

USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL: FAILING IN STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

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ABSTRACT

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Arguments have been made on both sides of the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy that was written into United States law in 1993. Many existing arguments are based on morality, religion, ethics, philosophy, and rational reasoning. This paper continues the exploration of this policy along a new dimension that focuses on military strategic leadership. We investigated the relationship between key tenets of military strategic leadership doctrine and the "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. The key finding of this paper is that many critical facets of military strategic leadership doctrine are inconsistent with the policy. Based on this finding we conclude that it is time for strategic leaders, both civilian and military, to reevaluate this policy while considering the tenets of military strategic leadership.

DON'T ASK, DON'T TELL: FAILING IN STRATEGIC LEADERSHIP

He that never changes his opinions, never corrects his mistakes, and will never be wiser on the morrow than he is to-day.

—Tryon Edwards¹

Recent events in the Global War on Terror have sparked a substantial debate within American society on the utilization of one of its most treasured resources, the soldiers, sailors, airmen, and marines who serve this country. More accurately, the debate hinges on whether current US administration policies and strategies are fundamentally sound as they risk the lives of the young men and women who serve so valiantly on the front lines of this war. Despite the debate over national security policy, the American military service member is still very revered in the eyes of the American public. This sentiment carries over to the military services in general, as reflected in polls about confidence in the military as an institution.²

Even in this era of outstanding public support, there appears to be a growing rift between the military and the American people over the ban of openly gay³ service members. Technically, the nation does not preclude gays from serving. The caveat is that gays cannot serve while openly acknowledging their homosexual lifestyle.⁴ Americans, on the other hand, have increasingly become more tolerant of the openly homosexual lifestyle throughout society, to include the military.⁵

Not only does the military experience external friction from the American people over this policy, but internally the tide is changing as well. Polls and anecdotal evidence point to an increasing level of acceptance within the military of openly gay service members. Former Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff retired General John Shalikashvili recently called for an end to the gay ban.⁶ Former Secretary of Defense William Cohen followed this up by referring to the ban as a “policy of discrimination.”⁷ Former Judge Adjutant General of the Navy, Retired Admiral John D. Hutson, wrote an opinion in 2003 stating that it is time to lift the gay ban.⁸ A West Point cadet recently won top honors for his senior thesis arguing that “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” is inconsistent with basic American principles and that sexuality is as fundamental to one’s identity as gender, race, and religion.⁹ Zogby International’s recently released poll of combat veterans from Iraq and Afghanistan showed that a plurality still exists within the military against the service of openly gay members (37% for the ban, 26% against, with the rest either neutral or unsure). However, this poll is not considered a strong endorsement of the current law. Given that only 37% of the force actively supports this policy, it should not be surprising that the poll

also revealed that 73% of service members are comfortable around gays, and 78% would have still joined the military if gays were allowed to serve openly.¹⁰

There is a significant body of literature published by the military services (with the Army publishing the preponderance of it) on leadership. The key finding in this paper is that the current policy allowing gays to serve under the constraint that they do not openly admit their sexuality is inconsistent with many of the basic tenets of military leadership doctrine. More specifically, the policy fails in the realm of strategic leadership. Given this inconsistency between leadership doctrine and the current policy, it might be argued that either one or the other should be changed. We submit that the military already has a firm grasp of leadership, and changes within this domain are not exigent. We also believe the status quo is not a good long term solution because it is difficult to reconcile the policy with key tenets of military strategic leadership doctrine, potentially forcing leaders to compromise their better judgment in order to enforce the policy. Therefore, it is time for strategic leaders to reconsider this policy and give significant consideration for the tenets of military strategic leadership as they do so.

The topic of openly gay service in the US military is an emotional one for many people. The arguments both for and against the policy run along multiple threads and in several dimensions. After providing the historical context for the current policy, we explore many of the legacy arguments that exist on both sides of the issue. We show that there is no existing argument for the current policy that is robust enough to override any need for the discussion of the policy in the context of strategic leadership. We then explore the policy along the new dimension of strategic leadership doctrine, and provide multiple examples where the policy and the military doctrine are at odds. We conclude with a short discussion of the way ahead.

The Historical Context

Regardless of whether militaries have banned homosexuals from serving openly, there is no argument that homosexuals have served in militaries since the earliest days of armies and navies. B.R. Burg provides a comprehensive historical perspective on gays in militaries from the ancient Greeks to the present.¹¹ In US military history¹², the service of gays was not formally regulated and disallowed until the 1940s, though for decades afterward these policies were inconsistently implemented. The original 1940s justification for the policies against homosexual military service was psychiatric deviation. In the '50s at the height of the Cold War there was a fear of subversives, and homosexuality was considered a sexual perversion which was considered grounds for dismissal from federal employment. Later in the '60s homosexuality was considered a sexual perversion that in its own right made one unfit for

military service. Finally in 1981 the Department of Defense made the homosexual policy implementation more consistent by withholding any discretion for individual commanders to retain homosexual service members.¹³

During the 1992 presidential election campaign, Bill Clinton responded to a question from a Harvard student and promised that if elected he would lift the ban on gays serving in the military. He further stated, "I think people who are gay should be expected to work, and should be given the opportunity to serve the country."¹⁴ Despite some pretty strong backlash from the Joint Chiefs of Staff and Congress on the basis of unit cohesion and individual privacy¹⁵, soon after his inauguration President Clinton directed Defense Secretary Les Aspin to submit a draft of an executive order ending discrimination based on sexual orientation in the military. Secretary Aspin, in turn, requested RAND to study the issue and provide input for formulating the draft executive order.¹⁶

Not surprisingly (since the study was commissioned by an administration whose stance on the issue was already well known) Rand's report came back overwhelmingly for lifting the ban on gays serving in the military. Listed below are the highlights of this report:¹⁷

- The focus should be on behavior and conduct, not sexual orientation.
- Public opinion on the matter should be considered with a grain of salt. For example, it is important to note that 61% of Americans were against President Truman's order to racially integrate the military.
- No formal research shows that lifting the ban will affect unit cohesiveness. Leadership is still the most important factor in unit cohesion.
- Evidence from other militaries that have lifted bans against openly gay service members suggests that such a lifting will not be a major disrupting force.
- Group members do not need to like each other in order to work together effectively.
- Leadership on professional personal conduct in addition to recent barracks upgrades can overcome privacy concerns.

However, months before this report was completed, the leadership of the military, Senate, and the religious right had mobilized enough support to effectively kill President Clinton's initiative.¹⁸ Congressman Barney Frank, the only openly gay congressman at the time, authored the compromise that was eventually accepted by all parties.¹⁹ Thus, the well known "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" (DADT) policy effectively became law in late 1993.²⁰ In summary, this law states that homosexuals can serve in the military as long as their sexual orientation is not manifested in either a verbal admission or through behaviors. Additionally, military leaders are not allowed to ask service members if they are homosexual, or conduct "witch hunts" to find

homosexuals within the ranks. The basis for the policy as written into the law is to maintain “high morale, good order and discipline, and unit cohesion,” in addition to a minor reference about maintaining privacy.²¹ To date, DADT has been relatively resilient to legal challenges, though there appears the need for reconciliation between some contradictory Supreme Court judgments with respect to consensual sodomy and the implementation of DADT.²²

Legacy Arguments on Both Sides of the Issue

Individual morality is the judgment that stems from a person’s perception of welfare, justice, and rights. The development of morality primarily comes from internalizing societal norms and practices²³, though moral arguments can also challenge social mores. Many arguments surrounding DADT, especially those in support of the policy, are built from a strictly moral or religious perspective, and are often based on seminal religious documents such as the Bible or the Koran, or other contemporary religious publications.²⁴ However, religious leaders cannot agree on the morality of homosexuality and its relationship to the military, as evidenced by Carey’s book of essays against DADT by leaders in different Christian denominations.²⁵ Even in the face of religious disagreement, it is safe to say that most contemporary mainstream religions still consider homosexuality an immoral state. If we assume that religious arguments are overwhelmingly against homosexuality, we should still consider this information irrelevant while forming military policy in a secular government. However, as evidenced by recent comments by the current Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, there are still military strategic leaders who justify DADT based on individual morality formed from their upbringing.²⁶

If morality comes primarily from societal norms, then as evidence shows our society becoming more accepting and tolerant of the homosexual lifestyle, it follows that with each passing day allowing gays in the military becomes less of a moral dilemma in American society. Even if we assume that homosexuality is less a moral issue in American society, the debate does not end there. Some hold the military, and more specifically the officer corps, to a different moral standard than society. While acknowledging the need for professional refinement, Mattox argues that the officer corps should stick to its current moral commitments rather than refine them.

[The Army] must communicate its moral commitments in ways that will appeal to the moral sensitivities of reasonable men and women in a liberal democratic society who may not embrace for themselves the same moral imperatives as does the officer corps. In this regard, even if the American people were either to expect or to require less in terms of moral commitment from its Army officer corps, the officer corps can neither expect nor allow less of itself.²⁷

Most would probably agree that holding the military to a higher standard than civil society in some norms and practices is proper. However, stated in Mattox's terms, there may come a time when the military's moral commitments no longer cohere with the moral sensitivities of society. If this occurs, then instead of holding the moral high ground, the military will be perceived as holding on to some unreasonable restriction on its members that is completely unrelated to morality. Having said that, certain behaviors, regardless of whether grounded in homosexual or heterosexual orientation, will always be considered immoral (for example, child pornography, sexual harassment, or public exposure) because these are acts (sometimes violent) that in some way, shape, or form violate another person's accepted rights.

One of the more fundamental issues surrounding DADT regards whether a person is born gay or chooses to be gay. This is fundamental because our American heritage supports not discriminating against inherent traits (where they do not directly influence job performance). According to the American Psychological Association, most scientists today agree that sexual orientation is not a result of conscious choice, but rather complex interactions between environmental, cognitive, and biological factors occurring early in life.²⁸ If homosexuality is not a conscious choice, then banning gays from openly serving in the military appears to look more like discrimination than sound policy.

Through the years there have been many rational justifications for not allowing gays to serve in the US military, but most of these have fallen to faulty logic or lack of evidence. It was once believed that homosexuals were a higher security risk (more susceptible to blackmail), but clearly sexual improprieties are just as easily committed by heterosexuals.²⁹ Some have argued that lifting the ban will cause an outbreak of HIV that would potentially overwhelm the military's health system³⁰, but no scientific or statistical basis for this claim exists. We have already discussed how homosexuality was previously considered a mental illness that prohibited military service, but in 1973 the American Psychological Association ruled that homosexuality is not a mental disorder.³¹ It has been argued that the cost of lifting the ban and accommodating homosexuals in the barracks and throughout all services provided by the military is cost prohibitive. In fact, the opposite might be the case, as the ban is believed to have cost the government from 1994 through 2003 somewhere between \$190 million³² and \$364 million³³ to recruit and train replacements for enlisted service members separated under DADT. While the gay ban is argued to support military effectiveness, primarily through facilitating unit cohesion (more on this below), there are clearly other effects that negatively impact military effectiveness. Most notable of these are the negative impacts of losing highly trained and skilled soldiers under the DADT policy who are difficult to replace in a timely manner (e.g., 26 Arabic and Farsi

linguists between 1998 and 2004³⁴, and 244 doctors, nurses, and health care specialists from 1994 through 2003³⁵). Lastly, some worry about the impact of lifting the gay ban on recruiting for an all-volunteer force. The recent Zogby poll of combat veterans showed that 78% would have still joined the military if gays were allowed to serve openly, with 10% stating that they would not have joined. These numbers can be spun either way (78% is an overwhelming majority, but with an all-volunteer force we do not want to lose any significant percentage of our recruiting base), and in isolation are not conclusive about the overall effect of lifting the ban on DADT.

One justification, however, has withstood the test of time and weathered many legal challenges. We are speaking of the necessity to maintain “high morale, good order and discipline, and unit cohesion”,³⁶ and this eventually became the principal statutory rationale for DADT.³⁷ Wells-Petry argues that a ban on gays serving in the military is a good policy on the basis of morale and cohesion.

Once the Army presents evidence that there is a rational basis between excluding homosexuals and the maintenance of morale, good order, and discipline within the armed forces, the burden shifts to plaintiffs to show that the proffered basis – and hence the secretarial determination homosexuality is incompatible with military service – is irrational, or is at least an insufficient showing of rationality.³⁸

The fault with Wells-Petry’s logic is that it assumes the Army has proven this rational connection between homosexuals serving openly and a decline in unit cohesion and morale. While the unit cohesion and morale justification has satisfied the courts to date, the social science experts who conduct and analyze research with rigor are not necessarily in agreement. Segal and Kestnbaum argue strongly that rigorous social science does not support a causal relationship between social cohesion³⁹ and military performance.⁴⁰ Kier⁴¹ and MacCoun⁴² independently cite numerous studies that show the linkage between cohesion and tasks, concluding that social aspects are not in the cohesion equation. King is a little less extreme in the conclusion of his study. He states that although personal bonds may be a factor in cohesion, they might be subordinate to the importance of formal collective training in determining unit cohesion.⁴³ The common thread amongst these studies, as well as a very important concept for consideration in the DADT debate, is that group performance is less about whether the members of the group accept and like one another, and more about whether the group has a common task that they are trying to accomplish.

However, the usefulness of most of these studies for military purposes has to be called into question because they were conducted outside of the military context, and then later applied to the military domain as another example of where the results might be useful. Even if

one accepts the fact that task cohesion overrides social cohesion as a major determinant of military unit performance, this is not conclusive proof that openly serving homosexuals would not affect cohesion because we could not find any studies directly comparing the level of task cohesion in military units with and without openly gay personnel.

What can we conclude from arguing out of both sides of the mouth? The conclusion is that there is no rigorous evidence conclusively showing that lifting the gay ban in the US military will or will not affect unit performance and cohesion. Even though it does not conclusively predict the impact on the US military, it may be constructive to consider the effects that lifting the gay ban has had on militaries of other countries. In 2003, Belkin released the results of his study of four of the 24 nations who at that time allowed homosexuals to serve in their militaries. Belkin chose for his study the British, Canadian, Israeli, and Australian armies because their demographics, organization, and culture were most similar to the US military. His study provides evidence that lifting the gay ban in these militaries did not result in a loss in military effectiveness, and he further infers that the same result would occur if the ban were lifted in the US military.⁴⁴ We believe this is a plausible inference, but there will be no proof until the policy is changed.

Let us consider the cohesion issue from a different perspective. In 2003 Wong and colleagues interviewed soldiers fresh from the fight in Operation Iraqi Freedom. They concluded that soldiers of today, like those of yesteryear, are motivated to fight and risk their personal safety in combat situations because of strong emotional bonds with their comrades.⁴⁵ Even though this result is about combat motivation and not about group performance like many of the above mentioned studies, if we agree that soldiers fight for one another because they do not want to let down their buddies, it can be inferred that social cohesion is still an important factor in combat. At this point the important question becomes whether openly gay service members and their heterosexual counterparts will accept each other and form bonds strong enough to fight for one another.

Notwithstanding the agreed upon notion that soldiers in combat tend to put aside their petty disagreements in the face of life and death situations, the recent Zogby international poll of Iraq and Afghanistan combat veterans is very revealing about this topic. Of the respondents, 73% were comfortable in the presence of gays. Of those who knew of a gay member in their unit (23% knew this for certain), 72% said this fact had no impact or a positive impact on their personal morale, and 67% said it had no impact or a positive impact on their unit morale.⁴⁶ Admittedly without empirical evidence to back it up, we believe that heterosexuals who are

comfortable in the presence of gays and who do not believe gays negatively impact morale will fight for their gay comrades as they would for their heterosexual comrades.

How would the negative feelings of the other 28% and 33% respectively affect the cohesion of the unit? We do not know. However, all human beings have biases typically based on their environmental upbringing, yet the effects of close interaction in social and work situations with those for which there is a bias often overcomes these predisposed notions. The Zogby poll illustrates this effect. For those who were not sure if someone in their unit was gay, only 51% thought that a gay unit member would have no impact or a positive impact on personal morale (down from 72% of those who positively knew a unit member was gay). The same affect occurred with unit morale, with the number going down from 67% to 28%. Clearly those who knew for certain they worked with a gay service member were more likely to believe this fact had a positive or no impact on personal or unit morale. This is consistent with a similar phenomenon that Samuel Stouffer reported in his seminal work on the American soldier.⁴⁷ As black and white soldiers increased the amount of contact with one another, they showed more support for racial integration.

The same effect has also been demonstrated at the macro organizational level. For example, in previous times the leadership of the US military claimed that the integration of blacks, and then women, would harm cohesion.⁴⁸ Fast forward to the year 2007, long after racial and gender integration became an accepted norm in the military, and we would be hard pressed to find military leaders who would like to return to the old days of a segregated military.

The polls show overwhelmingly that the American public is becoming more accepting of allowing gays in the military. The number in favor of allowing gays in the military jumped from 40% in 1993 to somewhere between 58% and 79% in 2006.⁴⁹ And given that 91% of young adults believe gays should serve openly,⁵⁰ it appears that as the population ages there will probably continue an upward trend on favoring openly gay military service. Jones and Koshes argue that as homosexuality is better accepted in society, it will also be better accepted in the military, and morale issues on the basis of homosexuality will be less and less of an issue. And for whatever issue still remains at the time the ban on openly gay service is lifted, they believe the leadership and regulatory capabilities are available to overcome them.⁵¹

Even if we are to assume that racial and gender biases still exist in today's military and continue to affect cohesion and morale, the overall impact is clearly not enough to keep the US military from being the world's dominant military force and winning wars. And winning wars, as Wells-Petry so eloquently argues (though she uses this argument to support the gay ban), is the

bottom line indeed.⁵² Is the military wrong again about the bottom line effect of integration on cohesion and the ability of the military to perform?

Although the privacy concerns with respect to lifting the gay ban take on a minor role when compared to cohesion, they are worth addressing because they are mentioned in the law and are an active part of the debate. Based on the environmental conditions under which military members serve, they are often forced into situations where modesty considerations can play a role. This can range from group shower facilities in garrison barracks to the need to conduct personal hygiene and bodily functions on the battlefield. Often (but not always) leaders make accommodations to separate genders so they can perform these functions in private without compromising modesty or raising sexual tensions. It is a fair question to ask whether lifting the gay ban would require the same accommodations to be made within genders between homosexual and heterosexual service members. A good analysis of how sexual modesty is a byproduct of our American culture along with how the “etiquette of disregard” can overcome privacy issues is contained in Shawver.⁵³ Belkin and Embser-Herbert also makes a case to temper the privacy concerns.⁵⁴

- DADT does not preserve the privacy of heterosexual soldiers, because gays already serve. Therefore, lifting the gay ban does not raise the stakes of privacy.
- In other militaries that lifted gay bans, few homosexuals openly disclosed their orientation. (This point assumes that privacy is only an issue when gays are “out”, which is consistent with DADT.)
- Barracks upgrades are providing much more privacy than in the past.
- Gay and straight soldiers in the same showers are much less different from societal norms than men showering with women. (The inference here is that gays and heterosexuals of the same gender should not have privacy concerns when sharing showers.)

Clearly, privacy is another issue where the jury is still out. However, once again this may be an issue that can easily be overcome with effective leadership and regulatory capabilities.

Up until this point in this paper we have not intended to make a decisive case either for or against DADT. Rather, since we are about to embark upon a discussion of how DADT is inconsistent with the principles of military strategic leadership, it was important to impress upon the reader that no argument for the current policy is without a strong counter argument that also has its merits. Since no decisively strong case for the gay ban exists, discussing DADT in the context of strategic leadership is relevant.

Having stated that, after a thorough literature search on all arguments for and against DADT, it is important to note that two trends became clear. First, the preponderance of information available on the subject is against the current DADT policy, in favor of lifting the gay ban. Second, the arguments in favor of lifting the ban tended to be much more objective, often based on statistical evidence and rigorous social science research. On the other hand, the tendency of authors who oppose lifting the gay ban is to make subjective arguments that were often emotional and based on anecdotal evidence rather than sound logic and scientific principles. Here is an extreme example (note that there was no citation to back up the author's claim in the last sentence of this quote):

What homosexuals want us to accept is that they'll come into the military and behave themselves like good little boys and girls. They won't allow their predilections for deviant behavior to interfere with the order and discipline of the units to which they are assigned. Now this is from people who average fifty sexual partners in a year as opposed to a heterosexual's twelve in a lifetime.⁵⁵

Considering a New Dimension: Strategic Leadership

As we investigate the relationship between the tenets of military strategic leadership and DADT, we first lay out the military leadership documents that are available to form the basis for this comparison. Surprisingly, no joint doctrine or publications on leadership were found to exist. While each of the services provides some kind of documentation on leadership, there is a wide variance on the scope and focus from service to service. The Army provides by far the most thorough guidance on leadership, producing a regulation⁵⁶, pamphlet⁵⁷, and doctrinal manual⁵⁸ at the department level, as well as a primer⁵⁹ and list of competencies specifically focused on strategic leadership⁶⁰ from its senior service college. The Army publications cover the gamut of leadership levels from small unit through strategic. The Air Force has a doctrinal manual⁶¹ that covers the principles of leadership from the tactical through strategic levels, as well as the values of the service. The Marine Corps has two doctrinal manuals on leadership. One covers values and ethics⁶², while the other focuses on the individual leadership characteristics expected of Marines⁶³. The Navy's literature on leadership is very narrowly focused on business process management at the organizational and strategic levels.⁶⁴ Given the Army's thorough documentation on strategic leadership, coupled with minimal information from the other services, we primarily used Army publications as the basis for military strategic leadership when building our arguments. However, we are confident that the Army doctrine on this topic applies equally across all services.

Military strategic leadership is fundamentally about leading and managing change.⁶⁵ When placing this charge in the context of the “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, the obvious question is whether or not the military needs to change at all. The problem with this question is that even in the absence of asking it, the American people appear to be providing an answer. We have already shown the statistical evidence that the American people are becoming more and more accepting of the openly gay lifestyle and its compatibility with uniformed service. With this information, and given the above argument that no decisive objective justification for the policy exists, it is logical to assume that eventually the American people will insist on a change in policy. Will the military take the initiative in what appears to many to be an inevitable change, or will it wait to be told to integrate openly gay service members?

It would be easy for the military’s strategic leaders to hide behind the cloak of federal statutes and insist that any change is beyond their control and in the hands of Congress. However, as soon as the military realizes that change is inevitable (we have argued the signposts are already there), its strategic leaders have an inherent responsibility to lead the change. This sends the correct message to the American people that the military knows how to lead change, instead of always waiting to be told to change. Ulrich sums it up nicely.

Ideally, military institutions that are attuned to the discrepancies between professional norms and democratic norms will anticipate the inevitability of externally driven change. Such proactive behavior affords the military profession the opportunity to autonomously incorporate changes more on its own terms.⁶⁶

Doctrinally, the challenge for military strategic leaders is to create grounded future-oriented change.⁶⁷

Strategic leaders accept change in proactive, not in reactive fashion. They anticipate change even as they shield their organizations from unimportant and bothersome influences. The history of the post-Vietnam volunteer Army illustrates how strategic leaders can effectively shape change to improve the institution while continuing to deal with routine operations and requirements.⁶⁸

There is a natural tension between the military reflecting the culture that it is sworn to defend and the imposition of social imperatives which might undermine military capability. While acknowledging the dangers of the military becoming disconnected from American society and degrading civil-military relations, Hillen argues that if closing the gap compromises military capability, then the military and society can exist with different values.⁶⁹ Very few will argue against this point, but as noted above, the critical question returns to whether lifting the gay ban compromises military capability. There is no conclusive evidence it does.

Segal and Bourg make the argument that if the Army wants to improve its level of professionalism, it needs to embrace diversity and “adapt its culture and policies to reflect more

closely the egalitarian attitudes of its client.”⁷⁰ Ulrich continues this theme, but argues that keeping pace with society will enhance legitimacy.

As the perception grows that the military’s political ideology is dramatically divergent from the civilian elites entrusted as security policy-makers, the parallel assumption will grow that the military is an institution apart from the society it serves. Moreover, it may be seen as a self-serving, rather than a nation-serving institution.⁷¹...Democratic military professionals must develop the judgment required to distinguish between “social engineering” detrimental to the effectiveness of the profession, and legitimate evolutions of professional practices reflective of the democratic values of the state.⁷²

A significant part of the military’s challenge in relating to its core constituency is managing its communication with the American people. Effective communication is critical for strategic leaders.

One prominent difference between strategic leaders and leaders at other levels is the greater emphasis on symbolic communication. The example that strategic leaders set—their words, decisions, and their actions—have meaning beyond their immediate consequences....⁷³

This notion of symbolic communication is an inherent aspect of strategic leadership. If the military resists lifting the gay ban, then the military’s symbolic message to both its members and constituents is that an openly gay lifestyle is not acceptable in society. Note the distinction that while the military may not subscribe to this message, it is unintentionally broadcast through symbolic communication, possibly resulting in a perception that the military cannot relate to its core constituency.

It is interesting to note that historically the rates of gays discharged from the military decrease during our nation’s times of need.⁷⁴ Recently, both in the First Gulf War and in the more recent Global War on Terror, the discharges of gays were temporarily suspended.⁷⁵ This brings up a troubling case of symbolic communication because the basis for the policy is unit cohesion. The symbolic message is that either unit cohesion is not critical in times of combat, or allowing gays to serve openly in the military will not significantly degrade unit cohesion. The hypocrisy of this symbolic message is at once intuitively obvious.

The US military as an organization is certainly considered to be one of the most foremost authorities on leadership in the world. Yet, another symbolic communication inadvertently sent by DADT is an indictment against all levels of US military leadership. DADT implies that lifting the gay ban would disrupt unit cohesion to such a degree that our direct and organizational leaders could not overcome this leadership challenge, resulting in a significant degradation in military capability. The military might want to show more faith in its leaders than this symbolic communication does. As the military’s own doctrine states, forms of diversity can actually

support leadership. “A leader’s job is not to make everyone the same; it is to take advantage of the different capabilities and talents brought to the team. The biggest challenge is to put each member in the right place to build the best possible team.”⁷⁶

Military communication from its strategic leaders is also about sending messages that support the military’s values.⁷⁷ What message is sent about integrity⁷⁸, when the military forces serving gays to withhold their feelings and activities for fear of dismissal? What message is getting through with respect to loyalty, when the military cannot even address many of the specific needs or services their gay community might have? What message is getting through about respect, when the military respectfully shows them the door as soon as they admit their sexuality? If military leadership doctrine states that honor “demands putting the [military] values above self-interest and above career and personal comfort.”⁷⁹, then it would be difficult to argue that homosexuals serving “in the closet” are not some of the most honorable service members in our military. It is difficult for the military to send a consistent strategic message to both its members and the American people about values, when it treats a known subculture in a manner that is inconsistent with its own values.

According to a relatively recent Army publication, six metacompetencies describe the Army strategic leader in the post-September 11th environment. We believe two of these metacompetencies are especially relevant in the context of DADT. The first is cross-cultural savvy, which “implies that an officer can see perspectives outside his or her own boundaries.”⁸⁰ For the inevitable future debate on DADT, it is critical that military strategic leaders understand the perspectives of the gay service member as they form their positions. The second related metacompetency is interpersonal maturity, because it “includes the ability of officers to analyze, challenge, and change an organization’s culture to align it with the ever changing outside environment.”⁸¹ This implies that it might be important for the military’s strategic leaders to keep their organization aligned with American society’s majority acceptance of the homosexual lifestyle.

The Way Ahead

We argued above that there are no clear cut decisive arguments that justify the ban against homosexuals serving openly in the US military. Similarly, we do not consider our own conclusion that DADT is inconsistent with military strategic leadership doctrine to be a singular justification for overturning the policy. We believe that when emotions and predisposed biases are put aside, that the facts of the case and the current environment will support lifting the ban against gays serving openly in the US military, and this in turn will pull the tenets of military

strategic leadership out of their current state of hypocrisy. Whenever the debate rages again, we hope that sensitivities to military strategic leadership doctrine will be considered in that forum.

We also believe the timing of this debate should be carefully considered. A debate focusing on DADT may be a distraction to a military institution that is currently decisively engaged in Iraq and Afghanistan. Even if lifting the gay ban is inevitable, waiting a little longer to do so is okay at this critical time in our nation's history.

When that time comes, strategic leaders should not rush to execute the changes, but first use systems level thinking to carefully consider the potential second and third order effects before devising an implementation plan. Zellman provides a thorough summary of the unique challenges of implementing social change in the military, and provides a framework that could be applied if the gay ban were lifted.⁸² Until that time, we should continue to build for the future, while not forgetting our past.

When our nation was younger, we took comfort in myths that today seem wrongheaded, even un-American. We told ourselves that Native Americans were vermin and that the nation's expansion and security required their extermination. We told ourselves that we couldn't let women vote in our elections, because they didn't have the intellectual acumen to make sound decisions. That black Americans could not serve in our armed forces alongside whites because integration would impair unit cohesion. That if women were admitted to the U.S. service academies, the quality and integrity of the education of combat leaders would diminish catastrophically. The eerie echo of those sentiments can today be heard in the official rationalizations for don't ask, don't tell.⁸³

Endnotes

¹ Tryon Edwards, *A Dictionary of Thoughts* (Detroit: F.B. Dickerson Co., 1908), 386. Tryon Edwards was a 19th century American theologian.

² The Gallup Organization, "Confidence in Institutions," June 2006; available from <http://www.gallupoll.com/content/default.aspx?ci=1597>; Internet; accessed 15 October 2006. This poll shows that 73% of Americans have either a great deal or quite a lot of confidence in the military as an institution. The military scored highest of any institution in the poll, which included organized religion, police, banks, branches of government, and other institutions.

³ In contemporary terminology, the word "gay" usually refers to men and the word "lesbian" is more predominantly used in referring to women. Throughout this document the words "homosexual" and "gay" are both used as gender neutral terms.

⁴ *Policy Concerning Homosexuality in the Armed Forces, U.S. Code*, vol. 107, sec. 654 (1993).

⁵ David F. Burrelli and Charles Dale, "Homosexuals and U.S. Military Policy: Current Issues," *CRS Report for Congress* (May 2005), 6.

⁶ John M. Shalikashvili, "Second Thoughts on Gays in the Military," *New York Times*, 2 January 2007, sec A, p. 17.

⁷ William Cohen, interviewed by Wolf Blitzer, CNN, 2 January 2007.

⁸ John D. Hutson, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Retire a Bad Military Policy," *National Law Journal* (August 11, 2003): 30.

⁹ Alexander H. Raggio, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell, Don't Be: A Philosophical Analysis of the Gay Ban in the US Military," US Military Academy Senior Thesis, 2005.

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¹⁵ *Ibid.*, 116.

¹⁶ Bernard D. Rostker et al., *Sexual Orientation and U.S. Military Personnel Policy* (Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation, 1993), v.

¹⁷ *Ibid.*, xix-xxx.

¹⁸ David M. Rayside, "The Perils of Congressional Politics," in *Gay Rights, Military Wrongs: Political Perspectives on Lesbians and Gays in the Military*, ed. Craig A. Rimmerman (New York: Garland Publishing, 1996), 147.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 159-163.

²⁰ *Policy Concerning Homosexuality in the Armed Forces.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² David F. Burrelli and Charles Dale, "Homosexuals and U.S. Military Policy: Current Issues," *CRS Report for Congress* (May 2005), 12-20.

²³ Elliot Turiel, *The Culture of Morality: Social Development, Context, and Conflict* (Cambridge, UK: Cambridge University Press, 2002), 1-2.

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²⁵ John J. Carey, ed., *The Christian Argument for Gays and Lesbians in the Military*, ed. (Lewiston, NY: Mellen University Press, 1993).

²⁶ Aamer Madhani, "Top General Calls Homosexuality 'Immoral'," *Chicago Tribune*, 13 March 2007, 1.

²⁷ John Mark Mattox, "The Moral Foundations of Army Officership," in *The Future of the Army Profession*, 2d ed., ed. Lloyd J. Matthews (New York: McGraw Hill, 2005), 405.

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³² U.S. General Accounting Office, *Military Personnel: Financial Costs and Loss of Critical Skills Due to DOD's Homosexual Conduct Policy Cannot Be Completely Estimated* (Washington, D.C.: U.S. General Accounting Office, February 2005), 3-4.

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³⁵ U.S. Under Secretary of Defense Davis S. C. Chu, letter to U.S. Representative Martin T. Meehan, Washington, D.C., 29 June 2005.

³⁶ *Policy Concerning Homosexuality in the Armed Forces*.

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³⁸ Melissa Wells-Petry, *Exclusion* (Washington, D.C.: Regnery Gateway, 1993), 57.

³⁹ Social cohesion refers to emotional bonds and friendship, and is distinguished from task cohesion which refers to a group's commitment to achieving a common goal.

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