Militarized Extremism

The Radical Right and the War on Terror

Abigail R. Hall, Jerod T. Hassell, and Chivon H. Fitch

On January 6, 2021, a group of rioters breached the U.S. Capitol building. The mob, supporters of outgoing president Donald Trump, sought to overturn his defeat in the 2020 presidential election (Healy 2021). As media circulated and individuals began to be arrested following the riot, one photo drew attention. The picture shows several men walking up the Capitol steps in a line, each holding onto the back of the man in front of him. Known as a "file formation," this is a well-known military tactic used in areas of restrictive terrain, under conditions of low visibility, or when a rifle team is unlikely to come under enemy fire (U.S. Department of the Army 1992, 330). Writing on the photo, journalists Michael Biesecker, Jake Bleiberg, and James Laporta said, "The formation … [is] instantly recognizable to any U.S. soldier or Marine who served in Iraq or Afghanistan. It was a chilling sign that the vanguard of the mob … either had military training or were trained by those who did" (2021, including a copy of the photo).

This is not the only indication that members of the U.S. Armed Forces participated in the Capitol riots. An analysis of Pentagon records found that a full 14 percent of those arrested had a military connection (see Snider, Rappard, and Cohen

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2021). For perspective, it must be noted that only 7 percent of American adults are veterans (see Vespa 2020). Those arrested include seven army, eight marine, and two navy veterans; an active-duty member of the air force; and several National Guardsmen (Vespa 2020). The FBI questioned retired navy Seal and Iraq and Afghanistan veteran Chief Petty Officer Adam Newbold regarding his involvement in the mob (Kenney 2021). Air force veteran Ashli Babbitt was killed by Capitol Police during the riot. She had completed tours of duty in Iraq and Afghanistan as well as deployments to Kuwait and Qatar (*BBC News* 2021).

Perhaps more concerning than the presence of so many military members among the rioters was how many of them are also known far-right extremists (FREs) or members of far-right extremist groups (FREGs). Authorities arrested army reservist Timothy Hale-Cusanelli, described in a police affidavit as an "avowed white supremist and Nazi sympathizer" for his involvement in the riot (qtd. in Diaz and Treisman 2021). Former marine Dominic Pazzola faces federal charges. He is a member of the Proud Boys, an "alt-right" hate group of self-described "Western chauvinists" (Levy and Ailworth 2021). Another Proud Boy, Joseph Randall Biggs, a thirty-seven-year-old army combat veteran, was also arrested (Sidner, Rappard, and Cohen 2021). Thirty-eight-year-old army veteran Jessica Watkins, navy veteran Thomas Edward Caldwell, and former marine Donovan Crowl have been charged with conspiracy (Lynch 2021). All three are members of the Oath Keepers, an antigovernment right-wing fringe group (Anti-Defamation League 2015).

This connection between far-right extremism and individuals with military experience is not new. In 2017, for example, James Alex Fields Jr. made headlines at the Unite the Right rally in Charlottesville, Virginia, when he ran his car into a crowd of counterprotestors, killing one woman. A member of the white-supremacist group Vanguard America, Fields had completed a brief stint in the U.S. Army (Stapley 2017). The event's organizer, Nathan Damigo, is a marine veteran who completed two tours of duty in Iraq before returning home and founding the white nationalist group Identity Evropa (see Branson-Potts 2016).

The purpose of this paper is to explore an important dynamic between far-right extremism and the U.S. military in the United States in the period after the terrorist attacks of September 11, 2001 (9/11) by highlighting the mechanisms through which military personnel integrate their unique skills and military organizational structure into FREGs. We argue that changes within the military resulting from the war on terror—namely, an increase in deployments and a relaxation of recruitment standards—provided an avenue for FREs to acquire military training more easily. We identify the mechanisms through which this training and military structures have been integrated into FREGs. The rest of this paper proceeds as follows. In the first section, we provide a brief overview of the relevant literature related to FREs, FREGs, and the U.S. military. The second section describes how after the 9/11 attacks and the launch of the war on terror, changes in military operations allowed for FREs to join military ranks and made military veterans appealing recruits to

FREGs, and it offers the available evidence regarding direct military connections. This section's three subsections examine the integration of individual human capital into FREGs, discuss how FREGs have incorporated the military's organizational dynamics into their organizations, and describe the data concerning the rise in far-right incidents since 9/11.

Current Literature and Our Contribution

For the purposes of this paper, we employ the following definition of far-right extremism offered by Joshua Freilich, Steven Chermak, and David Caspi: "The domestic far-right is comprised of individuals or groups that subscribe to aspects of the following ideals: they are fiercely nationalistic [and] ... anti-global[,] ... believe in conspiracy theories that involve grave threat to national sovereignty and/or personal liberty and ... that one's personal and/or national 'way of life' is under attack .... ([S]ometimes such beliefs are amorphous and vague, but for some the threat is from a specific ethnic, racial, or religious group)" (2009, 499).

Research on FREs and FREGs is relatively limited. Most available research comes from psychology and sociology and falls primarily into two categories. The first area analyzes the psychological pathologies associated with FREs and their groups (see Arena and Arrigo 2000; Horgan, Shortland, and Abbasciano 2018). The second category examines the social connections in FREGs and the ramifications of extremist activity (see McVeigh and Cunningham 2012). Other discussions of FREGs come from profiles of or memoirs by former extremists (for example, see Saslow 2018).

Although religious extremism has been studied in economics (see Iannoccone 2006), the connection between extremists and military personnel has received little attention. Examining Ku Klux Klan (KKK) membership in the 1920s, Roland Fryer and Steven Levitt (2012) include veteran status in their analysis, but the data are sorely limited. In previous work examining the links among veterans, the military, and criminal justice, the literature focuses either on the relationship between veterans and subsequent employment as police officers or on veterans as inmates (see Logan and Pare 2016; Shernock 2017). In the context of the military–FRE connection, Brent Smith and his colleagues found that FREs were "more than four times as likely to have military training as leftist terrorists ... and more than twice as likely to have military training as international terrorists" (2011, 354). Kathleen Belew (2018) offers the most detailed analysis to date of veterans in FREGs, examining the integration of military personnel into the white-power movement after the Vietnam War. Her analysis, however, focuses on the period between 1975 and 1995. Government organizations provide other data on FREGs and the military. In 2008, for example, the FBI issued a report on extremist organizations and the recruitment of current or former military members (Federal Bureau of Investigation [FBI] 2008).

Our analysis contributes to existing literature by examining the links among FREs, FREGs, and the U.S. military. Our work relates most directly to that of Belew by illustrating how war, in this case the war on terror, and changes to the military landscape allowed for the establishment and growth of FREGs in the period after 9/11. We identify and discuss avenues through which these groups have become more militarized.

The War on Terror and Its Connection to FREGs

War on terror is the term used to describe the U.S.-led global counterterrorism campaign following the attacks on the Pentagon and World Trade Center on September 11, 2001 (Jackson 2019). As part of this "war," the U.S. government has engaged in numerous foreign operations in the name of combatting terrorism, including most notably wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. These two wars as well as other military operations abroad resulted in a marked increase in military deployments (Wenger, O'Connell, and Cottrell 2018). In addition, concerns within the military regarding recruitment and attrition resulted in the relaxation of military enlistment standards (Kennard 2012). We contend that the policies implemented to address these issues are important for understanding how FREs and FREGs have progressively militarized.

Although the number of U.S. military personnel remained relatively constant between 1999 and 2018 (between approximately 1.3 and 1.5 million active-duty members), foreign deployments have become "a key aspect of military service, especially in the post 9/11 era" (Defense Manpower Data Center 2019, quoting Wenger, O'Connell, and Cotrell 2018, 2). Between September 2001 and September 2015, some 2.77 million military personnel engaged in more than 5.4 million deployments (Defense Manpower Data Center 2019). From September 2001 to September 2011, members of the U.S. Armed Forces spent more than 1.5 million troop-years in Iraq and Afghanistan alone (Balocchi 2013, 1). These deployments demonstrate the scale of foreign intervention after 9/11 and illustrate the number of individuals involved.

This increase in deployments coincided with deep concern among top officials regarding military recruitment. A memo to senior commanders in 2005 referred to military attrition rates as "a matter of great concern" and called on military leaders to "reverse the negative trend" (Jaffe 2005). Military recruiters faced strong incentives to bend the rules to meet enlistment goals. Failure to meet their quotas resulted in "punitive counseling," and repeated failure to meet targets harmed a recruiter's chances for a promotion (as described in Kennard 2012, 24).

As a result, military recruiters were incentivized to admit and the military to retain servicemen whom they might otherwise have rejected for military service or released from duty because of their extremist views or behavior. Matt Kennard documents how ignorance, both genuine and willful, on the part of military

personnel allowed for the increased recruitment of neo-Nazis and members of other hate groups, gang members, and known criminals into the U.S. Armed Forces after 9/11 (2012, 17–24). “The War on Terror,” he notes, “produced no official acknowledgement from Pentagon brass that regulations had been loosened on neo-Nazis . . . . [H]owever, officials seem to accept that it has happened by stealth” (23). Kennard quotes one public-affairs officer on military recruitment and FREGs saying, “We [the military] exclude based on behavior . . . . A Swastika would trigger questions, but again if the gentleman said, ‘I like the way the swastika looked,’ and had a clean criminal record, it’s possible we would allow that person in” (23). Pointing to how failure to meet enlistment targets resulted in disciplinary action for military recruiters, Kennard makes clear the implications for the recruitment of FREs. “It’s in the interest of recruiters,” he writes, “to interpret recruiting standards loosely . . . . When, in 2006, the army relaxed regulations on non-extremist tattoos . . . this cut recruiters even more slack” (24).

Both the increase in deployments and relaxing of recruitment standards effectively lowered the relative cost to extremists for acquiring military training. Whereas prior to the war on terror, an individual holding an extreme right-wing ideology might have been rejected for service or dismissed due to his or her affiliations, after 9/11 the same individual was now able to enlist and remain in the Department of Defense’s employ. Brandon Russell is one such example of this dynamic as well as of its implications. He joined the Florida National Guard in 2016 despite sporting what authorities didn’t realize was a white-supremacist tattoo. Russell would later establish the Atomwaffen Division (AWD), a neo-Nazi terrorist group (see Altman 2018). Recognizing this shift in standards, FREGs had and continue to have an incentive to send their members into the military for the explicit purpose of acquiring military training. Moreover, FREGs have utilized these shifts to actively recruit current and former military in order to capitalize on their skills. There are two specific mechanisms through which FREGs have integrated military personnel, organizational structure, and tactics since the start of the war on terror.

The Importation of Military Human Capital into FREGs

The term *human capital* refers to the knowledge, skills, and characteristics that contribute to an individual’s productivity. Every organization requires the individuals within it to possess types of human capital that will help achieve the organization’s goals. The government agencies responsible for designing and carrying out various foreign interventions, including those in the war on terror, are no different in this regard (Coyne and Hall 2018). This means that those involved in conducting a foreign intervention (e.g., the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan) must refine their skills in order to achieve personal and organizational success. For example, those engaged in interventions related to the war on terror must be comfortable implementing

directives against an unwilling foreign population. Directives may include employing monitoring techniques, engaging in censorship, suppressing resistance groups, using violence, and so on (Coyne and Hall 2018, 30–36). These skills as well as an "interventionist mindset" are reinforced through a variety of mechanisms, including active participation in rigid bureaucratic organizations (e.g., the military) (Coyne and Hall 2018). This has two implications. First, those involved in interventions related to the war on terror are likely to develop and hone these skills lest they lose out on opportunities for personal advancement. Second, the organizations responsible for carrying out the war on terror, such as the military, are likely to attract those individuals who have a comparative advantage in the aforementioned activities.

Importantly, the human capital that military members acquire as a part of operations related to the war on terror does not disappear at the end of their military tenure. Instead, these skills and attitudes become a permanent addition to their skillsets. Once the intervention or their part in it has concluded, these individuals take their acquired skills with them to other endeavors. They in turn use their abilities to influence the domestic institutions in which they participate. This is important for our purposes in that military personnel, trained in carrying out the war on terror, have successfully integrated their military skills into various FREGs. An example is particularly illustrative.

Army veteran and former KKK member Chris Buckley has offered detailed information regarding his involvement in the organization as well as the activities of the KKK as an organization. His experience captures the dynamic outlined earlier. Over the course of his army career, Buckley deployed to both Iraq and Afghanistan and radicalized, developing a fierce hatred of Muslims. As a combat engineer, he would necessarily master skills such as "advanced marksmanship and maneuvering techniques," "engaging targets as part of a team," and training on "advanced weapons, like machine guns and … live grenades" (United States Army 2019). He specialized and trained on a variety of tasks, including constructing defensive obstacles; creating, placing, and detonating explosives; and detecting enemy countermeasures (e.g., landmines). All would come into play upon his return home and his joining of the KKK (Prescott, Taylor, and Morris 2018).

The Klan has a long history of integrating military members and their skills into its ranks. Two Confederate veterans founded the organization in 1865, and Confederate general Nathan Bedford Forrest was selected as the group's first leader (see Glass 2016). Following the completion of his role in the war on terror, Buckley ultimately found himself in the role of "Grand Nighthawk" within the KKK. In this capacity, he was able to transfer many of the skills he learned in the military to his fellow KKK members. Within the broader organizational structure of the Klan, this position is the operational equivalent of Buckley's military rank at his discharge—sergeant. The army describes sergeants as "the first line supervisors [who] have the most direct impact on Soldiers" (United States Army 2020). A sergeant is responsible

for ensuring that each member of his or her unit is "trained to competency in their [military occupational skill]," for properly maintaining all government-issued property, and for reporting at any time the location and activity of each member of the unit (Army.com 2019).

As a Grand Nighthawk, Buckley was again responsible for the training and development of new recruits (Gang Enforcement Company 2019). It was his job to ensure that new members mastered the necessary skills required of them within the KKK's organizational structure. Speaking of his role, Buckley stated it was his job to "vet everybody that [came] into the Klan" (qtd. in Prescott, Taylor, and Morris 2018). Just as he had been responsible for training new military personnel, Buckley likewise trained new Klansmen—utilizing the precise tools he had acquired as a result of his involvement in the war on terror abroad. "I started trying to take it [training Klan members] a little bit further . . . . I have these skills, this training, you know, I could pass that along. So . . . here I am teaching these guys how to move in cohesive units . . . and shoot, move, and communicate, to return fire, bounding overwatch [a tactical military maneuver], and things of that nature" (qtd. in Prescott, Taylor, and Morris 2018). He taught his fellow Klan members "how to use and conceal weapons, [to engage in] close-quarters fighting, [to conduct] surveillance, [and to maintain] secrecy" (Hendrix 2018).

Buckley was recruited into the KKK following his time in the military. This is not uncommon. In fact, many FREGs purposefully recruit from military ranks for the explicit purpose of integrating military human capital. In a report on the relationship between military personnel and FREGs, the FBI noted that "[m]ilitary experience is found throughout the white supremacist extremist movement as a result of recruitment [by FREGs] . . . and self-recruitment by veterans sympathetic to white supremacist causes. Extremist leaders seek to recruit members with military experience in order to exploit their discipline, knowledge of firearms, explosives, and tactical skills" (FBI 2008, 3). Whereas some organizations recruit military members and veterans covertly, others are clear in their intentions. The Oath Keepers, the antigovernment right-wing fringe group referenced in the introduction, *explicitly* recruits current and former military members as well as police officers and other first responders (FBI 2008). Founded by army veteran Elmer Rhodes, the group is thought to be one of the largest fringe militia groups in the country. Their members are called to uphold the oaths they took to defend the U.S. Constitution from "all enemies foreign and domestic," including "enemies" within the U.S. government. The group's recruiting efforts include sending to deployed military personnel care packages that also have the organization's handbook and marketing materials (Anti-Defamation League 2015).

In addition to recruiting from the ranks of the military and military veterans, FREGs have also actively encouraged their members to join the U.S. Armed Forces, explicitly noting the changes in recruiting standards following 9/11 and the start of

the war on terror. Right-wing terrorist Dennis Mahon, for example, stated, "They [the military] are so desperate … they are going to let you in with a small swastika. If you are an obvious racist and shoot niggers and queers you might find it difficult, but generally, you are fine" (qtd. in Kennard 2012, 28). He referenced the desire for FREG members to acquire military-related human capital and transfer it into their groups: "The soldiers learn from unconventional warfare in Iraq," he said. "[T]hey can use that type of warfare in America … . I tell people to learn as much as you can to improve munitions capabilities, patrolling; I want them to learn sniping and explosives" (qtd. in Kennard 2012, 29).

Changes in the Organizational Dynamics of FREGs

The domestic reintegration of military members occurs in a variety of public and private organizations both in and out of the defense-security sector. In some organizations, those who have developed a comparative advantage in implementing and developing the tools of foreign intervention will benefit through better advancement opportunities within the organizations of which they are a part. The organizations themselves may also benefit from these changed dynamics, becoming more efficient in carrying out their operations. By utilizing their unique human capital domestically, those who participated in the war on terror may be better able to secure promotions within their respective organizations, earn higher wages, take on leadership positions, and so on. By suggesting and implementing new organizational forms and social control techniques based on their experiences in the war on terror, those previously engaged with the military are afforded a unique entrepreneurial opportunity within an assortment of organizations. Because of their known skillsets and reputation for success abroad, those once involved in foreign interventions may be better able to rise to positions of leadership within organizational hierarchies, which further allows them to influence both organizational structures and objectives (Coyne and Hall 2018, 38).

To understand the influence of military personnel on the structure and operation of FREGs, consider again the KKK. In its early years, the Klan "organized among military lines in a rigid hierarchy" (Illinois Legislative Investigative Commission 1976, 33–34). Contemporary Klan structure continues to integrate military organizational dynamics, with government researchers making explicit connections between military structures and the KKK hierarchy. "Militarily, the Imperial Wizard [the Klan's highest executive] is the commander in chief of the Klan army[;] … the military designation of the Grand Dragon is that of a division commander[;] … [the] Great Titan … [has a] military equivalent … of a brigade commander … . In charge of [the smallest Klan unit] is an Exalted Cyclops … . His military designation is regimental commander and he is assisted in his duties by … 'Terrors'" (Illinois Legislative Investigative Commission 1976, 33–34).

The integration of military organizational dynamics into FREGs is not limited explicitly to military structure but also includes a variety of military operations. The experience and knowledge possessed by contemporary and former military members often means these individuals occupy a position of authority within a given FREG's hierarchy, thereby exerting significant influence over the organization itself. The FBI report discussed earlier, examining FREGs in the post-9/11 context, captures this idea clearly: "[M]ilitary veterans involved in white supremacist extremism may . . . apply specialized training in weapons, tactics, and organizational skills to benefit the extremist movement" (2008, 2). The same report also highlights how individuals with military experience can use their knowledge to advance their role in these groups and come to occupy position of authority. "[T]hey," referring to FREs with military backgrounds, "frequently occupy leadership roles[;] . . . their involvement has the potential to reinvigorate an extremist movement" (3). Moreover, the report indicates that as a direct result of the human capital and organizational dynamics brought into FREGs by individuals with military experience, current and former military members are likely to exert substantial influence over these groups. The FBI found this to be especially true of veterans of the war on terror. "Military experience . . . distinguishes one within the extremist movement . . . [I]nvestigations indicate they [individuals with military experience] frequently have higher profiles within the movement, including recruitment and leadership roles. These are also the most common activities of the 19 [FREs who were] verified or unverified veterans of Iraq and Afghanistan" (10).

The report then highlights three specific examples of this dynamic. First, a self-proclaimed marine and Iraq War veteran said he formed a chapter of the National Socialist Movement (NSM) in Montana in 2006 before becoming the group's state leader. Second, the report references a Fort Riley soldier who founded his own skinhead organization in 2004 before assuming the role of state leader of the Aryan Nation in Kansas. Third, the report notes a marine officer who after his return from Iraq contacted NSM regarding starting a branch in California (FBI 2008, 10).

Further Evidence of the Argument

The study of FREs and FREGs is complicated by several factors. Given the number of groups, the clandestine nature of their organizations, their paranoia, and so on, no comprehensive data exist on the connection between the military and FREGs. However, the existing data support the argument that instances of military-linked far-right extremism have increased in the years since the 9/11 attacks. To examine the relationship between military service and far-right incidents, we reviewed data from the Profiles of Individual Radicalization in the United States (PIRUS) database (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism 2018; see also Jensen et al. 2018). The database includes information about extremists who have

engaged in or planned attacks in the United States through 2017. We utilized the available post-9/11 PIRUS data, which accounted for fifteen years (through 2017). We then examined data from fifteen years prior to 9/11 (going back to 1986) in order to make a before-and-after comparison based on the same timeframes. Figure 1 shows the numbers of military-affiliated far-right extremists identified per year.

Comparing the two time periods, the data indicate that the total number of military-affiliated FREs doubled from 34 cases in the pre-9/11 period to 68 cases in the post-9/11 period. The data illustrate one peak of 7 cases in the pre-9/11 period but five peaks in the post-9/11 period: 6 cases in 2004, 5 cases in 2008, 7 cases each in 2007 and 2008, and 12 cases in 2017. The number of active-duty military and veterans engaged in the riots of January 6, 2021 (as noted earlier, 14 percent of those initially arrested) far surpasses the peak in 2017.

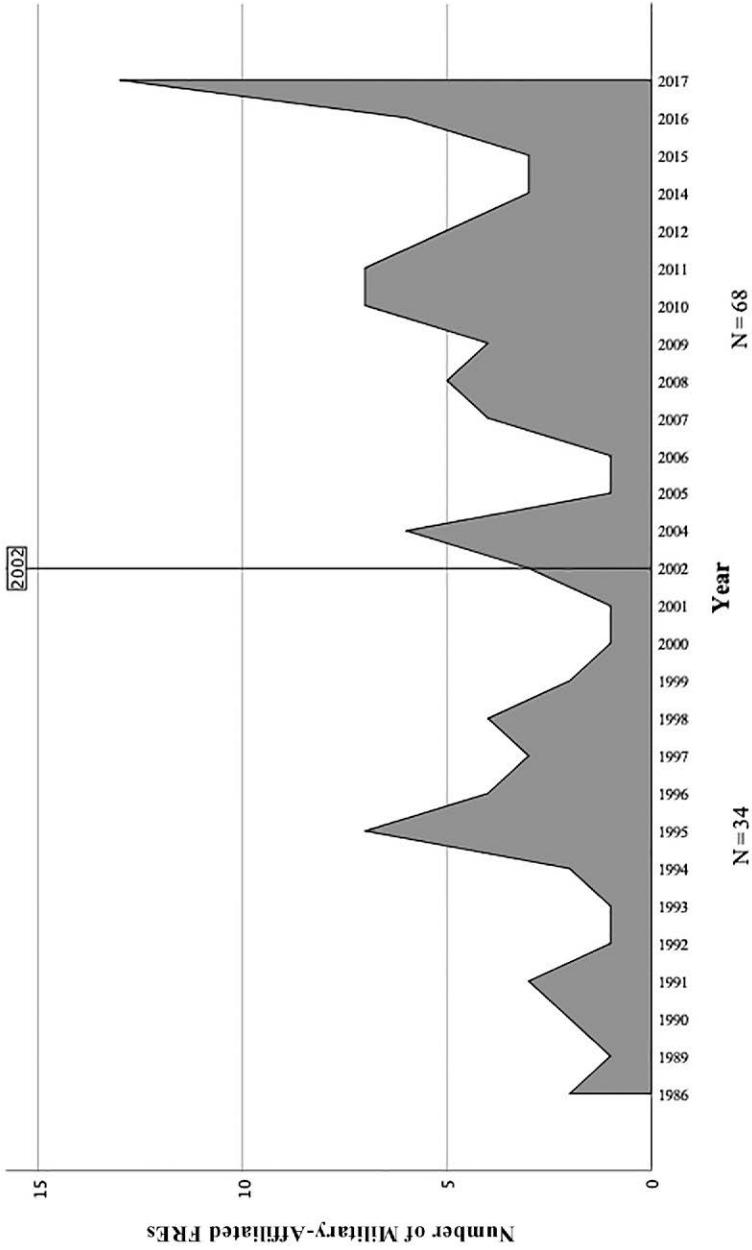
It is important to note that violent incidents involving FREs have also increased in the post-9/11 period, not just FRE activity in general. The number of events involving realized casualties (injuries or fatalities) committed by FREs doubled from 145 events before 9/11 to 295 events after 9/11. The number of instances of violence involving military-affiliated FREs increased more than 94 percent, from 19 cases before 9/11 to 37 cases after 9/11 (figure 2).

In addition to increases in the number of military-affiliated FREs and in the number of violent incidents perpetrated by military-affiliated FREs, the PIRUS data indicate that the potential for harm is greater in the post-9/11 period. In analyzing the anticipated fatalities of planned attacks during this period (i.e., what would have been the likely impact on human life had plots been successful), we see the fatality potential has markedly increased. The number of FREs profiled who intended to cause fatalities increased from 35 in the pre-9/11 period to 114 in the post-9/11 period. The magnitude of these potential fatalities also increased. The number of cases identified with anticipated fatalities of twenty or more increased 73 percent, from 15 cases before 9/11 to 26 cases after 9/11.

Looking specifically at the fatality potential for military-affiliated FREs, we observe similar increases. The number of military-affiliated FRE events with anticipated fatalities increased some 68 percent over the period—from 16 to 27 (see figure 3). In terms of magnitude, the number of events with a high-fatality potential (twenty or more fatalities) increased 83 percent, from 6 in the pre-9/11 period to 11 in the post-9/11 period (see figure 3). This demonstrates that the concern about rising activity among FREGs, especially those with military members, is warranted not just in terms of overall growth but also in terms of the potential harm.

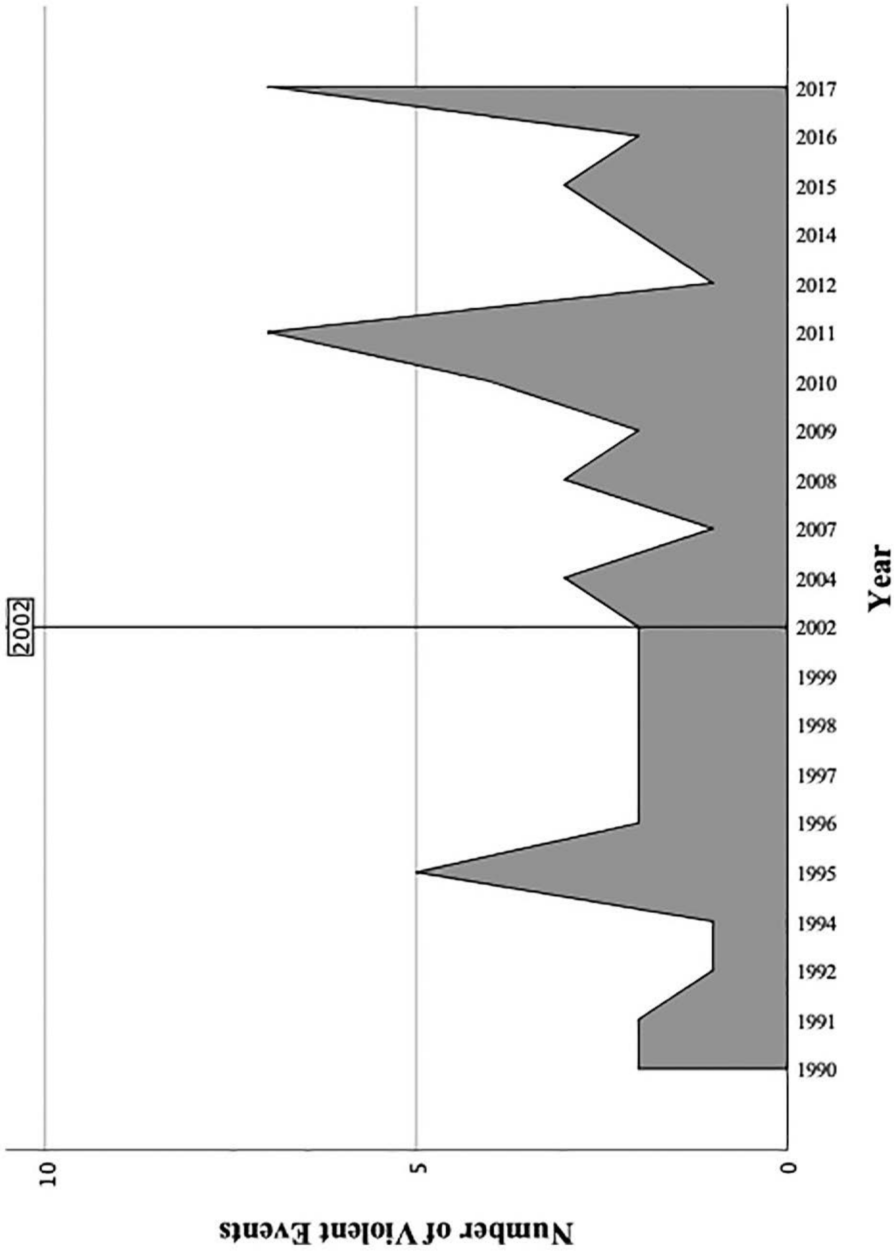
It is important to note that all of these data likely understate the true magnitude and impact of military-affiliated FREs, for two reasons. First, the PIRUS data set is missing information related to military status for many cases, meaning that some military connections are likely uncounted. Second, as noted earlier, military-affiliated FREs are often in positions of authority within FREGs and work to transfer

Figure 1
Number of Military-Affiliated Far-Right Extremists before and after 9/11



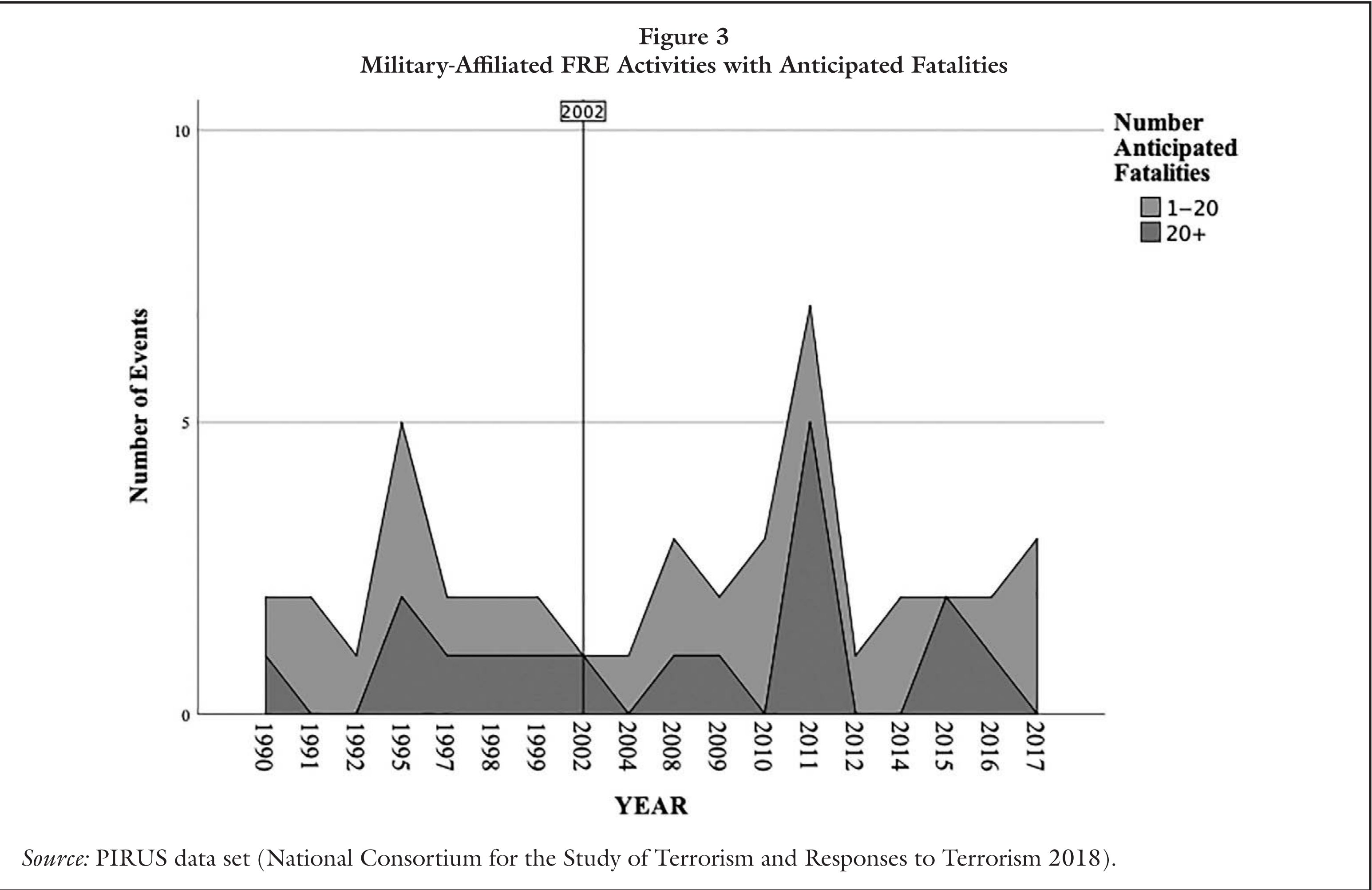
Source: PIRUS data set (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism 2018).

Figure 2
Violent Events Committed by Military-Affiliated FREs



Source: PIRUS data set (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism 2018).

Figure 3
Military-Affiliated FRE Activities with Anticipated Fatalities



Source: PIRUS data set (National Consortium for the Study of Terrorism and Responses to Terrorism 2018).

their skills to other, nonmilitary members. This dynamic—nonmilitary-affiliated FREs utilizing the skills learned from those with military training—is not captured by these data. Thus, the impact is understated.

Further evidence of the growth in military-affiliated engagement in far-right extremism since 9/11 is supported by a number of specific cases. Each illustrates how FREGs can capitalize on military human capital and organizational dynamics and shows the impact of these connections. For example, it is worth noting several FREGs with an explicit military connection created in the post-9/11 period. Several groups in this period were either founded by or have among their leadership current or former military members. Brandon Russell, the former member of the Florida National Guard mentioned earlier, created the neo-Nazi group AWD in 2016. An investigation of the group in 2018 found that its ranks included at least three active-duty military personnel and three veterans (Thompson, Winston, and Hanrahan 2018). Joshua Beckett, who served in the army from 2011 to 2015, used his experiences from the war on terror to train his fellow AWD members on firearms and hand-to-hand combat. Another member, marine Vasillios Pistolis, used his training in a leadership role to vet and train new members (Thompson, Winston, and Hanrahan 2018).

Identity Evropa was similarly founded by a veteran, marine Nathan Damigo. Like AWD, the group hosted a number of veterans, including two marines, two Army ROTC cadets, an army physician, a member of the air force, and a Texas National Guardsman. The group made headlines for organizing the deadly Unite the Right rally in 2017 (see Mathias 2019). The Oath Keepers, also referenced earlier, was founded in 2009 by former army paratrooper Elmer Rhodes. Though he did not participate in the war on terror, the group explicitly recruits from current and former military members. The organization's website states the group is an "association of current and formerly serving military" and other first responders, highlighting the desirability of military members to FREGs.[1]

The larger Boogaloo movement, a loosely organized yet notably violent FREG, was created in 2012. Mike Dunn, a key leader in the movement, is a marine veteran. Other examples of intimate connections among this group, military human capital and organizational dynamics, and acts of terrorism are plentiful. In May 2020, three "Boogaloo Bois" were arrested on terrorism charges related to a bomb plot. All three had military experience. In October 2020, several Boogaloo Bois were arrested in connection with a plot to kidnap Governor Gretchen Whitmer of Michigan. Two of the men served as U.S. marines, and Marine Corps reservist Joseph Morrison is facing terrorism charges (see Seck 2020).

This growth of the far-right movement is likely to engender other consequences. Though the overall number of instances of domestic terrorism involving FREs is small, it has grown substantially since 9/11. This rise—in particular the connec-

1. See "About Oath Keepers," Oath Keepers website, at https://oathkeepers.org/about/.

tion between the military and FREGs—has alarmed policy makers and the public, resulting in calls for the government to utilize a variety of tools of social control to curb the trend. Former CIA officer Robert Grenier, for example, called to treat the individuals involved in the Capitol riots as insurgents (Grenier 2021). Such policies would ultimately bring the tools of war home, with undoubted consequences for U.S. citizens (see Coyne and Hall 2018).

Conclusion

Current and former members of the military have used their unique human capital and experience with military organizational structures to bolster and change the dynamics of FREGs and the far-right movement. This is an important overlooked cost of the war on terror. Whereas other analyses focus on either the monetary or human costs of the conflict, we emphasize another cost, the strengthening of FREGs within the United States. Given the number of current and former military members involved in the war on terror and the greater domestic political pressures, these trends may continue.

More broadly, our analysis further illustrates that domestic institutions are not wholly separate from foreign policy. The actions of the U.S. government with respect to counterterrorism policy following 9/11 have directly contributed to contemporary trends related to far-right extremism. Writing on the threat of domestic terrorism in 2017, the Congressional Research Service noted that "the emphasis of counterterrorism policy in the United States since . . . [9/11] has been on jihadist terrorism. However, in the last decade, domestic terrorists—*people who commit crimes within the homeland and draw from U.S.-based extremist ideologies* . . . have killed American citizens and damaged property across the country" (Bjelopera 2017, emphasis in the original). By making it easier for extremists to receive military training in the U.S. Armed Forces, officials have helped to create a real and potentially growing problem—a far-right movement that has integrated military personnel, structures, and tactics into its operations.

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