Pentagon report reveals growth of fascistic networks within US military

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On Thursday, California Democratic Representative Peter Aguilar announced that he would be introducing legislation based on the findings of an October 2020 Pentagon report that lists seven recommendations aimed at curbing the growth of far-right "domestic extremists" within the US military.

"This report confirms that white supremacist extremists are attempting to use our military to acquire training, new recruits and validity for their hateful and violent causes," Aguilar said in a press release dated February 18. Aguilar is the vice chair of the House Democratic Caucus and he sits on the subcommittees for Defense and Homeland Security.

The 59-page report does not give the number of suspected "domestic extremists" operating within the US military. Its recommendations, such as gaining access to an FBI tattoo database, are meant to screen out open fascists, neo-Nazis and white supremacists before they join, as opposed to ejecting those already in the ranks.

Citing research compiled by the New America Foundation between September 12, 2001 and June, 11 2016, the report notes that "right-wing extremists were responsible for more deaths in the US than any other type of extremists." It acknowledges that some fascists are currently operating within the military even after they have been identified as such by military leadership.

The release of the report coincided with confirmation by Defense Department officials that nearly 5,000 US troops will remain in the capital until at least mid-March, following intelligence and open source reports that far-right forces loyal to Trump will assemble in Washington DC on or around March 4.

NPR and other media outlets have reported that as many as 15 percent of those arrested in connection with the January 6 siege of the US Capitol are current or former military personnel. The military is already in the midst of an unprecedented 60-day stand-down ordered by Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin earlier this month "to discuss the problem of extremism in the ranks."

The document begins by acknowledging that the Department of Defense is "facing a threat from domestic extremists (DE), particularly those who espouse white supremacy or white nationalist ideologies." It goes on to say that "despite a low number of cases in absolute terms, individuals with extremist affiliations and military experience are a concern to US national security because of their proven ability to execute high-impact events."

The report asserts that since 2014, the US has "witnessed a resurgence in white supremacy and white nationalist activity." It takes note of the 2017 "Unite the Right" rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, calling it "the country's largest gathering of white supremacists in decades." It also cites the proliferation of fascist shooters "inspired" by Norwegian far-right mass murderer Anders Breivik, including Christchurch, New Zealand shooter Brenton Tarrant and El Paso, Texas shooter Patrick Crusius.

Admitting that the number of current and former military personnel who subscribe to "white supremacist" or "white nationalist" ideology is unknown, the report cites, in a footnote, a *Military Times* poll from last year that found that roughly one-third of those in the military had witnessed signs of "white supremacy" in the ranks.

The report cites three groups, identified as "domestic terrorists'" and "domestic extremists," that are targeting the military for recruitment and training. The groups "were selected for discussion because of their activity and connections with current and former military service personnel," the report states. It names the neo-Nazi Atomwaffen Division (AWD), Identify Evropa (since rebranded as the American Identity Movement—AIM) and unaffiliated white supremacists and white nationalists.

The AWD officially disbanded in July 2020 and renamed itself the National Socialist Order. Prior to its rebranding, the group had an estimated membership of about 80 in the US, with affiliated cells in Europe and the Baltic States. It was co-founded in 2015 by Florida resident Brandon Russell, who would go on to enlist in the Florida National Guard shortly after creating the group.

Since its founding, the AWD has been involved in multiple

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murders and terrorist plots. Prior to enlisting, Russell had a large AWD "radioactive" symbol tattooed on his right shoulder, with the Waffen-Schutzstaffell (SS) shield encompassing it. The tattoo and Russell's openly fascist views did not trigger alarm bells during his screening process or once he was in the military.

The report cited at least four AWD members who were in the military, one of whom was a recruiter for the AWD who allegedly was trying to bring 12 more like-minded individuals into the Navy.

In excerpts taken from the now-defunct Iron March online forum in 2016, Russell confidently replied to a fellow fascist concerned that he might be outed by soldiers or superior officers. "I was 100 percent open about everything with the friends I made at training," he said. "They know about it all. They love me too cause I'm a funny guy."

In January 2018, Russell, then 22, was sentenced to five years in prison after pleading guilty to possession of an unregistered destructive device and improper storage of explosive materials. Police discovered extensive bomb-making material, along with a cache of neo-Nazi signs, posters, flags and a framed photo of Oklahoma City bomber and Army veteran Timothy McVeigh in the Tampa, Florida apartment Russell shared with another AWD member.

The report cites another exchange from the Iron March forum in which an infantry soldier admitted, "I've met quite a few rightists—some openly National Socialist, lots of neo-Nazis, others just nationalist, others red-pilled conservatives... You see plenty 'of our kind' in the combat arms."

The post ends: "A good way people in the military find other rightists is to simply wear a shirt with some obscure fascist logo. I met my good buddy at a brigade luncheon when he noticed the Totenkopf on my shirt. On most bases, you can see the occasional right-wing symbol. Sun wheel there, 88 here, Mussolini's face over there, a Templar cross tattoo. The symbols of SS units are especially common, even on things as public as cars, flags and helmets."

The other major named group cited in the report is the Identity Evropa/American Identity Movement. In contrast to the AWD, IE/AIM is not an explicitly violent organization. Instead, its members have described their aim as creating "a better world for people of European heritage, particularly in America, by peacefully effecting cultural change" through "five principles: nationalism, identariatism, protectionism, non-interventionism, and populism."

The report names 13 current or former soldiers who were identified as IE/AIM members, with multiple soldiers still in the military even after being identified as IE/AIM members. These include a lieutenant colonel serving as a physician in the Army Reserve, a US Air Force master sergeant who has been demoted to technical sergeant, a Texas Army National Guard soldier and a Minnesota National Guard soldier who was allowed to remain in the Guard after undefined "corrective action" was taken.

In the section discussing members of the "unaffiliated white supremacists movement," the report cites the arrests of an Army reservist and two military veterans in Las Vegas this past summer. Andrew Lynam, Stephen Parshall and William Loomis are all suspected members of the Boogaloo movement. They were indicted on terrorism and explosives charges in July 2020 in connection with an alleged scheme to cause violence between police and anti-police violence protesters by throwing Molotov cocktails at police during protests.

The report, titled "Leveraging FBI Resources to Enhance Military Accessions Screening and Personnel Security Vetting," has largely been ignored by the mainstream press. It was commissioned after representative Aguilar filed an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act for fiscal year 2020 directing the secretary of defense to submit a report on the "feasibility" of using the FBI's Tattoo and Graffiti Identification Program and the National Gang Intelligence Center to screen those seeking to enlist for white nationalist and other extremist connections.

In addition to the Pentagon gaining access to the FBI database on tattoos, the report recommends an updating of the Standard Form 86, which is used for background checks, that DoD officials be offered an unclassified version of the FBI's Ethnically Motivated Violent Extremism training program, and that the Department of Defense contract with data companies to screen potential recruits' social media accounts for evidence of extremism.

It also recommends that the Defense Department establish a special designation across all branches for those discharged for domestic extremist activity and that the Defense Department "collaborate with pertinent governmental stakeholders to develop a specific definition for domestic extremists across the whole of government."

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