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## **Right-wing extremism in the military: a typology of the threat**

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# Right-Wing Extremism in the Military

A typology of the threat

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Teun van Dongen, Yannick Veilleux-Lepage,  
Eviane Leidig, Hanna Rigault Arkhis

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ICCT Research Paper

May 2022



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## Abstract

This research paper seeks to examine the nature of the nexus between right-wing extremism and the military by surveying five potential consequences (i.e., problem areas) arising from the presence of right-wing extremists within the armed forces of twelve Western countries. The five problem areas identified are military personnel: 1) committing right-wing extremist violence; 2) facilitating right-wing extremist violence by organisations; 3) perpetuating ideologically motivated hate crimes or violation of procedures and rules of engagement while on deployment; 4) hampering military diversity and inclusion efforts with activities and behaviours; and 5) undermining civilian control over the military. Based on a systematic review of five years of news media articles and government reports from 2017-2021, we find that for most problem areas the worst conceivable manifestations have thus far not (yet) materialised. Further, activities of military personnel with right-wing extremist leanings were not more dangerous as a result of their military background. Overall, the nature of the nexus between right-wing extremism and the military was vastly different amongst the countries in our study, with Germany and the US appearing to be the most heavily affected. The mapping of this threat serves as a basis for informing policymakers of the various scenarios and appropriate responses to counter right-wing extremism within the military.

**Keywords:** right-wing extremism, military, extremist violence, hate crime, military misconduct, terrorism, recruitment, radicalisation

# 1. Introduction

The 6 January 2021 attack on the US Capitol has given rise to public and scholarly concerns about the threat posed by right-wing extremists within Western militaries. The many videos and images of the attack, such as those showing Air Force veteran Larry Brock Jr. inside the Senate chamber wearing a tactical vest and helmet and gripping plastic handcuffs, made it palpably clear how dangerous it is to have people in the military who adhere to right-wing extremist ideologies.<sup>1</sup> Moreover, as the following months saw the arrests of several dozen American service members or veterans for their involvement in the attack, there is legitimate concern that the nexus between right-wing extremism and the military represents a structural problem.

Similar worries have been voiced in Germany, where Bundeswehr soldier Franco A. was accused of plotting a terrorist attack while posing as a Syrian refugee. This incident, too, captured the attention of a nation and ignited a public debate about right-wing extremist sentiments in the military. Elsewhere, service members have sought to oppose COVID-19 containment measures using violence. For example, in Belgium, a month-long manhunt took place during the summer of 2021, as authorities tried to locate a heavily-armed soldier who had threatened to kill a virologist for his role as adviser to the government during the pandemic. Likewise, in Canada, an armed reservist rammed his pickup truck through the front gate of the grounds at Rideau Hall in an attempt to “arrest” Prime Minister Justin Trudeau.

While these recent events have brought the issue of extremism within Western armed forces to the forefront, concerns about the issue have in fact existed for a long time, intensifying in response to high-profile violent attacks before subsiding again. Within this climate, most of the public and scholarly discussion surrounding what can be termed the *right-wing extremism-military nexus* has been characterised by (1) a focus on right-wing extremist violence perpetrated or facilitated by military personnel (such as those described above); and (2) case studies of countries where such violence took place, which often focus exclusively on the situation in the United States and Germany.

This research paper seeks to broaden our understanding of the right-wing extremism-military nexus by highlighting not only the diversity of this phenomenon but also the multifaceted consequences that can arise from the presence of radicalised personnel in the military. Building on the existing literature on terrorism and civil-military relations, we begin by introducing a typology of the threats which may emerge from the presence of radicalised personnel within Western militaries. The typology identifies five distinctive potential consequences; namely, that radicalised military personnel may:

- (1) commit acts of terrorism or political violence;
- (2) provide material support or training for right-wing extremist groups;
- (3) commit ideologically motivated hate crimes or violate procedures and rules of engagement while on deployment;
- (4) hamper diversity and inclusion efforts by militaries; and
- (5) disrupt the civilian-military power dynamic.

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<sup>1</sup> Tom Dreisbach and Meg Anderson, “Nearly 1 In 5 Defendants In Capitol Riot Cases Served In The Military,” NPR, January 21, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/21/958915267/nearly-one-in-five-defendants-in-capitol-riot-cases-served-in-the-military>.

In order to validate this theoretical frame, we present a systematic review of media articles and government reports that catalogue recent incidents of right-wing extremism in the armed forces of twelve Western countries. Based on this systematic review, we determine what form the five consequences take in Western militaries today. The twelve Western countries surveyed in this review are Germany, the United States (US), the United Kingdom (UK), Canada, Austria, Switzerland, France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Belgium, and the Netherlands.

This research paper seeks to contribute to scholarship on the right-wing extremism-military nexus in two important ways. First and foremost, it provides a much-needed framework to understand the various risks and implications associated with this phenomenon. Such an approach to the problem has so far been largely missing in the literature, which has instead tended to focus on the profiles of right-wing extremists with military backgrounds,<sup>2</sup> on empirically rich descriptions of the nature of their activities,<sup>3</sup> or on only one problem area, mostly physical violence, in the US.<sup>4</sup> Secondly, as the majority of work on this subject has focused on one country, or a small number of countries (mostly the US and Germany), there is a lacuna in the understanding of the phenomenon across different countries. To date, Daniel Koehler's comparative assessment of the problem in Canada, the US, Germany, and the UK represents the most ambitious attempt to explore the nature of the phenomenon across multiple countries.<sup>5</sup> This perspective is vital in order to develop a richer understanding of how the right-wing extremism-military nexus can look in practice. Therefore, the current paper seeks to provide a stepping stone for future research that aims to conduct more structured cross-country comparisons, investigating which manifestations of the right-wing extremism-military nexus occur most frequently, which countries are most heavily affected, and why some are more heavily affected than others.

## 2. The Right-Wing Extremism-Military Nexus

As mentioned above, recent high-profile incidents in various Western countries have sparked public fear of a potential extremist threat originating within the armed forces. However, these incidents differ greatly in nature: some have involved terrorist plots, while others have featured the open display of right-wing extremist symbols by military personnel. This suggests that the right-wing extremism-military nexus can manifest in a variety of ways. In an attempt to capture this diversity, we examined the emerging body of literature focusing on the connection between right-wing extremism and the military,<sup>6</sup> along with the literature on terrorism and civil-military relations. Based on this review, we developed a framework that captures the various ways in which the right-wing extremism-military nexus can create problems. We identified five such problem areas, which are outlined below.

2 S. Moskalenko, "Zip-tie guys: military-grade radicalization among Capitol Hill insurrectionists", *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* vol. 14, no. 2 (2021): 179-191; H. Haugstvedt and D. Koehler, "Armed and Explosive?", 1.

3 F. Flade, "The Insider Threat: Far-Right Extremism in the German Military and Police", *CTC Sentinel* 14, no. 5 (2021): 1-10.

4 S.G. Jones et al., *The Military, Police, and the Rise of Terrorism in the United States*; D. Milton and A. Mines, "This Is War".

5 D. Koehler, *A Threat from Within? Exploring the Link between the Extreme Right and the Military* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2019), <https://icct.nl/app/uploads/2019/09/ICCT-Koehler-A-Threat-from-Within-Exploring-the-Link-between-the-Extreme-Right-and-the-Military.pdf>.

6 It is worth noting that a great deal of research on this topic focuses either on the risk factors that might be involved when military personnel turn towards extremism, or the impact of military service on the susceptibility of personnel to far-right and authoritarian views. While important, both of these topics are outside of the scope of this research paper. See for example H. Haugstvedt and D. Koehler, "Armed and Explosive? An Explorative Statistical Analysis of Extremist Radicalization Cases with Military Background," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 34, no.1 (2022); and K. Roghmann and W. Sodeur, "The Impact of Military Service on Authoritarian Attitudes: Evidence from West Germany", *American Journal of Sociology* 78, no. 2 (1978): 418-433.



## 2.1 Problem area 1: Right-wing extremist violence perpetrated by military personnel

One of the fundamental questions regarding the nexus between right-wing extremism and the military concerns whether radicalised military personnel pose a greater threat of right-wing extremist violence as a result of their skills, resources, training, and access to equipment.

In the aftermath of the 1995 Oklahoma City bombing, the issue of the “insider threat” was at the forefront of US counter-terrorism for a short period of time. Scholarship on this topic boomed from 1995 to 1999, but declined post-9/11.<sup>7</sup> In more recent years, however, the spectre of terrorist attacks committed by right-wing extremists with a military background has re-emerged within public, academic, and law enforcement discourse. This is undoubtedly the result of the high-profile incidents mentioned in the previous section: Franco A.<sup>8</sup> in Germany is accused of planning to assassinate the head of the Amadeu Antonio Foundation while posing as a refugee,<sup>9</sup> Corey Hurren made an attempt to “arrest” the Prime Minister of Canada,<sup>10</sup> and hundreds of individuals with a military background were arrested for their participation in the 6 January 2021 attack at the US Capitol.<sup>11</sup> Indeed, in the aftermath of the Capitol attack, many media outlets focused on the seemingly disproportionate number of military service members among the participants.<sup>12</sup> Lending further credence to the belief that radicalised service members can pose a security threat, Jones et al. found that the proportion of domestic terrorist attacks perpetrated in the US by individuals with a military background had recently increased, shifting from 0.8 percent in 2018 to 1.5 percent in 2019, and increasing significantly to 6.4 percent in 2020.<sup>13</sup>

7 R.A. Goldenberg, *The New Challenge to Operational Readiness: the Threat of Extremist and Supremacist Groups to the United States Military* (Newport, RI: Naval War College, 1997); Walter M. Hudson, *Racial Extremism in the Army* (School of United States Army, 1998); J. Dyer, *Harvest of Rage: Why Oklahoma City Is Only the Beginning* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1998); Marc Flacks and Martin F. Wiskoff, *Gangs, Extremists Groups, and the Military: Screening for Service* (Monterey CA: Security Research Center, 1998); “Extremism in the Ranks”, *Newsweek* 127, no. 13 (1996), <https://elibrary.ru/item.asp?id=2559281>; R.A. Serrano, “Rooting Out Hate in the Ranks”, *Los Angeles Times*, 6 February 1996, <https://www.latimes.com/archives/la-xpm-1996-02-06-mn-32736-story.html>; L.M. Curtin Jr, *White Extremism & The U.S. Military* (Monterey, CA: Naval Postgraduate School, 1997); R.D. Barnes, “Blue by Day and White by (K)Night: Regulating the Political Affiliations of Law Enforcement and Military Personnel”, *Iowa Law Review* 81, no. 4 (1996): 1079–1172.

8 As a significant part of the research for this paper was conducted on the basis of media reporting, we use the names of the people involved as they appear in these media reports. In some countries, such as Germany and the Netherlands, it is customary among journalists and media organisations to refer to suspects who have not (yet) been convicted of a crime by their first name and the first letter of their surname. In other countries, it is customary to refer to suspects by their full name. When referring to individuals in relation to a specific incident, we follow the practice of the country where that incident took place. Therefore, our choice to refer to someone by their full name or by a semi-anonymised name should not be interpreted as an assessment regarding the culpability of this individual.

9 K. Bennhold, “German Officer Goes on Trial, Accused of Plotting Far-Right Terrorism”, *The New York Times*, 20 May, 2021. <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/05/20/world/europe/german-officer-trial-far-right-terrorism.html>.

10 Y. Veilleux-Lepage, “Investigating the Radical Right’s Presence in the Military”, in *Mainstreaming the Global Radical Right: CARR Yearbook 2019/2020*, ed. Eviane Leidig (Stuttgart: ibidem-Verlag, 2020), 193–96.

11 T. Dreisbach and M. Anderson, “Nearly 1 in 5 Defendants In Capitol Riot Cases Served In the Military”, NPR, 21 January, 2021, <https://www.npr.org/2021/01/21/958915267/nearly-one-in-five-defendants-in-capitol-riot-cases-served-in-the-military>.

12 The notion that the mob at the Capitol consisted of a disproportionately large number of active or former military personnel is nonetheless the subject of some academic debate. In their work on the subject, Milton and Mines argued that when compared to the proportion of male veterans, rather than the overall proportion of veterans in the US population, there was “actually a very slight underrepresentation of veterans among the January attacks.” See D. Milton and A. Mines. “‘This Is War’: Examining Military Experience among the Capitol Hill Siege Participants.” Washington DC: Program on Extremism, George Washington University & Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2021.

13 S.G. Jones et al., *The Military, Police, and the Rise of Terrorism in the United States* (Washington, DC: Centre for Strategic and International Studies, 2021).

## 2.2 Problem area 2: Right-wing extremist violence facilitated by military personnel

A second concern relates to right-wing extremists with a military background providing material support or training for right-wing extremist groups. Several scholars and analysts focusing on these issues have warned that extremist groups (as well as gangs and criminal organisations) deliberately seek to recruit individuals with specific military skills, including the ability to use military tactics, weapons, and explosives.<sup>14</sup> Demonstrating the openness of right-wing extremist groups to such input from the military, Davey and Weinberg’s analysis of right-wing extremist Telegram channels showed that users frequently shared US military training manuals, discussed military tactics and history, and generally viewed the US Armed Forces as an exemplar of how armed right-wing extremist groups should be structured and conduct operations.<sup>15</sup> Moreover, individuals with occupational specialities, such as organisational leadership experience, tend to end up in leadership positions in extremist groups. Various authors see this as an indication that right-wing extremist groups are eager for the expertise of such individuals.<sup>16</sup> As a former US Army Criminal Investigations Division Command Special Agent warned, extremist groups, in addition to recruiting radicalised soldiers, have also encouraged their own members to enlist in order to “learn combat tactics” and “medical skills,” and to “gain access to weapons and supplies.”<sup>17</sup>

With regard to this latter practice, however, it is important to note that not all right-wing extremists who join the military are doing so in order to gain skills or resources that they can transfer to right-wing extremist groups. Indeed, there may be multiple reasons for an individual with a right-wing extremist ideological worldview to join the military. A summary search of Stormfront Canada and Stormfront Quebec, subforums of the largest anglophone neo-Nazi website, reveals that discussions about motivations to join the Canadian Armed Forces revolve around three distinct themes.<sup>18</sup> Firstly, individuals stand to gain socioeconomic benefits for themselves, such as free education and transferable skills for professional advancement. Secondly, they wish to challenge certain military or foreign policies that users of these forums typically oppose, particularly policies of inclusion that allow transgender people to serve openly in military forces, or efforts to root out far-right elements from the ranks. Lastly, individuals seek to gain access to weapons and expert weapons training, as well as opportunities to build leadership skills. In such cases, the motivations appear to concern the attainment of a desired self-image rather than the advancement of the operational capabilities of right-wing extremist groups. Nonetheless, such military skills and resources may still end up strengthening or professionalising right-wing extremist groups.

## 2.3 Problem area 3: Ideologically motivated hate crimes or violation of procedures and rules of engagement while on deployment

In his book *Irregular Army*, Matt Kennard argues that the demand for personnel due to the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq led to the loosening of recruitment standards within the US military, enabling easier access for neo-Nazi, white supremacist, gang member, criminal, and mentally ill recruits.<sup>19</sup>

14 D. Milton and A. Mines, ‘This Is War’; Abigail R. Hall et al., “Militarized Extremism, the Radical Right and the War on Terror”, *The Independent Review* 26, no. 2 (2021): 10.

15 J. Davey and D. Weinberg, *Inspiration and Influence: Discussions of the US Military in Extreme Right-Wing Telegram Channels* (Beirut, Berlin, London, Paris and Washington, DC: Institute of Strategic Dialogue, 2021).

16 A.R. Hall et al., “Militarized Extremism”, 4-5; Milton and Mines, “This Is War”.

17 C.F. Smith, *Gangs and the Military: Gangsters, Bikers, and Terrorists with Military Training* (Lanham, MA: Rowman & Littlefield, 2019).

18 Y. Veilleux-Lepage, “Is There a Radical Right Racism Problem in the Canadian Armed Forces?”, *Rantt Media*, 6 January 2019, <https://rantt.com/is-there-a-radical-right-racism-problem-in-the-canadian-armed-forces>.

19 M. Kennard, *Irregular Army: How the US Military Recruited Neo-Nazis, Gang Members and Criminals to Fight the*

Kennard further claims that several atrocities committed by US military personnel against civilians were perpetrated by individuals who would previously not have passed screening tests for entry.

Building upon Kennard's work, we have identified that personnel who engage in misconduct with respect to local populations vary in the extent to which they espouse right-wing extremist ideology. At one end of the spectrum are atrocities committed by individuals who are not explicitly aligned with right-wing extremist movements, but who nonetheless demonise local populations. For example, the US soldiers responsible for the Mahmudiyah rape and killings had become obsessed with the idea of "killing some Iraqis". Similarly, prejudice and racism have been apparent throughout all ranks of service during the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq, with high-ranking personnel and ground troops on numerous occasions using slurs like "hajji", "camel jockey", or "sand n\*\*\*\*\*".<sup>20</sup> Reflecting on enlisted soldiers who displayed xenophobic rhetoric, attitudes, or behaviours, a former police detective recounted that:

"I found working with the military to be highly influenced by current politics and world affairs. During peacetime, the Army and Navy seemed concerned as to the background and affiliations of their service men and women whereas during war those concerns were reversed. Many times, during the early years of the Iraqi [sic] and Afghanistan wars I was told that if those kinds of individuals liked killing then what's wrong with them killing for Uncle Sam to which I always replied I guess they could rape, steal and sell dope for Uncle Sam as well."<sup>21</sup>

Towards the other end of the spectrum are ideologically driven events. Among these, we would place the Somalia Affair, in which a group of Canadian soldiers tortured and murdered a Somali teenager in 1993.<sup>22</sup> In the aftermath of the incident, the Canadian Armed Forces faced negative backlash following the public release of videotaped footage of racism and brutal hazing in the Canadian Airborne Regiment. One segment depicted Canada's UN peacekeepers in Somalia referring to local citizens with derogatory racial slurs and joking about hunting Somalis as trophies.<sup>23</sup> Another tape showed a Black Canadian Airborne recruit crawling through a gauntlet of physical blows and a shower of human waste with the words "I love KKK" scrawled on his back.<sup>24</sup> According to Razack in *Dark Threats and White Knights*, these videos demonstrated entrenched racism and violence amongst soldiers, and a broader acceptance of right-wing extremist ideology within the regiment.<sup>25</sup>

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War on Terror (New York City: Verso Books, 2015).

20 P.W.D. Martin, "Why so Many Iraqis Hate Us? Try 'Towel Head' on for Size", HuffPost, 11 April 2008, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-so-many-iraqis-hate-u\\_b\\_96330](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/why-so-many-iraqis-hate-u_b_96330); A. Bay, "'Embrace the Suck' and more Military Speak", NPR, 8 March 2007, <https://www.npr.org/2007/03/08/7458809/embrace-the-suck-and-more-military-speak>; T.E. Ricks, "US Military Cultural Awareness: I Was a pro-Saddam Protestor, was Called a 'Camel Jockey,' but I AM an American Soldier", *Foreign Policy*, 30 April 2005; B. Herbert, "From 'Gook' to 'Raghead'", *The New York Times*, 2 May 2005, <https://www.nytimes.com/2005/05/02/opinion/from-gook-to-raghead.html>.

21 C.F. Smith, *Gangs and the Military*, 87.

22 Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia, *Dishonoured Legacy: The Lessons of the Somalia Affair: Report of the Commission of Inquiry into the Deployment of Canadian Forces to Somalia* (Ottawa: Canadian Government Publishing, 1997).

23 G. Shorey, "Bystander Non-Intervention and the Somalia Incident", *Canadian Military Journal* 1, no. 4 (2001): 19–28.

24 A. Amad, "Remembering the 'Somalia Affair', Canada's Forgotten Abu Ghraib Moment", *Vice*, 14 March 2018, <https://www.vice.com/en/article/7x75xg/remembering-the-somalia-affair-canadas-forgotten-abu-ghraib-moment>.

25 S. Razack, *Dark Threats and White Knights: the Somalia Affair, Peacekeeping, and the New Imperialism* (Toronto, Buffalo: University of Toronto, 2004).

When racist and xenophobic attitudes are allowed to pervade a military, this can negatively affect its ability to successfully carry out mission objectives. In the aftermath of the Cold War, military intervention by Western states has to some extent shifted towards humanitarian intervention (such as in Somalia, Rwanda, former Yugoslavia, and Libya) and counter-insurgency (such as in Iraq, Afghanistan, and Mali). These operations depend on the establishment of meaningful partnerships with local stakeholders, often referred to as “winning hearts and minds”. However, ongoing (and at times systematic) racist and xenophobic rhetoric, ideas, or behaviours within a military can profoundly hamper efforts to build trust and collaboration with local populations. In short, these incidents undermine the “hearts and minds” focus of missions. If such incidents are left unchallenged, this can create a climate in which human rights violations, including hate crimes, become normalised.

## 2.4 Problem area 4: Activities and behaviours that hamper diversity and inclusion efforts

The presence of right-wing extremist elements within a country’s military may also have a detrimental effect on *esprit de corps* and unit cohesion and create a culture or atmosphere that makes colleagues feel unsafe. It may also hamper efforts by Western militaries to foster a respectful workplace free from discrimination and harassment on the basis of race, ethnicity, or gender, and to create a military force that reflects the fabric and diversity of contemporary societies.<sup>26</sup>

Despite a concerted effort to increase diversity and inclusion, several Western militaries routinely miss recruitment targets for underrepresented demographics. In fact, multiple reports and surveys across Western countries reveal that military personnel belonging to minority groups (for example, based on ethnicity, religion, or sexual orientation) face considerable discrimination, hazing, or abuse during service.<sup>27</sup>

26 Department of Defense Board on Diversity and Inclusion, ‘Recommendations to Improve Racial and Ethnic Diversity and Inclusion in the US Military’, 15 December 2020, <https://media.defense.gov/2020/Dec/18/2002554852/-1/-1/0/DOD-DIVERSITY-AND-INCLUSION-FINAL-BOARD-REPORT.PDF>; NATO, Diversity and Inclusion Annual Report, (2019), [https://www.nato.int/nato\\_static\\_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/2/pdf/2019-annual-diversity\\_inclusion\\_report.pdf](https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2021/2/pdf/2019-annual-diversity_inclusion_report.pdf); United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, A Force for Inclusion Defence Diversity and Inclusion Strategy 2018-2030, 6 August, 2018, [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/907901/20180806-MOD\\_DI\\_Plan\\_A4\\_v14\\_Final-U.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/907901/20180806-MOD_DI_Plan_A4_v14_Final-U.pdf); Standing Committee on National Defence, Improving Diversity and Inclusion in the Canadian Armed Forces, 2019, <https://www.ourcommons.ca/Content/Committee/421/NDDN/Reports/RP10573700/nddnrp17/nddnrp17-e.pdf>; Ministère de la Transformation et de la Fonction Publique, Des Référents “mixité-Égalité” Dans l’armée [“Gender equality” referents in the army] (2020), <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/actualites/articles/egalite-femmes-hommes-le-ministere-des-armees-labellise>; Bundeswehr, Diversity in the Bundeswehr, <https://www.bundeswehr.de/en/about-bundeswehr/identity-of-the-bundeswehr/equal-opportunities/diversity-bundeswehr>.

27 S.M. Hernandez, “A Better Understanding of Bullying and Hazing in the Military”, *Military Law Review* 223, no. 2 (2015): 415–39; T.M. Nteta et al., “Self-Selection versus Socialization Revisited: Military Service, Racial Resentment, and Generational Membership”, *Armed Forces & Society* 42, no. 2 (2016): 362–85; M.E. Dichter et al., “This is the Story of Why My Military Career Ended Before It Should Have’: Premature Separation from Military Service Among US Women Veterans”, *Affilia* 30, no. 2 (2015): 187–99; United Kingdom Ministry of Defence, UK Regular Armed Forces Continuous Attitude Survey Results 2021, (2021), [https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment\\_data/file/987969/Armed\\_Forces\\_Continuous\\_Attitude\\_Survey\\_2021\\_Main\\_Reportedited.pdf](https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/987969/Armed_Forces_Continuous_Attitude_Survey_2021_Main_Reportedited.pdf); L. Shane, “Signs of White Supremacy, Extremism up Again in Poll of Active-Duty Troops”, *Military Times*, 6 February 2020, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/02/06/signs-of-white-supremacy-extremism-up-again-in-poll-of-active-duty-troops/>; Ministère des Armées, Lutte Contre Le Harcelement Sexuel Les Violences Sexuelles et Sexistes et Les Discriminations de Toute Sorte [Fight against Sexual Harassment, Sexual and Sexist Violence and Discrimination of All Kinds], 24 September, 2021, <https://www.defense.gouv.fr/portail/vous-et-la-defense/egalite-femmes-hommes/lutte-contre-le-harcelement-sexuel-les-violences-sexuelles-et-sexistes-et-les-discriminations-de-toute-sorte/cellule-themis>.

While not all acts of discrimination experienced by service members are related to right-wing extremist ideology, the unchecked presence of right-wing extremist views contributes to an unsafe and hostile climate within a country's military. This presence can manifest in a wide range of actions, including hate crimes against minority groups and open expressions of sympathy for right-wing extremist actors or ideas. In addition, failure on the part of military leadership to properly address such conduct may contribute to normalising these actions and reinforce an unwelcoming environment for minority service members.

It is important to note that there is also a specific gender dimension to these incidents. As Jessica White notes, the hyper-masculine culture that characterises the military—the “idealized conception of the archetypal ‘hero’ as a white, straight, male figure who is brave, valiant, honorable, and patriotic”—is echoed in the patriarchal organisational structure of right-wing extremist groups.<sup>28</sup> The development of the unit as an “in-group” with these characteristics can result in dehumanising the enemy in racial and ethnic terms (as discussed in Problem area 3). However, this process of “othering” can also manifest towards “those within the ranks that don't fit within this archetypal hero conception.” Left unchecked, this hyper-masculine culture proliferates within the ranks, and has the potential to form a bridge with right-wing extremism.<sup>29</sup> All this further negatively affects unit cohesion and *esprit de corps*, while damaging the institution's reputation with society, thus impeding militaries' ambitions to be more diverse.<sup>30</sup>

## 2.5 Problem area 5: Civilian-military power dynamics

The final concern in the convergence of right-wing extremism and the military is identified by both Huntington and Janowitz as the “civil-military problematique”.<sup>31</sup> This relationship involves a paradox: a military must be capable of acting upon orders from civilian leadership, while remaining subordinate to civilian authority. A subordinate military is viewed by these theorists as essential to the fabric of Western democracy.<sup>32</sup> This raises the issue of what happens when segments of the military, for ideological reasons, no longer view themselves as subordinate to civilian control.

The implications of the rupturing of civil-military safeguards necessary to Western democracies are large and wide-ranging in scale. In extreme cases, this can manifest in a desire or attempt to overturn existing civilian control or outcomes of democratic processes. There are several historical examples that demonstrate the potential consequences of this, such as the regime of Franco in Spain and the Greek military juntas. In their analysis of the 6 January 2021 attack (which largely focused on the aesthetics of the event), Schake and Robinson found that the use and open display of items associated with the US military, including flags, clothing, and uniforms, emboldened the rioters and imbued them with a sense of being “the inheritors of a proud American tradition” of insurgency against tyrannical civilian control.<sup>33</sup> This suggests a worldview, apparently shared by some service members, according to which the military has the right to disobey political orders.

28 J. White, “Why Extremism Appeals to Some Active & Former Military Members”, Rant Media, 16 December 2021, <https://rantt.com/why-extremism-appeals-to-some-active-former-military-members>.

29 H. Rigault Arkhis and J. White, “Female Veterans and Right-Wing Extremism: Becoming ‘One of the Boys’”, International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 28 January 2022, <https://icct.nl/publication/female-veterans-and-right-wing-extremism-becoming-one-of-the-boys/>.

30 Y. Veilleux-Lepage, “Is There a Radical Right Racism Problem in the Canadian Armed Forces?”

31 Samuel P. Huntington, *The Soldier and the State: The Theory and Politics of Civil-Military Relations* (Cambridge, MA: Belknap Press, 2002); M. Janowitz, *The Professional Soldier: A Social and Political Portrait*, (New York: Free Press, 2017).

32 P.D. Feaver, “The Civil-Military Problematique: Huntington, Janowitz and the Question of Civilian Control”, *Armed Forces & Society* 23, no. 2 (1996): 149–78.

33 Kori Schake et al., “Assessing Civil-Military Relations and the January 6th Capitol Insurrection”, *Orbis* 65, no. 3 (2021): 539-540.



In parallel, smaller actions such as service members flouting regulations regarding the display of extremist symbols or participation in extremist groups also demonstrate an erosion of civilian control of military forces.

### 3. Research Design and Methodology

To determine the validity of our theoretically derived framework, we conducted a systematic review of media articles and government reports in order to catalogue recent incidents of right-wing extremism in the armed forces of twelve Western countries. This enabled us to examine how the five problem areas identified above currently manifest within Western militaries.

#### 3.1 Data Collection

In cataloguing recent incidents of right-wing extremism in Western armed forces, we focused on incidents in which the behaviour of military personnel appeared to be motivated by one of the five common ideological features identified by Cas Mudde: “nationalism, racism, xenophobia, anti-democracy, and the strong state.”<sup>34</sup> These incidents spanned different levels of involvement in right-wing extremism; in some cases, service personnel were affiliated with active or proscribed right-wing extremist groups or organisations, while in other cases, the personnel in question merely supported right-wing extremist ideology. Our data collection was limited to incidents involving active service members, including individuals enrolled in military academies. We excluded civilian employees within the military, contractors, veterans, and relations of military personnel. Police or law enforcement personnel were also excluded, unless they served as part of a unit that falls under military jurisdiction, which is the case in France (*Gendarmerie nationale*), Italy (*Carabinieri*), Spain (*Guardia Civil*), and the US (Coast Guard).

The scope of our inquiry was limited to incidents that occurred during the five-year period between 2017 and 2021<sup>35</sup> in the following twelve Western countries: Germany, the UK, the US, Canada, Austria, Switzerland, France, Spain, Italy, Greece, Belgium, and the Netherlands. These countries were included in our sample for two main reasons. Firstly, they show fundamental similarities as multicultural societies with liberal democratic political systems. Furthermore, these countries have similar right-wing extremist movements (both historical and current), with shared ideological principles, organisational structures, and international ties.<sup>36</sup> This situation is in contrast to, for example, countries in Latin America with a recent history of right-wing military dictatorship, or countries with a far-right government in power. As such, the potential for a right-wing extremism-military nexus remains a common challenge for these countries.

Incidents fitting the inclusion criteria were collected through a systematic search of news media articles—similar to the method employed for the Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence (RTV) dataset at the Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX)<sup>37</sup>—as well as public government reports highlighting or monitoring incidents of right-wing extremism within the military.

34 C. Mudde, “Right-Wing Extremism Analysed: a Comparative Analysis of the Ideologies of Three Alleged Right-Wing Extremist Parties (NPD, NDP, CP’86)”, *European Journal of Political Research* 27, no. 2 (1995), 203-224.

35 This duration reflects our intention to explore recent incidents rather than to map the history of the phenomenon.

36 S. von Mering and T. Wyman McCarty (eds.), *Right-Wing Radicalism Today: Perspectives from Europe and the US* (London and New York: Routledge, 2013); U. Backes and P. Moreau (eds), *The Extreme Right in Europe: Current Trends and Perspectives* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2012); D. Art, *Inside the Radical Right: the Development of Anti-Immigrant Parties in Western Europe* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2011); P. Hainsworth, *The Extreme Right in Western Europe* (London and New York: Routledge, 2008); B. Klandermans and N. Mayer (eds.), *Extreme Right Activists in Europe: Through the Magnifying Glass* (London and New York: Routledge, 2006).

37 Center for Research on Extremism (C-REX), *Codebook for the Right-Wing Terrorism and Violence (RTV) dataset*, 2 July 2021, <https://www.sv.uio.no/c-rex/english/groups/rtv-dataset/codebook-02.07.2021.pdf>.

Data was collected and analysed in English and in the original languages of publication for all countries, with the exception of Italy and Greece (for which we focused on reporting in English). We chose keywords such as “far right” + “right-wing extremism” + “neo-Nazi” + “military” + “armed forces” + [country] + [year] and entered them in the search engines Google, Google News, and Bing to find incidents to include in our analysis. Incidents were also cross-checked with reported attacks in ICCT’s *Terrorist Threat Assessment*,<sup>38</sup> as well as a database created and maintained by Yannick Veilleux-Lepage on military service members involved in right-wing extremism.<sup>39</sup>

The searches and cross-checking were carried out by three coders, each of whom examined a different set of countries. Due to time and budget constraints and limits to the coders’ knowledge of the relevant languages, it was not possible to have multiple coders examine the same source material. Consequently, there were also no measurements of inter-coder reliability. The results were compiled in a spreadsheet, which contained an entry for each incident in each country, including per entry a short description, a link to the source(s), the date, and the problem area the incident belonged to. This overview was then checked by one other member of the research team. If there was disagreement about the inclusion of an incident or the choice of problem area, the other members of the research team were brought in to discuss whether or how to include the incident in question. The problem areas (and the indicators formulated in section 3.2) were treated as mutually exclusive, meaning that one incident could not be associated with more than one problem area or indicator.

## 3.2 Operationalisation of Problem Areas

During data collection, we used the following indicators to explore the scope of the problem areas within the twelve countries:

*Problem area 1: Right-wing extremist violence perpetrated by military personnel.*

For this problem area, we surveyed incidents in which radicalised service members engaged in right-wing extremist attacks, including terrorist attacks, violent vigilantism, and violent hate crimes. We only included cases in which the ideology of the perpetrator was clear, and in which the ideology also motivated the violent act. We also included planned attacks that were foiled by law enforcement, but only if there was enough evidence to establish the nature and target of the act with reasonable certainty. The same goes for planned attacks that were attempted but not successfully executed for other reasons.

*Problem area 2: Right-wing extremist violence facilitated by military personnel.*

This problem area addresses the possibility that military skills and resources ultimately strengthen or professionalise right-wing extremist groups’ capacity for violence. We looked for instances in which military resources or expertise were being transferred to right-wing extremist groups by military personnel with right-wing extremist views. Such transfers could concern materiel (e.g. military personnel helping right-wing extremists illegally acquire weapons or other material resources), as well as expertise (e.g. military personnel providing military training or instructions to right-wing extremists).

<sup>38</sup> T. van Dongen, M. Wentworth and H. Rigault Arkhis, *Terrorist Threat Assessment, 2019-2021* (The Hague: International Centre for Counter-Terrorism, 2022), <https://icct.nl/publication/terrorist-threat-assessment-2021/>.

<sup>39</sup> Yannick Veilleux-Lepage, *Life Path of Radicalised Service Personnel Dataset*. Unpublished Dataset. 2021

*Problem area 3: Ideologically motivated hate crimes or violation of procedures and rules of engagement while on deployment.*

To decide whether this problem area is a concern for the countries in our sample, we looked for instances of ideologically motivated misconduct by military personnel on missions. These instances encompass several categories, ranging from the use of violence against local populations, to instances of bullying and large-scale verbal abuse. We explored incidents across this entire spectrum.

*Problem area 4: Activities and behaviours that hamper diversity and inclusion efforts.*

For this problem area we looked for ideologically motivated activities and behaviours that, if left unchecked, create an atmosphere or culture that is intolerant of diversity and inclusion. There are various ways in which such a hostile culture can arise, as mentioned in section 2.4. These can include hate crimes against minorities perpetrated upon colleagues, the open display of right-wing extremist symbols, the distribution of extremist propaganda, and playing and singing right-wing extremist songs.

*Problem area 5: Civilian-military power dynamics.*

For this problem area we explored instances in which military personnel undermined civilian control over the military for reasons related to their right-wing extremist views. As is the case for the previous problem areas, manifestations of this problem area vary in severity. On the more extreme end of the spectrum, we looked for plans or attempts to remove civilian authorities and replace them with like-minded individuals. Less far-reaching manifestations of this problem area include disobedience to civilian political orders that do not align with a right-wing extremist political agenda.

To examine our source material with regard to the various indicators, we carried out a directed content analysis,<sup>40</sup> in the sense that we used the framework above to guide our search. A directed content analysis was considered more appropriate than more inductive approaches. As explained above, our review of the literature on the right-wing extremism-military nexus revealed various possible ways in which the nexus can create problems. Given the richness of this literature and our proposal of a framework that serves to summarise this body of work, we felt it advantageous to apply this framework to our sources in a directed manner rather than using an inductive approach.

### 3.3 Limitations

While the approach described above contributes to a broader understanding of the right-wing extremism-military nexus and problems it causes, we also acknowledge that it has a number of limitations. The first of these concerns the use of media reports as source material rather than only law enforcement and court documents. News media are subject to political bias and the “news-hole” effect. On the other hand, scholars have drawn insight from content analysis of news media reports for large-scale incident analysis.<sup>41</sup> Moreover, solely using law enforcement and court documents would have significantly reduced the number of cases for analysis, as several incidents did not lead to criminal charges or court cases, or were dealt with internally by military authorities.

40 Hsiu-Fang Hsieh and Sarah E. Shannon, “Three Approaches to Qualitative Content Analysis”, *Qualitative Health Research* 15, no. 9 (2005), 1277-1288.

41 S. Hutter, *Protesting Culture and Economics in Western Europe: New Cleavages in Left and Right Politics*. (Minneapolis, Minn: University of Minnesota Press, 2014).

To reduce the impact of this limitation, where possible we triangulate information presented by reputable news organisations and magazines like *Mediapart*, *Der Spiegel*, and *CNN* with information derived from law enforcement and court documents.

A second, related limitation is the impact of location/regional bias<sup>42</sup> in media reporting, which affects the nature and richness of source material that is available per country. There are more media reports available for some countries than for others, which might lead to an overrepresentation of such countries in the overall set of incidents. Furthermore, the availability and nature of governmental data varies per country as well. For example, in monitoring right-wing extremist activity in the military, the German Ministry of Defence looks not only for signs of neo-Nazi activity, but also for signs of membership of, or sympathy with,<sup>43</sup> far-right groups such as the Identitarian Movement. For the Austrian Ministry of Defence, on the other hand, membership of the Identitarian Movement is not grounds for investigation.<sup>44</sup> As a result of such differences, government documents vary (slightly) by country in terms of the phenomena they describe.

In the same vein, our research results may be biased towards countries where the right-wing extremism-military nexus is of greater public concern, as incidents in such countries might be more likely to attract media attention. Finally, the militaries of the countries that we have examined are very different in size, which may affect the number of incidents per country; that is, larger militaries may yield larger absolute numbers of incidents.

## 4. Findings

Our systematic survey of media articles and government reports allowed us to validate our theoretical framework by identifying a series of incidents that conform to the five problem areas we identified in the literature. In the subsections below we will discuss the various incidents we found for each problem area, in order to illustrate what that problem area looks like in practice.

### 4.1 Problem area 1: Right-wing extremist violence perpetrated by military personnel

A primary finding is that right-wing extremist-motivated violence committed by military personnel is not equally distributed across all countries. In particular, many of the documented cases took place in the US. Examples include two incidents involving Air Force Sergeant Steven Carrillo, who was associated with the accelerationist group Boogaloo Bois.<sup>45</sup> In the spring of 2020, using firearms and a self-made pipe bomb, he launched two separate ambush attacks against law enforcement officers in Oakland and Ben Lomond, California, killing one officer in each attack. On one of these two occasions, he received help from an accomplice. The court described it as “a premeditated attack”.<sup>46</sup>

42 S.D. Reese, “Understanding the global journalist: A hierarchy-of-influences approach.” *Journalism studies* 2, no. 2 (2001): 173-187.

43 Bundesministerium der Verteidigung, Koordinierungsstelle für Extremismusverdachtsfälle BMVg [Ministry of Defence, Coordination Office for Suspected Extremism Cases], 31 December 2020, <https://www.bmvg.de/resource/blob/5035922/12c56d83535897f117043e86041a91c8/20210225-dl-2-bericht-der-koordinierungsstelle-fuer-extremismusfaelle-data.pdf>.

44 “Heer sperrt rechtsextreme Identitäre nicht mehr grundsätzlich” [Army No Longer Blocks Right-Wing Extremist Identitarians in Principle], ORF, 4 April 2019, <https://orf.at/stories/3117600>.

45 Matthew Kriner and Jon Lewis (2021). The evolution of the Boogaloo movement. *CTC Sentinel* 14(2): 22-32. <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-evolution-of-the-boogaloo-movement/>

46 Department of Justice, “Criminal Complaint against Steven Carrillo”, 15 June 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/opa/pr/two-defendants-charged-murder-and-aiding-and-abetting-slaying-federal-protective-service>.

Right-wing extremist violence from military personnel can also come in the form of physical assault without the use of firearms or other weapons. This is made clear by the case of Vassilos Pistolis,<sup>47</sup> a Lance Corporal of the Marine Corps as well as a member of the neo-Nazi group Atomwaffen Division. After the infamous Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville in 2017, Pistolis wrote in a social media post that he had “drop kicked” a trans woman<sup>48</sup> who was participating in a counter demonstration.

By far the most high-profile case of right-wing extremist violence by US military personnel took place during the storming of the Capitol on 6 January 2021. At the time of writing, the insurrectionists are still being arrested and tried, but at least fifty members of the armed forces are facing charges for their participation in the violent attempt to keep the joint session of Congress from certifying Joe Biden’s victory in the 2020 presidential election.<sup>49</sup> We cannot be sure whether all fifty suspects are indeed right-wing extremists, but given the presence in and around the Capitol of right-wing extremist groups such as the Proud Boys and militia groups such as the Three Percenters and Oath Keepers,<sup>50</sup> as well as the crowd’s expressions of support for right-wing extremist ideas, it is likely that at least some of the fifty military suspects were motivated by right-wing extremist political views.

There are also instances in which the perpetrators were caught during the preparation of their attacks. Andrew Lynam, a US Army reservist and moderator of a Boogaloo Bois Facebook group, is currently facing trial for joining forces with two veterans to work on a plan to throw Molotov cocktails at a Black Lives Matter demonstration. All three were arrested in May 2020.<sup>51</sup> Another example concerns Army soldier Ethan Melzer, who contacted the Order of the Nine Angles (O9A), a satanic neo-Nazi group, to commit an attack against his own army unit. Despite the fact that no organised leadership currently exists within O9A,<sup>52</sup> Melzer allegedly informed the group of the whereabouts of his unit and told his co-conspirators when the unit would be lightly armed and therefore at its most vulnerable.<sup>53</sup> The plan dissolved when the FBI arrested Melzer shortly afterwards in June 2020.<sup>54</sup> He is currently awaiting trial for his involvement in this plan. Similarly, Chris Hasson, a white supremacist Coast Guard officer, was found to be planning a mass shooting targeting Democratic lawmakers and left-wing media personalities.<sup>55</sup>

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47 D. Koehler, A Threat from Within?

48 A.C. Thompson, A. Winston and J. Hanharan, “Ranks of Notorious Hate Group Include Active-Duty Military”, *Frontline*, 3 May 2018, [https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/ranks-of-notorious-hate-group-include-active-duty-military/?utm\\_source=twitter&utm\\_medium=social&utm\\_campaign=share\\_button](https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/ranks-of-notorious-hate-group-include-active-duty-military/?utm_source=twitter&utm_medium=social&utm_campaign=share_button).

49 J. Feldscher, “US Troops on Base Less Likely to Seek Extremist Content Than Americans in General, Study Finds”, *Defense One*, 24 June 2021, <https://www.defenseone.com/threats/2021/06/us-troops-base-less-likely-look-for-extremist-content-americans-general-study-finds/174949/>.

50 D. Milton and A. Mines, “This Is War”.

51 Veilleux-Lepage, *Life Path of Radicalised Service Personnel Dataset*. 2021

52 A. Koch. “The ONA Network and the Transnationalization of Neo-Nazi-Satanism”, *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (2022).

53 Department of Justice. “Sealed Complaint against Ethan Phelan Melzer a/k/a “Etil Reggad”, Department of Justice, 4 June 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/press-release/file/1287701/download>.

54 Department of Justice. “US Army Soldier Charged With Terrorism Offenses For Planning Deadly Ambush On Service Members In His Unit”, Department of Justice, 22 June 2020, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/us-army-soldier-charged-terrorism-offenses-planning-deadly-ambush-service-members-his>.

55 Military.com. “Coast Guard Officer Christopher Hasson Sentenced to More than 13 Years in Alleged Plot”, *Military.Com*, 30 January 2020, <https://web.archive.org/web/20210205201228/https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/01/31/coast-guard-officer-christopher-hasson-sentenced-more-13-years-alleged-plot.html>.



Germany is another country in which we found substantial evidence for Problem area 1. For example, Lieutenant Franco A. is accused of planning an attack against asylum seekers, as well as the assassination of the director of the Amadeu Antonio Foundation, an organisation engaged in researching racism.<sup>56</sup>

For the other countries in our sample, such examples are harder to find. Arguably the most high-profile case took place in Belgium, where Army sergeant Jürgen Conings sought to kill a well-known virologist, Mark Van Ranst, who advised the government on policies to deal with the COVID-19 pandemic. After disappearing from public view for a couple of weeks, Conings, who had ties to a right-wing extremist group called the Flemish Legion,<sup>57</sup> was found dead in a forest. Authorities had feared that he was searching for Van Ranst, but it transpired that he had committed suicide shortly after setting out.<sup>58</sup>

Another instance of a (planned) attack by a right-wing extremist with ties to the military occurred in Canada in the summer of 2020, when the aforementioned Armed Forces reservist Corey Hurren crashed his truck into the gates of Rideau Hall, the official residence of the Governor General of Canada. Hurren, armed with several firearms, sought to “arrest” Prime Minister Justin Trudeau, but was detained by police after entering the grounds of Rideau Hall.<sup>59</sup>

Otherwise, there have been few reported cases of physical violence, or serious plans to commit such violence, by military personnel outside the US and Germany. Although it is possible that our data collection may have been skewed towards cases that were reported in English, for most of the countries examined we also conducted searches in the language of the country concerned. Therefore, it does appear that Problem area 1 is more prominent in the US and Germany than in other countries. Due to the history of active and well-organised right-wing extremist movements within these two countries,<sup>60</sup> it is possible that ties to the military have become more developed through sustained interaction.

Another issue that stands out from our analysis concerns the rudimentary nature of the attacks concerned. A major consideration regarding potential right-wing extremist violence by military personnel is that such individuals are believed, or even feared, to have a greater capability to commit attacks as a result of combat training. The attacks discussed above, however, do not display high levels of operational and planning skills. Vehicle ramming, throwing Molotov cocktails, physically assaulting demonstrators, and mounting ambushes to shoot police officers are not modes of attack exclusive to individuals with military training.

56 “Bundesgerichtshof Beschluss, 17/18 Vom 22. August 2019 in Dem Strafverfahren Gegen [...] Wegen Vorbereitung Einer Schwere Staatsgefährdenden Gewalttat u.a.” [Federal Court Resolution StB 17/18 of 22 August 2019 in the Criminal Proceedings Against [...] for Preparing a Serious Act of Violence Endangering the State, Among Other Things] (2019), <https://juris.bundesgerichtshof.de/cgi-bin/rechtsprechung/document.py?Gericht=bgh&Art=pm&Datum=2019&nr=101399&linked=bes&Blank=1&file=dokument.pdf>; C. Fuchs, “Soldaten, Die Den Umsturz Planen” [Soldiers who plan to overthrow], Zeit Online, 23 July 2020, <https://www.zeit.de/gesellschaft/zeitgeschehen/2020-07/bundeswehr-rechtsextremismus-chat-hetze-soldaten>.

57 HLN. “Jürgen Conings Gaf Gevechtstraining Aan Het Vlaams Legioen” [Jürgen Conings Gave Combat Training To The Flemish Legion], HLN, 28 May 2021, <https://www.hln.be/binnenland/jurgen-conings-gaf-gevechtstraining-aan-het-vlaams-legioen~a290034e/>.

58 RTL Nieuws. “Stappenteller Op Nul: Ex-Militair Jürgen Conings Waarschijnlijk al Snel Na Verdwijning Overleden” [Pedometer At Zero: Ex-Military Jürgen Conings Probably Died Soon After Disappearance], RTL Nieuws, 24 August, 2021, <https://www.rtlnews.nl/nieuws/artikel/5249714/jurgen-conings-stappenteller-800-stappen-belgie-ex-militair>.

59 C. Tunney, “Corey Hurren Sentenced to 6 Years in Prison for Breaching Rideau Hall Gates While Armed”, CBC News, 10 March 2021, <https://www.cbc.ca/news/politics/corey-hurren-rideau-hall-sentencing-decision-1.5943612>.

60 Especially for the US, see K. Belew, *Bring the War Home* (Cambridge, London: Harvard University Press 2018).

Therefore, with regard to the incidents analysed, having a military background does not necessarily translate into more sophisticated or larger-scale attacks.<sup>61</sup>

## 4.2 Problem area 2: Right-wing extremist violence facilitated by military personnel

Recent, concrete cases of this problem area are rather rare, but not entirely absent. One case concerns a member of the US National Guard active in the Atomwaffen Division, who was accused of sending bomb-making instructions to other group members.<sup>62</sup> In a similar vein, before his arrest in September 2019, US Army Specialist Jarrett Smith gave lectures via Facebook to right-wing extremists in which he explained how to make explosives. Smith, who was attempting to join a neo-Nazi paramilitary group in Ukraine, also spread instructions on social media regarding materials needed for the fabrication of explosives.<sup>63</sup>

The few cases that we did find are not as strongly concentrated in the US as the ones discussed under Problem area 1. Outside the US, the aforementioned Jürgen Conings not only targeted the virologist Mark Van Ranst, but also provided combat training to members of the Flemish Legion in Belgium.<sup>64</sup> In Canada, Patrick Matthews, who had ties to the neo-Nazi group The Base, attempted to set up a training camp and recruit members in preparation for the upcoming race war.<sup>65</sup> A similar case in Germany involved a man who operated under the alias *Hannibal*, who was an active member of an accelerationist cell within the German elite unit KSK.<sup>66</sup> Hannibal provided military training to civilians in order to turn them into a viable “self-defence” unit.<sup>67</sup> The German federal police also suspected that the base of the KSK was used by extremist groups as a storage facility.<sup>68</sup>

While we only found a few recent cases of the transfer of military resources and expertise to right-wing extremist groups, the risk is nevertheless high. In examining reports of incidents in several countries, we found an apparent overlap in membership between the military and right-wing extremist groups. In some cases, the number of people involved ran into the dozens. Peter Pilz, an Austrian MP for the left-wing party JETZT, claimed in 2019 that there were sixty-three members of the Austrian branch of the Identitarian Movement in the national armed forces.<sup>69</sup> In France, estimates are in the same range, with reporting by the magazine *Mediapart* revealing the existence of dozens of armed forces personnel who sympathise with neo-Nazism.<sup>70</sup>

61 This finding supports the findings of a recent START Research Brief, which showed that extremists “without military backgrounds were successful in conducting violent attacks more often (55%) than the subjects with U.S. military experience (40%).” START, “Extremism in the ranks and after” (University of Maryland, 2021), 3.

62 NBC News. “Florida Neo-Nazi Leader Gets 5 Years for Having Explosive Material”, NBC News, 9 January 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/news/us-news/florida-neo-nazi-leader-gets-5-years-having-explosive-material-n836246>.

63 D. Koehler, A Threat from Within?

64 See footnote 57.

65 M. Rachini, “Far-Right Infiltration of Canada’s Military Poses a Serious Threat, Says Winnipeg Reporter”, CBC Radio, 18 September 2020, <https://www.cbc.ca/radio/day6/ruth-bader-ginsburg-dead-at-87-the-far-right-in-canada-s-military-super-mario-at-35-and-more-1.5728537/far-right-infiltration-of-canada-s-military-poses-a-serious-threat-says-winnipeg-reporter-1.5728539>.

66 Y. Veilleux-Lepage, Life Path of Radicalised Service Personnel Dataset. Unpublished Dataset. 2021.

67 M. Kaul, “Wer Warnte ‘Hannibal’?” [Who warned ‘Hannibal’?], Tagesschau, 24 February 2021, <https://www.tagesschau.de/investigativ/wdr/ksk-mad-razzia-101.html>.

68 Ibid.

69 Kleine Zeitung. “Pilz Kontra FPÖ Identitäre Beim Heer: Kunasek Nimmt Lockerung Zurück” [Pilz versus FPÖ Identitarians in the Army: Kunasek Takes Back Relaxation], Kleine Zeitung, 4 April 2019, [https://www.kleinezeitung.at/politik/innenpolitik/5607171/Pilz-kontra-FPOe\\_Identitaere-beim-Heer\\_Kunasek-nimmt-Lockerung](https://www.kleinezeitung.at/politik/innenpolitik/5607171/Pilz-kontra-FPOe_Identitaere-beim-Heer_Kunasek-nimmt-Lockerung).

70 S. Bourdon, J. Brabant and M. Suc, “Une Filière Néonazie Au Sein de l’armée Française” [A Neo-Nazi group within the French Army], Mediapart, 16 March 2021, <https://www.mediapart.fr/journal/france/160321/une-filiere-neonazie-au-sein-de-l-armee-francaise>.

The Anti-Defamation League, which monitors right-wing extremism in the US, identified seventy-two service members suspected of being white supremacists.<sup>71</sup> These are just fractions of the overall number of military personnel, but it is certainly enough to strengthen right-wing extremist groups that are in need of military weapons and expertise.

In other countries, the overlap between right-wing extremist groups and the armed forces appears to be marginal, at least on the basis of the evidence we could find. Four members of the Spanish neo-Nazi group *Lo Nuestro* are also in the Spanish armed forces,<sup>72</sup> and there have been some (seemingly) isolated cases in Switzerland<sup>73</sup> and the UK.<sup>74</sup> In the Netherlands, there were twenty-one dismissals from the armed forces in the period from 2014–2019, some of which (it is unclear how many) were imposed as sanctions for ties with right-wing extremist groups.<sup>75</sup> In Italy, an officer from the *Carabinieri* was arrested for his ties to the right-wing extremist group Aryan Roman Order, which was planning an attack against a NATO base. The attack was foiled before it could be executed.<sup>76</sup> Note that, given the limitations of relying on publicly available material, these numbers should not be taken as definitive; that is, there may be members of right-wing extremist groups in the armed forces whose right-wing extremist ties have not yet become apparent.

Regarding the right-wing extremist activities carried out by military personnel, we found that not all such efforts required military training. In some cases, these individuals engaged in quite mundane activities in support of their causes. Master Sergeant Cory Reeves, a member of Identity Evropa (later the disbanded American Identity Movement), was discharged from the US Army for spreading right-wing extremist propaganda,<sup>77</sup> while Airman First Class Dannion Phillips' contribution to Identity Evropa's cause appears to have been limited to putting up stickers with the group's logo throughout Oklahoma City.<sup>78</sup> Similar to what we found for Problem area 1, it is possible that such military personnel adopt the methods of the right-wing extremist groups they are involved with, rather than the other way around.

71 Anti-Defamation League, *Extremism in the U.S. Military: Problems and Solutions* (New York, NY: Anti-Defamation League, 2021).

72 C. Enrique Bayo, "Un Grupo Neonazi de Murcia Cuenta Con Un Capitán Del Aire y Un Sargento de Marina Que Instruyen a Cadetes Para Ser Oficiales" [A Neo-Nazi Group from Murcia Includes an Air Captain and a Marine Sergeant who Instruct Cadets to be Officers], *Público*, 28 February 2021, <https://www.publico.es/politica/ultraderechista-ejercito-grupo-neonazi-murcia-cuenta-capitan-aire-sargento-marina-instructores-cadetes-oficiales.html>.

73 20 Minuten, "Armee Befördert Rechtsextremisten" [Army Promotes right-wing extremists], 20 Minuten, 30 December 2018, <https://www.20min.ch/story/armee-befoerdert-rechtsextremisten-934525613004>.

74 D. Koehler, *A Threat from Within?*

75 John van den Burg, "Ook in Nederland Vinden Rechts-Extremisten Het Leger Aantrekkelijk" [In the Netherlands too, Right-Wing Extremists Find the Army Appealing], *Radio Amerika*, 19 May, 2021, <https://www.radioamerika.nl/ook-in-nederland-vinden-rechts-extremisten-het-leger-aantrekkelijk/>.

76 At the time of writing, it is still being investigated whether the Carabinieri officer only supported the attack or whether he was actually involved in the planning of the attack. Should it turn out that he was involved in the planning, his actions would fall under Problem area 1; however, since we cannot yet be certain of his involvement, we have classified it under Problem area 2. F. Marone, "Aryan Roman Order: The Case of an Italian Neo-Nazi Group", *Italian Institute for International Political Studies*, 10 June 2021. <https://www.ispionline.it/en/pubblicazione/aryan-roman-order-case-italian-neo-nazi-group-30769>.

77 G. Harkins, "'They Know All About It': Pentagon Report Details Military Reach of Supremacist Groups", *Military.com*, 18 February 2021, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/02/18/they-know-all-about-it-pentagon-report-details-military-reach-of-supremacist-groups.html>.

78 C. Mathias, "Exclusive: 7 U.S. Military Members Identified As Part Of White Nationalist Group", *HuffPost*, 17 March 2019, [https://www.huffpost.com/entry/white-nationalists-military-identity-evropa\\_n\\_5c8ab70ae4b0d7f6b0f1094b](https://www.huffpost.com/entry/white-nationalists-military-identity-evropa_n_5c8ab70ae4b0d7f6b0f1094b).

### 4.3 Problem area 3: Ideologically motivated hate crimes or violation of procedures and rules of engagement while on deployment

In recent years, scholars<sup>79</sup> and journalists<sup>80</sup> have documented the widespread use of racial epithets among International Security Assistance Force personnel in Afghanistan and American troops in Iraq to describe local populations. It has been argued by some veterans that such rhetoric serves to blur the lines between insurgents and civilians, dehumanising them all.<sup>81</sup> While some may be tempted to dismiss this as merely a military equivalent of “locker-room talk”, anecdotal evidence and several inquiries into the matter seem to indicate that anti-Arab racism was not already ingrained in soldiers, but rather originated from the top ranks to indoctrinate subordinate soldiers.<sup>82</sup>

The existence of widespread anti-Arab racism within Western militaries deployed as part of the Global War on Terror is not necessarily indicative of widespread right-wing extremist views among service members. However, it does reveal a generally problematic culture in which far-right and Islamophobic attitudes can prosper. A 2007 survey of US troops suggests that only 38 to 47 percent of troops felt it necessary to treat non-combatants with respect.<sup>83</sup> These perceptions of non-combatants within local populations in Iraq and Afghanistan may partly explain reports of unethical behaviour and violence against civilians perpetrated by service members during deployment.

Nonetheless, incidents reflecting this problem area are difficult to find. There has recently been a reduction in the number of troops being deployed on military missions in Iraq and Afghanistan, which is likely to mean that there will also be less reported abuse and misconduct along these lines. Additionally, hate crimes and malicious behaviour towards civilians during deployment often takes place out of sight of the media, and governments are generally wary of admitting to the existence of this type of behaviour in their own armed forces.

The cases identified for this problem area include those of French soldiers deployed in French Guyana and the Sahel region, who openly sympathised with neo-Nazi ideas and symbols and racially abused local populations.<sup>84</sup> Note that, for the reasons mentioned above, reporting of such incidents remains very limited; this means that the scope of this problem area may well extend beyond the incidents we have been able to identify.

### 4.4 Problem area 4: Activities and behaviours that hamper diversity and inclusion efforts

This problem area is by far the most commonly reported manifestation of the right-wing extremism-military nexus in the countries examined. In nearly all of the incidents we found for this problem area, the activity did not involve violence, but rather the open display of sympathy with right-wing extremist ideas, creating an atmosphere hostile to diversity and inclusion.

79 C. Parenti, *The Soft Cage: Surveillance in America: From Slavery to the War on Terror* (New York: Basic Books, 2003); T. Wall, “Philanthropic Soldiers, Practical Orientalism, and the Occupation of Iraq”, *Identities* 18, no. 5 (2011): 481–501; D. Egan, “Frantz Fanon and the Construction of the Colonial Subject: Defining ‘The Enemy’ in the Iraq War”, *Socialism and Democracy* 21, no. 3 (2007): 142–54.

80 B. Herbert, “From ‘Gooks’ To ‘Hajis’”, *The New York Times*, 21 May 2004, <https://www.nytimes.com/2004/05/21/opinion/gooks-to-hajis.html>.

81 J. McIntosh, “‘Because It’s Easier to Kill That Way’: Dehumanizing Epithets, Militarized Subjectivity, and American Necropolitics”, *Language in Society* 50, Special Issue 4: The Generic (2021): 583–603.

82 M. Kennard, *Irregular Army*.

83 C.A. Castro and D. McGurk, “Battlefield Ethic”, *Traumatology* 13, no. 4 (2007): 24–31.

84 TRT World. “Does the French Army Have a Neo-Nazi Problem?”, *TRT World*, 8 November 2021, <https://www.trtworld.com/magazine/does-the-french-army-have-a-neo-nazi-problem-45093>.

This may also explain why it is the most common problem area, as displaying sympathy with right-wing extremist ideas requires little effort on the part of the perpetrator.

One such manifestation of this problem area is the posting of right-wing extremist content on social media. Military personnel in Canada received disciplinary action over racist comments made online,<sup>85</sup> and a German Lieutenant-Colonel in the KSK was suspended over right-wing extremist comments he made on social media.<sup>86</sup> In Switzerland, four members of the armed forces turned out to be members of the Facebook group Misanthropic Division Switzerland, which spreads anti-Semitic and neo-Nazi propaganda.<sup>87</sup>

Given the rich history of right-wing extremist songs and music (such as the Horst Wessel Song, or the white power rock and heavy metal scene that has long provided opportunities for community building<sup>88</sup>), it is not surprising that singing Nazi songs or playing fascist music is also a method used by some military personnel to create a climate that is hostile to diversity. KSK members played Nazi music during a farewell party at a shooting range in 2017,<sup>89</sup> and members of Spain's parachute brigade BRIPAC made a fascist salute while singing a song about a Spanish military unit that fought with the Wehrmacht during World War II.<sup>90</sup>

Other incidents categorised in this problem area include soldiers performing the Nazi salute in the Netherlands,<sup>91</sup> Germany,<sup>92</sup> and France.<sup>93</sup> Similarly, several accounts describe military personnel openly displaying white supremacist tattoos<sup>94</sup> or Nazi flags.<sup>95</sup> In Canada, a media report uncovered that “active members of the military are running an online army-surplus company that caters to white supremacists by selling clothing and other items glorifying the short-lived and white-ruled African state of Rhodesia.”<sup>96</sup>

In sum, there are many ways (which often occur in combination) to create an atmosphere that is hostile to diversity and inclusion, and such cases are widespread among the countries in our selection. The cases surveyed allow us to make the following important observations.

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85 S. Bell and M. Stephenson, “Canadian Armed Forces Members Linked to Six Hate Groups: Internal Report”, Global News, 27 May 2019, <https://globalnews.ca/news/5322011/canadian-armed-forces-members-linked-to-six-hate-groups-internal-report/>.

86 D. Koehler, A Threat from Within?

87 C. Sommaruga, “Tolérance Zéro Contre l’extrémisme Au Sein de l’armée. Aussi Pour l’extrémisme de Droite et l’antisémitisme” [Zero Tolerance Against Extremism Within the Army. Also For Right-Wing Extremism and Anti-Semitism], The Federal Assembly — The Swiss Parliament, 13 December 2017, <https://www.parlament.ch/en/ratsbetrieb/suche-curia-vista/geschaeft?AffairId=20174102>.

88 A. Jipson, “Introduction to the Special Issue: Influence of Hate Rock”, *Popular Music and Society* 30, no. 4 (October 2007): 449–51.

89 M. Stoeber, “Bundeswehr Ermittelt Gegen KSK-Elitekämpfer” [Bundeswehr Investigates against KSK elite fighters], BR24, 17 August, 2017, <https://www.br.de/nachrichten/deutschland-welt/bundeswehr-ermittelt-gegen-ksk-elitekaempfer,QSYReu>.

90 N. Tomás, “Spanish Soldiers Give Nazi Salutes in Video, but Minister Looks the Other Way”, *El Nacional*, 16 December 2020, [https://www.elnacional.cat/en/politics/robles-video-nazi-salutes-spanish-army-marea\\_566343\\_102.html](https://www.elnacional.cat/en/politics/robles-video-nazi-salutes-spanish-army-marea_566343_102.html).

91 John van den Burg, “Ook in Nederland Vinden Rechts-Extremisten Het Leger Aantrekkelijk”.

92 M. Stoeber, “Bundeswehr Ermittelt Gegen KSK-Elitekämpfer”.

93 D. Koehler, A Threat from Within?

94 Times of Israel. “Des Néo-Nazis Dans l’armée Française, Selon Mediapart” [Neo-Nazis in the French Army according to Mediapart], Times of Israel, 13 July 2020, <https://fr.timesofisrael.com/des-neo-nazis-dans-larmee-francaise-selon-mediapart/>.

95 D. Koehler, A Threat from Within?

96 G. Galloway, “Canadian Forces Looking into Allegations of White-Supremacist Material Being Sold at Military-Surplus Store Run by Soldiers”, *The Globe and Mail*, 29 October 2018, <https://www.theglobeandmail.com/politics/article-canadian-forces-looking-into-allegations-of-white-supremacist-material/>.



First, it is important to distinguish between countries like Switzerland and the Netherlands, where there is little reporting of misconduct of this kind, and countries like the US and Germany, where there are many such reports. A large number of such reports in the US and the Germany seems to concentrate on the existence of a generally hostile atmosphere. For example, according to a survey by *The Military Times*, “[m]ore than one third of all active-duty troops and more than half of minority service members in the US armed forces say they have personally witnessed examples of white nationalism or ideological-driven racism within the ranks in recent months.”<sup>97</sup> Moreover, countries differ in the strength of their response to Problem area 4. While in the US, such behaviour appears to be tolerated to a certain extent, other countries have recalled or disbanded units to deal with the problem. In Germany, for example, the elite unit KSK had to be partially disbanded in late 2019 because of the pervasiveness of right-wing extremist sympathies. Later, in June 2021, a German army platoon in Lithuania was ordered to return to Germany because it had developed a unit culture in which anti-Semitic and racist slurs and right-wing extremist behaviour were normalised.<sup>98</sup> These contrasting examples demonstrate that there is a clear difference in the extent to which various countries are responding to Problem area 4.

The second key observation is that such incidents fall short of physical violence. Decorating a room with Nazi flags, openly displaying white supremacist tattoos, and singing Nazi songs are clearly acts of aggression, but they do not involve physical violence. Nor did we identify cases of physical violence of right-wing extremist service members against minority service members.

It is important to bear in mind that militaries may be reluctant to acknowledge the existence within their ranks of systematic or widespread behaviours that hamper diversity and inclusion efforts. For example, in recent years, the Canadian Armed Forces have come under severe criticism for their apparent failure to address sexual assault and misconduct.<sup>99</sup> Therefore, it is likely that at least some of these behaviours will go unnoticed by those not directly involved.

## 4.5 Problem area 5: Civilian-military power dynamics

It is rare that members of the armed forces openly choose their right-wing extremist views or sympathies over their duty to civilian leadership. However, one exception took place in April 2021 in France. A group of former and active military officers,<sup>100</sup> some with ties to right-wing extremist groups, published an open letter in which they warned of the alleged disintegration of French society as a result of combined efforts from anti-racists, Islamists, and “the hordes from the suburbs [*banlieues*]”. The authors of the letter asserted that they were “ready to support policies that will take into account the safeguarding of the nation,”<sup>101</sup> which was widely interpreted as a veiled threat to commit a coup d’état.<sup>102</sup>

97 L. Shane III, “Signs of White Supremacy, Extremism up Again in Poll of Active-Duty Troops”, *Military Times*, 6 February 2020, <https://www.militarytimes.com/news/pentagon-congress/2020/02/06/signs-of-white-supremacy-extremism-up-again-in-poll-of-active-duty-troops/>.

98 Counter Extremism Project. “Germany: Extremism and Terrorism, Counter Extremism Project, <https://www.counterextremism.com/countries/germany>.

99 H. Honderich, “Canada Apologises for ‘Scourge’ of Military Sexual Misconduct”, *BBC News*, 13 December 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-59632657>.

100 *Le Monde*. “Tribune de Militaires: Le Chef d’état-Major Des Armées Souhaite La ‘Mise à La Retraite d’Office’ Des Généraux En ‘Deuxième Section’”, [Military Tribunal: The Chief of Staff of the Armies Calls for the ‘Compulsory Retirement’ of the Generals in the ‘Second Section’], *Le Monde*, 28 April 2021, [https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/04/28/tribune-de-militaires-le-chef-d-etat-major-des-armees-souhaite-la-mise-a-la-retraite-d-office-des-signataires-en-activite\\_6078418\\_823448.html](https://www.lemonde.fr/politique/article/2021/04/28/tribune-de-militaires-le-chef-d-etat-major-des-armees-souhaite-la-mise-a-la-retraite-d-office-des-signataires-en-activite_6078418_823448.html).

101 J.-P. Fabre-Bernadac, “‘Pour Un Retour de l’Honneur de Nos Gouvernants’: 20 Généraux Appellent Macron à Défendre Le Patriotisme” [‘For a Return of the Honor of Our Governors’: 20 Generals Call on Macron to Defend Patriotism], *Valeurs Actuelles*, 21 April 2021, <https://www.valeursactuelles.com/politique/pour-un-retour-de-lhonneur-de-nos-gouvernants-20-generaux-appellent-macron-a-defendre-le-patriotisme/>.

102 *Le Monde*, “Tribune de Militaires”.

This reading was lent further credence by the fact that the letter was published exactly sixty years after a group of far-right generals attempted a coup to prevent the independence of Algeria.<sup>103</sup>

There are reports of similar sentiments in Spain, where in 2020 a manifesto was released criticising the “social-communist” government for putting Spain’s unity at risk. The signatories were all former officers.<sup>104</sup> In early 2021, it became apparent that their position had some support among active service members as well: a group of military reservists agreed in a WhatsApp chat that the only way to keep Spain from falling apart was to kill twenty-six million Spaniards. News reports about the chat led the Spanish government to launch an investigation into right-wing extremism in the Spanish military.<sup>105</sup>

Furthermore, there is some evidence that right-wing extremists in the US military are willing to overturn civilian leadership if they believe it is in the interest of the country. For example, the militia group Oath Keepers, which has military personnel among its members, claims that the Constitution has primacy and therefore encourages its members to disobey certain civilian and military orders which they interpret as violating the Constitution.<sup>106</sup>

These three examples, especially the French and Spanish cases, are strikingly similar and thus clearly exemplify one of the potential scenarios within Problem area 5. Beyond these, however, we only found a few other examples of Problem area 5. One such case concerns a sergeant-major in the Dutch military police who questioned the legitimacy of civilian authorities, alleging that they engage in child abuse and paedophilia. In 2020, this individual organised a protest march against “child mistreatment, child trafficking and ritual child abuse” by the elite, echoing the QAnon conspiracy that overlaps with contemporary right-wing extremist groups. However, this appears to be a line of activity he developed separately from his work in the military police.<sup>107</sup> Perhaps this is a blueprint for a second type of scenario under Problem area 5, but more evidence of larger numbers of military personnel involved in such initiatives would be needed to designate it as a valid scenario within this category.

## 5. Conclusion

The aim of this research paper was to sketch the diversity of manifestations of the nexus between right-wing extremism and the military. Building upon academic literature that outlines possible problems arising from an extremist presence within the military, we have provided a broad overview of the ways in which the right-wing extremism-military nexus is currently manifesting in Western armed forces. In doing so, this research paper makes an important contribution to our understanding of this phenomenon by proposing a conceptual framework that outlines the risk and implications associated with the right-wing extremism-military nexus. This conceptual framework also captures the variety of ways in which each problem area may manifest itself.

<sup>103</sup> Le Monde, “Tribune de Militaires”.

<sup>104</sup> R. Minder, “Ex-Military Officers Criticize Spain’s Government and Praise Franco”, The New York Times, 27 December 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/12/27/world/europe/spain-military-franco-fascist.html>.

<sup>105</sup> Cristina de la Hoz, “El Congreso Investigará La Presencia de La Ultraderecha En El Ejército a Peticion de ERC y Bildu” [Congress Will Investigate The Presence of The Ultra-Right In The Army at the Request of ERC and Bildu], El Independiente, 25 January 2021, <https://www.elindependiente.com/espana/2021/01/25/el-congreso-investigara-la-presencia-de-la-ultraderecha-en-el-ejercito-a-peticion-de-erc-y-bildu/>.

<sup>106</sup> S. Jackson, *The Oath Keepers: Patriotism and the Edge of Violence in a Right-Wing Antigovernment Group* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

<sup>107</sup> S. van Mersbergen, “Marechaussee Neemt Afstand van Medewerker Die Mars Houdt Tegen ‘Ritueel Kindermisbruik’” [Constabulary Distances Themselves From Employee Who Stops Mars Against ‘Ritual Child Abuse’], AD, 18 October 2020, <https://www.ad.nl/binnenland/marechaussee-neemt-afstand-van-medewerker-die-mars-houdt-tegen-ritueel-kindermisbruik~a6ae6b53/>.

This approach has also broadened our view regarding what the right-wing extremism-military nexus can entail. For instance, Problem area 4 ranges from isolated instances of misconduct to the case of Germany partially disbanding a unit to curtail a culture of racism and anti-Semitism. This suggests that each Problem area may encompass various levels of severity. On the whole, most of the incidents discussed in section 4 represent less severe manifestations of the nexus, with just a few cases that one could consider worst-case scenarios. In itself, this is not surprising, as extreme variants are rare by nature. However, with much of the public concern about the right-wing extremism-military nexus focusing on these extreme scenarios (e.g. large-scale, sophisticated terrorist attacks) it is important to draw attention to the many other scenarios that may be less dramatic but nevertheless need to be addressed.

Importantly, we have also observed that the nature of the nexus of right-wing extremism and the military differed greatly among the countries in our sample. The US and Germany appear to be the most heavily affected countries; this is perhaps unsurprising given the overall strength of right-wing extremist movements within these two countries. In other words, while such cross-national differences are difficult to explain definitively, it is plausible that Germany and the US are the countries where the most problem areas apply and where the right-wing extremist scene is the most vibrant and active. ICCT's *Terrorist Threat Assessment* shows that in 2020, Germany and the US witnessed a higher number of right-wing terrorism-related arrests than the ten other countries in our sample.<sup>108</sup> Interestingly, both Germany and the US have in recent years seen right-wing extremist groups mobilise large mobs to storm legislative buildings. This suggests that the right-wing extremism-military nexus may not occur in a vacuum, but rather correlates with a severe overall right-wing extremist threat. Bearing in mind the limitations to our research mentioned in section 3.3, however, this relationship needs to be investigated in more depth.

Another avenue for further research on the nature of the right-wing extremism-military nexus concerns the application of a gender lens, especially given the hyper-masculine culture of military environments discussed above. Within the problem areas identified and analysed above, instances of violence (Problem areas 1 and 2) and especially malicious conduct and a hostile culture (Problem areas 3 and 4) may stem in part from gendered assumptions and norms.<sup>109</sup> As such, future research should examine the role of masculinity and fraternity in shaping attitudes and behaviours, in order to better understand this little-researched dimension of the phenomenon. Although militaries are increasingly attempting to diversify their ranks in order to reflect the fabric of contemporary Western societies, policies aimed to create inclusion for ethnic, religious, and sexual minorities will only succeed to the extent that the internal culture supports these initiatives. Therefore, understanding how gender impacts upon identity and culture within such spaces is key for assessing motivations and designing appropriate responses.

Finally, with regard to policy recommendations, a first step towards formulating appropriate policies to address the right-wing extremism-military nexus is to map the ways this nexus can manifest in practice. We have attempted to give an overview of this phenomenon, which provides governments with the basis for a checklist to explore what needs to be examined within the right-wing extremism-military nexus in their respective countries. Given that our conceptualisation of the right-wing extremism-military nexus is still in its early stages, we are not in a position to provide tailored policy recommendations. One aspect we do wish to emphasise, however, is that the leniency observed in some countries' responses to the right-wing extremism-military nexus is unproductive. An example of this is Corey Reeves (see section 4.2), who was known to have spread right-wing extremist propaganda and was nonetheless initially retained in his post. Given the variety of ways in which the right-wing extremism-military nexus can create problems, dealing

<sup>108</sup> T. van Dongen, M. Wentworth and H. Rigault Arkhis, *Terrorist Threat Assessment, 2019-2021*, 25.

<sup>109</sup> R. Hinojosa, "Doing Hegemony: Military, Men, and Constructing a Hegemonic Masculinity", *The Journal of Men's Studies* 18, no. 2 (2010): 179–94.

with this challenge necessitates a bespoke approach. However, whatever such an approach may entail, it begins with the political will to recognise the severity of the problem. This research paper is a starting point towards recognising and understanding the problem, but it will have little impact if governments and military organisations turn a blind eye.

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