

The Honorable Patrick M. Shanahan
Acting Secretary of Defense
U.S. Department of Defense
1000 Defense, Pentagon
Washington, D.C. 20301-1000

The Honorable Kirsjten Nelson
Secretary of Homeland Security
Department of Homeland Security
301 7th Street SW, Mail Stop 0150
Washington, D.C. 20528

Dear Acting Secretary Shanahan and Secretary Nelson:

We write to you regarding the arrest this week of Lt. Christopher Hasson, a self-professed white nationalist who planned to “murder innocent civilians on a scale rarely seen in this country.” We applaud the swift action taken by federal agencies to stop this threat to our national security and ensure that Lt. Hasson could not execute his plans.

However, we are also concerned that an individual that espouses these views could repeatedly serve in the military across multiple services. This latest incident is another in a series that tarnishes the proud legacy of the United States Armed Forces. In the wake of the Charlottesville white supremacist rally, at least six active duty members or veterans were identified as being present at the event and with connections to hate groups. Two other Marines were arrested the same month after attending a Confederate Memorial Day rally and brandishing white nationalist regalia. The involvement of service members in these activities is cause for significant concern, particularly given their combat and weapons training.

Our hope is that these incidents are isolated events and are not indicative of a larger, systemic issue within the United States Armed Services. Beyond the extremes of domestic terrorism, we are additionally concerned with low level racism and other identity-based harassment that disrupts unit cohesion, impacts readiness, and degrades the ability of our servicemembers to protect our nation. Servicemembers who experience or witness racist or hateful behavior must be able to report such behavior without fear of repercussions.

United States law clearly prohibits discrimination and extremist behavior amongst military service members: 10 USC 934 states that “all disorders and neglects to the prejudice of good order and discipline in the armed forces, all conduct of a nature to bring discredit upon the armed forces... shall be taken cognizance of by a general, special, or summary court-martial”. While the vast majority of our servicemembers continue to serve honorably, with distinction, and in adherence to this standard, it appears that some service members are still able to actively associate with extremist organizations.

We thus write to you requesting information on actions that your departments are taking to prevent the accession of recruits with ties to supremacist or hate groups and ensure an inclusive environment for all servicemembers.

1. What policies are in place in each service to prohibit the participation or association with organizations with extremist, supremacist, or hate based views?
2. What actions have the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security taken to unify these policies across all five services?

3. What steps are the Department of Defense and the Department of Homeland Security undertaking in each service to screen recruits for extremist ties?
4. How were Lt. Hasson and other military servicemembers with ties to extremist groups able to circumvent these checks?
5. Were there any indications in Lt. Hasson's service history with multiple branches of the Armed Services that indicated he was unfit for service?
6. What avenues do members who experience or witness extremist, supremacist, or hate based harassment have for reporting these incidents?
7. What programs do the Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security have in place to encourage the use of these reporting mechanisms?
8. What reporting and tracking metrics do the Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security maintain at the service level on extremist, supremacist, or hate based crimes?
9. What surveys of servicemembers have the Department of Defense and Department of Homeland Security conducted to identify the prevalence of incidents of extremist, supremacist, or hate based harassment within the Armed Services?

Thank you for your attention and prompt reply regarding our concerns. We look forward to hearing from you, and continuing to work with you to ensure all members of the military embody values consistent with an inclusive.