


# Pentagon Tightens Ban on Supremacist Activity After Years of Denying Problem

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Since the SPLC warned the U.S. military about extremist activity among active-duty personnel in 2006, the Pentagon brass has steadfastly denied that a problem existed and insisted that its “zero-tolerance” policy was sufficient to keep organized racists out of its ranks.

That changed this past November, when the Pentagon quietly tightened its policy on extremist activity, which formerly only banned “active participation” in extremist groups but did not define what that meant.

Under the new regulations, military personnel “must not actively advocate supremacist doctrine, ideology or causes” or “otherwise advance efforts to deprive individuals of their civil rights.” The new rules specify that “active participation” includes activities such as recruiting, fundraising, demonstrating or rallying, training, organizing and distributing supremacist material, including online posts.

The revision should give commanders ample new tools to root out racial extremists in their midst. The previous policy, in effect since the mid-1990s, could be interpreted to mean that military personnel were allowed to be “mere members” of hate groups or that they could engage in unaffiliated extremist activities — such as posting racist and anti-

Semitic messages to social networking websites and e-mail lists or maintaining online profiles filled with racist materials. As the SPLC has repeatedly pointed out, the policy allowed numerous active-duty members to engage in a range of supremacist activities.

The policy change, which slipped under the radar for months, was reported Friday by Michael Isikoff of *Newsweek*. In a blog post, Isikoff examined the military backgrounds of two members of the Hutaree Militia, the radical Michigan group whose members were indicted late last month in a plot to murder a law enforcement officer and then attack the funeral procession with homemade bombs and missiles.

The SPLC has been urging the Pentagon to revise the regulations since 2006, when it published “A Few Bad Men,” a report revealing that large numbers of neo-Nazi skinheads and other white supremacists were joining the armed forces to acquire combat and weapons training – skills that could be used to commit terrorist acts against targets in the U.S.

The report cited the case of Matt Buschbacher, a Navy SEAL who attended the 2002 leadership conference of the neo-Nazi National Alliance while on active duty. The group’s late leader, who espoused murdering Jews in abandoned coal mines, was the author of *The Turner Diaries*, the race war novel used by Timothy McVeigh as a blueprint for the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing. The SPLC alerted military officials to the fact that Buschbacher was producing neo-Nazi recruitment flyers via his Racialpride.com website, but he was allowed to complete his tour of duty in Iraq and even given an honorable discharge.

Another example in the 2006 report was the case of Robert Lee West, then an active-duty airman. When the SPLC informed military officials of West’s activities, which included posing in front of a swastika flag with two assault rifles and ranting about the “Zionist Occupied Government,” they said no action would be taken unless he recruited fellow extremists or committed a crime.

In a letter to then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, SPLC President Richard Cohen urged the military to adopt a zero-tolerance policy with regard to extremists in the ranks. Forty members of Congress wrote a similar letter, as did Sen. Richard Shelby, an Alabama Republican. But in his reply and in subsequent letters, Under Secretary of Defense David S. C. Chu dismissed the concerns as being unnecessarily alarmist. The military took no remedial action.

Two years later, in 2008, the SPLC reported new evidence that supported its initial findings. That report revealed that 46 members of the white supremacist social

networking website Newsaxton.com had identified themselves as active-duty military personnel. The report quoted a racist skinhead who posted a comment to a neo-Nazi online forum, excitedly saying that he had joined the Army and specifically requested an assignment where he would learn how to make an explosive device. "I have my own reasons for wanting this training but in fear of the government tracing me and me loosing [sic] my clearance I can't share them here," wrote the poster, who called himself "Sobibor's SS," a reference to guards at a Nazi concentration camp.

After that report, Cohen reiterated his request to the Pentagon that the rules be tightened. Once again, Chu replied by saying the military already had such a policy in place and needed nothing more. "We are committed to sustaining a culture in which all personnel from diverse backgrounds serve together in defense of our great nation," Chu wrote.

Meanwhile, an unclassified FBI Intelligence Assessment in Fall 2008 detailed more than a dozen investigative findings and criminal cases involving Iraq and Afghanistan veterans as well as other active-duty personnel engaging in extremist activity in recent years. "The military training veterans bring to the [white supremacist] movement and their potential to pass this training on to others can increase the ability of lone offenders to carry out violence from the movement's fringes," the FBI report warned.

In February 2009, the threat became even harder to ignore. Lance Corporal Kody Brittingham, a Marine stationed at Camp Lejeune in North Carolina, was arrested and later charged with threatening the president after investigators found white supremacist materials and a journal containing a plot to assassinate President Obama among his belongings.

Then, in April 2009, a Department of Homeland Security report on the threat of domestic terrorism from right-wing extremists stated that the department "assesses that rightwing extremists will attempt to recruit and radicalize returning veterans in order to exploit their skills and knowledge derived from military training and combat."

With no apparent action being taken by the Pentagon, in July 2009 the SPLC appealed to Congress to investigate the problem. In a letter to committee chairmen with oversight over homeland security and the armed services, the SPLC presented dozens of additional profiles of active-duty military personnel on the New Saxon website. Those profiles included an individual who wrote that he was about to be deployed with the Air Force overseas and was looking forward to "killing all the bloody sand n——!" Another poster listed Adolf Hitler's *Mein Kampf* as one of his favorite books. Many of the profiles included pictures of the posters in military uniform.

Two months later, in September, SPLC officials were invited to brief staff members of Sen. Joe Lieberman's Committee on Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs.

The Pentagon's November rule revision, at long last, won't eliminate all racial extremists or potential terrorists from the armed services. But it is a significant step forward and should make it much easier for commanders to investigate and discharge the likes of Matt Buschbacher and Robert Lee West.

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