csis.org/blogs/examining-extremism/examining-extremism-oath-keepers.

Military service may also causally contribute to violent extremism by providing a tight-knit social environment in which individuals with extremist tendencies can connect with like-minded service members, collectively enhancing their propensity for violent extremism. Social science theories often present radicalization as an individual phenomenon, in which the individual experiences a gradual cognitive or ideological restructuring, ultimately resulting in endorsement of ideologically-inspired violence. Some scholars have suggested that these theories underplay the extent to which an individual's social environment reinforces the radicalization process.[36] For example, anthropological study of violent extremists in Europe suggests that previous experience with "extremist milieus" — e.g., a gang, cult, or simply a "loose network of friends of family" who are extremists — may enhance radicalization pathways.[37] These findings mirror multiple empirical analyses of risk factors, which find robust associations between the presence of "deviant peers" or "radical friends" and violent extremist behavior.[38] Like-minded peers may function as ideological or strategic mentors, mutually enhancing each other's understanding of a particular ideology and capacity to engage in political violence inspired by said ideology. The presence of like-minded peers may also increase an individual's assessment of an ideology's social acceptability.[39] In the military, the potential for this social-group-reinforcement of extremist tendencies seems particularly high, given the emphasis placed by the military on creating unit cohesion and cultivating the bonds of brotherhood.[40] Indeed, recent military research demonstrates that the norm of brotherhood has a "fundamental influence on the views and actions of soldiers"[41] and that these influences are especially strong within military subunits (e.g. special forces).[42] While these bonds are usually beneficial, they may have adverse consequences in the context of violent extremism; within this generalized environment of brotherhood, the military may provide an opportunity for active-duty service members with extremist tendencies to find and connect with other extremists, or influence peers lacking such tendencies — peers with whom they may already have unusually strong ties grounded in military fraternity.[43]

In contrast to theories which center the importance of ideology as a catalyst for future violence, alternative explanations focus on violence itself to understand military extremism. As many researchers have suggested, dramatic shifts in ideology or psychology are not a necessary condition for engaging in violent extremism.[44] Some individuals, for a variety of reasons, may have a preexisting proclivity for or fascination with violence, and subsequently attach themselves to ideologically-oriented violent extremist

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[36] See, for example: Borum, R. (2011). "Radicalization into Violent Extremism I: A Review of the Social Science Theories," https://digitalcommons.usf.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1139&context=jss (especially p. 14-31). Also see note 17.

[37] Crone, M (2016). "Radicalization Revisited: Violence, Politics, and the Skills of the Body," https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/ia/inta92-3-05-crone.pdf: 597-600.

[38] *Supra*, Wolfowicz et al (2020): 3 ; Pritchett and Moeller (2021). "Can social bonds and social learning theories help explain radical violent extremism," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/2578983X.2021.1889133: 93.

[39] See, Andrew M. Bell, Military Culture and Restraint toward Civilians in War: Examining the Ugandan Civil Wars, 25 Security Studies, 495-6 (2016). (stressing that the adoption of military norms by new servicemembers is strongly influenced by whether these norms' are accepted by their more experienced peers).

[40] *See e.g.,* Martin L Cook, *Reflections on The Relationship Between Law and Ethics*, 40 Adelaide Law Review 485, 495 (2019)

[41] FIONA TERRY & BRIAN MCQUINN, The Roots of Restraint in War, 30 (2018). See also, Bell, *supra* Note 39.

[42] Id.

[43] This social-group theory is also supported by preliminary research from START, which indicates that active-duty service members who engage in violent extremism have high rates of co-radicalization and co-offending. See Jensen et al (2022): 29.

[44] See, for example: Khalil, J (2014). "Radical Beliefs and Violent Actions Are Not Synonymous: How to Place the Key Disjuncture Between Attitudes and Behaviors at the Heart of Our Research into Political Violence," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/1057610X.2014.862902 (especially p. 199-200, 206-7); Hemmingsen and Castro (2017). "The Trouble with Counter-Narratives," https://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/784884/DIIS_RP_2017_1.pdf: 19-22.

groups as a convenient channel or conduit for said violence.[45] Given that the United States military is a self-selected volunteer population, it could be the case that some who choose to join the military do so (at least in part) in pursuit of violence, and merely transfer their pursuit of violence to an extremist group upon concluding their military service. Participation in the military may offer these individuals the opportunity to develop their skills for employing violence, elevating the future danger they may pose as violent extremists. This method of understanding violent extremism – centering the attraction of violent acts themselves, rather than underlying ideological or political grievances – aligns with empirical research linking heightened "sensation seeking" (a "desire for novel and stimulating experiences") to increased support for political violence.[46]

1.3. Long-Term Service-Related Risk Factors: Separation and Lasting Effects

Military service may causally contribute to violent extremism not only through the service itself, but also the necessity of discharge upon the conclusion of service. Many theories of radicalization posit that the path towards extremism begins with some form of personal destabilization or loss — a loss of purpose, significance, or ideological inspiration.[47] Radicalization may follow as an individual, seeking desperately to fill this human need for purpose, attaches themselves to a cause with such intensity that they engage in violence in support of said cause.[48] Empirical research supports robust associations between this "loss of significance" phenomenon and the likelihood of committing ideologically-motivated violent crime.[49] Applied to the military, veterans may experience a substantial loss of significance upon discharge.[50] On active duty, service members may easily define themselves by the goal of promoting national security, defending American values, or at minimum achieving the reasonably clear objectives entailed by particular military tasks. Upon discharge, however, service members lose this purpose, and may seek to fill the gap with an ideologically-related purpose — e.g., those endorsed by certain DVE groups. As such, the process of discharge may place veterans at special risk for violent extremism. Veterans may experience a juncture in which a purpose — one which they already are accustomed to defending with violence — is stripped from them. DVE groups consequently constitute a plausible candidate for veterans to regain their human

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[45] Hemmingsen and Castro (2017). "The Trouble with Counter-Narratives," https://pure.diis.dk/ws/files/784884/DIIS_RP_2017_1.pdf: 19-22; Crone, M "Radicalization Revisited: Violence, Politics, and the Skills of the Body," International Affairs Mar. 2016 https://www.chathamhouse.org/sites/default/files/publications/ia/inta92-3-05-crone.pdf: 597-600.

[46] For example: Schumpe et al (2020). "The Role of Sensation Seeking in Political Violence: An Extension of the Significance Quest Theory," https://www.apa.org/pubs/journals/releases/psp-pspp0000223.pdf.

[47] For a helpful, brief summary of these theories, see Carthy et al (2020). "Counter-narratives for the prevention of violent radicalisation: A systematic review of targeted interventions," https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1002/cl2.1106: 4. For more specific theories, see, for example: Gill, P (2007). "A Multi-Dimensional Approach to Suicide Bombing," https://www.ijcv.org/index.php/ijcv/article/view/2750/2511: 151-3 ; Agnew, R (2010). "A General Strain Theory of Terrorism," https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/1362480609350163.

[48] Kruglanski et al (2019). "Cognitive Mechanisms in Violent Extremism," https://reader.elsevier.com/reader/sd/pii/S0010027718303032?token=89BF7406B78C8374F9ECCBA73B63101B31074D0152B771FECEFE61B458593CDD0C27163AC4A13155FD47813489E2B8A0&originRegion=us-east-1&originCreation=20220706202454: 10-13.

[49] Jasko et al (2016). "Quest for Significance and Violent Extremism: The Case of Domestic Radicalization," https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1111/pops.12376.

[50] House Committee on Veterans' Affairs (2021). *Report on Domestic Violent Extremist Groups and the Recruitment of Veterans*, https://veterans.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Extremism%20Report.pdf: 14.

need for significance, especially if the groups bear ideological proximity to values embodied by military service.

Moreover, discharge not only deprives service members of an ideologically-oriented purpose afforded by military service, but also the ideologically-oriented *community* represented by the military. A collection of theoretical and empirical research suggests that some individuals may join violent extremist organizations to (at least in part) attain a sense of belonging[51]; this radicalization path seems especially plausible in the context of veterans who join DVE groups with ideological orientations proximal to the military. A discharged service member leaves a community structure which may be particularly robust, in that it places special emphasis on brotherhood, on close-knit ties between service members. Consequently, veterans may experience especially severe feelings of community-loss following separation, generating strong incentives to regain the lost community through participation in military-like organizations.[52] Many American militia groups (e.g. Oath Keepers) cohere around norms of masculinity, brotherhood, and the use of violence to protect patriotic ideals; these militia groups also utilize a hierarchical rank system parallel to that of the military and engage in military-style training exercises.[53] Given these similarities between militia groups and the military itself, veterans might turn to militias to regain not only a sense of community in general, but the particular *type* of community that they lost through separation.[54] Discharge thus may function as a risk factor for service members by inducing both a loss of purpose and loss of community.

Relatedly, veterans may face heightened risk of post-discharge radicalization due to targeted recruitment efforts from DVE organizations. As noted above, it is unclear whether veterans are more susceptible than the general population to broadly-applied recruitment tactics (e.g., the spread of online misinformation). However, veterans' risk for radicalization may uniquely increase if DVE organizations make special efforts to recruit from the veteran population. Indeed, certain anti-government or militia groups purposefully seek to increase veteran membership through targeted recruitment, both because a) veteran members may bolster a group's credibility and b) veteran members often possess enhanced leadership capabilities and experience engaging in organized violence.[55] These targeted recruitment efforts may render veterans especially vulnerable to radicalization either simply by increasing their exposure to extremist content,[56] or through persuasion via tailored messaging which may be especially convincing to

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[51] See, for example: Borum (2004). *Psychology of Terrorism*, https://www.ojp.gov/pdffiles1/nij/grants/208552.pdf: 25-6 ; Lyons-Padilla et al (2015). "Belonging nowhere: Marginalization & radicalization risk among Muslim immigrants," https://behavioralpolicy.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/05/BSP_vol1is2_-Lyons-Padilla.pdf ; Speckhard et al (2022). "White Supremacists Speak: Recruitment, Radicalization & Experiences of Engaging and Disengaging from Hate Groups," https://www.icsve.org/white-supremacists-speak-recruitment-radicalization-experiences-of-engaging-and-disengaging-from-hate-groups-2/: 2, 8-10, 22-4.

[52] House Committee on Veterans' Affairs (2021). *Report on Domestic Violent Extremist Groups and the Recruitment of Veterans*, https://veterans.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Extremism%20Report.pdf: 12-14.

[53] Goldwasser (2021). "Extremism Among Active-Duty Military and Veterans Remains a Clear and Present Danger," https://www.splcenter.org/hatewatch/2021/10/12/extremism-among-active-duty-military-and-veterans-remains-clear-and-present-danger.

[54] *Supra*, *Report on Domestic Violent Extremist Groups and the Recruitment of Veterans*, https://veterans.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Extremism%20Report.pdf: 12-14.

[55] *Supra,* Goldwasser (2021) ; *supra, Report on Domestic Violent Extremist Groups and the Recruitment of Veterans*, https://veterans.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Extremism%20Report.pdf: 10-11.

[56] For research linking exposure to extreme media and violent extremism sympathies/behaviors, see (for example): Frissen et al (2019). "On the Cumulative Role of Different Types of Media in the Radicalization Puzzle," https://www.researchgate.net/publication/331284020_On_the_Cumulative_Role_of_Different_Types_of_Media_in_the_Radicalization_Puzzle ; Pauwels et al (2016). "Differential Online Exposure to Extremist Content and Political Violence: Testing the Relative Strength of Social Learning and Competing Perspectives," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2013.876414.

the veteran audience — e.g., through appeals to the same values of "brotherhood, courageous heroism, and protection of the oath of the Constitution" that may have prompted some veterans to initially join the military.[57]

More particular cognitive theories may also suggest a link between the lasting psychological consequences of military service and violent extremism. In particular, empirical research documents a relationship between military service and post-traumatic stress disorder (PTSD), especially for male veterans with combat experience.[58] It is important to emphasize, here, that the empirical evidence connecting mental illness to violent extremism is quite ambiguous; statistical significance, effect sizes, and even the direction of the effect vary substantially across different populations, social contexts, and the psychological condition in question.[59] However, multiple studies do identify heightened levels of PTSD symptoms amongst individuals with violent extremist histories or sympathies, as compared to non-extremist populations.[60] Moreover, with respect to the relevant population and context of this discussion, preliminary research suggests elevated rates of PTSD amongst American veteran extremists with combat experience, as compared to non-extremist veterans.[61] Psychological theories of extremist activity offer a potential explanation for this tentative link between PTSD and violent extremism — symptoms of PTSD may reduce "cognitive flexibility,"[62] a psychological measure identified as a protective factor against violent extremism.[63] Cognitive flexibility demarcates an individual's capacity to alternate between distinct patterns of thought or adapt their analytical processes to different contexts;[64] consequently, cognitive flexibility might a) inversely correlate with rigid essentialized thinking/outgroup bias[65] and b) diminish the

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[57] *Supra*, *Report on Domestic Violent Extremist Groups and the Recruitment of Veterans*, https://veterans.house.gov/imo/media/doc/Extremism%20Report.pdf: 12.

[58] See, for example: Lehavot et al (2018). "Post-traumatic Stress Disorder by Gender and Veteran Status," https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7217324/pdf/nihms-1574106.pdf: 5-7. 14; Kintzle et al (2018). "PTSD in U.S. Veterans: The Role of Social Connectedness, Combat Experience and Discharge," https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6164108/; Friedman et al (1994). "Post-traumatic stress disorder in the military veteran," https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/7937358/.

[59] For literature reviews of the conflicting empirical evidence regarding mental illness, see: Gill et al (2021). "Systematic Review of Mental Health Problems and Violent Extremism," https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10111558/3/Gill_20_06_25%20Resub_nonanon.pdf ; Misiak et al (2019). "A systematic review on the relationship between mental health, radicalization and mass violence," https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/european-psychiatry/article/systematic-review-on-the-relationship-between-mental-health-radicalization-and-mass-violence/A9E1E9F4409058D5D55ADA5568430AB7.

[60] Bhui et al (2020). "Extremism and common mental illness: cross-sectional community survey of White British and Pakistani men and women living in England," https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC7525107/; Weenink (2019). "Adversity, Criminality, and Mental Health Problems in Jihadis in Dutch Police Files," https://www.universiteitleiden.nl/binaries/content/assets/customsites/perspectives-on-terrorism/2019/issue-5/9--weenink.pdf: 136.

[61] *Supra*, Jensen et al (2022): 37.

[62] See, for example: Daneshvar et al (2022). "Self-compassion and cognitive flexibility in trauma-exposed individuals with and without PTSD," https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s12144-020-00732-1 (statistically significant difference in cognitive flexibility between "trauma-exposed individuals with and without PTSD"); Walter et al (2010). "More than symptom reduction: Changes in executive function over the course of PTSD treatment," https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/abs/10.1002/jts.20506.

[63] See, for example: Zmigrod et al (2019). "Cognitive Inflexibility Predicts Extremist Attitudes," https://www.frontiersin.org/articles/10.3389/fpsyg.2019.00989/full ; Schumann et al (2021). "Does cognitive inflexibility predict violent extremist behavior intentions? A registered direct replication report of Zmigrod et al., 2019," https://bpspsychub.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1111/lcrp.12201.

[64] Dajani and Uddin (2015). "Demystifying cognitive flexibility: Implications for clinical and developmental neuroscience," https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC5414037/: 571.

[65] For studies demonstrating a significant inverse association between cognitive flexibility and race essentialism, see: Pauker et al (2017). "The Role of Diversity Exposure in Whites' Reduction in Race Essentialism Over Time," https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1948550617731496: 948 ; Leffers (2021). "Downstream Consequences of Racial

tendency to unyieldingly attach oneself to an ideological position,[66] both of which may be positively related to extremism.[67]   Military service may thus expose veterans to enhanced risk of violent extremism by inducing a particular psychological condition — PTSD — associated with downstream cognitive changes which in turn contribute to extremist activity. Moreover, psychological research on veteran populations indicates an inverse association between "social connectedness" and the severity of veterans' PTSD symptoms.[68] Consequently, some veterans may join DVE groups not only for a sense of community per se (as discussed above), but also as an effort to cope (perhaps subconsciously) with PTSD. Discharge-induced loss of community thus may function both as a risk factor in itself, and as an indirect risk factor by exacerbating PTSD symptoms that independently constitute risk factors.

1.4. DoD-Specific Risk Factors: Policies and Practices

In light of these broader theoretically-informed considerations, several more particular difficulties of active-duty life – difficulties often generated by existing DoD procedures – may function as risk factors for DVE within the military. Servicemembers often lack substantial input into their initial base assignments, which commonly station recruits far from pre-existing support systems, family, and friends; as their careers proceed, service members transfer frequently between bases, often without ample time to establish new support systems within the base community. On some military bases, sexual assault, drug use, and other antisocial behavior proliferate without sufficient recourse or treatment. In combat, service members may witness gruesome or gratuitous violence, even in pursuit of justifiable objectives. Taken together, these troubling conditions could themselves cause or exacerbate mental health difficulties amongst service members, thereby causing or reinforcing risk factors discussed above.

Moreover, if service members perceive military leadership (or the federal government) as responsible for their active-duty deprivation, they may begin to lose trust in the military as an institution, a process which itself augments radicalization risks. In isolation, the quality-of-life concerns discussed above may not induce service members to abandon their broader faith in the armed forces as an institution. However, the potential for lost trust seems more plausible when considering these hardships in conjunction with dynamics which strike more directly at the leadership-soldier relationship or the candor of

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Essentialism: A Two-dimensional Approach," https://repository.library.northeastern.edu/files/neu:bz613b289/fulltext.pdf (PhD Dissertation): 78. For studies demonstrating a significant inverse association between cognitive flexibility and bias, see: Klauer et al (2010). "Understanding the role of executive control in the Implicit Association Test: Why flexible people have small IAT effects," https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1080/17470210903076826: 616-7 ; Ito et al (2015). "Toward a Comprehensive Understanding of Executive Cognitive Function in Implicit Racial Bias," https://www.researchgate.net/publication/271333664_Toward_a_Comprehensive_Understanding_of_Executive_Cognitive_Function_in_Implicit_Racial_Bias/link/58ff5f37aca2725bd71e5106/download: 201-2 (significant inverse association between cognitive flexibility and negative racial attitudes).

[66] *Supra*, Zmigrod et al (2019): 2.

[67] For evidence tying group bias to violent extremism, see: Naderer et al (2022). "An Online World of Bias. The Mediating Role of Cognitive Biases on Extremist Attitudes," https://www.researchgate.net/publication/358799185_An_Online_World_of_Bias_The_Mediating_Role_of_Cognitive_Biases_on_Extremist_Attitudes: 14, 16 (significant positive association between outgroup bias and extremist attitudes) ; Jensen et al (2018). "Radicalization to Violence: A Pathway Approach to Studying Extremism," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2018.1442330: 1080-3. For evidence tying rigid ideological attachments to violent extremism, see research on "obsessive passion": Bélanger et al (2020). "Supporting political violence: The role of ideological passion and social network," https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/1368430220933954.

[68] Kintzle et al (2018). "PTSD in U.S. Veterans: The Role of Social Connectedness, Combat Experience and Discharge," https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6164108/.

institutionalized military procedures. For example, inquiries from the Government Accountability Office have documented over 1,000 substantiated policy violations by military recruiters within a two-year period (2004-5), including more than 100 cases of coercion and false promises made to prospective enlistees.[69] Further investigative reporting suggests that these false promises included (for example) lying to prospective recruits regarding their probability of serving in combat; coercive tactics included threats of imprisonment made to adolescents hoping to withdraw from provisional enlistment agreements.[70] Servicemembers affected by these recruitment practices could plausibly lose substantial trust in the military as an institution, given the dishonesty and intimidation channeled through an institutionalized military recruitment process. Moreover, in times of conflict, junior service members may (correctly or incorrectly) perceive certain orders as ethically unsound, especially when they lack knowledge of the broader strategic context or intelligence justifying the order; this too could yield suspicion or distrust of military leadership. Perhaps most directly (yet also anecdotally), throughout interviews of soldiers stationed at Fort Hood, interviewees consistently emphasized their "distrust" of military leadership to maintain confidentiality and promptly administer justice for criminal activity on base.[71] These phenomena not only breed discontentment, but could cast broader doubt on the military's commitment to achieving its objectives in a legitimate, ethical manner. In tandem with various quality-of-life concerns endured by service members, these more particular trust-eroding experiences could plausibly lead some to lose faith in the military as an institution.

A prominent strand of literature on violent extremism draws links between reduced trust in traditional institutions and one's propensity for violent extremism.[72] An individual who loses trust in traditional institutions may "seek solace in nontraditional, insalubrious, or radical alternatives," perceiving that only "challenging convention" can viably promote their goals or values.[73] For example, right-wing vigilante extremists – often motivated by nativist or anti-immigrant sentiments – may pursue violence upon losing trust in local law enforcement to adequately manage perceived security threats[74]; alternatively, politically-aspirant individuals may resort to violence upon losing faith in traditional channels of political participation to represent their views.[75]

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[69] Government Accountability Office (2006). *DOD and Services Need Better Data to Enhance Visibility over Recruiter Irregularities*, https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-06-846.pdf: 21, 30-2.

[70] American Civil Liberties Union. *Soldiers of Misfortune: Abusive U.S. Military Recruitment and Failure to Protect Child Soldiers*, https://www.aclu.org/sites/default/files/field_document/2008.05_soldiers_of_misfortune_report.pdf: 18-23.

[71] *Report of the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee* (2020), https://www.army.mil/e2/downloads/rv7/forthoodreview/2020-12-03_FHIRC_report_redacted.pdf: 37, 41-3, 108, 115.

[72] See, for example: Cherney and Murphy (2019). "Support for Terrorism: The Role of Beliefs in Jihad and Institutional Responses to Terrorism," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/09546553.2017.1313735?journalCode=ftpv20: 1053-4 ; Mogghadam, F (2005). "The Staircase to Terrorism," https://psycnet.apa.org/fulltext/2005-01817-002.pdf: 163-4. For statistical analyses, see Finkel et al (2020). "Community Violence and Support for Violent Extremism: Evidence From the Sahel," http://www.stevenfinkel.com/papers/communityviolenceandsupport.pdf: 10-14 ; *supra* Wolfowicz et al (2021): 31.

[73] *Supra,* Finkel et al (2020): 3.

[74] See, for example: Laryš (2022). "Far-Right vigilantes and crime: law and order providers or common criminals? the lessons from Greece, Russia, and Ukraine," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/abs/10.1080/14683857.2022.2086666?journalCode=fbss20 ; Mareš and Bjørgo (2020). "Vigilantism Against Migrants and Minorities: Concepts and Goals of Current Research," Ch. 1 in *Vigilantism Against Migrants and Minorities*, https://api.taylorfrancis.com/content/chapters/oa-edit/download?identifierName=doi&identifierValue=10.4324/9780429485619-1&type=chapterpdf.

[75] See, for example: Iqbal et al (2022). "The Relationship between Existential Anxiety, Political Efficacy, Extrinsic Religiosity and Support for Violent Extremism in Indonesia," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1057610X.2022.2034221?needAccess=true: 5-6 (significant inverse association between perceived political efficacy and individual-level support for violent extremism) ; Hansen et al (2020). "Ethnic political exclusion and terrorism: Analyzing the local conditions for violence,"

When applying this research to the American military, caution is necessary. It is unclear whether disillusionment with military leadership is likely to make service members believe that they have lost the franchise and must use violence to promote their political ideals. However, plausible connections between institutional trust and violent extremism may exist in the American military context. Perhaps analogously to right-wing vigilantes taking law enforcement into their own hands when they perceive the institution in question to have neglected its duty, service members who lose trust in the military as an institution may seek to promote the military's purported values through non-military organizations if they believe the military itself has failed to do so. Participation in the Oath Keepers, for example, could represent an impulse to "take into one's own hands" the duties of the military – i.e., using force to uphold the Constitution, as both the military and the Oath Keepers claim to do. More simply, perhaps service members who lose trust in the federal government on account of adverse service experiences seek to enact violence against the very institution which wronged them, in the form of anti-*government* violence — the most common motivation for service members who engage in violent extremism.[76] For these reasons, adverse service experiences may function as risk factors for violent extremism not merely by reducing service members' mental health or general well-being, but also by diminishing their trust in the military and government as institutions.

Finally, the particularities of military recruitment and separation practices may partially explain ties between service members and DVE. With respect to recruitment, the military has historically diminished its enlistment standards during periods of high troop demand or low volunteerism. Lessened standards have permitted (for example) individuals convicted of violent felonies to enlist through increased dissemination of "moral waivers".[77] For many of the reasons described above, these practices may causally contribute to radicalization by providing those with violent tendencies access to further training in violence or networks of violent peers. Alternatively, empirical analyses demonstrate strong ties between prior criminal activity and violent extremist behavior,[78] suggesting that recruitment practices which permit felons may simply select individuals into the military who would have been at high risk for violent extremism irrespective of military service. Moving forward, challenges associated with diminished recruitment standards may only increase — all branches of the armed forces currently face record-low recruitment rates.[79] As standards loosen in response, the military will likely admit increasing numbers of individuals who express risk factors for violent extremism. Even if service itself does not causally contribute to future violent extremism, the admission of individuals who express risk factors increases the likelihood that the military as an institution will increasingly become perceptually associated with DVE.

With respect to separation, the inadequacy of current military policy may also contribute to violent extremism amongst service members. Although recent DoD initiatives suggest an attempt to bolster *preventive* measures against extremism in the ranks (e.g., education for veterans regarding DVE groups'

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https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0738894218782160 (significant positive association between the political exclusion of ethnic group within a geographic region, and levels of domestic terrorism within that region).

[76] *Supra*, Jensen et al (2022): 2.

[77] Alvarez, L (2008). "Recruitment of felons up in U.S. Army and Marine Corps," https://www.nytimes.com/2008/04/22/world/americas/22iht-army.4.12232382.html. For a monograph-length discussion, see: Kennard, M (2012). *Irregular Army: How the US Military Recruited Neo-Nazis, Gang Members, and Criminals to Fight the War on Terror*.

[78] Jensen et al (2020). "The Link Between Prior Criminal Record and Violent Political Extremism in the United States," https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-36639-1_6.

[79] Kube and Boigon (2022). "Every branch of the military is struggling to make its 2022 recruiting goals, officials say," https://www.nbcnews.com/news/military/every-branch-us-military-struggling-meet-2022-recruiting-goals-officia-rcna35078.

recruitment tactics),[80] the DoD's present strategy seems fairly unsophisticated with respect to service members who *already* display extremist tendencies – commanders retain wide authority to determine the appropriate remedy, resulting in "non-uniform, scattershot enforcement" which often involves the blunt tool of separation.[81] [82] A strategy of separation a) makes no attempt to counteract the underlying causes of extremism in the military, and instead merely shifts the problem out of sight, b) imposes greater burdens on local and federal law enforcement who may already lack sufficient resources, and c) may even exacerbate the risk of future violence for many of the reasons outlined above. For example, if an individual perceives their discharge as wrongful government treatment, they may consequently lose additional trust in the government as an institution; non-honorable discharge also correlates with more severe PTSD symptoms.[83] To the extent that "scattershot enforcement" also includes cases of excessive leniency (as opposed to separation), this too seems inadequate – lax responses to extremist activity on the part of military leadership may function as tacit, authoritative approval of such behavior, potentially exacerbating the radicalization process. In total, current DoD recruitment and separation practices do little to reduce the preexisting probability that service members will engage in DVE; if anything, these practices function as risk factors in themselves by reinforcing other potential contributors to violent extremism.

2. <u>Potential Protective Factors</u>

In contrast to the above considerations, various facets of military service may diminish servicemember vulnerability to violent extremism. As the discussion below will delineate, many putative protective factors derive from the same theoretical concerns which suggest vulnerabilities; through the lens of a single theory, one aspect of military service may indicate a heightened risk for violent extremism, while a separate element of service implies protection against the same. This section proceeds in three parts:

1) *Selection-based protection* - the effects of recruitment screening and a self-selected population

2) *Service as a safety net* - the potential role of military service as an outlet for violence and source of purpose/community

3) *Government-backed benefits* - how existing veteran-specific programs may counteract risk factors for violent extremism

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[80] *Report on Countering Extremism Within the Department of Defense* (2021), https://media.defense.gov/2021/Dec/20/2002912573/-1/-1/0/REPORT-ON-COUNTERING-EXTREMIST-ACTIVITY-WITHIN-THE-DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE.PDF: 12-3.

[81] For the quoted language, see: Stafford and LaPorta "Decades of DOD efforts fail to stamp out bias, extremism," AP News Dec. 2021 https://apnews.com/article/business-donald-trump-lloyd-austin-veterans-arrests-aa564fe473dd4c347189bb39ad8a9201 ("Experts interviewed by the AP say there's also ongoing concern over the military commander's ability to enact a wide range of administrative and disciplinary actions -- including administrative separation or appropriate criminal action -- against military personnel who engage in prohibited activities. Commanders essentially have total discretion to determine how to address situations as they arise, which experts say has created non-uniform, scattershot enforcement, with some commanders establishing a no-tolerance approach and others employing weak enforcement of the rules.")

[82] For current DoD procedural guidelines regarding extremism within the ranks, see: https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/132506p.PDF (especially p.12).

[83] *Supra,* Kintzle et al (2018). "PTSD in U.S. Veterans: The Role of Social Connectedness, Combat Experience and Discharge."

2.1. Selection-Based Protection: Screening and Self-Selection

To begin, various *selection*-based phenomena may reduce the incidence of violent extremism risk factors within military populations — i.e., irrespective of any causal effects from service itself, the manner in which the military selects recruits may produce a servicemember population with lower rates of certain risk factors than the general population. First, recruitment screening procedures may function as a protective factor by simply barring individuals who exhibit particular risk factors from service. Despite complications posed by periodically relaxed enlistment standards (noted above), the military generally screens against individuals with severe mental illness and prior criminal history, both of which correlate with violent extremism to some extent. The screen against prospective recruits with criminal history is perhaps particularly notable — multiple empirical analyses have found an especially strong inverse relationship between law abidance and extremist behavior.[84] Law abidance may imply a belief in the legitimacy or normative weight of legal prohibitions, consequently reducing an individual's willingness to violate the law through violent extremism;[85] alternatively, law abidance may simply indicate a fear of legal sanction, which could deter such individuals from engaging in extremist activity. Regardless of one's reasons for obeying the law, a general tendency to do so seems to correlate inversely with violent extremism,[86] and the military's enlistment screening process consequently may function as a protective factor by effectively selecting for law-abiding individuals.

In addition to screening-based selection effects, self-selection may play a role in limiting the connection between military service and DVE — the type of individual who elects to volunteer for service may, for a variety of reasons, be less likely to express certain risk factors for violent extremism than the average individual. For example, service members (at least upon entry into the ranks) may possess greater institutional trust on average than the general population. In survey data, a substantial proportion of active-duty service members cite patriotic motivations for enlistment, expressing a desire to serve their country;[87] this same desire represents the most commonly-selected rationale for *remaining* in the armed forces, in DoD surveys of active-duty Army.[88] These individuals choose to serve their country *through the institutions of government* and reaffirm this choice even after multiple years in the armed forces. This persistent willingness to risk one's life on behalf of a government institution, under the command of a government institution, may reflect heightened overall institutional trust within the servicemember population — the absence of which may causally contribute to violent extremism, as suggested above. As such, the volunteer-based system of military recruitment may, in practice, function as a protective factor against violent

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[84] Clemmow et al (2020). "The Base Rate Study: Developing Base Rates for Risk Factors and Indicators for Engagement in Violent Extremism," https://discovery.ucl.ac.uk/id/eprint/10092863/1/Clemmow_et_al-2020-Journal_of_Forensic_Sciences.pdf: 7 ; *supra*, Wolfowicz et al (2020): 40 (significant negative effect of law abidance on radical behavior) ; Jensen et al (2020). "The Link Between Prior Criminal Record and Violent Political Extremism in the United States," https://link.springer.com/chapter/10.1007/978-3-030-36639-1_6.

[85] See, for example, Bouhana (2019). "The Moral Ecology of Extremism: A Systemic Perspective," https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/834354/Bouhana-The-moral-ecology-of-extremism.pdf: 13 ; Rottweiler et al (2022). "Individual and Environmental Explanations for Violent Extremist Intentions: A German Nationally Representative Survey Study," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/07418825.2020.1869807: 826-7, 838.

[86] *Supra*, Note 84.

[87] Woodruff et al (2006). "Propensity to Serve and Motivation to Enlist among American Combat Soldiers," https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/pdf/10.1177/0095327X05283040: 359.

[88] *Department of the Army Career Engagement Survey: First Annual Report*, 2021, https://talent.army.mil/wp-content/uploads/2021/11/DACES-Annual-Report_JUNE2021.pdf: 10, 28-9.

extremism, in that the average individual who chooses to volunteer retains heightened levels of institutional trust.

2.2. *Service as a Safety Net: Outlet for Violence, Source of Purpose, Sense of Community*

In addition to selection-based effects, military service itself may causally protect service members against violent extremism. Several of the same theoretical frameworks applied above to vulnerabilities conversely imply this protective function. First, if the military indeed attracts individuals with a pre-existing proclivity for violence, service may function as a more legitimate, less socially-destructive outlet for those who otherwise would have exercised this proclivity by engaging in violent extremism. Although combat training (as noted above) may enhance an individual's capacity to engage in future extremist activity, service nonetheless enables individuals to channel violent tendencies towards legally-authorized military objectives, rather than criminal activities. Especially for service members who remain in the armed forces for a protracted period of time, service may occupy violent tendencies for long enough to divert them from future violent extremism; the median age of American violent extremists with service history is 37 years old, potentially implying the existence of a loose age threshold beyond which age-related factors render violent extremism less feasible.[89]

Furthermore, as noted above, certain theoretical analyses of violent extremism place emphasis on the loss of individual purpose as a catalyst for future extremist activity; this same theoretical approach may conversely suggest a protective function of military service. Although many service members likely endure a loss of purpose upon discharge, the same logic would suggest that service members *acquire* purpose through enlistment. In survey data on active-duty soldiers' reasons for enlistment, prominent responses include a desire to serve one's country, the absence of preferable alternatives, and the preceding occurrence of a "crisis" (e.g. unemployment or divorce).[90] All such responses may indicate that many service members choose to enlist (at least in part) to fill a personal void or regain a lost sense of vocation. As such, although military service may occasionally be responsible for the loss of significance which precipitates violent extremism, the armed forces conversely may function as a sort of purpose-based "safety net" against extremist activity, providing purpose to a population of individuals who otherwise may have sought to satisfy their need for significance by resorting to violent extremism. The protection provided by this safety net could be quite extensive in duration; some individuals find life-long vocation through military service, from active-duty to involvement in veterans' organizations post-discharge.

Similarly, this conception of the military as a safety net applies to theories of violent extremism which emphasize an individual's need for *community* as an incentive to participate in extremist organizations. If military service provides purpose to individuals who otherwise may have sought purpose through violent extremism, the military may also offer a sense of community to those who otherwise would have discovered community through participation in a DVE group. For example, as noted above, service members endure adverse childhood experiences at rates higher than the general population; this may imply that some individuals join the military to gain a sense of belonging not present in their pre-enlistment environment.

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[89] *Supra*, Jensen et al (2022): 24.

[90] *Supra*, Woodruff et al (2006): 359.

2.3. Government-Backed Benefits: Military-Specific Programs

Finally, various benefits associated with military service may protect service members against violent extremism by counteracting presumptive risk factors, such as (for example) unemployment.[91] Experience in the armed forces provides many service members with transferable skills attractive to employers; advanced individual training in engineering, medicine, or other fields can open post-discharge employment opportunities even for service members who lack a college education. In survey data, a majority of veterans across all experience levels report that military service was "useful in giving them the…training needed for a job outside the military".[92] Moreover, per federal law, veterans are entitled to preferential hiring for the majority of federal occupations.[93] Despite severe post-separation challenges encountered by many service members, the veteran unemployment rate hovers only slightly above that of the general population and diminishes dramatically with time-since-separation,[94] which could indicate that veteran-specific employment benefits countervail the negative employment effects of separation. Taken together, the employment-based benefits of service may consequently shield veterans against extremist activity. As with mental illness, the empirical evidence connecting unemployment to violent extremism is somewhat ambiguous; statistical significance, effect sizes, and even the direction of the effect vary across different populations and social contexts.[95] With respect to the military, American veterans who engage in violent extremism do appear to experience unemployment at rates far above non-extremist veterans,[96] although empirical data remains limited. Unemployment could thus represent one of a mosaic of risk factors which, in select circumstances, coalesce to produce violent extremism, and the employment-based benefits of military service function as a protective factor by hindering such a process.

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[91] For examples of studies supporting a significant association between unemployment and violent extremism see: *Supra*, LaFree et al (2018). "Correlates of Violent Political Extremism in the United States," https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1745-9125.12169: 233, 248-253 ; Altunbas and Thornton (2011). "Are Homegrown Islamic Terrorists Different? Some UK Evidence," https://www.researchgate.net/publication/227577791_Are_Homegrown_Islamic_Terrorists_Different_Some_UK_Evidence: 266-70.

[92] Parker et al (2019). "The American Veteran Experience and the Post-9/11 Generation," https://www.pewresearch.org/social-trends/2019/09/10/the-american-veteran-experience-and-the-post-9-11-generation/: 25.

[93] For details, see: https://www.fedshirevets.gov/job-seekers/veterans/veterans-preference/.

[94] Loughran (2014). "Why Is Veteran Unemployment So High?", https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RR284.html: ix-x.

[95] For empirical analyses which support a significant association between unemployment and violent extremism, see note 91. For empirical analyses which undermine the connection between unemployment and violent extremism, see: Bhui et al (2014). "Might Depression, Psychosocial Adversity, and Limited Social Assets Explain Vulnerability to and Resistance against Violent Radicalisation," https://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0105918: 4 (no significant association between individual-level unemployment and "sympathies towards violent protest and terrorism") ; Treistman (2021). "Social Exclusion and Political Violence: Multilevel Analysis of the Justification of Terrorism," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/pdf/10.1080/1057610X.2021.2007244?needAccess=true: 12-14, 17 (significant inverse association between state-level unemployment and individual-level support for terrorism, controlling for individual-level unemployment); Krueger (2008). "What Makes a Homegrown Terrorist? Human Capital and Participation in Domestic Islamic Terrorist Groups in the U.S.A.," https://dataspace.princeton.edu/bitstream/88435/dsp012f75r8023/1/533.pdf: 5-6 (no statistically significant difference in unemployment between population of individuals charged with Islamic terrorist attacks, as compared to a sample of American Muslims).

[96] *Supra*, Jensen et al (2022): 25, 32, 37.

In a similar fashion, other government-backed military benefits could diminish tendencies towards violent extremism in the military. With few reservations, all active-duty service members and veterans enjoy access to comprehensive health insurance (with coverage for pharmaceuticals and mental health care), specialized VA home loans at discounted rates, stipends for university and vocational courses through the GI Bill, and various other benefits.[97] As with unemployment, empirical research yields varied results when investigating ties between basic standards of living (mental health, financial stability, education level) and violent extremism.[98] Nonetheless, some empirical analyses do suggest that financial stability and education correlate inversely with violent extremism or support for violent extremism.[99] Accordingly, finance-related and education-related government benefits may function as protective factors against violent extremism for individuals with military experience.

3. <u>Proposed Solutions</u>

A plethora of solutions exists to combat domestic violent extremism in the ranks of the military. Numerous institutions ranging from the Department of Defense to various nongovernmental organizations offer a broad range of potential solutions. However, since many aspects of these solutions tend to overlap with each other, for the sake of clarity we have identified and grouped the most common solutions thematically. The four major themes of solutions we identified focus on media protection, education, junior leadership interventions, and community build-up.

3.1. On-going Responses to Domestic Violent Extremism in the Military

It is important to note that there are protections and solutions advanced by governmental entities. For example, the military screens against individuals with certain mental health conditions, history of drug

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[97] For details, see: https://www.usa.gov/military-assistance.

[98] For empirical research on the connection between mental illness and violent extremism, see Notes 28, 59-60. For examples of conflicting research on the relationship between education levels and violent extremism, see: Berrebi (2003). "Evidence About The Link Between Education, Poverty and Terrorism Among Palestinians," https://papers.ssrn.com/sol3/papers.cfm?abstract_id=487467 (education positively associated with violent extremism at the individual level) ; Krueger and Malečková (2003). "Education, Poverty and Terrorism: Is There a Causal Connection," https://pubs.aeaweb.org/doi/pdfplus/10.1257/089533003772034925 (no significant association) ; Lee (2011). "Who Becomes a Terrorist? Poverty, Education, and the Origins of Political Violence," https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/world-politics/article/abs/who-becomes-a-terrorist-poverty-education-and-the-origins-of-political-violence/C1EB3A9A595B5BBD9E4C9FC9A4E9FBB2 (at the individual level, inverse association between education and terrorism participation, comparing terrorists to nonviolent activists). For empirical research on the link between financial stability and violent extremism, see: Fair et al (2016). "Relative Poverty, Perceived Violence, and Support for Militant Politics: Evidence from Pakistan," https://scholar.princeton.edu/sites/default/files/jns/files/relative-poverty-perceived-violence-and-support-for-militant-politics-evidence-from-pakistan.pdf (at the individual level, significant inverse association between perceived relative poverty and support for militant groups) ; Kavanagh (2011). "Selection, Availability, and Opportunity: The Conditional Effect of Poverty on Terrorist Group Participation," https://journals.sagepub.com/doi/10.1177/0022002710374713 (significant positive association between poverty and participation in terrorism, but only for individuals with a baseline level of education) ; *Supra*, Berrebi (2003). "Evidence About The Link Between Education, Poverty and Terrorism Among Palestinians" (no significant association).

[99] See note 98.

use, and prior criminal convictions.[100] However, it is important to note that these screenings are primarily at the point of entry into the armed services and can fail at countering extremist radicalization within the ranks once it foments.

Accordingly, the Department of Defense has sought to commission working groups to examine and study the prevalence of extremist behavior in the armed forces while also seeking to find ideal solutions to prevent extremist activities. An example of this would be the Countering Extremist Activity Working Group (CEAWG). In 2021, Secretary of Defense Lloyd J. Austin III directed a Department-wide stand down to instruct Department of Defense personnel on the threat posed by extremist activity.[101] Furthermore, the Pentagon also established a new anti-extremism working group alongside the CEAWG established by Secretary Austin in a subsequent memo.[102] The CEAWG identified immediate actions identified by subject-matter experts and urgently implemented them, while also developing additional recommendations.

The solutions that were immediately taken were to update regulatory definitions to clarify what was prohibited extremist activity, update the service member transition checklist, standardization of screening questionnaires, and further commission a study on extremist activity.[103] The CEAWG continue to conduct their research as of writing.[104]

3.2. Media Protection

Media literacy has been offered as a means to protect the Department of Defense audiences against violent extremism. 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.[105] Given the growth of misinformation and the risk of military audiences' exposure to foreign disinformation efforts, media protection solutions propose that it is likely a worthwhile effort to develop, test, and disseminate media literacy training content to U.S. service personnel.[106] In theory, such education may help audiences more critically weigh propaganda content or information and consider its merits.[107] Media literacy, access to diverse sources of information, and positive experiences with diversity appear critical for deradicalization.[108]

Relatedly, 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

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[100] Robert Andrew Cardona & Elspeth Cameron Ritchie, U.S. military enlisted accession mental health screening: history and current practice pubmed.gov (2007), https://pubmed.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/17274262/.

[101] Jim Garramone, *U.S. Department of Defense News*, February 3, 2021.

[102] Report on Countering Extremist Activity Within the Department of Defense (2021), https://media.defense.gov/2021/Dec/20/2002912573/-1/-1/0/REPORT-ON-COUNTERING-EXTREMIST-ACTIVITY-WITHIN-THE-DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE.PDF.

[103] Id.

[104] Ibid.

[105] Posard, Marek N., Leslie Adrienne Payne, and Laura L. Miller, Reducing the Risk of Extremist Activity in the U.S. Military. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021. https://www.rand.org/pubs/perspectives/PEA1447-1.html.

[106] Helmus, Todd C., Hannah Jane Byrne, and King Mallory, Countering Violent Extremism in the U.S. Military. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1226-1.html.

[107] Brown, Ryan Andrew, Todd C. Helmus, Rajeev Ramchand, Alina I. Palimaru, Sarah Weilant, Ashley L. Rhoades, and Liisa Hiatt, Violent Extremism in America: Interviews with Former Extremists and Their Families on Radicalization and Deradicalization. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 2021. https://www.rand.org/pubs/research_reports/RRA1071-1.html. Also available in print form.

[108] Ibid.

radicalization.[109] 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 a last-ditch resort, the Department of Defense can outright ban certain websites from being accessed. However, there are softer interventions that exist that can serve to open the door, so to speak, to diverse sources of information and other perspectives.

An example of this would be the approach taken by Moonshot, a private company that uses open-source data to target extremism.[110] 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.[111] 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".[112] The highly targeted nature of the Redirect Method offers a unique opportunity for the Department of Defense 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. When Moonshot was run in the United States, targeted advertisements received over 4,000 clicks redirecting to alternative content for searches related to white supremacism content and over 500 clicks of the Islamist-inspired extremism content.[113]

3.3. Education

Educating audiences about critical information regarding extremism is a key feature of any terrorism prevention policy. Under an education prong, the DoD would need to vigorously communicate its policies and educate audiences on the risks of extremism and extremist recruitment efforts. It has been proposed that the Department of Defense develop a comprehensive training and education plan that provides regular training to Department of Defense military and civilian personnel, and those advancing to leadership positions.[114] At a minimum, the content will be based on new conceptions of what extremism is and the best possible counter extremist activities.[115]

RAND Corporation is suggesting that the Department of Defense 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 Defense policies with respect to extremism, and the expectations of military personnel. The Department of Defense stand down sought, in part, to address this requirement.

Education has also been focused on the community at large and RAND Corporation believes that such a curriculum should be the model for a Department of Defense training initiative.[116] The Department of Defense has used a tool called the Community Awareness Briefing (CAB) to educate local audiences and civic institutions about the threat and signs of radicalization. Routinely updated to reflect current events,

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[109] Marek et al. *supra,* note 105

[110] Moonshot, https://moonshotteam.com/ (last visited Jul 24, 2022).

[111] Ibid.

[112] Helmus et al. *supra* note 106

[113] Ryan Greer & Vidhya Ramalingam, The search for extremism: Deploying the redirect method The Washington Institute (2020), https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/search-extremism-deploying-redirect-method (last visited Jul 24, 2022).

[114] *Supra* note 102

[115] Ibid.

[116] *Supra* note 106

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. 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, the Federal Bureau of Investigation sponsored the website "Don't Be a Puppet," which aimed to raise young people's awareness of violent extremist groups and their recruitment strategies.

3.4. Junior Leadership Intervention

Another tool to prevent violent extremism is to combat it when it is spotted. An expectation of reporting service members who espouse extremist views and violate Department of Defense policies could be extremely effective to combating violent extremism. Service personnel and commanders will ultimately be the first ones to see extremism in the ranks and thus, will be given the responsibility of confronting extremist views and mandating an intervention. Junior leaders are the best candidates to take on this role because of the proximity to the majority of service members and the non-escalatory tools that they can utilize to handle issues.However, such a role in our junior leadership requires recognizing numerous considerations that junior leaders would consider in their actions.

If they consider the investigation process unfair and ineffective, they will be less likely to report their suspicions higher up the chain of command. Likewise, junior leaders could feel obligated to *not* report anything at all due to their loyalty to their subordinates and peers and desire to keep the unit cohesive.[117] Junior leaders lacking any kind of bright line test for reporting extremism could also have difficulty determining what type of conduct will rise to the level of extremism they are mandated to report. Consequently, a solution that brings in junior leaders to take the lead of combating extremism in the ranks will need to keep these considerations in mind when formulating what a policy would look like.

If an extremist mindset is found after investigation, interventions from here can follow either of two paths. The first would be separation and discharging from the military. However, the overall effectiveness of this kind of intervention would obviously be quite limited because a discharge might risk inflaming the separated individuals further and it could push them towards radicalization and violence. Furthermore, discharging a servicemember simply off-loads the responsibility to civilian law enforcement and community institutions.

The RAND Corporation has posited an an alternative "off-ramp"[118] solution that aims to deradicalize these individual's ideology.[119] Off-ramp interventions are those that seek to help radicalized individuals disengage from extremist organizations and desist from extremist activities.[120] In theory, service members and their family members who are identified as having extremist ties or have partaken in extremist activities could be given access to an off-ramp counselor who would recommend that they receive treatment

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[117] See e.g., Terry and McQuinn, *supra* note 41 (stressing the tension between servicemembers' loyalty to their peers and their duty to report violations).
[118] *Supra*, note 106
[119] *Supra,* note 106
[120] Ibid.

if they desired to do so.[121] 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 so that they are best suited to the Department of Defense mission.[122]

3.5. Community Build-Up

Non-governmental institutions have proposed empowering veterans and promoting American democratic values after discharge from the military. Encouraging a model with strong educational and public advocacy partnerships between the Department of Defense, Veterans Affairs, and community-based veterans' organizations can serve to prevent violent extremism by cutting off the allure of violence while also leveraging existing military programs that already support veterans. RAND Corporation has proposed that building such community institutions would be effective because the nexus between extremism and the U.S. military is strongest in the veteran community.[123] A stronger sense of community well-being and unit cohesion can make personnel and their families more resilient to extremist recruitment strategies.[124]

RAND Corporation suggest that community service providers can provide general guidance on how to break cycles of outrage and hate and to manage personal relationships with those with extremist views, organizing activities to dispel stereotypes and myths promulgated by hate groups, and organize real-time sessions with reformed extremists to understand the impact of extremism.[125] Additionally, service providers could also alert military leaders to signs of misinformation, recruitment, and emerging groups that may be posing a threat to the military community.[126]

Another proposal is that of the National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism (START). They have proposed the use of Public Affairs Officers (PAO) to advance alternative narratives that promote positive, prosocial empowerment of veterans in order to counteract violent, anti-social narratives posited by extremist movements.[127] They have also proposed veterans' organizations take on a bigger role in delivering messages that counter radicalization narratives that target past service members.[128]

4. <u>Ethical Considerations for Proposed Solutions</u>

4.1. DoD Initiatives

Counter-extremism policies may raise special ethical concerns when such policies are administered by the DoD and the military themselves, given the authority of military leadership to impose punitive sanctions, the importance of preserving military cohesion and readiness, and the value of maintaining the military's relatively apolitical identity. As such, this subsection considers the ethics of DoD-led counter-

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[121] Ibid.
[122] Ibid.
[123] Ibid.
[124] Ibid.
[125] Ibid
[126] Ibid
[127] *Supra*, Jensen et al (2022).
[128] Ibid.

extremism policy in particular. As discussed above, potential DoD-led responses include junior leadership enforcement of policies that prohibit extremist advocacy, along with DoD-generated "training courses" to warn against the dangers of extremist belief and recruitment. These initiatives may implicate ethical concerns related to free speech and expression. Any intervention that seeks to prohibit or advise against "extremism" or "extremist activities" necessarily entails defining those terms and consequently identifying particular strands of belief and conduct which meet said definitions (the DoD includes a definition of "extremist activities" in DoDI 1325.06(3)(8)(c)(1)).[129] The text of this definition seems to apply in a fairly broad, facially unbiased manner — e.g., it includes "advocating or engaging in unlawful force or violence to achieve goals that are political", which presumably encompasses endorsement of both left and right-wing violent extremism. However, the enforcement of anti-extremist policy is a necessarily subjective process controlled by authorities with their ideological subjectivities and therefore may result in the denigration of expression based on mere political or ideological disapproval (or be perceived as such). Similarly, a "training course" against violent extremism may also bear political or ideological bias if not constructed with special care to avoid hyper-focus on a particular subset of violent extremism or extremist ideology. In either case, unequal enforcement of anti-extremist policies raises ethical concerns concerning free speech principles, which traditionally caution against discrimination based on viewpoint — even when two viewpoints are both reprehensible.[130]

Alternatively, even if DoD authorities generate and enforce anti-extremist policies in an unbiased fashion, and even if these initiatives only denigrate unequivocally extremist activity, the approach may nonetheless have a chilling effect on individuals who wish to convey ideologically-proximal messages. For example, the DoD's definition of "extremist activities" includes "advocating widespread unlawful discrimination based on race, sex, gender…" ; isolating precisely what constitutes discrimination is the subject of much legal, political and philosophical debate, and this ambiguity may result in both a) over-zealous prescription of expression within the military and b) the chilling of legitimate discussion on sensitive matters.

Furthermore, the DoD's proposed anti-extremist programs may disrupt military cohesion, readiness, and efficacy. Individuals who are pressured to remain silent on issues discussed above may feel alienated by efforts to counter extremism even if they do not engage in extremist activity, hindering their capacity to complete military objectives and cooperate with fellow service members. This concern may become especially acute if anti-extremism programming is led by those responsible for giving vital orders, fostering distrust between leadership and lower-ranking service members. Similar complications could arise if the DoD places greater emphasis on the "duty to report," noted above; establishing a call-out culture within the ranks could destabilize the confidence necessary to complete challenging tasks in high-intensity environments. Threats to cohesion, readiness, and efficacy raise immediate ethical concerns given the high stakes in human life and well-being generally associated with military objectives.

Additionally, any DoD efforts to discharge extremists or screen against extremists during the recruitment process must confront the question of how to further address those excluded from service. Although the military cannot be expected to admit extremists into its ranks, an alternative approach that identifies extremists, denies admission, and takes no further action likewise seems morally unsatisfactory.

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[129] See current DoD procedural guidelines on extremism in the ranks:
https://www.esd.whs.mil/Portals/54/Documents/DD/issuances/dodi/132506p.PDF: 9-11.
[130] See, for example: Weinstein, J (2017). "Viewpoint Discrimination, Hate Speech, and Political Legitimacy: A Reply,"
https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1476&context=concomm ; Blocher, J (2011). "Viewpoint Neutrality and Government Speech," https://scholarship.law.duke.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2956&context=faculty_scholarship: 702-6,

The military retains a general prerogative to determine its recruitment policies, but not with complete disregard for the social consequences for civilian life. The military bears an obligation to determine what measures — e.g., coordination with local law enforcement — it must take to reduce the threat that a prospective recruit or discharged extremist poses to the broader community.

Of course, the military also screens against individuals with certain mental health conditions, history of drug use, and prior criminal convictions. Does the military also hold obligations towards society concerning those denied admission on these grounds? Most likely, the military's duties in this respect are comparatively weaker than its duties regarding individuals excluded due to extremist activity. The military may justifiably resist the former duties because it is not a social work organization and its key purpose is to preserve national security, not cure American civil society of its ailments. The military's obligation to take further action (beyond simply denying admission) is comparatively greater when the rationale for exclusion from service is evidence of extremist activity. Individuals denied admission on these grounds pose a clear threat to national security, and the military's broad duty to uphold national security implies a duty to guard against such threats, especially when presented by individuals it knowingly excludes from the ranks.[131] [132]

When considering any counter-extremism initiative generated by the DoD, one broad concern is that any *military-led* effort to combat violent extremism in the ranks risks politicization of the armed forces, given the blurry lines between certain political ideologies and violent extremism in the United States. If the US military becomes perceived as a political entity — an identity it has long resisted — rates of recruitment could decline, raising ethical concerns with respect to readiness and efficacy. The military's outward-facing posture – i.e., its direct communications to/appearances before the civilian population – likely function as key determinants of perceived politicization, and thus pose great risk if executed untactfully. This concern applies (for example) to the DoD's proposed "education and outreach plan," consisting of "training aids to educate and inform a wide range of audiences regarding the importance of reporting information pertaining to extremist activities."[133] Military-led distribution of anti-extremist pamphlets could easily be interpreted as a military-led public indoctrination or propaganda campaign. This applies to any prospective military outreach which labels itself as a counter-extremism program, including any advertisement which references extremism or discussion of extremism during recruitment visits. Even if the military makes every effort to approach violent extremism from an apolitical perspective, the topic already bears such a partisan connotation that the military politicizes itself merely by addressing the topic in the first place. Military-led counter-extremism initiatives could, in theory, be better positioned to avoid this concern if they consist of either purely internal measures or outreach measures that forgo public declarations of their counter-extremism intentions; however, such non-transparent measures raise

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[131] Of course, prior criminal record and mental illness also function as risk factors for violent extremism; however, the military has limited resources available for devotion to initiatives beyond achieving strategic objectives, and thus should prioritize only its most stringent external duties. Additionally, it is not entirely clear what security-based action the military could take with respect to individuals denied admission for mental illness or criminal record. Mental illness is not, in itself, a generally accepted justification for enhanced societal scrutiny or law enforcement observation; those with criminal history are already known to state authorities.

[132] With respect to individuals *discharged* on grounds of mental illness or criminal conviction, the military's ethical calculation may differ. In many cases, a plausible causal link exists between military service itself, and the development of mental illness or antisocial behavior during service. In these cases, the military holds fairly strong obligations to provide treatment or counseling — as a basic ethical principle, actors should work to ameliorate harms they themselves cause. The justification for this obligation, however, does not apply to prospective recruits rejected at the screening stage, and differs from the justification underlying duties held with respect to extremists.

[133] See DoD working group paper on extremism in the ranks: https://media.defense.gov/2021/Dec/20/2002912573/-1/-1/0/REPORT-ON-COUNTERING-EXTREMIST-ACTIVITY-WITHIN-THE-DEPARTMENT-OF-DEFENSE.PDF: 18.

additional ethical concerns related to secrecy and deception, which may ultimately increase the perception of military politicization and decrease institutional trust in the military.

4.2. Mental Health Interventions

Any attempt to mitigate DVE in the military through a focus on mental health should take care to avoid further stigmatization of mental illness. At present, active-duty service members may neglect treatment for mental illness out of fear that doing so may "be discrediting or embarrassing, cause harm to career progression, or cause peers and/or supervisors to lose confidence in [their] ability to perform assigned duties."[134] Likewise, surveys of veterans find robust associations between "higher perceived public stigma of treatment" — e.g., a belief that seeking treatment makes one look weak — and "lower treatment utilization".[135]

While efforts to encourage active and former service members to seek treatment will generally mitigate these adverse effects of stigma, an effort to address *violent extremism* via mental health treatment may exacerbate stigma if the initiative explicitly emphasizes a link between mental illness and violence. Such an initiative could cultivate a public perception that those who seek treatment are inherently volatile or dangerous, consequently deterring veterans – many of whom already believe the public perceives them as "violent"[136] – from seeking treatment. From an ethical perspective, counter-DVE efforts centered on mental health could consequently exacerbate the profound adverse social consequences of stigma if not executed and advertised tactfully. These social consequences could extend not only to veterans but to all individuals with mental illness who mutually suffer when stigma increases.

Irrespective of potential consequences for stigma, mental health intervention as a counter-extremism strategy may raise a more fundamental concern if taken too far. Treating violent extremism as primarily a question of mental health risks over-medicalizing an issue which, in many contexts, might be addressed more properly through paradigms of criminal justice or community-building. Of course, a medical response may be appropriate for violent extremists who indeed require treatment; however, an approach which presumes that violent extremists bear some pathology and subsequently prescribes medical treatment as the ideal first-line disengagement strategy risks needlessly diverting individuals to systems of psychiatric treatment which often impose severe constraints on individual liberty. [137] As noted above, many violent extremists show no signs of mental illness, and an overly-zealous medicalized approach to counter-extremism may unnecessarily disenfranchise individuals whose behavior could be addressed more appropriately through other means.[138]

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[134] Roscoe (2021). "The Battle Against Mental Health Stigma: Examining How Veterans with PTSD Communicatively Manage Stigma," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/10410236.2020.1754587: 1379.

[135] Kuleza et al (2015). "Help-Seeking Stigma and Mental Health Treatment Seeking Among Young Adult Veterans," https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC4672863/.

[136] *Supra,* Roscoe (2021): 1379.

[137] See, for example: Hawthorn and Ilhan (2015). "Rethinking Civil Commitment: The Radical Resources of the Ethics of Care," https://pubhub.lib.msu.edu/system/resource/0b10b4cf-7234-47c7-a6fe-66a2f032998a/attachment/original-890ee665986cafc3505f2120d0f8468a.pdf ; Substance Abuse and Mental Health Services Administration (2019). "Civil Commitment and the Mental Health Care Continuum: Historical Trends and Principles for Law and Practice," https://www.samhsa.gov/sites/default/files/civil-commitment-continuum-of-care_041919_508.pdf: 23-31.

[138] We should stress, however, that placing too great of an emphasis on criminal justice-based responses in lieu of mental health interventions may also raise serious ethical concerns. See, for example: Teravskis (2021). "Medicate and Segregate: How Due Process Fails to Protect Mentally Ill Inmates From Medically Inappropriate Confinement and Restraint," https://scholarship.law.umn.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1501&context=mjlst.

4.3. Technology, Discrimination, and the Armed Forces

When considering technology-based efforts to counter DVE in the military (such as those discussed in the "Media Literacy" section above), it may be prudent to ask whether such interventions can justifiably be targeted *exclusively* at military personnel. Is it morally permissible for a technological intervention to effectively discriminate against active-duty and former service members, controlling only what *they* encounter in the technological sphere? (See, for example, the previously-mentioned proposal to implement Moonshot's "Redirect" program "only in counties where U.S. military installations are present.")[139]

Of course, it is not unusual to treat members of the military as distinct from civilians, particularly in legal contexts. Broadly speaking, U.S. law permits greater constraints on the civil liberties of service members, given the heightened risk posed by potentially errant or disruptive behavior in a military setting. Servicemembers often operate under a different penal code, without the requirement of a unanimous jury for conviction[140]; in pursuit of cohesion and key strategic objectives, the Supreme Court has permitted the military to proscribe, for its members, a great deal of constitutionally-protected expression — e.g., political speech critical of the President — that the government may not proscribe in other settings.[141] The status quo legal system discriminates heavily against service members.

However, an intervention that alters how service members — and only service members — interact with technological platforms may present an additional ethical concern. Arguably, such an intervention could pose a great constraint on liberty; the discrimination could alter what service members see and hear daily: their ability to access new information, learn from their surroundings. Given the key role of social media in contemporary life, both as a tool for expression and education, any unequal treatment on social media platforms should arguably receive heightened ethical scrutiny. It is one (already ethically-dubious) matter to target counter-extremist advertisements exclusively at service members through a military-specific Redirect intervention, without directly restricting the content service members may peruse; it is another matter, as the RAND Corporation has also suggested, to "limit access to at-risk platforms on DoD internet and Wi-Fi systems,"[142] entirely closing off sections of technological space to service members. Any ethical concerns about censorship apply here, and perhaps with greater force, given that this censorship is unequally applied across populations.

Furthermore, the very fact that service members already bear many constraints on their civil liberties (as compared to civilians) may constitute a reason to *avoid* imposing further constraints on them, rather than a justification for further constraints. Although status quo limitations on service members may have compelling national security rationale, they nonetheless substantially restrict service members' civil liberties. These liberties constitute a special category of prized entitlements for a reason — to lose them, generally, deals a blow to the quality of one's social and political life. Thus, limiting service members' civil liberties even further may require an extraordinary justification, especially when such limitation entails denying them and only them access to certain kinds of online content.

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[139] Helmus et al, supra note 106, page 8.

[140] See CRS Report - https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R46503: 24.

[141] Beaumont (2009). "Rights of Military Personnel," https://www.mtsu.edu/first-amendment/article/1131/rights-of-military-personnel.

[142] Helmus et al, supra note 106, page 8.

Moreover, a policy that limits servicemember access to extremist material seems to ignore the potential benefits of *preserving* such access. Individuals with military backgrounds could serve as valuable, respected advocates against extremism by directly responding to radical online messaging. Given the high degree of public trust in the military, counter-messages from anti-extremist service members could be perceived as especially credible; likewise, service members at risk for radicalization may be more likely to accept counter-arguments presented by other service members. An intervention that bars all service members, irrespective of their ideological disposition, from accessing extremist content may hinder radicalization for some but also prevents others from encountering counter-arguments presented by sources they may find particularly trustworthy.

Also relevant are the duties of technology companies themselves. As others have suggested, technology companies may bear a moral responsibility to mitigate the harm that platforms cause to users, given that companies profit substantially from those same users' contributions to the platform.[143] In this sense, companies may hold an especially stringent duty to counter the online radicalization of service members, if violent extremists with military experience cause greater harm than the average extremist. On the other hand, technology companies function as stewards of contemporary public fora for communication — they manage platforms that constitute an essential component of expression, education, and even identity-formation in modern life.[144] As stewards of such a central communicative asset, they may bear responsibilities to keep the said asset as freely accessible as possible to any population, including service members.

5. CERL Recommendations

In light of the concerns presented in the preceding section, this section offers two modest recommendations to address the problem of violent extremism in the military. Of course, these recommendations are not intended to be a comprehensive solution to the problem; no single counter-extremism intervention is likely to eradicate, or even substantially reduce, the threat of violent extremism in the military. As noted above, service members face a multiplicity of potential risk factors, often arising at different moments in life and from disparate social or political sources. Consequently, a multiplicity of different strategies will be necessary to address the diverse reasons and pathways by which service members come to engage in violent extremism.

With this noted qualification, we recommend two broad initiatives, in the hope of providing a modest contribution to a larger counter-extremism effort. We intend that these recommendations avoid many of the ethical and practical concerns discussed above, while still addressing a subset of the manifold risk factors for violent extremism. The recommendations include:

1) An initiative to promote more comprehensive civics education within the armed forces. Broadly, our recommended educational program seeks to enhance service members' skills in media literacy and critical thinking, rather than focusing on education in democratic political thought. More specifically, we suggest that this civics education program be tailored to junior leaders within the military, who may be specially positioned to influence their subordinates and peers.

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[143] Carlson and Cosineau (2020). "Are You Sure You Want to View This Community? Exploring the Ethics of Reddit's Quarantine Practice," https://www.tandfonline.com/doi/full/10.1080/23736992.2020.1819285: 207-9.
[144] Id.

Civics education functions as a preventive measure; rather than waiting for extremism to arise in the military, addressing the issue post-hoc through separation practices, and subsequently exacerbating the problem, civics education aims to protect future and current service members against patterns of thought conducive to violent extremism before they develop.

2) An initiative to encourage veteran participation in social organizations which share values with both the military and certain DVE organizations, but which do not endorse the use of violence. This strategy acknowledges an ideological overlap between certain DVE groups and the military, and posits that some service members may be attracted to DVE groups in part because of this overlap. Promoting veteran participation in alternative, non-violent, ideologically-similar organizations could offer veterans the ideological affinity and sense of purpose provided by DVE without the associated risk of violence.

5.1. Civics Education

Educational institutions should be tasked with playing a role in the prevention of violent extremism. An education-based solution focuses on tackling extremist inclinations through a civics education that is designed to allow service members to engage with the world beyond the perimeter of their base. A civics education initiative should focus on critical thinking; one that is centered merely around providing information on democratic political thought or American history could by and large be ineffective because it would not approach critical thinking as an important facet of the curriculum.[145] In contrast, an education that focuses on media literacy, critical thinking, and a broader understanding of the role of citizens could serve to prevent violent extremism.

Such education has to take social media into account. Learning to analyze social media, looking at how algorithms operate or practices of trolling, and understanding algorithmic bias are important educational tasks.[146] Additionally, the education will require learning about concepts such as confirmation bias and even understanding how propaganda operates.[147] To engage with these issues and prevent their allure, supporting critical thinking and analysis is the most critical component of education. However, it ought to be noted that supporting critical thinking, while crucial, is only a small component of what a multi-faceted civics education should look like in this context. This education ought to be tailored to junior leaders who will continue to influence their subordinates and peers. Additionally, this civics education should explore the effective lives of individuals to understand what it means to belong to a supportive and camaraderie-based environment. Democratic life, cultures, and ideals should be cultivated along with respect for American political thought. Additionally, educational approaches to critically engaging with the digital world and online life should be developed to improve media literacy.

It is also not entirely clear that a universal educational program covering multiple theories of change would inevitably work. As pointed out by Search For Common Ground, "general assumptions and proven education theories of change may not be relevant or appropriate in conflict contexts and complex

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[145] *See* Civics Secures Democracy Act, (2021). (A high school civics bill that centers aroudn democratic political thought and American history)

[146] Zuboff, S. (2019) The Age of Surveillance Capitalism: The Fight for a Human Future at the New Frontier of Power. London: Profile Books.; Rouvroy, A. (2016) '"Of Data and Men": Fundamental rights and freedoms in a world of Big Data', T-PD-BUR(2015) 09REV, Council of Europe

[147] Stanley, J. (2018) How Fascism Works:The Politics of Us and Them. New York

environments where additional variables can upset the traditional change pathways".[148] Empirical evidence, detailed research, and complex findings are rare in the field of preventing violent extremism, even more-so in the military.[149] Research in this field is warranted and preliminary research has been fruitful.[150]

5.2. Non-Violent, Ideologically-Oriented Social Organizations for Veterans

The putative values and goals of certain DVE groups overlap with those of the military, particularly in the case of groups that claim to defend American values or otherwise have patriotic motivations. As suggested above, some veterans may turn to DVE groups to fill an ideological gap created by discharge, or to alleviate the distress of losing a patriotic purpose by adopting an ideologically-related one. If so, a successful intervention may seek to meet this ideological need in a nonviolent fashion, by encouraging veteran participation in nonviolent organizations with ideological leanings/goals similar to both the military and certain DVE groups.

Efforts to engage veterans in these activities should begin reasonably promptly following discharge — the initiative should aim to intervene before veterans turn to more socially destructive organizations. On average, veterans who engage in violent extremist activities do so 15 years after their military service concludes,[151] suggesting a fairly broad (but not unlimited) window of opportunity during which intervention can occur.

Such an intervention could involve the creation of new programs or placing greater emphasis on veteran inclusion in existing programs. The most obvious candidate organizations are those with government associations, where participation in said organization entails serving one's country and perhaps "defending" American interests in a non-violent manner. Any candidate organization should be as nonpartisan as possible to increase its appeal to a diverse veteran population; encouraging veteran participation in organizations with ties to left or right-wing DVE groups along the dimension of partisanship could lay the foundation for future adoption of broader elements of the DVE group's ideology.

Several existing organizations may fit this description, and thus might already be alleviating a loss of purpose induced by discharge. For example, veteran advocacy organizations such as the Military Officers Association of America (MOAA) essentially function as political interest groups, lobbying for pro-veteran legislative reform and providing chapter members with benefits packages (e.g. employment assistance, exclusive discounts).[152] (Other organizations similar to the MOAA include AMVETS, the NCOA, and AUSA.[153]) Membership could enable veterans to continue serving their country through participation in an organization that promotes the general well-being of service members. Admittedly, the number of MOAA

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[148] O'Donnell, A., Malone, A. and Melaugh, B., 2022. Sharing the World: Educational Responses to Extremism.

[149] Ibid.

[150] Ian Jamison, Measuring Open-Mindedness (2017), https://institute.global/sites/default/files/articles/Measuring-Open-Mindedness.pdf (last visited Jul 24, 2022). (program enabling children from different cultures to virtually 'meet' via videoconferencing and blogging and showed a marked increase in 'open-mindedness' and empathy which is then seen to act as an inoculation against extremist views)

[151] *Supra*, Jensen et al (2022): 10.

[152] For general information on MOAA benefits, see: https://www.moaa.org/content/join-moaa/why-join-moaa/. For general information on MOAA advocacy, see: https://www.moaa.org/content/publications-and-media/news-articles/2021-news-articles/advocacy/moaas-2022-legislative-priorities/.

[153] The stated acronyms represent the following organizations. AMVETS = American Veterans (https://amvets.org/) ; NCOA = Non-Commissioned Officers Association (https://www.ncoausa.org/) ; AUSA = Association of the US Army (https://www.ausa.org/).

members engaged in advocacy may be limited; for many local chapter members, the organization likely functions more as a social gathering place and information source rather than their enterprise or undertaking. Additionally, the MOAA's issue focus is fairly narrow — it is tailored almost exclusively to the promotion of veteran-oriented legislation, rather than broader national security priorities or even benefits for active-duty service members. Although advocating for improved VA healthcare could certainly be meaningful for many veterans, it may not be sufficient to replace the purpose attached to military service itself, in which service members can perceive themselves as active participants in missions to defend the homeland. Nonetheless, the MOAA and similar organizations could serve as a basis for future counter-extremism initiatives, on the theory outlined above. Efforts could be made to increase the geographical frequency of local chapters, thereby enhancing the ease of access for veterans (especially for those residing in rural areas). Existing separation transition programs could place greater emphasis on the availability of the MOAA and similar organizations to recently-discharged veterans. Even if such an intervention ultimately has only a modest effect on violent extremism, it would seem to constitute a low-risk, low-cost counter-extremism initiative with innocuous side effects (greater veteran participation in advocacy programs) and the benefit of mitigating DVE, if only at the margins.

Beyond expanding the role of existing organizations, we recommend creating two new initiatives to assist veterans in repairing the post-discharge loss of purpose:

- Establishing a federal program to employ veterans as research assistants at organizations that study defense, national security, or foreign policy (e.g., the RAND Corporation, Atlantic Council). Training large numbers of veterans to become high-level policy researchers is not feasible, given the limited number of positions available and the level of education required. However, many duties of lower-level research assistants involve essential and enriching tasks, such as data collection and literature review, on subject matters closely related to veterans' military experiences. While these research assistantships are often filled by students, a new initiative could offer a portion of these positions to veterans. Such an initiative would enable veterans to promote research that aims to defend American interests, values, and the military itself, allowing veterans to retain a purpose similar to that of military service without turning to DVE organizations.
- Creating Veterans for Civics Education, an initiative in which veterans provide lessons on constitutional values and American government to K-12 students. While many civics education programs already exist, a program with veterans as the educators would provide students with a unique perspective on civil liberties and constitutional values — the perspective of individuals who risked their lives to defend those values. This organization could alleviate the loss of purpose generated through discharge by enabling veterans to continue protecting American principles in a nonviolent manner — sharing those principles with younger generations. To avoid the perception of indoctrination or government overreach, each veteran educator could receive substantial freedom to shape their civics-related message informed by their unique personal experience in military service. Concerning public-private status, the program could perhaps receive federal funds, similarly to (for example) many private universities; however, the program would ideally retain only private employees, and avoid taking actions which generate a public perception of federal entanglement with the individual messages expressed by veteran educators.