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Donald H. Rumsfeld
Secretary of Defense
1000 Defense Pentagon
Washington, DC 20301-1000

Dear Secretary Rumsfeld:

There is mounting evidence that military recruiters and commanders, under intense pressure to meet manpower goals with the country at war in Iraq and Afghanistan, have relaxed standards designed to prohibit racist extremists from serving in the armed forces. To make matters worse, efforts to take action against extremists in uniform are being hampered by the ambiguous nature of current Department of Defense regulations on the subject. The result is that thousands of neo-Nazis and other white supremacists are now in the military, according to official sources. Because hate group membership and extremist activity are antithetical to the values and mission of our armed forces, we urge you to adopt a zero-tolerance policy when it comes to white supremacy in the military and to take all necessary steps to ensure that the policy is rigorously enforced.

We have been monitoring the activities of racist extremists since 1981. In 1986, we wrote to your predecessor, Secretary Weinberger, and presented evidence that members of the United States Marine Corps were participating in Ku Klux Klan paramilitary activities. We urged the Secretary to prohibit all military personnel from being members of or participating in the activities of groups like the Klan.

Secretary Weinberger responded forcefully. “Military personnel,” he stated in a directive, “must reject participation in white supremacy, neo-Nazi and other such groups which espouse or attempt to create overt discrimination. Active participation, including public demonstrations, recruiting and training members, and organizing or leading such organizations is utterly incompatible with military service.”

Unfortunately, Secretary Weinberger’s directive proved to be inadequate. Many military commanders interpreted it to prohibit only egregious forms of hate group activity, not mere memberships in such groups or activities like displaying hate group symbols or circulating extremist literature. The problem with the directive vividly came to light in December 1995 when neo-Nazi paratroopers with the 82nd Airborne Division at Fort Bragg gunned down a black couple in a ritualistic,

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racially motivated slaying. A subsequent investigation revealed that military leaders at Fort Bragg had overlooked numerous indications that a subculture of violent, neo-Nazi skinheads existed at the base.

Shocked by the events at Fort Bragg and the revelations that Tim McVeigh had distributed racist literature while in the service, the Army formed a task force and the House Armed Services Committee held hearings on extremism in the military in 1996. At those hearings, we testified that any type of involvement with extremist groups should disqualify someone from military service. Following the hearings and the task force investigation, the Department of Defense amended its regulations to more clearly define the nature of prohibited extremist activities. Then-Secretary of Defense William Perry made it clear that the regulations were intended to leave “no room for racist and extremist activities in the military.”

Despite Secretary Perry’s intentions, members of neo-Nazi and other extremist groups are still infiltrating the ranks of the armed forces. Even when their activities are exposed, they often are allowed to continue in uniform. Department of Defense investigators attribute the problem to the particularly intense pressure that military recruiters and commanders are under to meet and maintain force levels while the country is at war.

Department of Defense investigators with whom we have spoken estimate that thousands of soldiers in the Army alone are involved in extremist or gang activity. Hundreds of active duty soldiers proudly proclaim their neo-Nazi leanings in online venues like Stormfront, the popular white supremacist website that hosts discussion forums, and MySpace, the well-known social networking web service. Some neo-Nazi soldiers have been profiled in a well-known racist magazine boasting about their recent combat experiences in Iraq.

One Department of Defense investigator told us that in the past year he had identified and reported to military commanders 320 soldiers at Fort Lewis who are involved in extremist activity and recently uncovered a network of 57 neo-Nazi soldiers spread across five military installations.

Only two of the soldiers have been discharged up to this point. We told military investigators about a Navy SEAL, Matt Buschbacher, who was heavily involved in neo-Nazi activities. While on active duty, Buschbacher attended the 2002 leadership conference of the neo-Nazi group whose founder, William Pierce, wrote *The Turner Diaries*, the race-war novel that served as the blueprint for the Oklahoma City bombing. Despite the unequivocal nature of the evidence that Buschbacher was an active neo-Nazi, he was allowed to complete his tour of duty in Iraq and receive an honorable discharge.

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In addition to contending with pressures to keep force levels high, the military continues to wrestle with a policy against white supremacist activity that is still ambiguous. We recently discovered a web page maintained by Robert Lee West, an airman stationed at Warner Robbins Air Force Base in Georgia. The site pictures West standing in front of a swastika and Iron Eagle neo-Nazi banner holding twin AR-15 assault rifles. West states, "My mind and spirit shall ensure life for my people, and death for yours. I shall fight until I have achieved victory. Just remember when you speak to me that I don't play by ZOG rules and I will not hesitate to sever your ... artery." ZOG is the acronym for "Zionist Occupation Government," a neo-Nazi term that signifies the belief that the United States government is controlled by Jews.

When we called the Warner Robbins Office of Special Investigations, we were told that the Air Force was already well aware of West's neo-Nazi identity. "We've seen all his pictures, we've read his website, and we know what he's doing," Special Agent Will Manuel said. Still, Agent Manuel contends that the Air Force is powerless to act.

We're not going to go after him just based on what he says he believes, or on him making a lot of claims. There has to be an overt act first. He has to actually organize or recruit or commit a crime. But even his pictures and writings raise concerns, obviously, because we know that where you have one [neo-Nazi], there's usually another, and what he claims to represent totally goes against the core values of the military.

In our view, the Air Force has the authority under current Department of Defense policy to take action against West precisely because his conduct "goes against the core values of the military." The policy prohibits members of the military from "engaging in activities in relation to [extremist organizations] or in furtherance of the objectives of such organizations that are viewed by command to be detrimental to the good order, discipline, or mission accomplishment of the unit." The fact that Agent Manuel has a contrary view reflects, in our opinion, that the policy is ambiguous.

The task of keeping neo-Nazis out of the armed forces will always be a difficult one because white supremacists target the military while trying to hide their racist agendas. As a 1998 report for the Defense Department pointed out, "young civilian extremists are encouraged by adult leaders to enlist in the military to gain access to weapons, training, other military personnel." One can read newly posted exhortations to join the military on Stormfront on a weekly basis. Many postings also contain advice on how to engage in white supremacist activity while avoiding detection.

Still, Secretary Weinberger's words ring as true today as they did in 1986 when we first brought the problem of white supremacists in the military to his attention: Involvement with white supremacist groups and activities "is utterly incompatible with military service." As Secretary Perry

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reiterated a decade later, "Extremist activity compromises fairness, good order, and discipline. The armed forces, which defend the nation and its values, must exemplify those values beyond question."

To ensure that our military continues to exemplify the values that are at the core of our democracy, we recommend that you take the following steps:

1. Appoint a task force or commission to determine the extent to which pressure to meet manpower goals has led military recruiters and commanders to relax their standards on neo-Nazis and other white supremacists in the military.
2. Adopt a zero-tolerance policy on racist extremist membership or activity in the military. Ambiguities with the current policies should be resolved, and the discretion given military commanders to conclude that particular types of extremist activity are not detrimental to the good order or discipline of the military should be eliminated or severely circumscribed. The Army's recent revision to its regulations concerning the distribution of extremist literature is one step in the right direction.
3. Ensure that the policy is uniformly and rigorously enforced across all branches of the military.

Attached is an article we are publishing this morning on our website with more details about the problem of neo-Nazis in the military.

Please do not hesitate to have members of your staff call us if you have any questions or think that we can be of assistance to you in any way.

Sincerely yours,



J. Richard Cohen
Chief Executive Officer

JRC/lgt

Enclosure