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House Armed Services Military Personnel: Oversight of Extremism Policies in the Army

JIM BANKS: The hearing will now come to order. I ask unanimous consent that the chair be authorized to declare a recess at any time. Without objection, so ordered. I want to welcome everyone to this hearing of the Military Personnel Subcommittee. Today, we are here to address a foundational concern of American democracy, freedom of speech, a fundamental right that the Department of Defense and the United States Army are degrading with their latest, quote, "extremism policies and rogue training programs." This hearing will specifically address an anti-terrorism training given for years to countless young service members at Fort Liberty that characterize pro-life organizations as, quote, "terrorist groups." This training labeled several prominent and well-respected pro-life groups that count millions of everyday Americans as members as violent extremists.

The training accused the members of these organizations of being threats to the safety of military installations and designated symbols of pro-life groups, including state-issued pro-life license plates as indicators of terrorism. This disturbing training confirmed my fears about the recent publication of Army directive 2024-07, handling protest extremist and criminal gang activities.

This new directive would define something as simple as service members expressing support for those who refused the COVID vaccine as extremism, that is the Army is using an overly broad policy to police the speech of conservative service members, quiet dissent and require service members who believe in conservative ideals to hide their identities for fear of retaliation from their commands.

But the Army isn't simply targeting conservative speech and values. At any time the administration could weaponize this policy against any Army soldier with values different from the administration. That is why our oversight of these trainings and policies is so urgent. The First Amendment is broad for a reason.

Once speech is limited, no matter how offensive or vulgar, individual freedoms are dangerously infringed upon and that is a real threat to our democracy. I would now like to introduce our witnesses, Doctor Agnes Schaefer and Lieutenant General Patrick Matlock. Thank you for being with us today. I hope this hearing provides an opportunity for our members to have a productive exchange.

Before hearing from our witnesses, let me offer Ranking Member Kim an opportunity to make any opening remarks. Ranking Member Kim?

ANDY KIM: Yeah. Thank you, Mr. Chair. I want to begin by emphasizing that extremism has no place in the United States military. We rely on professionalism, discipline and integrity of our armed forces to defend our nation and uphold our values as Americans. I'm hopeful that this hearing will provide our witnesses with an opportunity to discuss what transpired at Fort Liberty and explain how the Department of the Army can improve the development and approval of extremism training materials for service members and just training materials writ large.

Extremist ideologies, whether rooted in hate violence or division threaten the cohesion and readiness of our forces and undermine the trust that the American people place in our national security. As we confront extremism, we must also remain vigilant in protecting our service members' constitutional rights to free speech.

Like all Americans, our military personnel have the right to express their political, social and religious views in their personal capacity so long as they do not engage in actions that incite violence, undermine good order and discipline, or threaten unit cohesion. This is a critical balance that leaders must maintain and that brings me to the concerning issue regarding the terror awareness training at Fort Liberty in North Carolina.

As we understand it, this training has, for years erroneously identified specific nonprofit organizations as terrorist groups. And I just want to, for the purposes of this hearing, just make sure that all my colleagues recognize that we're talking about groups that were identified across the political and ideological spectrum.

It was not just about pro-life groups, there were also environmental groups, animal rights groups and this is not a situation about focusing and targeting on any sort of more conservative or liberal sides. This was across all of those political spectrums and we should be able to tackle it with that full comprehensive approach as needed.

Incorrectly labeling legitimate organizations as terrorist groups not only undermines the credibility of the training, but also puts service members at risk of being unfairly scrutinized or penalized based on their associations or memberships. We must be cautious and purposeful in how we define and identify threats to our national security and our focus must remain on actions, behaviors and credible threats.

The Army must avoid creating an environment where service members fear they could be unfairly targeted based on their personal beliefs or associations. So long as those associations do not translate into actions or imminent threats of violence, incorrectly labeling groups can blur the lines between legitimate efforts to combat extremism and infringement on individual rights.

And those mistakes can also weaken service members trust in the training itself, which is vital to its effectiveness in helping our soldiers live up to their full potential. I look forward to clear answers today about how this mistake happened and what steps the Army is taking to correct it and how the Army will ensure that future training materials are more accurately and carefully vetted.

I look forward to our witnesses, testimonies and responses to our questions today. With that, I yield back, Mr. Chair.

JIM BANKS: Thank you, Mr. Kim each both of you rather have an opportunity to make an opening statement. We respectfully request that you summarize your testimony in five minutes or less. Your written comments and statements will be made part of the hearing record following the opening statements. Each member will have an opportunity to question the witnesses for five minutes.

With that, Doctor Schaefer, you may make your opening statement.

AGNES SCHAEFER: Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to appear before you on behalf of the men and women of the United States Army. The Army's mission remains constant, to fight and win our nation's wars. We do this with a trained and ready force prepared to respond to the evolving landscape threat landscape.

In order to remain ready, the Army requires many forms of training in my role as the assistant secretary of the Army for Manpower and Reserve Affairs. I provide oversight for both the Army's anti-terrorism policy and extremism policy and their respective training requirements. The G.357 then operationalizes.

Those policies with the support and assistance of the provost marshal -- marshal general for anti-terrorism policy and they are implemented at the command level. The Army has provided responses to Congressional inquiries into an incident at Fort Liberty in July 2024, involving the presentation of nonstandard anti-terrorism training slides to 47 soldiers.

These training slides were related to the Army's anti-terrorism policy, not the Army's extremism policy. The slides inaccurately referenced nonprofit, public advocacy organization groups such as National Right to Life, Operation Rescue, Earth First, Earth Liberation Front, Animal Liberation Front and PETA as terrorist organization, which is inconsistent with the Army's anti-terrorism policy and training.

The secretary of the Army and I have stated unequivocally that nonprofit groups such as those referenced in the training slides are

not terrorist groups and should not be described as such in army documents or training materials. The slides do not represent the official policy or views of the US Army. The incident at Fort Liberty was assessed through an Army Regulation 15-6 investigation directed by 18th Airborne Corps leadership which was completed on July 29th, 2024. The investigation found the slides in question were locally developed at Fort Liberty.

The slides have been used for training since 2017 and were not reviewed or approved by Fort Liberty leadership because local policies were not in place for reviewing and approving such training slides. There is no evidence indicating that the individual who developed and presented the training attempted to Deliberately subvert DOD or Army policy.

Nor is there any evidence to suggest the individual attempted to further a personal viewpoint through the presentation. The individual who altered the slides was a junior employee who used open source research and inaccurately implied that the organizations on the slide were -- were potential security threats.

No similar training discussing nonprofit advocacy groups was found on Fort Liberty and there is no evidence indicating that the slides were acquired, shared or presented outside of Fort Liberty. As soon as this incident came to light, the director of the Fort Liberty Directorate of Emergency Services implemented a series of corrective actions, including immediately ceasing the use of the entire set of training slides, a review of training to ensure compliance with Army regulatory requirements and guidance, legal reviews of training content revalidation of instructors and periodic checks of training courses and tracking of those checks.

Immediately following the completion of the investigation. And in accordance with its findings and recommendations, the 18th Airborne Corps commander directed several actions, including development of policy for periodic reviews of locally developed training for consistency with Army and DOD policy to include approval levels and

frequency, a comprehensive review of anti-terrorism training materials used on Fort Liberty to ensure compliance with Army and DOD policy and authorization of disposition of any disciplinary concerns involving civilian employees as appropriate and necessary.

In addition to the actions directed by the 18th Airborne Corps commander, the Army is undertaking an Army-wide review to ensure that these or similar materials are not being disseminated elsewhere and that locally developed threat awareness and Army-wide anti-terrorism training aligns with DOD anti-terrorism standards, guidance and training.

We fully acknowledge that this incident has revealed a gap in our processes at the command level that has existed since these slides were first developed in 2017 and that we need to alleviate the potential for individuals to develop training materials without appropriate supervisory review. The recently Army -- the recently directed army wide review is intended to close that gap.

Chairman Banks, Representative -- Ranking Member Kim, members of the subcommittee, I thank you for your generous and unwavering bipartisan support of our outstanding soldiers, civilian professionals and their families. I look forward to your questions.

PATRICK MATLOCK: Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you for the opportunity to testify today. I appreciate both your support and your demonstrated commitment to our Army. As the Deputy Chief of Staff of the Army for operations plans and training, one of my roles is to ensure that our training is well conceived, adequately resourced and in accordance with the Army's policies and values.

To begin with, let me be clear regarding the specific incident we are discussing today. The training materials presented at Fort Liberty were neither developed nor approved by any Army proponent office and were more importantly not in line with Army policies and values. I want to emphasize that this specific episode at Fort Liberty was an exception to the process and culture that governs Army training.

In particular, I would like to highlight three reasons why army training, culture and process remains strong and how we guard against incidents like this one from occurring. Those three reasons are standardized foundational training, soldier-level after action reviews and commander oversight. First, our training process and culture emphasizes standardization.

Whether training is focused on developing individuals or the more complex collective unit training at our combat training centers, the Army's Training and Doctrine Command centrally standardizes our foundational training materials. To do this, specific proponent offices with expert knowledge develop foundational training materials across the Army.

Proponents also develop an approved the training that certifies our instructors what we refer to in the Army as training the trainer. In the Fort Liberty case locally developed training did not adhere to the standards set forth by the Army proponent office. In response, we published guidance directing an Army-wide review of all locally developed training materials, including anti-terrorism training and we ensure -- we're going to ensure compliance with our carefully developed foundational standards and our Army values.

Standardization is a cornerstone of our training and enterprise and ensures that isolated incidents such as this remain isolated. The second reason to have confidence in Army training processes and culture is that we embrace a culture of after action reviews. In other words, we have processes at every level to identify and implement lessons learned every training event in the Army to include training -- the training that took place at Fort Liberty should include an after action review to identify how we can improve.

I cannot stress enough how central this process is to all we do in the Army. We take great care to build units and commands that are learning organizations and that are capable of rapid improvement. Our culture of after action reviews helps to ensure that if we encounter a situation where local training does not adhere to Army standards, our

soldiers have an available mechanism to capture that, report it and correct it. The third reason we remain confident in our training, processes and culture is that training and execution is first and foremost a commander's responsibility.

As noted, the proponent offices are responsible for ensuring training materials aligned with army values and policies during the foundational development phase. But then we hand these tools to commanders at all levels. Commanders are then entrusted to ensure that all training achieves its aims and aligns with army policy and values during execution.

Through supervision of the training process, commanders ensure quality control and assess the effects of training on soldiers. To that point, I want to emphasize that this did not occur at Fort Liberty and we acknowledge that failure. Based on the guidance we have issued. However, I'm confident that commanders are already ahead of our conversation here today and have reviewed their training materials to ensure these materials accord with our values.

Ultimately, the long-standing culture of standardization after action reviews and command responsibility is the most rapid and efficient guarantor of quality training. Chairman Banks, Ranking Member Kim, distinguished members of the subcommittee, thank you again for your steadfast support of our outstanding men and women in uniform, our civilian professionals and our families, I look forward to your questions.

JIM BANKS: Thank you to both of you. I recognize myself for five minutes to ask questions and let me just begin by backing up for a moment. This training started in 2017. It lasted until a few months ago. Ten thousand soldiers were taught that National Right to Life was a potential domestic terrorist threat or that soldiers with state issued pro-life license plates were a threat.

How in the world does something like that go on for so long and neither of you or anyone in leadership ever catches it? General, start with you.

PATRICK MATLOCK: Chairman Banks, thank you for the question. So I want to emphasize again these training materials were improperly developed and should have never --

JIM BANKS: -- Why did it go on for so long? I understand. I appreciate you acknowledging that. But what --

PATRICK MATLOCK: -- Chairman Banks, the failure was in providing -- anyone providing feedback or any supervisor not observing the training and taking immediate correction. There is no excuse for how long it lasted.

JIM BANKS: Um, Doctor, I mean it's crazy.

AGNES SCHAEFER: I would echo that.

JIM BANKS: So, so my -- so the follow up to that is, has anyone -- has anyone been held accountable for it? This is the United States Army. This is -- this is a training that went on since 2017. You're acknowledging that you all missed it. Um, any accountability at all?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Chairman Banks, in the conduct of the investigation after it was completed, the commander directed corrective actions which have all been completed at Fort Lee.

JIM BANKS: You're the United States Army, has anyone been held accountable? The commander further delegated responsibility for any additional actions to the garrison commander. How about the soldier who created the training to begin with? Has he been held accountable?

PATRICK MATLOCK: The individual who created the training has received corrective training, has been retrained as a trainer and continues to perform --

JIM BANKS: -- Corrective training but accountability?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Mr. Chairman, I'm not going to talk about specific accountability actions because those actions reside with the chain.

JIM BANKS: Why not with the -- you're the United States Army? No and you're -- you're acknowledging that mistakes were made, but has anyone been held accountable for that mistake?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Again, Chairman, I'm not going to describe specific actions taken because those actions reside with the chain of command and it's our policy not to discuss those.

JIM BANKS: Let me ask you -- let me -- let me ask you this. 10,000 soldiers were told that National Right to Life was a potential terrorist group and soldiers with pro-life license plates were a potential terrorist threat. Have those 10,000 soldiers been -- been told that they were misinformed?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Chairman, in the investigation concluded based on surveys from the soldiers and also by speaking to the soldiers that at the end of the training, they did not have the misperception about the nature of those organizations.

JIM BANKS: I don't know what that means. Despite those 10,000 soldiers been told that they've been misinformed.

PATRICK MATLOCK: Chairman, they have not specifically been told they've been misinformed. The investigation concluded based on a survey of soldiers who received the training that they did not perceive that those organizations were terrorist organizations. Again, the training materials were very poorly developed and we fully acknowledge that -- that failure.

Is National Right to Life a terrorist group?

AGNES SCHAEFER: Absolutely not.

PATRICK MATLOCK: Is the Earth Liberation -- you mentioned a long list of organizations. Is the Earth Liberation Front a terrorist group? You said in your opening statement that they're not.

AGNES SCHAEFER: No, Absolutely not. None of these organizations.

JIM BANKS: The Earth Liberation Front has been held responsible for bombings and arson and they're not a terrorist group or a potential terrorist threat?

AGNES SCHAEFER: So I would defer to --

JIM BANKS: According to the Department of Homeland Security.

AGNES SCHAEFER: Yeah, I would defer to General Matlock about specific training related to anti-terrorism groups. We typically do not call them out and so --

JIM BANKS: -- You did in your opening -- in your opening statement, you said these groups were called a potential terrorist threat, but they're not a potential terrorist threat. You said National Right to Life and then you said the Earth Liberation Front.

AGNES SCHAEFER: So we don't think -- I don't want to misstate --

JIM BANKS: Maybe you misspoke?

AGNES SCHAEFER: Maybe I misspoke, but the ones we as a whole, we do not, um, you know, think that advocacy groups in general are terrorist groups unless they have proven otherwise.

JIM BANKS: I just want to say this is the United States Army and we had training going on since 2017 until a few months ago. That was saying that National Right to Life was a potential terrorist threat and soldiers with a pro life license plate issued by the state were potential terrorist threats and -- and you guys, you admit that something went wrong.

But -- but yet today, even at this hearing, no one has ever been held accountable for it. This is embarrassing and it makes me wonder what other mistakes is the United States Army making, maybe even in a -- in a larger way. So I'm even more baffled after hearing from you than what I was before with that I yield to ranking member Kemp.

ANDY KIM: Yeah, thanks, Mr. Chair, I guess I'd like to just pick up. I mean, you know this is a concern that this type of training occurred. And as mentioned, you know, the groups that were highlighted were,

you know, from a range of different uh advocacy and ideological backgrounds here. I guess I wanted to just ask, was there any assessed political motivation from the person who designed this training material?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Ranking Member Kim, the investigation determined that there was no political motivation by any person involved in the training.

ANDY KIM: OK, well, look, I -- as I said, you know in the opening, I mean this was something that did target groups that span the ideological spectrum. And I think that what we can focus on right here is what can we do to make sure we're safeguarding. I agree with the chairman that you know the fact that this went on for so many years is alarming, you know, and trying to figure out how we can get the feedback, how we can make sure that this doesn't happen in the going forward.

So I guess I'd like to just ask, you know, what safeguards are being implemented to prevent future errors of this nature?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Ranking Member Kim, per the directive that we issued to review the antiterrorism training, we put a number of requirements in there, including a legal review, a review at the Colonel and GS-15 level and we emphasize alignment of training materials with the Army-standard training packages provided By the proponent offices?

ANDY KIM: So there would be then review prior to material being utilized because you know as as we've kind of discussed at different time, you know, there's no ability for leadership of the Army at the very highest levels to review all the material that's happening all across all the different units. So, you know, is there then a protocol for that review ahead of time?

Is there also going to be, you know, screenings or sit ins to be able to view and how the training is being utilized? Can you walk us through some of that?

PATRICK MATLOCK: No, that is -- that's all correct. In a normal process when it's properly executed, commanders at the appropriate level advised by their staff in many cases advised by their legal advisors would review the training materials before they are presented and utilized in the training program. When that's an Army-wide training package, a training support package that's done at the proponent level.

When it's a locally developed training package that's done by the respective commander with their staff.

ANDY KIM: OK. And there was conversation that you raised in the opening about an Army-wide review. I guess I'd just like to have a sense of how far along is that and has so far in that review have any additional concerns been raised or found?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Ranking Member Kim, that -- that review is ongoing now was initiated a couple of weeks ago. We have a suspense early next year. We wanted to make sure we had plenty of time for our reserve, our National Guard and Army Reserve components to complete that review. I'm confident that in most cases that review is already completed and thus far there's been no issues identified with any other training materials.

ANDY KIM: Well, we'll make sure that this committee and the Armed Services Committee continues to follow up in the new year as that investigation concludes. I guess I just want to finish with just sort of a big picture question here that I'd love the two of you to address. But just how does Army balance the needs to address legitimate extremist threats within the ranks while protecting the rights of service members, particularly when it comes to political, religious and charitable affiliations.

Um, Doctor, maybe we could start with you.

AGNES SCHAEFER: Thank you. Thank you for that question, sir. Uh, so as you know, um, the department updated its extremist policy in 2021. That extremist policy has been in existence in some form since really

the early 70s. And so this has been a long -- this has been in place for a very long time, um, and what the -- the purpose of the 2021 update was to clarify what is prohibited activity under that policy.

Um, and so there are -- it tried to tighten up the definition of extremism and then laid out 14 criteria for active participation in extremism. And so the point of that was to make it less confusing to folks about what that policy focuses on. We just released the Army policy that nests within that broader DOD policy.

We released that in June. Um, and, um, I will, um, you know, emphasize that the -- the DOD policy, which again is the overarching policy. The North Star for that policy is that, quote, "A service member's right of expression should be preserved to the maximum extent possible in accordance with the First Amendment and the constitutional and statutory provisions of Title 10 and 18 of US code and consistent with good order and discipline and national security." So really the line for those prohibitive activities are those 14 criteria that are laid out in the DOD policy and that the Army policy mirrors.

ANDY KIM: Thank you. I'll yield back.

AGNES SCHAEFER: Mr. Gaetz.

MATT GAETZ: So, General Matlock, after years of the Army wrongly telling over 10,000 soldiers that someone having a pro-life license plate might make them a terrorist. Was anybody fired?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, again, the chain of command is the responsible agent for adverse actions or personnel actions and I'm not going to comment on what they've done or not done. That resides with the chain of command.

MATT GAETZ: Well, don't you think that has failed because -- because wasn't the obligation to stop this nonsense also at the chain of command?

PATRICK MATLOCK: The chain of command took immediately upon receiving the report of the poorly developed training materials. The

chain of command took immediate action.

MATT GAETZ: In the United States Army eight years might be immediate, but it doesn't seem all that immediate to me. I mean, does -- does years and years of doing this seem like the chain of command was immediately responsive to this errant action to you?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, we recognize that that is a very long period of time --

MATT GAETZ: -- OK. So -- so we'll dispense with it then. OK, so you're kind of playing games. I mean, I think the Congress deserves to know after you all screwed up with 10,000 soldiers, whether you fired anyone, whether you suspended anyone, whether anyone got a demotion in rank or what the consequence was like. You don't get to just say it's our chain of command and it's not Congress's business when you screw up to this magnitude.

Like does that not register with you?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, it does, that's why I'm here today.

MATT GAETZ: Right. So just tell us did anyone get fired, suspended, demoted or any of those three?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, again the -- the those training materials were very poorly prepared. They were used --

MATT GAETZ: -- But we don't -- so this is what's going on, General. We don't believe that your chain of command approach is going to be sufficient to deal with this if you play hide the ball on what the consequence was and it sort of seems to be a DOD-wide problem that, you know, that -- that people who express policy or scripture aligned with Christian faith get demonized and attacked.

I mean, we saw that in the United States Navy when the SEALs wanted to have an exception for the vaccine and then your own inspector general had to say that they were improperly treated. We saw it in the Marine Corps when someone posted a Bible verse and -- and was then subjected to disciplinary action and now here in the Army.

I mean, Mr. Chairman, I'm -- I'm at a loss because they won't even tell us what they've done. Now now I'm wondering how this emerged. It was in 2017. Who was the chief of staff of the Army then?

PATRICK MATLOCK: I believe in 2017 General Milley was the chief of staff of the Army.

MATT GAETZ: Oh, well, interesting. Do you think this is happening elsewhere? This kind of stuff?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, in the United States Army, no, I don't think it is.

MATT GAETZ: Yeah, well, here's what I do, Mr. Chairman. I would -- I would -- I would demand answers to the questions that we're asking. This is -- I don't even know how to use my last minute and a half of time because they're not going to answer the question on what consequence. And if the consequence isn't public, it doesn't function as a sufficient deterrent.

Like what you guys do when you allow this to happen for years with no consequence and then eight years later or whatever when you're called out on it, you say, well, there's a consequence but we won't tell you what it is, then you increase the recidivism of this type of behavior and not for nothing. But it's one of the reasons why in some of the key demographic areas that the Army is traditionally drawn from to fill its ranks, you're struggling right now.

So I think we -- I think we're owed answers to these questions. And frankly, I would start fencing money at the United States Army until we get those answers. I yield back.

VERONICA ESCOBAR: Doctor Schaefer, I have a couple questions for you. Thank you both for your presence and your testimony here today. Under the leadership of SECDEF Austin, the Department of Defense and each of the services has undertaken a host of actions to confront legitimate threats of extremist activity and proactively educate our service members on these issues to prevent their falling prey to recruitment by violent extremist organizations.

Some of which specifically target members of the military and law enforcement. Would you please specifically speak to how Army Directive 2024-07 fits into these efforts while still protecting the rights of service members pertaining to political or religious affiliation?

AGNES SCHAEFER: Well, as I mentioned before, really the guiding light for that -- the -- that our policy and the DOD policy is the fact that their people can say things, but they -- it's when they cross that line into active participation. That is the way the department has clarified the definition of -- of extremism, and it has laid out those 14 criteria for active participation in extremism.

Um, and in addition, um criminal gangs are also incorporated into the R-directive and we have a sort of a definition for that as well as well as different criteria including things like fundraising, um, uh, things like that, recruiting training, members of gangs and those kinds of things.

VERONICA ESCOBAR: Thank you. General Matlock, one of my colleagues wanted to know specifically what the consequences were for the trainer, generally speaking, not specific to this issue in particular, but generally speaking, does the military or the Army publicly discuss disciplinary actions against members of the military?

Is that something you could share with us?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, we generally don't discuss punitive or adverse administrative actions with military -- taken against military members or civilian employees. We do that based on privacy and the safety of the individuals and that's been a long-standing policy.

VERONICA ESCOBAR: So with regard to this issue now, in particular, you all have discussed, I mean, believe me, I was equally alarmed as my colleagues were and the breadth of -- of those organizations identified was startling. For example, an animal rights organization that is listed as a terrorist organization. And so I appreciate the fact that you are here talking about it, but I do think it's important for the public who might be watching to understand the limitations in a

public setting around talking about disciplinary actions with regard to specific individuals.

And so you mentioned privacy and safety, are there other issues within policy that would prevent you from talking about specific disciplinary action against a member of your personnel?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, I don't know if it's policy, but it's long-standing norm to -- to not have those discussions so that we don't improperly influence members of the chain of command. As you know, we care deeply about the independent judgment of each commander and part of why we do this work the way we do it is to preserve that independent judgment.

VERONICA ESCOBAR: I appreciate that. And then just finally, anything you'd like to add in addition to what was mentioned to Mr. -- Representative Kim about going forward how to prevent this in the future, anything that you might have left out? I appreciate how thorough you've been.

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, on the training portion, I just -- I would add that um, reinforcing the norm of adhering to standard training materials, particularly when it's an Army-wide training requirement and that's always the best practice is to use the standard materials and then tailor specific mission preparation activities for a specific location.

And when commanders do that, they're -- they're always on track with the training and always on track with their mission preparation.

VERONICA ESCOBAR: Appreciate it. I'm out of time. I yield back.

JIM BANKS: Mr. Mills?

CORY MILLS: Thank you so much, Mr. Chairman. Look, I want to go back to something that my colleague, Mr. Gaetz was talking about that you responded where he asked do you think this is going on anywhere else in the actual forces? Your comment was, I don't think it's happening in other places in the Army. I think, but you don't know for

certain do you because you allowed this to go on for almost seven years, correct?

PATRICK MATLOCK: I can't look you in the eye and guarantee that it's not happening in other locations at this time. We have no information to suggest improperly prepared anti-terrorism materials are being used anywhere else in the Army.

CORY MILLS: So we hear it right here, Mr. Chairman. He's literally saying that we have no idea whether or not it's going on in other locations in the Army. We have no idea whether or not this is continuing as it has for seven plus years. It's almost like Lucy and the football where they're essentially just going ahead and saying, well, we found it in this location after seven plus years and 10,000 soldiers but we're unaware if it's still going on in other locations because we haven't done our jobs to ensure that it's not.

Look, I'm a noncommissioned officer from the United States military. I served in the Army proudly and I'm grateful for your service, but you're sitting here running a political game, making comments like, well, I can't talk about the chain of command. OK, fine. We're not asking to dox the individuals to ask for the names of the commanders to say exactly what the overarching goal or what has been happened, whether they were demoted, whether there was some type of removal command.

But can you at least answer whether or not UCMJ action has at least taken place for those to be held responsible?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, on the -- the training conduct, I'm 100 percent confident in the Army chain of command across all Army organizations that they work diligently every day to produce the right training outcomes for each of their missions.

CORY MILLS: But yet you don't know whether or not it's actually being implemented as we didn't know what was being trained for seven plus years, correct?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Again, my -- my -- my confidence in the Army chain of command across the entire globe is unwavering.

CORY MILLS: And I ask again as all my colleagues have tried to ask for these answers. This is a bipartisan request from Congress who funds our national defense. Are you aware of any UCMJ action being utilized to ensure not corrective training action, that's not holding someone accountable. Let's just be clear. When I was a noncommissioned officer and I smoked someone for basically making a mistake and had them push or flutter kick the whole time, I called that corrective action.

But that's not to the severity of what we're discussing here with 10,000 soldiers were literally trained, that being pro-life is an extremist act. So is there -- or is there not any UCMJ action which has been held -- and I don't want the political rhetoric of saying this is a chain of command issue because you, sir, are above that chain of command at the end of the day.

You wear those stars proudly on your shoulders that you've earned to ensure the oversight and the actual leading of our troops. Is that not correct?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, I've been a commander many times. I'm not currently in the chain of command or a commander.

CORY MILLS: But do you know whether or not UCMJ action was utilized?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative --

CORY MILLS: -- Are you aware of that knowledge?

PATRICK MATLOCK: I've made it clear that I'm not going to comment on those.

CORY MILLS: So then what's the point, Mr. Chairman, in having these hearings, if we don't even have someone who's willing to testify to give us the answers, This is completely pointless, sir. I'll be honest with you. I don't think you're deserving of a fourth star given the fact that you

can't even come before Congress to ensure that we have accountability and oversight.

That is a key and critical thing. My young corporals and E-5s know that. Unbelievable. You've stated that the training conducted at Fort Bragg claiming pro-life groups are extremists was inaccurate. However, this training was somehow conducted for seven years before any oversight was exercised. How do you plan to implement oversight or a policy for oversight moving forward?

PATRICK MATLOCK: The training was conducted at Fort Liberty. It was a very long --

CORY MILLS: -- It will always be Fort Bragg to me --

PATRICK MATLOCK: -- And that length of time is -- is almost unexplainable. I'm confident that if this issue had been identified at any point during that period of time, the Army would have taken immediate corrective action like we did.

CORY MILLS: But here's my problem, how can the Army properly define what is extremist when the DOD education activity requires students and staff to be educated on radical racial and sexual ideas? While Tricare limits a parent's ability to view their children's medical records and allows children to receive bodily mutilation or abortion services without parental consent or notification?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, again, on the training that was conducted at Fort Liberty -- Liberty, there's no excuse for the quality, the poor quality of that.

CORY MILLS: Mr. Chairman, we're clearly not going to go anywhere here. So with that I yield back.

JIM BANKS: Rep Tokuda?

JILL TOKUDA: Thank you, Mr. Chair, and I'll try to structure my questions differently given that I think there's some very basic questions, to be very honest, on both sides of the aisle, just trying to get at a basic accountability and we don't seem to be able to get that

from this particular forum, but I would just remind the people on the panel today, you are here for a reason.

The buck stops with you. At the end of the day extremism that mischaracterizes both sides of the political spectrum. It just gets away from us truly dealing with valid cases of extremism that hurts our people and our military and our communities. And so I would hope for frankness in the discussion going forward, because if not, it's going to be very hard for us to be able to do the work of the people here today.

Um, I wanted to talk a little bit on an area that's very close to my heart, but when we take a look at the DOD instructions and the Army directives, um, you know, it does include a specific definition of extremist activities. It's very long. But related to discrimination based on certain protected categories.

The definition reads advocating widespread unlawful discrimination based on race color National origin, religion, sex, including pregnancy, gender, identity or sexual orientation. And I want to focus specifically on how this definition and the Army's directive more broadly applies to anti-Asian discrimination and hate in the military, which I've learned firsthand and heard firsthand from Asian American service members is a growing concern amidst our strategic competition with China.

Doctor Schaefer, I think the answer is obvious, but just for the record advocating for violence targeted at people belonging to any of those specific categories would be prohibited extremist activity, is that correct?

AGNES SCHAEFER: Correct the both the -- the DOD instruction and our regulation really point to the criteria point to things that are unlawful and widespread discrimination.

JILL TOKUDA: OK, and what about advocating for the idea that other soldiers belonging to any of those specific categories are unfit to serve in uniform not loyal to this country or otherwise less American or un-American, would that constitute extremist activity?

AGNES SCHAEFER: It's hard for me to comment on a hypothetical. I think that it really depends on the criteria and the specific.

JILL TOKUDA: I mean, we've seen specific instances where because someone is a Chinese American. Back in World War II, because someone was of Japanese descent, very similar to my grandfather who served in the military intelligence service, very secretive there and yet his father was interned in the camps for being an enemy to to the country.

We have seen this before when loyalty is questioned to the country because of their -- their race. So specific enough would that be considered an extremist activity?

AGNES SCHAEFER: Again, it depends on if the action becomes unlawful and is widespread.

JILL TOKUDA: OK, I know I'm running close on time right now and I do want to get through more of this, but in terms of the definition of active participation, does that include actions and decisions that soldiers might take in the performance of their duties? So as a hypothetical example, if an Army recruiter categorically refuses to consider people of a specific racial or ethnic background, again questioning loyalty or other types of things, would that be considered extremist?

AGNES SCHAEFER: Again, I'm sorry, I'm not a lawyer, I -- that kind of situation again, we -- we assess these on a case-by-case basis.

JILL TOKUDA: OK, so in this case-to-case basis, let me just skip right to the end then I know you're doing data collection on these things. You're considering these cases, where does the buck stop? These are very subjective definitions you have of even extremist activity. Um, where does it ultimately stop If there is a question, there's a gray area and any one of your commands chains of commands?

Where does the buck stop to ultimately say this is or is not extremist activity this should or should not be tracked, this should or should not

be part of a curriculum or anything else? Where does the buck stop, so we know who to call for it?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, so for -- for any case the commander responsible or the civilian director if it's --

JILL TOKUDA: -- OK. So what if they have a question, where does it go from there?

PATRICK MATLOCK: They have access to expert at appropriate echelons. They have access to legal expertise, they have access to law enforcement expertise, they have access --

JILL TOKUDA: -- So that's still not the buck where the buck stops, you're talking about people they can consult with essentially to come up with a decision if they are still in a gray area. If they're still questions ultimately your chain of command, where does the buck stop to say --

PATRICK MATLOCK: -- That responsibility lies with the commanders. So at the end of the process after gathering facts on any particular incident, the commander makes a decision regarding the application.

JILL TOKUDA: I think the problem here is we have a diffused sense of accountability of every single command has its own arbitrary subjective ability to make a determination on extremist activity. Therein lies your problem and I think you have to actually answer the question of where does the buck stop And I don't think I've gotten my answer.

Thank you. My time has run out.

JIM BANKS: Mr. Waltz?

MICHAEL WALTZ: Thank you, Mr. Chair. I just want to build on the obvious frustration you're hearing from -- from this committee, General and Ms. Schaefer. Just a quick question for you. My understanding is military court martials are public, those proceedings and results of those proceedings are public, correct?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, I'm not an expert on how that process occurs, but I do know at the end of the process of a court martial, that record becomes part of the public domain.

MICHAEL WALTZ: That's right. It is. Um, I would -- I would hope, General, as the Army G-357 you'd be very familiar and I would certainly expect you, Ms. Schaefer, to be familiar. Non-judicial punishment is published. Of course the names are not published, but the act of non-judicial punishment is published. That's public information.

I'm just telling you, I'm actually not asking you, I know it to be true.

PATRICK MATLOCK: So it can be made public, that's right.

MICHAEL WALTZ: So in this case, and this is a -- there is a fundamental disconnect under this Department of Defense between taking responsibility and accountability. And we've seen that all the way from the top. So you're taking responsibility for basically mislabeling tens of thousands of Americans as extremists. But there's no accountability that you're willing to make us aware of. And as you know, as a commander of a unit, you have soldiers lose sensitive items, you have soldiers conduct misconduct and the other soldiers don't see accountability.

That's not good for unit cohesion and unit morale, is it?

PATRICK MATLOCK: We -- Representative, that accountability is an important and vital process of maintaining good order and discipline we use a wide variety of means --

MICHAEL WALTZ: -- In this case, have we -- has there been any accountability? So again, a number of which not asking for names, don't want to violate anyone's privacy, but that our constituents and taxpayers in a public forum deserve to know yes or no according to the determination of your investigation, was there any level of accountability?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, I made it clear that I'm not going to comment on specific actions taken by the chain of command. The

chain of command, concluded the investigation and followed through with actions appropriate.

MICHAEL WALTZ: I would encourage you to talk to the chief and talk to the Department of the Army. You are -- your unwillingness to answer that question, which is clearly a policy decision you have made, not binding by us or anything statutory is not only damaging to the public's view of the Army and we're having a real problem with the public signing up to serve in the Army.

It's also damaging with civil military relations right now. I just want to address titling for a moment since we're on the topic of extremism and titling is a process where a soldier comes under investigation, not charged, not prosecuted, just merely under investigation and they're essentially flagged in a series of databases.

And there's been a real issue with those flags then getting lifted because the soldier isn't informed, maybe moves on to serve in other capacities in a civilian capacity that may need a background check, maybe seeks for reenlistment and they're barred. I mean, we have story after story that's come to this committee of lives ruined because of this secret flag that goes on, on their file and that they're made unaware of. But other agencies like the FBI and others doing background checks are.

So because of a Congressional inquiry, 2200 soldiers who were flagged never charged or titled. Fortunately, due to the good work of this committee and the responsiveness of the army, it was reduced significantly, but I'm worried about the broader policy still in place. So, Ms. Schaefer, will going forward, will soldiers be notified of a titling designation in a prompt manner and given a chance to appeal it?

AGNES SCHAEFER: Sir, I'm not familiar with the specific policies related to that.

MICHAEL WALTZ: You set policy for manpower.

AGNES SCHAEFER: Yes, I understand that and I have heard that there is -- has had been an issue, but I don't know what the policies are in

place and --

MICHAEL WALTZ: -- That's incredibly disturbing. I mean, that was a specific Congressional inquiry that caused a 100-fold reduction.

AGNES SCHAEFER: It may have happened before I came into the seat.

MICHAEL WALTZ: OK. Among the penalties listed for when a soldier's titled is a denial of reenlistment is that -- could have obvious impacts on retention. Um, so you would be unfamiliar with any type of due process there is for a soldier never charged who wishes to continue their service. But yet this titling activity takes place, you're unfamiliar?

AGNES SCHAEFER: I will look into it.

MICHAEL WALTZ: I would ask you to become very familiar. This has been incredibly disturbing and come back to this committee with -- with answers to those questions. Thank you, Mr. Chairman.

JIM BANKS: Mr. Horsford.

STEVEN HORSFORD: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. Chairman Banks and Ranking Member Kim, to the general and to=, Dr. Schaefer, uh, extremism in the military is a persistent threat. It has led to theft of military equipment, security breaches, harm to morale, mental health, unit cohesion and personnel retention harm to recruiting, recruiting efforts and harm to mission success.

Unchecked, extremism damages our social fabric and undermines our democratic norms and institutions. Research from the Anti-Defamation League found that there is a significant evidence that service members today are encountering anti-Semitic and extremist personnel in their units and that this extremist threat to the ranks has been harmful to the effectiveness and security of the force in multiple ways.

In the summer of 2024, as part of the findings of the Department of Defense's Countering Extremist Activity Working Group review, the DOD released new directives aimed at addressing extremism in the ranks. I secured language in the 2023 NDAA that required the

Department of -- the Secretary of Defense to report on the implementation and status of its training and education for Department of Defense members and civil personnel to protect the military from extremist recruitment and activity.

So can you describe in detail what the Army is doing to make sure that this training is both effective and actionable?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, thank you for the question. I -- as part of my preparation for today's session, I reviewed the training materials associated with extremism, countering extremism training. It's very well designed. It's delivered in a standard package across the Army. As you've noted in your comments, we take maintaining good order and discipline in our formations very seriously.

And the extremism policy is a key part of how we do that and deliver combat-ready units.

STEVEN HORSFORD: Thank you. In the 2017, the Military Times conducted a survey of over 1,100 service members that suggested that 1-in-4 had seen examples of white nationalism among their fellow service members. And in 2019, they repeated the survey and found that that percentage had risen to more than 1-in-3. What is the Army doing to address these service members concerns both in recruitment and in personnel management -- personnel management, what steps is the Army taking to protect minority service members from threats?

AGNES SCHAEFER: Sir, I think that the -- the DOD instruction from 2021 again was meant to clarify and tighten up the definition of extremism and the newly rolled out our Army regulation -- I'm sorry, the Army directive that we just rolled out in June will also, um, you know, address those issues and tighten, tighten up those definitions even more so, um, we do not tolerate extremism in the ranks and these are meant to protect our folks.

STEVEN HORSFORD: Thank you. With the lack of propensity to serve among America's youth, how is the army making sure that we are not missing the mark when talking about recruitment with women and

with young people of color, especially ones that are concerned about extremism in the military?

AGNES SCHAEFER: So I would also add that, um, we have screening processes during a sessions, the assessment process to screen out extremists, um, along again the categories that um the DOD instruction lays out. That's a DOD-wide policy, um. So our -- we are trying to increase propensity to serve across all demographics.

Um, and we are trying to take an agnostic approach here, right? The policy itself, um, the extremist policy is agnostic. It doesn't call out particular groups or anything like that. Um, again, it is based on active participation and so the um increasing propensity, one of the ways we are doing that is reaching out to different parts of the country trying to refamiliarize the country with what the Army does.

Um and again, we're doing that across demographics and geographical areas.

STEVEN HORSFORD: Thank you. I'll just close, General, by adding my concern to the lack of transparency. I agree with several of the members who have spoken today by not responding to that incident it actually makes the overarching issue of addressing extremism that much more concerning. So whether here or in a classified setting, Mr. Chair, I would recommend that we ultimately get that response that members are asking for.

I yield back.

JIM BANKS: Yes, sir. Ms. Sewell.

TERRI SEWELL: Thank you, Mr. Chairman. I couldn't agree more than what my colleague, Mr. Horsford, just said. I wanted to sort of go along the same lines that Congresswoman Tokuda started and that's I guess asking you Doctor Schaefer. Do you feel confident that the updated extremist policy and it's been updated a number of times, you spoke about the 14 criteria, that do you feel confident that this updated policy will weed out any extremism that's in the military -- that's in the Army?

AGNES SCHAEFER: I certainly think that it tightens up the definition more than it did. So I think it alleviates confusion and again really maintains the focus not on individual circumstances, but widespread discrimination, not individual cases of discrimination those can be dealt with in separate complaints processes.

TERRI SEWELL: With all due respect, I think that given the gray area on active participation, several of the definitions that folks have asked you to, you know, opine on or cases there seems to be wide -- there still seems to be enough of a gulf that you could drive a Mack Truck through. And -- and I think that extremism what concerns me is that I have service members in my district who have complained about racist comments and extremism that they've -- that they've experienced themselves.

And we can't get to that if we're not addressing the fact that there was a problem and that that problem was fixed. And instead, I think that problem, I don't think that that problem has been fixed. I mean this is about accountability, right? We have a job to oversee and to provide oversight and when we're not getting the answers, we're not getting clarity on what actually happened and what our response and solution is. It just makes it harder for us for those of us who have legitimate complaints from our service members about extremism to actually have those addressed.

So I think that, um, you know, the 14 criteria, the updated 14 criteria, the reporting requirements, they add another layer, I don't think that they actually solve the -- the problem. And I think that we -- we owe it to our military and to our service members to really get to the bottom of this and the root cause of it. So, um, General Matlock, I think that you know, I wanted to ask you what matrix are we using to -- to measure the prevalence of this, you know the prevalence of this problem?

I know that we have lots of updated policies and reporting requirements, but has the Army considered alternatives to its current data collection like you know, conducting surveys that can identify the

problems across the services? I mean, how are we getting at the root problem?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, I would on your previous, if I may?

TERRI SEWELL: Sure.

PATRICK MATLOCK: The -- I think the reporting changes and the -- and the much more clear they are defined. I agree requirements actually go a very long way to your concern, meaning that internal of the Army, those reports are mandated to be delivered to the right agencies. So that second and third looks occur.

TERRI SEWELL: And I think that those are great, but if they're still gray area, people don't have that, that leaves that leads to ambiguity and that also leads to subjectivity. And I think that, um, as Doctor Schaefer was saying we're trying to not categorize one particular race or we're not trying to -- but rather trying to weed out the activity itself.

And so with all due respect, sir, I think that you know the subjectivity is a problem that all of us here have. And I don't think that we're -- we're adding to that concern by not fully answering the questions that are being put forth by my colleagues. And that frustrates me because I, you know, I think that -- that there -- there I want my service members complaints to be addressed and it waters down their complaints if -- if people feel like they're not being heard or or if people don't think that there exist any -- any extremism in the military.

And you and I both know that that's not the purpose of the military and it doesn't help good soldiers to be, you know, it doesn't -- it doesn't help us protect and defend the homeland when we -- when people feel that the -- that the soldiers are there next to may not necessarily have their back. And so this is a deeper problem, but -- but as far as data collection, are you satisfied that we're -- that we're on the right track?

PATRICK MATLOCK: Representative, for data collection on extremist actions or allegations very satisfied with the procedures we have in place. And to your point, we do have other means of measuring morale, cohesion and discipline in our formations.

TERRI SEWELL: Um, so, Mr. Chairman, before I yield back, I just wanted to echo the sentiments that -- that have been felt on both sides of the aisle that we're really not getting to the root. We're not getting the answers we need to really evaluate extremist activities. And I think that until we get that, it's hard for us to continue to proceed.

And it definitely does undermine, you know, service -- service members confidence in their ability to actually get incidents like this resolved. Thank you and I yield back.

JIM BANKS: Thank you. I want to thank the members for participating and I want to thank both of you for being here today to be a part of an important discussion. General, I respect you, I respect the uniform that you wear, but your inability to discuss accountability with us today, I think, greatly undermines your position, your authority, your leadership.

I think it's embarrassing to the United States Army. Ten thousand soldiers were erroneously trained and you told us that those 10,000 soldiers had never been notified that they were erroneously -- erroneously trained. For the first time that I asked you the question about accountability you said that the service member who created the slide deck would received corrective training.

And then when I ask you the question again, you said it's against the policy of the Army to discuss accountability, which is just not true. That is -- that is a very untrue statement. I mean, if it -- if um, a military court martial occurs that's public, if non-judicial punishment is -- is occurs that's published without the names associated.

I think the reason that you can't answer the question is because you know and we know that no one has ever been held accountable for this training that started in 2017 and occurred until a few months ago. I think that's a -- I think that's a big embarrassment for the United States Army. You heard bipartisan frustration today about that fact lack of accountability.

Um, it's a -- it's dangerous, it's a bad pattern. We hope you do something about it, but I can assure you this committee is going to -- is going to continue to provide the oversight of situations like these to prevent them from happening again. So with that, thank you for being here. The -- the hearing is adjourned.

Partials for this Transcript

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