

Protecting the Protectors

Preventing and Mitigating Domestic Violent Extremism in the Military, Veteran, and Law Enforcement Communities

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Executive Summary

In recent years, the involvement of currently serving military members and law enforcement officers, as well as veterans of those two professions, in domestic violent extremist organizations and activities has received public attention. While they represent the minority of those engaged in domestic violent extremism (DVE), their participation merits additional scrutiny, given the nature of their professions—which includes taking a sworn oath to defend the Constitution and the nation, possessing the authority to use force to safeguard national security and public safety, and adhering to a professional ethic. It is especially important to scrutinize their participation in DVE because members of these communities have engaged in violence against the very system they are sworn to protect.

There are three phases in the service lifecycle to identify and prevent individual engagement in or sympathy for DVE organizations: screening during the recruitment process; training and managing currently serving personnel; and screening, educating, and resourcing individuals transitioning out of service.

Efforts to identify and address DVE are approached differently in the Department of Defense (DoD) and the law enforcement community. For military service members, a centralized, top-down structure with formal policies, practices, and programs provides guidance from the DoD, the military departments, and the military services across all three phases of the service lifecycle.

By contrast, the law enforcement community operates across a patchwork of decentralized federal, state, county, and local hierarchies, resulting in wide variation between policies and practices across approximately 18,000 local police agencies.

Even though the DoD has a formal structure to address DVE, the department still faces challenges similar to those of the law enforcement community in managing participation in DVE organizations and activities by current and former service members. While recent efforts to update policies regarding the screening, management, and transition of service members are necessary, they are not sufficient to prevent the appeal of DVE. Similarly, the absence of a cohesive structure connecting law enforcement agencies prevents opportunities to develop and implement formal mechanisms to address the challenge.

Members of the military and law enforcement communities (both those currently serving and veterans) play a unique role in the American social contract. In exchange for authorities to use force in the name of the state for the

protection of society, members of these professions are expected to uphold a stricter moral standard than their civilian counterparts. Moreover, members of the profession are expected to regulate entry into their ranks and enforce norms of acceptable behavior through individual and communal allegiance to a code of ethics. While externally imposed laws and policies can define the boundaries of acceptable behavior within the profession, internal enforcement of a shared professional ethos is more likely to intrinsically motivate behavior that aligns with the high standards of the profession.

The DoD, the military services, and law enforcement organizations would benefit from thoughtful and consistent updates to social media screening processes. Law enforcement organizations should follow best practices to include counter-DVE training within existing training modules on related topics. Beyond updates to policy, real opportunities exist for engaging in communicating, modeling, and enforcing the professional ethic internally across the lifecycle of service. Increased formal education and training of the professional ethic by respected leaders within these communities may be more impactful than externally required “box checking” activities. Membership organizations, including police-, military-, and veteran-serving organizations, can provide consistent, standardized professional development and a sense of community and purpose for those currently serving, and can also reach transitioning and veteran members of the military and law enforcement communities who may be disconnected from support.

Introduction

In the days and weeks immediately following the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, news reports focused on rates of participation by those with military or law enforcement backgrounds.¹ While military- and law enforcement-affiliated individuals were in the minority of those charged with crimes, it remains striking how many were associated with these professions. As of September 2022, the most recent data revealed that among the 896 people charged with crimes connected to the January 6 attack on the Capitol,² at least 47 were current or former law enforcement personnel and 128 were current or former military personnel.³

The active solicitation of military or law enforcement skillsets by domestic violent extremist (DVE) groups merits attention. Members of the military and law enforcement are proficient in lethal skillsets, and DVE groups seek to gain such expertise in two ways: by recruiting those who are serving or who have served and

by infiltrating the military and law enforcement “to gain tactical training and access to weapons and explosives.”⁴ Additionally, groups seek the credibility associated with the professionalism and discipline of military and law enforcement personnel.⁵

The public focus on their participation is rooted in expectations based on the social contract between citizens and those sworn to protect them. Members of the military and law enforcement communities hold distinct authorities and responsibilities within American society, which uniquely entrusts them to use force and other techniques that infringe on privacy and civil liberties. In return, members of both professions swear an oath and are expected to abide by a self-regulating professional ethic. Further, American society expects veterans of the military and law enforcement communities to adhere to high principles in civic life and in their personal conduct as citizens. Participation in DVE-related activities runs counter to the special roles assigned to these communities within the context of the social contract.

Both the federal government and academic researchers have analyzed the presence of domestic violent extremism within the military, law enforcement, and veteran communities. However, most existing research focuses specifically on one of those three. This study offers a comprehensive analysis of trends across the three communities.

The Department of Defense (DoD) and law enforcement agencies already enforce strict screening processes to identify adverse behavior within their ranks, including drug use, gang affiliation, or association with international terrorist organizations. To varying degrees, the DoD and law enforcement agencies at the federal, state, and local levels have reviewed screening, management, and post-service transition processes to address the presence of DVE ideologies and behaviors within their ranks. However, these efforts have often been reactionary, sporadic, and inconsistent.

Questions remain in the public discourse and among senior leadership and members of Congress: Is DVE in the military, veteran, and law enforcement communities

even a problem? If so, how widespread is it? Is the attention being paid to identifying, preventing, and punishing offenders proportional to their representation within these communities?⁶

Even among those who assess that the rate of a military and law enforcement presence in DVE activities is a problem, there is little consensus about how best to address the issue. Initiatives within the executive branch (particularly the DoD) to address DVE within the military have been met with pushback from some members of Congress who cite the efforts as wasteful.⁷

While efforts to prevent, identify, and rectify involvement in DVE activities are highly centralized in the military services, the structure of the law enforcement community is highly decentralized. Efforts to standardize any policies and practices, or even to identify best practices across law enforcement agencies, therefore

present a challenge for less controversial topics, let alone the contentious topic of DVE within the ranks.

CNAS announced the launch of the Countering Domestic Violent Extremism project in February 2022, convening a task force of experts in the field of countering DVE in the military, veteran, and law enforcement com-

munities (Appendix A). Three virtual working groups were conducted over a period of five months, focusing on recruitment and screening; in-service policies and practices; and post-service outreach and support. This project sought to develop a new approach to countering domestic violent extremism within the military, veteran, and law enforcement communities.

To that end, CNAS researched three processes in the professional lifecycle for the identification and management of DVE within the military, veteran, and law enforcement communities: recruitment and screening; current personnel management policies and practices; and transition and post-service outreach and support. With respect to recruitment, the CNAS team focused on the ways in which relevant departments and agencies screen for domestic extremist affiliation and radicalization, specifically the potential for engaging in violence. With respect to personnel management policies and practices, CNAS examined existing policies used to

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identify and mitigate DVE within the ranks and identified existing gaps and tensions. Lastly, CNAS studied existing programs, policies, and processes for those transitioning out of the military or law enforcement and identified opportunities to mitigate the appeal of DVE organizations to those who have already transitioned out of service.

Trends in U.S. Domestic Violent Extremism and Connections to the Military, Veteran, and Law Enforcement Communities

Broadly, domestic violent extremism has emerged as one of the nation’s most pressing homeland security threats in recent years. In August 2022, FBI Director Christopher Wray testified that, “The number of FBI investigations of suspected DVEs has more than doubled since the spring of 2020.”⁸ In April 2022, Department of Homeland Security (DHS) Secretary Alejandro Mayorkas testified that, “The Intelligence Community assesses that racially or ethnically motivated violent extremists (RMVEs) who advocate for the superiority of the white race, including white supremacists, and militia violent extremists (MVEs) present the most lethal DVE movement in the homeland.”⁹ In September 2021, National Counterterrorism Center Director Christine Abizaid testified that, “Since 2018, DVEs—who are driven by a range of ideologies—have been the most lethal terrorists within the homeland and will most likely pose an elevated threat during the next few years.”¹⁰ While these senior officials have not focused their assessments or public remarks on the issue of DVE within the military, veteran, and law enforcement communities specifically, they have repeatedly sounded the warning that DVE in general is a pressing and dangerous domestic threat, and will continue to be in the coming years.

In the past decade, domestic violent extremism has been increasing. Between 1994 and 2021, the number of domestic terrorism attacks and plots increased, with 2020 and 2021 at the highest levels.¹¹ In 2021 alone, there were 73 domestic terrorist attacks and plots.¹² The number of fatalities from these attacks increased from 5 to 30 between 2020 and 2021.¹³ In 2021, the Office of the Director of National Intelligence released a report to Congress, identifying the increase of white supremacists and militias as a national security threat.¹⁴ The Department of Justice (DOJ) is the lead federal government entity responsible for preventing,

investigating, disrupting, and prosecuting acts of domestic terrorism.¹⁵ As Assistant Attorney General for National Security Matthew Olsen has counseled, “DOJ investigates and prosecutes violent extremists for their criminal acts and not for their beliefs or based on their associations, and regardless of ideology.”¹⁶ The National Strategy for Countering Domestic Terrorism, issued by the Biden administration in June 2021, is the first national strategy issued specifically on the topic of domestic terrorism. It identifies at least three main drivers: racially or ethnically motivated extremism, anti-government or anti-authority motivated extremism, or lone actors or small groups with mixed ideologies.¹⁷

Modern U.S. history includes a number of occurrences of domestic terrorism perpetrated by individuals with connections to the military. The bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah Federal Building in Oklahoma City on April 19, 1995, remains the most deadly and significant event of domestic terrorism in American history. Army veteran Timothy McVeigh implanted and detonated a bomb inside a vehicle outside the Murrah building, which housed federal employees as well as a children’s day care center. The explosion killed 168 people, including 19 children, and injured several hundred others. McVeigh was employed as a security guard at the time of the attack.¹⁸



The bombing of the Alfred P. Murrah building on April 19, 1995, by Army veteran Timothy McVeigh, was the deadliest domestic terrorist attack in U.S. history. (Bob Daemrich/AFP via Getty Images)

Additional significant examples of domestic terrorism perpetrated by individuals with professional connections to the military community include:

- The 16th Street Baptist Church bombing (1963): On September 15, 1963, four members of the Ku Klux Klan's no. 13 chapter set off a bomb in the 16th Street Baptist Church in Birmingham, Alabama. This church was a prominent location for Birmingham's Black community and was a continuous target for racial discrimination and assaults. The explosion killed four girls and injured several others.¹⁹ Two of the four perpetrators of this attack were veterans of the U.S. military.
- Ruby Ridge standoff (1992): On August 21, 1992, an 11-day standoff occurred between anti-government ideologue Randy Weaver, who had connections to white supremacist violent groups, and the U.S. Marshals. This standoff led to a shootout, leaving members of Weaver's family and a U.S. Marshal dead. Randy Weaver was a former Green Beret.²⁰
- Centennial Olympic Park bombing (1996): On July 27, 1996, at the 1996 Summer Olympics in Atlanta, Georgia, Eric Robert Rudolph set off a bomb in Centennial Olympic Park, killing one woman and injuring more than 100 people.²¹ Rudolph went on to place additional bombs in Georgia and Alabama during the next two years, evading an intense law enforcement manhunt for five years. A U.S. Army veteran, he had attended Air Assault School at Fort Campbell, Kentucky.²²
- Wisconsin Sikh Temple shooting (2012): On August 5, 2012, Wade Page shot 10 people in a Sikh temple in Oak Creek, Wisconsin, killing seven, and then himself after being shot by law enforcement personnel. Page was a white supremacist and U.S. Army veteran.²³

These illustrative examples highlight that perpetrators of domestic violent extremism have had connections to the military community long before January 6, 2021. Existing scholarship points to DVE being prominent among military personnel and veterans dating back at least to the Vietnam War, if not earlier.²⁴ In 1970, the U.S. Marine Corps recorded more than 1,000 cases of racial violence within their ranks. Experts view events such as the Vietnam War as enabling environments for domestic violent extremist behaviors and views.²⁵ The National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism at the University of Maryland published a research brief in December 2021, highlighting 458 instances of extremist-related crimes committed by

Americans with military backgrounds between 1990 and 2021. Findings included that 386 of these criminals were no longer serving in the military at the time of their extremist acts, and most had been out of military service for more than a decade, demonstrating the potency of targeted recruitment of veterans.²⁶

The work of government analysts and officials to identify even potential links between violent extremist trends in the United States and the military community can be difficult and controversial. In 2009, DHS published a report titled *Rightwing Extremism: Current Economic and Political Climate Fueling Resurgence in Radicalization and Recruitment*.²⁷ The analysis included the following statement:

Returning veterans possess combat skills and experience that are attractive to rightwing extremists. DHS I&A [Office of Intelligence and Analysis] is concerned that rightwing extremists will attempt to recruit and radicalize returning veterans in order to boost their violent capabilities.²⁸

Following the release of the 2009 report, there was substantial media attention and criticism from lawmakers, including calls for then-DHS Secretary Janet Napolitano to resign.²⁹ DHS initially defended the assessment, but quickly withdrew the report.³⁰ The 2009 report was criticized from varying perspectives, ranging from lawmakers who challenged the report as maligning the veteran community, to the ACLU, which criticized the report's emphasis on ideology instead of violent actions.³¹

Meanwhile, the connections between law enforcement and domestic violent extremism—or the ideological underpinnings of it—have received, generally, less attention from either the government or the research community.³² In 2006, an FBI intelligence assessment cautioned law enforcement personnel “regarding white supremacist groups’ interest in ‘infiltrating law enforcement communities or recruiting law enforcement personnel.’”³³ More recently, criminal prosecutions of individuals charged in connection with the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol provide support for more analysis of law enforcement alongside military and veteran susceptibility to recruitment by domestic extremist groups. As of late October 2022, approximately 900 people have been charged for actions taken in connection with the attack on the Capitol.³⁴ According to an assessment by NPR, as of September 2022, at least 14 percent of those charged appear to have connections to the military or law enforcement.³⁵ Twelve are former

law enforcement officers, and five were current police officers at the time. Of those who have been convicted so far, about 68 (or 9 percent) are former law enforcement or military personnel.³⁶

Analysis and Findings

The CNAS review of military, veteran, and law enforcement efforts to counter DVE in their communities resulted in three major findings: (1) Recognition of the problem to be solved is inconsistent; (2) An inconsistent set of best practices has been established; (3) Efforts across these communities are significantly disparate. As a result, this report endeavors to move the public debate forward by proposing a set of recommendations to assist these communities in developing initiatives to prevent and mitigate against DVE.

This report’s recommendations are based on the following premises. First, the military, veteran, and law enforcement communities need to be better informed that they are being *targeted* by DVE groups. Second, the CNAS research team assesses that the best opportunity to mitigate against the threat is at the screening and recruitment phase. Third, the implementation of new

training models of “inoculation”³⁷ (exposing potentially targeted communities to the threat of ideologies that may infiltrate their ranks) is likely to be more effective than traditional bureaucratic training programs or modules.

A consistent question raised by task force participants over the course of this study was, “Should law enforcement communities be learning from DoD practices, or should the DoD be learning from law enforcement models?” Congress appears to have rejected the DoD model. There are indications that DHS initiated a review in 2021, but then paused its efforts after a preliminary report was issued. According to publicly available information, the DOJ has not conducted a review or analysis across its law enforcement components. A RAND report suggested that perhaps the DoD should be learning from local law enforcement organizations, but local law enforcement entities are generally far less resourced and less well equipped to provide a model for federal government organizations.³⁸

A second question is whether rooting out DVE should be treated differently than rooting out any other type of undesirable activity or affiliation, such as corruption, drug use, international terrorism affiliations, or criminal gang affiliations. Is there something unique about the



On January 6, 2021, a mob stormed the U.S. Capitol, delaying congressional certification of the 2020 election. Dozens of law enforcement officers were injured as a result, and five police officers died in connection with the attack. (Brent Stirton/Getty Images)

threat DVE poses to organizations and professions, or should this be addressed as a screening and disciplinary issue similar to other disqualifying activities? While certain challenges do exist in identifying DVE, education and training to counter it should be incorporated into existing efforts, and DVE should not be treated as an isolated threat.

The Professional Framework

Both the military and law enforcement services are considered professions with established norms and ethics. In order to be considered a profession, the following four characteristics must be present: expertise, a collective and individual responsibility to serve society, a sense of being part of a larger body, and an ethic and ethos.³⁹

As part of the responsibility to serve society, members of the military and law enforcement professions enter into a social contract. In exchange for providing protection, service members and law enforcement officers are granted permissions and privileges that are not provided to regular citizens. As professions, the military and law enforcement communities “have significant influence over the criteria for entrance into the profession . . . by setting and enforcing standards for practice, standards

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that are made public and must be publicly defensible.”⁴⁰ While external laws and policies may dictate limitations on behavior, it is the intrinsic power of a professional ethos that causes the individual and the group to abide by a moral code.

A professional ethos creates a sense of identity among those who share the ideals. It refers to the “collective and internal sense of what each member must be as a member of the profession.” It is “more about what it means *to be* a member of that profession than it is about what members of the profession *do*. One *must do* certain things because one is a member of a certain profession, and one *must not do* certain other things, also because one *is* a member of the profession.”⁴¹

Further, members of the military and law enforcement professions enter into the community of practice through taking an oath, at which point the individual “tak[es] up new roles and obligations that one did not have prior to taking that oath. With this comes a new moral identity and obligations related to that role and membership in

this community.”⁴² Anti-government and anti-authority sentiment directly counters the oath and activities of service in the military and law enforcement. Moreover, law enforcement (particularly the FBI and DHS), along with intelligence elements (particularly the National Counterterrorism Center), has primary responsibility for countering and responding to domestic terrorism within the United States—making it necessary to ensure that those among the ranks do not harbor extremist sentiments themselves.⁴³

As this report explores, externally imposed laws and policies regarding the prevention, identification, and monitoring of involvement with DVE organizations and activities have been limited in their ability to affect change within the military, veteran, and law enforcement communities. The professional ethic framework may provide avenues for improvement within the communities of practice, as explored in the recommendations.

Recruitment and Screening

The recruitment process provides the first opportunity for the military and law enforcement communities to flag concerns for any aspect of an individual’s fitness for service, including whether the person may have connections with violent extremist groups or may have participated in associated activities. The military and law enforcement professions maintain rigorous standards for entry, including physical fitness, mental aptitude, and professional bearing. Candidates may be further subjected to background checks to identify any past criminal behavior. This section provides an outline of the current policies and practices in place for each of the professions.

MILITARY

The DoD establishes baseline screening criteria for military service, including medical and physical standards, military accession testing programs, and requirements for character and conduct.⁴⁴ The guiding document for conduct standards, Department of Defense Instruction (DoDI) 1304.26 (“Qualification Standards for Enlistment, Appointment, and Induction”), states, “The underlying purpose of these enlistment, appointment, and induction standards is to minimize entrance of persons who are likely to become disciplinary cases, security risks, or who are likely to disrupt good order, morale, and discipline.”⁴⁵

While the DoD sets the overarching policy, the individual military services manage recruitment standards with some variation. However, within each service, the standard process includes candidate interviews with recruiters, tattoo screenings to identify any suspicious markings, background investigations to identify past criminal activity, and additional screenings for extremist activity during the security clearance process.

Though the current policies and processes screen for DVE behaviors, the existing systems are imperfect. The current process relies heavily on self-reporting during recruiter and security clearance interviews. Individuals may not be personally incentivized to share such affiliations, and background checks only flag a candidate if the person was caught engaging in criminal activity and formally charged. Additionally, the services do not screen social media posts, which may provide important indicators that people have participated in or intend to engage in DVE. While social media affiliations and posts may indicate that an individual is involved with a group engaged in DVE, or holds domestic extremist views, the services are limited in their ability to use social media for screening. First, attribution is difficult, as people may operate under pseudonyms, or their names and likenesses may be used in an unauthorized manner by other individuals. Second, the services do not have a uniform standard to apply to screening social media.

The screening process also presents challenges with respect to First Amendment considerations. As one working group member stated, “People are legally able to hold unpopular beliefs; it doesn’t mean they’re extremists.”⁴⁶ A sense of confusion exists regarding how best to screen for an individual’s willingness to use violence while at the same time protecting constitutionally guaranteed views and speech. A consensus emerged in the working group highlighting the differentiation between personal views and views that contradict the oath to the Constitution.⁴⁷ Participants highlighted the need to approach DVE through the framework of professionalism within the force, appealing to the need to maintain the strength, cohesion, and health of the institution, and to inculcate individuals with a commitment to the mission and the organization over any potential leanings they may have toward DVE.⁴⁸

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LAW ENFORCEMENT

Law enforcement organizations across the country are generally still evaluating whether it is necessary to revise recruiting practices to specifically screen for DVE activities, affiliations, or sympathies. Unlike the U.S. military, which has a centralized, structured method of recruitment and screening across services, U.S. federal, state, and local law enforcement organizations employ varying methods of recruiting and onboarding new hires. Federal recruitment and screening, which takes place according to civil service regulations and departmental or agency guidelines, varies across agencies. For example, the rules, standards, practices, and training among law enforcement components of DOJ and DHS differ, including among the specific law enforcement components that reside within those umbrella departments. Each state and local law enforcement organization

has unique practices. The extent and sophistication of recruitment activities include factors such as the size of the population center, the size of the police force, and the financial and other administrative resources available.⁴⁹ Recent initiatives to change recruiting processes to weed out extremism in the ranks of police forces have been met at the state level with political resistance.⁵⁰

Generally, the expectations among law enforcement executives are that existing mechanisms such as background checks and, where used, polygraph examinations, will effectively screen out DVE affiliations, just as they have for other criminal history, international terrorism affiliations, and gang activity in the past. Police departments across the country have varying uses of polygraphs in the onboarding phase: some departments use them; others do not. Social media activity screening is one component of due diligence for law enforcement hiring practices. One question that law enforcement organizations may face is how to conduct such screening in a way that adheres to and respects First Amendment rights.⁵¹ Departments generally do not have policies or practices intended to specifically root out DVE affiliations or proclivities. Some police executives are currently exploring whether their departments need to make additional efforts to address how to prevent the influence of DVE groups.⁵²

Local law enforcement agencies around the country are currently experiencing a highly challenging recruiting environment. These difficulties are reducing the size of the candidate pool and impacting the quality

of recruits. Input from law enforcement executives during this project suggests that young adults today are less likely to pursue a long-term career in that field. Recruiting numbers are low at the same time that existing law enforcement officers are leaving the profession. Fraternal Order of Police President Patrick Yoes remarked in August 2022, “We see law enforcement officers leave our profession at a rate we’ve never seen before.”⁵³ While departments have not openly acknowledged lowering standards to meet recruiting requirements, some leaders consulted during this project did acknowledge that the challenges likely negatively affect the quality of the recruitment pool by decreasing competition among potential candidates.

The challenge of effectively screening for violent extremist activities, affiliations, or sympathies is complicated by the lack of effective policies in the military, and by the existing recruiting pipeline from military service to law enforcement. A significant number of officers are recruited into law enforcement directly after military

A significant number of officers are recruited into law enforcement directly after military service or have military experience.

service or have military experience. Approximately 19 percent of active-duty law enforcement officers come to the profession with a military service background.⁵⁴ The military-to-law-enforcement pipeline is a longstanding career path, with veterans’ preference and civil service laws and regulations encouraging such career transitions.

There are benefits to law enforcement agencies for recruiting from the military community. Members may have a shared commitment to public service. Military recruits may be older and therefore have more maturity and life experience than non-military recruits. Familiarity and training with weapons, the ability to operate in a hierarchical environment, and commitment to public service are all common attributes. The nature of policing has changed, however, and the recruitment pipeline and processes that support it should be reevaluated and expanded in light of these changes. While some skills are transferrable, 21st century law enforcement and policing demand different abilities than those that are developed through military training and service. To design an agency equipped to handle the range of modern policing challenges, today’s investigative law

enforcement and on-the-ground policing necessitate wider education, training, and interpersonal skills than was the case decades ago.⁵⁵ The skills needed for modern-day policing are frequently different than those developed in combat, extraterritorial military policing environments, or domestic military base security functions. For example, responding to calls related to mental illness or substance abuse requires police officers with greater education and training in behavioral science and social services, and less reliance on weapons and force. Accordingly, existing recruitment practices that rely on substantial veterans’ preference and use recruitment materials that hype the paramilitary nature of law enforcement activities should be reevaluated and likely redesigned. The informal practices now in place limit the recruitment of appropriately trained candidates.⁵⁶ The strong military-to-law-enforcement recruitment pipeline needs to be reconsidered.

In-Service Policies and Practices

The DoD, military services, and law enforcement community maintain a complex system of screening for and addressing adverse behavior among those currently in their ranks. This section provides an overview of current policies and practices in those communities.

MILITARY

The DoD has maintained policies and practices for dealing with extremist behavior since 1969. In the wake of the January 6 attacks, Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin ordered an examination of the current DoD policy regarding prohibited activities (DoD Instruction 1325.06), releasing the updated policy in December 2021. The revised instruction gives a unified definition of “extremism” and “active participation” and provides for better educating service members about potential threats as they transition out of the military. Extremism is specifically defined as “the unlawful force, violence, or other illegal means to deprive individual liberties through the lens of political, religious, discriminatory, or ideological objectives.”⁵⁷

Service members are subject to civil law and the stricter Uniformed Code of Military Justice (UCMJ). The current UCMJ does not include a separate punitive article on domestic violent extremism. However, the proposed National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022 includes language requiring that the DoD produce a report on whether such an article should be included in the UCMJ.⁵⁸

In addition to updating the policy, the DoD also instituted a force-wide stand-down to address extremism

in the force. Service members were relieved of their operational duties for a day in order to engage in a conversation regarding extremism in the military. The stand-down was structured to reinforce the importance of the oath to the Constitution and to provide an avenue for service members' questions, comments, and concerns. While this event was seen as an important and necessary step among DoD leadership, it was met with pushback from some members of Congress who cited the efforts as wasteful, costing more than \$500,000.⁵⁹

Within the military services, the responsibility and authority for prevention of extremist behaviors and early intervention are delegated to local commanders from the service leadership.⁶⁰ As such, commanders are expected to uphold and model leadership values reflective of the profession, to know their subordinates, and to use their discretion in reporting any questionable behavior.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

The research dialogues carried out for this study reveal that efforts to review whether DVE activities, affiliations, or sympathies among the ranks of federal, state, and local law enforcement are prevalent and have been varied, inconsistent, and inconclusive. In March

2022, the Department of Homeland Security released a preliminary *Domestic Violent Extremism Internal Review* report.⁶¹ This review, conducted by the DHS chief security officer, did not find evidence that DVE affiliation or activities were a problem within the department's law enforcement ranks, which include more than 80,000 federal law enforcement officers spread across multiple departmental components and agencies. The report noted, however, that the data available to reviewers was insufficient. As of September 2022, DHS had not conducted a follow-up review, and it did not have plans to do so.

According to publicly available sources, the Department of Justice has not conducted a comprehensive review of policies and practices of law enforcement agencies for countering DVE within the ranks of current or former agents and officers. In addition, there is no indication that the DOJ plans to conduct an internal review of its law enforcement components to assess the threat of how its officers and agents may be targeted for recruitment by DVE groups, or whether there is a current DVE presence within its ranks. As the lead federal government entity responsible for preventing, investigating, and prosecuting acts of domestic terrorism, the National



Secretary of Defense Lloyd Austin honors Capitol Police Officer Brian Sicknick as the slain officer lies in state on February 3, 2021. Sicknick died in the line of duty from injuries sustained during the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. (Erin Schaff/Pool/Getty Images)

Security Division of the Justice Department created a task force in early 2022 to more effectively coordinate domestic terrorism matters across the department and the federal government.⁶²

As discussed earlier, in February 2021, the Department of Defense conducted a day-long, department-wide stand-down to discuss the issue of violent extremism within the ranks.⁶³ The CNAS research team has not identified any law enforcement organization that conducted a similar agency-wide stand-down.⁶⁴ Law enforcement personnel have advised that after racial justice protests in summer 2020, some departments did facilitate internal dialogues about racial justice, bias, and professional ethics. These discussions, however, were focused solely on issues prevalent in civic life at the time, and not on issues related to domestic violent extremism.⁶⁵

There are more than 18,000 law enforcement agencies nationwide, each of which sets its own policies and practices for operations, oversight, internal affairs, and related matters.⁶⁶ Formal policies and processes generally do not exist at the state, county, and local department levels regarding how domestic violent extremist activity or affiliations may be discovered or addressed. Certain states have initiated efforts to root out violent extremism within law enforcement departments. For example, California, Oregon, Minnesota, and Washington, D.C., have proposed new legislation that would require law enforcement agencies to exclude officers with ties to violent extremist groups.⁶⁷ Oregon's recent changes focus on the screening process, which would include more reviews of social media posts.⁶⁸ Police departments in New York, Maryland, Pennsylvania, North Carolina, and Washington conducted investigations within their forces to see if any of their officers were affiliated with the Capitol rioters.⁶⁹

As things stand now, local or state officials likely will not become aware of DVE affiliations among their ranks until and unless an individual officer engages in an activity that is violent or criminal in nature. In such a case, law enforcement officers may be investigated by a different law enforcement organization, and subject to discipline and removal based on existing policies in their individual agency. If someone is discovered to be affiliated with a DVE group in a way short of activity that evolves into criminal activity, it is likely to be through informal means.

Law enforcement organizations generally rely on existing insider threat programs intended to identify national security or criminal threats within the organizations. These efforts, to the extent that they exist, are

at different levels of sophistication, depending on the size and breadth of the law enforcement organization; they are not tailored specifically to DVE groups. A RAND study reported: "Police departments across the country are working to identify and remove violent extremists from the police payrolls." However, the extent to which this effort is systematic or beyond case-by-case handling of specific incidents is unclear.⁷⁰ The research discussions with law enforcement executives that took place for this study indicate that police organizations are more likely using informal mentorship programs, in-person discussions on public trust, and common-sense training sessions that encourage good judgment.

Post-Service Transition and Support

Given the level of commitment required to succeed as a professional in the military or law enforcement, individuals within these professions can derive a personal sense of identity and significance from their work. Service in these professions involves camaraderie, purpose, discipline, and structure that may not exist once someone transitions out of the field. The sense of identity loss and a lack of community can prime transitioning service members and law enforcement officers to be sympathetic to groups that emulate military structure, culture, and discipline—thereby increasing the potential appeal of DVE organizations, which emphasize these attributes in their targeted recruitment of military and law enforcement personnel.

MILITARY

The already-established Transition Assistance Program (TAP) now includes better education about DVE organizations' targeted recruitment of transitioning service members. TAP, an interagency effort administered by the Department of Defense in collaboration with other federal agencies, including the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA), is intended to ensure that service members are prepared to successfully reintegrate into society as civilians. While TAP's predominant emphasis is post-service employment, the program also seeks to provide personnel with the skills to reengage with their communities.

Updates to the existing TAP in the aftermath of the January 6 attack include new language during pre-separation counseling to reinforce the "need to honor the oath of office and to support and defend the Constitution."⁷¹ The counseling further informs transitioning members about avenues for reporting extremist activities should the person become targeted for DVE recruitment. Additionally, the VA engages in information-sharing sessions such as the DoD-led programs to reach those



Retired New York Police Department officer and former Marine Thomas Webster assaulted a Capitol police officer on January 6, 2021. (U.S. Department of Justice Court Filing)

who have already transitioned out of service.

Once individuals transition from military service to veteran status, there is limited jurisdiction for behavioral consequences should they become engaged in DVE. However, the VA has the authority to terminate veterans' benefits if they are prosecuted for criminal activity.

Beyond government programs, several nonprofit veteran service organizations (VSOs) exist to ensure healthy transitions into society after military service. Such organizations appeal to veterans' sense of identity. For example, the legacy VSOs (including the Veterans of Foreign Wars, American Legion, and Vietnam Veterans of America) assist those navigating the VA claims and benefits system, but also provide a sense of community for people who have left military service. Service-focused organizations such as The Mission Continues and Team Rubicon, along with fitness-focused groups such as Team Red, White, and Blue, fill the need for structure, purpose, and community.⁷² Participation in these organizations can thus help meet veterans' psychological needs and serve to mitigate the appeal of membership in DVE organizations—which exploit these needs in their recruitment efforts.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

A background in law enforcement has not historically been typical of those who engage in domestic terrorism, and domestic violent extremist groups are generally anti-law enforcement and anti-authority. However, around 2 percent of those charged in connection with the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol were current or former law enforcement officers.⁷³ Accordingly, the research year used here included consideration of whether additional post-service outreach to retired and former law enforcement officers would be useful. CNAS task force convenings and research interviews found that even beyond the issue of countering domestic violent extremism, there is a substantial need for post-career services and outreach throughout the law enforcement community.

When law enforcement officials retire or leave, the post-service outreach and support mechanisms appear to be minimal, whether at the federal, state, or local levels. Discussions with law enforcement experts in the task force sessions pointed to stark differences between post-service support for military veterans versus their law enforcement counterparts. Interviews with law enforcement executives revealed that the closest forms of post-service outreach and support for these individuals are through unions, integrated officer wellness programs in which officers can participate throughout their service, or simply informal friend networks.

In contrast to the military, the law enforcement community lacks a standardized, formal offboarding process. There is no equivalent of a VA for the law enforcement community at the local, state, or national levels. The few organizations that exist to support law enforcement officers may be in a position to provide the leadership necessary to expand post-service support, for example the nonprofit International Association of Chiefs of Police and state-level associations of chiefs of police.

Consistent with the experience of those transitioning from military service, those transitioning from law enforcement may suffer from a loss of the purpose and discipline that accompanied their careers. Combined with the lack of community resources and networks, retired or former law enforcement officers may be susceptible to recruitment by a DVE organization that promises purpose, mission, and a sense of community.

Recommendations

Recruitment and Screening

MILITARY

Standardize social media screening practices.

Social media present unique challenges for the screening of prospective and current service members, including difficulties with attribution, but posts regarding involvement in DVE organizations and activities may serve as a leading indicator for future violent actions. The DoD and military services should consider adapting criteria for social media screening, including standards for acceptable professional behavior while in uniform.

Communicate the role of the professional ethics expected of a service member before the oath of office is administered.

Materials and training for military recruiters should include a clear articulation of shared professional ethics. Conversations with potential recruits should focus on the role of military service within the social contract prior to administration of the oath of office.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Integrate counter-DVE efforts into existing screening and recruitment processes.

Reducing the likelihood that individuals with DVE group activities or affiliations will join the law enforcement ranks is the best way to protect against infiltration of these groups. The recruitment and screening stage is the best opportunity to prevent the reach of these groups into the law enforcement communities. The research carried out for this study reveals that the best methods for integrating counter-DVE objectives into recruiting and screening are to maintain existing standards for recruitment, apply consistent practices for background investigations and social media screening, and widen the pipeline for law enforcement service to recruit individuals with the education, training, and skills that are appropriate for 21st-century policing, security, and law enforcement investigative activities.

In addition, although this would be difficult to quantify, one potential way to prevent the reach of DVE groups could be to ensure that military personnel who are already affiliated with or sympathetic to DVE do not transition directly into law enforcement. Repeatedly

during the interviews conducted for this research—with current law enforcement officers, retired police chiefs, and current federal law enforcement senior officials—it was affirmed that the 20th-century incentives and bureaucratic pathways from military service to law enforcement are outdated.⁷⁴ Screening standards for individuals with DVE affiliations are necessary for both those with prior military service and civilians. Applying these standards to former military personnel may prevent a direct pipeline from military service to law enforcement if those individuals were discharged or left military service early. It would also ensure no advantage over other qualified candidates applying for law enforcement positions. Far beyond the DVE issue specifically, retooling the recruitment pipeline to broaden it far beyond a traditional path directly from the military community is a necessary step in order to design police forces and law enforcement agencies that represent 21st-century best practices.

In-Service Personnel Policies

MILITARY AND VETERANS

Increase professional military ethics training in required Professional Military Education (PME).

The military services currently provide PME for commissioned and noncommissioned officers at regular intervals in the career path, particularly at points of transition to higher echelons of leadership. The academic environment of PME allows for freer discussion regarding the applicability of military ethics to ambiguous or difficult leadership challenges, and this can motivate service members to pursue behavioral change in themselves and their units.

Inculcate professional ethics as a leadership responsibility at every echelon, rather than making this the sole responsibility of judge advocates general and chaplains.

Service members may believe the study of professional ethics falls into the domain of legal advisors or spiritual and religious leaders. While these career fields certainly contribute to the overall development and socialization of professional military ethics, the self-regulating nature of the service ethic, both individually and communally, requires full participation. Contemplation of the meaning of the term at every echelon—platoon, squad, and ship level through services chiefs—is necessary for maintaining the professional ethic throughout the

service. Conversations about it should occur regularly at the local unit level in addition to more formal PME opportunities.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Integrate counter-DVE programs into existing law enforcement in-service training programs.

It is unnecessary to create specific programs devoted to countering DVE within the ranks. Instead, counter-DVE training should be part of a focus on security, insider threats, professional expectations, and ethics.⁷⁵ Advanced training in communications, emotional intelligence, and the evaluation of online content will further assist in identifying attempts at DVE recruitment.

Department training that incorporates DVE awareness should frame the issue in terms of an officer's natural duty to ensure public safety and sworn oath to enforce the law.

Because policing is a collaborative and team-based enterprise, officers can detect potential issues of concern among their peers. To counter the continuum of the path toward radicalization, training should cover the topic of extremism, sensitizing officers to the importance of addressing or reporting issues of concern early. Department leaders should ensure the existence of clear processes through which colleagues can report suspected DVE activities or sympathies.

Further, department trainers should seek to reduce ambiguity surrounding protected speech by proactively sensitizing officers to the types of activities that are permitted or prohibited by the particular agency's policies. Similar to the manner in which many departments teach professional ethics and standards, incorporated training about violent extremism should be scenario-based. This will provide officers with concrete rather than theoretical guidance. Clear guidance serves two important purposes: it educates officers on standards and expectations and it diffuses claims of ignorance about policy should disciplinary action be required.

Post-Service Transition and Support

MILITARY AND VETERANS

Educate those leaving service about the potential for their recruitment by DVE organizations.

DoD Instruction 1325.06 provides guidance on how transitioning service members should be educated regarding their potential targeted DVE recruitment. While Congress and the executive branch debate the

advisability of counter-DVE efforts within the services, the DoD and military services should execute the recommended changes to the Transition Assistance Program. This will reinforce the "need to honor the oath of office and to support and defend the Constitution," thus strengthening the professional ethic and sense of community that service members carry with them after transition.⁷⁶

Connect transitioning service members with resources for community engagement.

Individuals who belong to a profession find a sense of identity and community that extends beyond their work. After transitioning out of service, some may be vulnerable targets for DVE organizations that offer a community, mission, and sense of purpose. In order to counter such vulnerabilities, service-oriented military and veteran organizations can offer a sense of community and mission, meeting reintegration needs for individuals who no longer find a sense of identity or community in their civilian employment.

LAW ENFORCEMENT

Create new post-service networks and resources for retired and former law enforcement personnel.

At the federal level, greater attention among the major law enforcement departments should be devoted to providing transition assistance—both professional and personal—to retiring personnel. While not as ambitious or extensive as a "VA for law enforcement," this step would develop additional offboarding training programs, community-based social networks (real life, not only virtual), and continuing wellness programs (physical as well as mental) for retired and former law enforcement personnel.

This recommendation has implications far beyond the issue of countering DVE in the law enforcement community. It should be viewed in the context of improving the quality of life of law enforcement officers and making the profession attractive for a new generation of the workforce.⁷⁷

Conclusion

An emphasis on countering DVE within the military, law enforcement, and veteran communities is not new, but in the wake of the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol, renewed attention to the issue gave rise to incremental changes to policies and practices within the professions. Even though such updates to policies and practices are necessary to curb military, veteran, and law enforcement engagement in DVE, real opportunities exist for engaging the community of practice in communicating, modeling, and practicing the professional ethic internally across the lifecycle of service. Increased formal education and training of the ethic by respected leaders within these communities may be more impactful than externally required box-checking activities. Membership organizations, including police unions and military- and veteran-serving groups, can provide consistent, standardized professional development and a sense of community and purpose across the currently serving population, while also reaching transitioning and veteran members of the military and law enforcement communities who may be disconnected from support.

APPENDIX A: COUNTERING DOMESTIC VIOLENT EXTREMISM TASK FORCE*

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members participated in their individual capacities,
providing valuable insights and expertise to inform
this report. Task force members were not asked to
endorse any particular finding or recommendation
in this report, nor should they be interpreted as
doing so.*

APPENDIX B: SELECTED U.S. DOMESTIC VIOLENT EXTREMIST GROUPS

During the past several decades, federal law enforcement investigation of domestic terrorism has ranged from far-right white supremacist/neo-Nazi groups to far-left eco- and animal-rights groups. What distinguishes groups investigated for domestic terrorism is their connection to and engagement in criminal activity, including violence. The following are organizations whose activities and public profiles have risen in recent years, and who may target members of the military, veteran, and law enforcement communities.

Proud Boys

The mottos of this far-right group of self-identified “Western chauvinists” include, “White men are not the problem.”⁷⁸ While the Proud Boys have at times denied an underlying racist ideology, some of the members’ actions and statements have caused organizations such as the Anti-Defamation League (ADL) to label them as misogynistic, Islamophobic, transphobic, and anti-immigration.⁷⁹ According to the Justice Department, “Proud Boys members routinely attend rallies, protests, and other events, some of which have resulted in violence involving members of the group.”⁸⁰

The group was established in 2016 by Gavin McInnes, a co-founder of *Vice* magazine with a history of making racist and incendiary comments.⁸¹ Members have engaged in violent confrontations with anti-fascist protesters and have been associated with neo-Nazi groups and white supremacists. The Proud Boys gained national prominence in 2020 during a televised presidential debate between former President Donald Trump and then-candidate Joe Biden. When asked if he would condemn the extremist group, Trump drew criticism for telling its members to “stand back and stand by”—a message that was seen as potentially emboldening the group to be prepared for action.⁸²

Members of the group have been the subject of domestic terrorism investigations by the U.S. Justice Department, including for their role in the January 6, 2021, insurrection at the Capitol. Foreign governments including Canada and New Zealand have labeled the Proud Boys a terrorist organization based on a history of inciting others to violence in pursuit of political goals.⁸³

A collection of online posts by purported Proud Boys depicts a range of racist, misogynist, and nationalist views. For example, in a channel on the online platform Telegram (associated with the Proud Boys), a post reads: “The true minority in this world ARE whites. White children are less than 3 percent of the worlds [sic] population. I think since white majority countries are on a pathway to extinction we should correctly refer to non-whites by their true names. Worldwide majority.”⁸⁴ At a California rally in 2017, a member of the Proud Boys paramilitary wing stated, “I am not afraid to speak out about the atrocities that whites and people of European descent face not only here in this country but in Western nations across the world. The war against whites, and Europeans and Western society is very real and it’s time

we all started talking about it and stopped worrying about political correctness and optics.”⁸⁵ And in a 2017 interview with NBC News, Proud Boys founder Gavin McInnes said, “I’m not a fan of Islam. I think it’s fair to call me Islamophobic.”⁸⁶

The Proud Boys have been vocal in promoting falsehoods and conspiracy theories regarding the integrity of the 2020 U.S. election, and leaders of the group have been charged with seditious conspiracy. In June 2022, the U.S. Justice Department charged Enrique Tarrío and four other members with seditious conspiracy for their alleged role in the January 6 attack and their efforts to forcefully prevent the peaceful transfer of power. Several group members have pled guilty,⁸⁷ and the trial of Tarrío may begin as soon as December 2022. Most Proud Boys-affiliated individuals who have been charged in the attack are former members of the military.⁸⁸

Oath Keepers

The far-right Oath Keepers have been accused of engaging in acts of violence, purportedly for the purpose of defending the U.S. Constitution against elites whom they believe have threatened individual liberties of American citizens.⁸⁹ The 2009 group of co-founders includes former U.S. Army soldier Stewart Rhodes. The group has been instrumental in spreading various conspiracy theories surrounding overreach by the federal government and has frequently used force in support of its political aims.⁹⁰ Members have been associated with neo-Nazi, white supremacist, anti-immigrant, and anti-Islamic factions.

The Oath Keepers often appear to be a militia-style organization, dressing in tactical gear and carrying firearms during demonstrations. Their practices have included forming private security elements and “patrolling” during periods of unrest such as the 2014 protests in Ferguson, Missouri, following the police shooting of a Black resident, and during the 2017 Unite the Right white supremacist rally in Charlottesville.

In addition to conflicts with counter-protesters, the Oath Keepers have engaged in armed confrontation with members of law enforcement. For example, in April 2014, Oath Keepers converged on a ranch in Nevada after federal officials seized cattle belonging to a rancher because grazing fees had not been properly paid. Images from the scene showed far-right extremists engaged in a standoff with federal agents, pointing rifles at personnel from the Bureau of Land Management.⁹¹ Two years later, members of the Oath Keepers were among a similar group of far-right extremists that took siege of the Malheur National Wildlife Refuge in Oregon, engaging in a standoff with the federal government for more than 40 days.⁹²

On January 6, 2021, Oath Keepers allegedly moved into stack formation outside the U.S. Capitol in military style before breaching the building. While the attack was taking place, the government alleges that the group’s so-called quick reaction force (QRF) teams were stationed outside the Washington area, and were in possession of firearms,

explosives, and stockpiles of food. The U.S. Justice Department has charged members of the Oath Keepers with engaging in violence at the U.S. Capitol on January 6, 2021, in order to disrupt the certification of electoral results from the 2020 presidential election. Rhodes and his associates have been charged with seditious conspiracy for allegedly opposing “the lawful transfer of presidential power by force, by preventing, hindering, or delaying by force execution of laws governing the transfer of power.”⁹³

In September 2022, the Anti-Defamation League released a report that reflects and analyzes leaked data about membership names found in the Oath Keepers database, revealing many members of law enforcement and military communities who at various times have paid for membership. The leak also revealed that other public servants, including elected officials, government employees, teachers, religious figures, and others, were listed as members in the Oath Keepers database.⁹⁴ The ADL identified 117 individuals currently serving in the U.S. military. Other military affiliates in the database included 11 people serving in the reserves and 31 working as military contractors or in civilian positions in the U.S. military. Also in the database, the ADL identified 373 individuals whom they assess are currently serving in a U.S. law enforcement agency. This represents a noticeable increase from a similar report the ADL conducted in 2021, in which 76 law enforcement individuals were identified as being affiliated with the Oath Keepers.⁹⁵

The ADL’s closer study of the 373 individuals showed a range of security positions such as officers, detectives, captains, sergeants, and lieutenants. Additionally, the ADL identified at least 10 chiefs of police and 11 sheriffs, thus law enforcement officials with senior-level positions. Finally, the ADL estimated that 1,100 people listed in the database had previously served in law enforcement. Statistics from the Oath Keepers database leak revealed that this group effectively recruits from law enforcement and military communities.

Three Percenters

This militia-style movement is organized around hostility toward the federal government. Similar to other far-right militias, members of the group have claimed that the perceived overreach by government institutions requires members to prepare to respond with force in defense of constitutional rights.⁹⁶ The group’s name stems from its contested belief that only a small percentage of American colonists maintained the fortitude to fight the British. According to one member, “During the American Revolution, the active forces in the field against the king [sic] tyranny never amounted to more than 3 percent of the colonists. Three Percenters today, for the most part, identify with this 3 percent because they were true patriots fighting for the freedoms [that] the nation we love and honor was founded on.”⁹⁷ Motivated in part by their acceptance of conspiracy theories about government tyranny, the Three Percenters have engaged in paramilitary style activities, including weapons and tactical training, and have confronted members of law enforcement and protesters who oppose their cause.⁹⁸ The group has been frequently witnessed appearing at left-leaning protests and engaging in counter-demonstrations.

Members have also been present at political rallies hosted by former President Donald Trump and various right-wing groups, providing “security” against anti-Trump and other opposing demonstrators.⁹⁹ The government of Canada has designated the Three Percenters a terrorist entity.¹⁰⁰

Online communications by Three Percenter group members reveal patterns of racism, nationalism, and the perpetuation of conspiracy theories. For example, in court documents from one federal investigation into a group of likeminded extremists, a former Three Percenter allegedly said, “The only good Muslim is a dead Muslim. If you’re a Muslim I’m going to enjoy shooting you in the head. When we go on operations there’s no leaving anyone behind, even if it’s a one-year-old. . . . I guarantee if I go on a mission those little f***ers are going bye-bye.”¹⁰¹ In a separate posting on social media, a suspected Three Percenter allegedly tied immigration enforcement with conspiracy theories involving a military installation in New Mexico, writing, “If you can use deadly force at Area 51 why cant [sic] the same be done at the border?”

The U.S. Justice Department has arrested and charged members of the Three Percenter movement with their alleged role in the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol. Charges include “conspiracy, obstructing an official proceeding, and unlawful entry on restricted building or grounds,” as well as other offenses, according to court records.¹⁰² These records also reveal that group members discussed traveling to Washington with “medical kits, radios, multiple cans of bear spray, knives, flags, plates, goggles, helmets,” and firearms. Video from the attack shows members and associates pushing past lines of law enforcement and breaching the Capitol complex.¹⁰³ Among those charged in the January 6 cases is a former police chief.¹⁰⁴

The Boogaloo Movement

The members of this movement are known as Boogaloo Boys (or Bois), a loose group of libertarian anti-government extremists whose aim is to bring about a civil war against a federal government they view as corrupt and tyrannical.¹⁰⁵ Some Boogaloo members hold white supremacist and neo-Nazi views,¹⁰⁶ while others have claimed to object to white nationalism.¹⁰⁷ Experts describe the movement as having come together primarily online, with no formal system of membership.¹⁰⁸ Before social media platforms such as Facebook aimed to crack down on online spaces dedicated to Boogaloo views, likeminded adherents could gather in numerous digital groups and share extremist information. A U.S. Army veteran who wore a Boogaloo patch on his clothing was charged and pled guilty to crimes in connection with the January 6, 2021, attack on the U.S. Capitol.¹⁰⁹ Suspected Boogaloo adherents have been criminally charged with a range of federal crimes, including murdering and assaulting federal officers, as well as the destruction of property and weapons violations.¹¹⁰ For example, in 2021, a suspected member of the Boogaloo movement was arrested and charged with opening fire at a federal courthouse in Oakland, California, killing one guard and injuring another. After the shooting, federal authorities said

that the suspect, a former staff sergeant in the U.S. Air Force, spoke via encrypted messaging with other suspected Boogaloo adherents, telling them he was about to engage in a shootout with police. As sheriff's deputies approached his residence, the suspect opened fire, killing one officer.

One example of the seemingly wide-ranging and, at times, contradictory views held by Boogaloo Boys is two self-described members who were charged with conspiring to become “assets” of the designated foreign terrorist organization Hamas. Federal authorities arrested them in 2020.¹¹¹ According to authorities, witnesses saw them, armed, at a protest following George Floyd's murder. Allegedly they discussed “committing acts of violence against police officers” and “overthrowing the government and replacing its police forces.”¹¹² In a sting operation orchestrated by the FBI, the two Boogaloo adherents allegedly discussed aiding Hamas—an organization with shared anti-U.S. government views—and wanting to attack elected U.S. politicians as well as planning violence toward law enforcement. According to the criminal complaint, one of the suspects told an undercover FBI agent: “If we are able to accomplish our goals, the U.S. would be f***ing done.” These cases demonstrate the incongruous nature of the ideological basis for the Boogaloo movement and other percolating domestic extremist groups.

APPENDIX C: METHODOLOGY

This report follows a mixed-methods approach using three primary lines of effort to collect information and conduct analysis: an evaluation of existing literature and publicly available data, expert solicitation through a task force, and research interviews. CNAS further conducted a survey of current and former law enforcement officers to inform the analysis. For reasons outlined here, survey engagement was low.

Sources consulted included local and national reporting about DVE incidents involving military or law enforcement-affiliated individuals; veteran organization reports; academic journal articles; congressional hearings and testimony; DoD, DHS, and local law enforcement policies and analysis; and studies from federally funded research and development centers.

CNAS researchers analyzed the working group's findings to inform the design of a survey through the Qualtrics platform. This was distributed to the law enforcement community through targeted email lists and broadly through social media. Outreach was also conducted through the task force members to their individual networks. Between June and August 2022, only 24 law enforcement officers responded; 16 states and the District of Columbia were represented.

The anonymous public survey consisted of 11 questions, with three voluntary demographic questions. The survey questions follow in Appendix D. The questions inquired about the respondents' awareness of and resources available to those who identified violent extremism in their departments. Survey responses were used to gauge how police departments across the country handled violent extremist incidents and what resources leaders had.

The small sample size limited the ability to draw wide inferences. The very nature of the survey subject likely limited engagement. Task force experts from law enforcement indicated that the community is relatively closed to external questions, and that establishing trust is difficult.¹¹³

In April 2022, CNAS staff visited the FBI National Academy and spoke with law enforcement professionals about countering domestic violent extremism within their departments. The CNAS team further interviewed individuals at relevant law enforcement agencies, the DoD, and in academia.

APPENDIX D: SURVEY QUESTIONS

1. Have you received resources and training related to countering domestic violent extremism in your department?
 Yes
 No
2. If you witnessed or were made aware of domestic violent extremism in your department, do you know who to report it to or reach out to about it?
 Yes
 No
3. Do you think officers of your department are aware that law enforcement officers/military personnel/military veterans are being targeted by domestic violent extremist organizations for their skills and knowledge?
 Yes
 No
4. Has your department participated in a “stand-down” or “all-hands meeting” related to countering domestic violent extremism?
 Yes
 No
5. Do you think your department adequately screens at the recruitment and hiring stage for violent extremist activities?
 Yes
 No
6. Does your department incorporate social media usage into its screening and hiring processes?
 Yes
 No
7. Does your department have formal policies in place to identify and mitigate domestic violent extremism in the ranks?
 Yes
 No
8. Does your department have a formal network or connections with retired or former law enforcement officers in the department?
 Yes
 No
9. Does your retirement or departure process include information about potential targeting of former or retired law enforcement officers by domestic violent extremist organizations?
 Yes
 No
10. When law enforcement officers leave your department, what are some of the opportunities or professional activities they move on to?
 Move to another law enforcement department
 Transition to federal law enforcement
 Transition to another sector
 Retire
 Other _____
11. What recommendations do you have for policies, practices, resources, or guidance that could improve your department’s ability to address the potential for domestic violent extremism?
12. In which state do you work?
13. Are you now or have you ever been in a supervisory role?
 Yes, I am now
 Yes, I have been
 No

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