



Recommendations to Pentagon Working Group on Gays in the Military

OVERVIEW:

The Palm Center would like to offer its full support to the new Pentagon working group on gays and lesbians in the U.S. military and address the next steps for the “don’t ask, don’t tell” law and policy. We offer ten years of experience researching in this area, with a focus on gays in the military at home and abroad as well as on the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy specifically. The Palm Center is housed at the University of California, Santa Barbara, and has published over thirty books, book chapters, and journal articles on gays in the military. Nine of our studies have been published in peer-reviewed journals including *International Security*, *Armed Forces and Society*, and *Military Psychology*; others appeared in respected publications such as *Parameters*, the official journal of the U.S. Army War College.

Although our independent findings—as well as the vast majority of other government, military, and academic research—have concluded that ending the gay ban will not harm military effectiveness, our offer of support and recommendations below do not assume any outcome. We hope to be one of many resources that the working group considers. The recommendations below reflect our “lessons learned” from extensive work within this field.

RECOMMENDATIONS:

(1) Consult existing literature as a roadmap. Research on openly gay service is extensive, and includes over half a century of evidence gathered by independent researchers and the U.S. military itself, as well as the study of the experience of foreign militaries. The U.S. military’s own researchers have consistently found that openly gay service does not undermine cohesion. While some opponents of gays in the military have published material asserting links between gay service members and perceived harm to the military, no research has ever shown that allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly impairs overall readiness. This fact has been acknowledged by the Pentagon, which has said that the rationale for its gay ban is “inherently subjective in nature” and is rooted in “professional Military judgment, not scientific or sociological analysis.” Existing literature also provides helpful “lessons learned” about the implementation of a policy to replace the ban on openly gay service. The Appendix lists the major studies on gays in the military over the past fifty years. We recommend that the Pentagon working group consult the existing literature.

(2) Assess the Impact on Unit Cohesion Properly. The unit cohesion rationale, the claim that allowing gay men and lesbians to serve openly would undermine cohesion, must be assessed rather than assumed. Asking service members their opinion about whether openly gay service would harm cohesion is not an empirical assessment. Rather, to test the unit cohesion rationale, the working group should derive a measure of “outness” for a sample of units by asking members of each unit whether they have gay peers. The “outness” of each unit should then be correlated with independent measures of the unit’s readiness and cohesion after controlling for other determinants of unit quality. If a unit’s “outness” is uncorrelated or negatively correlated with unit quality, then this would cast doubt on the plausibility of the unit cohesion rationale. (This was the approach of Dr. Laura Miller, a RAND scholar, and Dr. Bonnie Moradi, a University of Florida professor, who published their findings in *Armed Forces and Society*. Their study appears in the Appendix.)

(3) Consult troops for relevant information rather than to ask their permission for reform. It is important to be sensitive to the concerns and anxieties of military members as options are weighed about lifting the ban on openly gay service. Yet it is crucial that, when uniformed personnel are consulted on this matter, the purpose of the consultations be made clear: Polls or anecdotes about the personal preferences of enlisted personnel and junior officers should not be used as a basis to determine policy, and they do not constitute evidence about the critical question of what impact lifting the ban will have on cohesion, recruitment, and effectiveness. In Britain and Canada, approximately two-thirds of troops surveyed said that they would not work with gays, yet when inclusive policies were implemented, just a handful of service members actually retired.

(4) Send study teams to Britain, Israel, Australia, and Canada. Twenty-five nations allow gays and lesbians to serve openly. None has reported any overall detriment to cohesion, morale, recruiting or retention. Internal reviews by the British and Canadian militaries found no negative impact on readiness, despite expectations that the policy transitions would cause substantial disruptions (see Appendix). American military culture is distinct from that of its allies, but the lessons from other countries are nevertheless instructive. We recommend that the Pentagon working group send research teams to other nations that allow gay men and lesbians to serve openly to determine what worked and what did not.

(5) Use an appropriate standard for assessing the likely impact of change. Some participants in the conversation over gays in the military have sought certainty about what will happen when “don’t ask, don’t tell” is repealed. Yet this is not consistent with how public policy assessments are made. By the standard of absolute certainty, we cannot know for sure whether the continuation of “don’t ask, don’t tell” could jeopardize readiness, just as we cannot know the future impact of any policy change before it happens. The appropriate criterion for any policy decision is not certainty, but a preponderance-of-evidence standard. A similar point must be made about measurability. Some insist that “don’t ask, don’t tell” has no *measurable*, negative impact on the armed forces, and that repeal poses an unacceptable risk to the military, without specifying how or how much repeal would harm the military. The working group should of course assess the impact of policy continuity and change with as much precision as possible; however, the question of measurability must be asked in an even-handed way when attempting to compare the impact of retaining “don’t ask, don’t tell” to the impact of repeal.

(6) Consult research on the timing of implementation. Secretary Gates has announced that, even after Congress repeals “don’t ask, don’t tell,” the military could require a year to implement an inclusive policy. Extensive research on the topic, however, including the 1993 RAND study, concludes that, once a decision is made to allow gay men and lesbians to serve openly, the policy transition should be implemented quickly. As RAND found, “The policy selected should be implemented immediately. Any sense of experimentation or uncertainty invites those opposed to change to continue to resist it,” which adds to uncertainty and anxiety about the change. This is also the lesson of foreign militaries. The working group should assess the wisdom of Secretary Gates’s proposed one-year implementation timeline.

(7) Leadership and consistency are more important than second-order effects. A closely-related issue is the question of imagined second-order effects. Research has found that there are only two major factors that determine the success of a transition to an inclusive policy. First, senior leaders must send clear signals of support for the new policy, and ensure that commanders discipline those who disobey it. Second, the military must have a single code of conduct that applies irrespective of sexual orientation, and that holds every service member to the same behavioral standards. (The U.S. military already has such a code.) Other factors have negligible or minimal impact. For example, much has been made of whether lifting the ban will require base housing and spousal rights for same-sex partners. Yet as a government entity, the military is governed by the Defense of Marriage Act; hence, partners of gay troops will not be accorded benefits. Substantial research has found that transitioning to an inclusive policy is less difficult in fact than is currently portrayed. Pretending that it is difficult, however, could invite the very divisiveness that participants of good faith on all sides of the conversation seek to avoid.

(8) Correct for biases introduced by “don’t ask, don’t tell.” “Don’t ask, don’t tell” shields itself from analysis in at least three ways. First, because gay troops cannot acknowledge their sexual orientation to researchers, it is difficult to assess the policy’s effect on them. Second, evidence suggests that many commanders are ignoring the presence of gay service members in their units in an effort to retain personnel, a fact which reflects belief among field officers that “don’t ask, don’t tell” actually hinders their jobs rather than helping cohesion. That said, they are unlikely to acknowledge this information given their side-stepping of the law. Finally, by sending a signal that gay troops are not equal, “don’t ask, don’t tell” sustains the appearance that military culture is less hospitable to gay troops, and less amenable to change, than is actually the case. A student study at the Naval Postgraduate School found that the majority of service members polled believe that they are more tolerant of homosexuality than their peers (a statistically impossible situation). Research shows that service members are, in general, tolerant of gay and lesbian peers but often feel they must pretend to be intolerant in front of others. When scholars fail to correct for this bias, they may mischaracterize the degree of tolerance among service members.

APPENDIX

What Does the Empirical Research Say about the Impact of Openly Gay Service on the Military? Major research studies on service by gays and lesbians.

1. In 1957, the secretary of the navy appointed a panel to investigate its homosexual exclusion policy. The outcome, known as the Crittenden report, stated that “the number of cases of blackmail as a result of past investigations of homosexuals is negligible” and “no factual data exist to support the contention that homosexuals are a greater risk than heterosexuals.”¹
2. In 1988, the Personnel Security Research and Education Center (PERSEREC) commissioned studies that found no evidence showing that gays were unsuitable for military service and suggested that the policy was unnecessary and damaging. The first report pointed to growing tolerance of homosexuality and concluded that “the military cannot indefinitely isolate itself from the changes occurring in the wider society, or which it is an integral part.” It found that “having a same-gender or an opposite gender orientation is unrelated to job performance in the same way as being left- or right-handed.” The second report found that “the preponderance of the evidence presented indicates that homosexuals show pre-service suitability-related adjustment that is as good [as] or better than the average heterosexual,” a result that appeared to “conflict with conceptions of homosexuals as unstable, maladjusted persons.”²
3. In 1992, the Government Accountability Office conducted its own study of the gay exclusion policy. Its researchers looked at seventeen different countries and eight police and fire departments in four U.S. cities and reviewed military and nonmilitary polls, studies, legal decisions, and scholarly research on homosexual service. The GAO recommended in an early draft that Congress “may wish to direct the Secretary of Defense to reconsider the basis” for gay exclusion.³
4. In 1993, GAO reported its findings from its study of twenty-five foreign militaries, with special focus on Israel, Canada, Germany and Sweden. According to its final report, “Military officials in all four countries said that the presence of homosexuals in the military is not an issue and has not created problems in the functioning of military units.” A key factor, said the report, was that homosexuals are reluctant to openly admit their sexual orientation even once the ban is lifted.⁴
5. In July 1993, Rand researchers at the National Defense Research Institute, a think tank founded by the Air Force, completed a study commissioned by Defense Secretary Les Aspin. Prepared by over 70 social scientists based on evidence from six countries and data analyses from hundreds of studies of cohesion, concluded that sexual orientation alone was “not germane” in determining who should serve. Rand found that “none of the militaries studied for this report believe their effectiveness as an organization has been impaired or reduced as a result of the inclusion of homosexuals.” In Canada, where the ban had just ended, Rand found “no resignations (despite previous threats to quit), no problems with recruitment, and no diminution of cohesion, morale, or organizational effectiveness.” The same conclusions were reached about Israel. The study reported that even in those countries where gays were allowed to serve, “in none of these societies is homosexuality widely accepted by a majority of the population.”⁵
6. Part of the Rand study examined police and fire departments in several U.S. cities, which it regarded as “the closest possible domestic analog” to the military setting. Rand found that the integration of open gays and lesbians—the status of most departments in the United States—actually enhanced cohesion and improved the police department’s community standing and organizational effectiveness.⁶ A Palm Center study of the San Diego Police Department in 2001 echoed the finding, adding that nondiscrimination policies in police and fire departments did not impair effectiveness even though many departments were characterized as highly homophobic.⁷
7. The U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences studied the situation and concluded in a report released in 1994 that anticipated damage to readiness never materialized after the ban was lifted: “Negative consequences predicted in the areas of recruitment, employment, attrition, retention, and cohesion and morale have not occurred since the policy was changed.”⁸

8. A 2000 report from the UK Ministry of Defence said the lifting of the ban was “hailed as a solid achievement” that was “introduced smoothly with fewer problems than might have been expected.” The changes had “no discernible impact” on recruitment. There was “widespread acceptance of the new policy,” and military members generally “demonstrated a mature and pragmatic approach” to the change. There were no reported problems with homosexuals harassing heterosexuals, and there were “no reported difficulties of note concerning homophobic behavior amongst Service Personnel.” The report concluded that “there has been a marked lack of reaction” to the change.⁹
9. In 2000, after Britain lifted its ban, the Palm Center at the University of California, Santa Barbara, conducted exhaustive studies to assess the effects of openly gay service in Britain, Israel, Canada, and Australia. Researchers there reviewed over six hundred documents and contacted every identifiable professional with expertise on the policy change, including military officers, government leaders, academic researchers, journalists who covered the issue, veterans, and nongovernmental observers. Palm found that not one person had observed any impact or any effect at all that “undermined military performance, readiness, or cohesion, led to increased difficulties in recruiting or retention, or increased the rate of HIV infection among the troops.” Palm researchers found that, “in each case, although many heterosexual soldiers [continued] to object to homosexuality, the military’s emphasis on conduct and equal standards was sufficient for encouraging service members to work together as a team” without undermining cohesion.¹⁰
10. A 2001 paper in the peer-reviewed journal of civil-military relations, *Armed Forces & Society*, argues that Israel’s 1993 decision to lift its gay ban did not influence military performance. It then assesses three arguments raised by experts who claim that Israeli experiences are not relevant for determining what would happen if the U.S. Congress and Pentagon lifted the American gay ban. In particular, it assesses the claims that most gay Israeli combat soldiers do not disclose their sexuality to peers, that some receive special treatment, and that cultural differences distinguish the U.S. and Israeli cases. The authors argue that the Israeli experience is not identical to the situation in the U.S., but that its lessons are instructive and lend weight to the claim that American military effectiveness would not decline if known homosexuals were allowed to serve.¹¹
11. A 2002 article in *International Security*, “A Modest Proposal: Privacy as a Flawed Rationale for the Exclusion of Gays and Lesbians from the U.S. Military,” argues that lifting the gay ban will not undermine heterosexual privacy. Heterosexual service members already shower with known homosexuals, and according to research, lifting the ban is unlikely to substantially increase the number who come out. Additionally, despite the presence of opposition in the ranks, few heterosexual service members are “extremely uncomfortable” around homosexuals, and discomfort that does exist will diminish after lifting the ban. Finally, same-sex desire and same-sex sexual encounters would occur even if all homosexuals were eliminated from the military. The study also concludes that the ban itself enables systematic invasions of heterosexual privacy.¹²
12. A decade after “don’t ask, don’t tell” was formulated, a study was published in *Parameters*, the official journal of the Army War College arguing that lifting bans on homosexual personnel does not threaten unit cohesion or undermine military effectiveness. The study was entitled, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell: Is the Gay Ban Based on Military Necessity?”¹³
13. In 2005, The U.S. Military Academy at West Point awarded the BG Carroll E. Adams award for best thesis to a paper entitled, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell, Don’t Be: A Philosophical Analysis of the Gay Ban in the U.S. Military,” by the cadet, Alexander Raggio. It was the first time a military service academy granted an award to a paper about gays in the military. The thesis argues that “don’t ask, don’t tell” is out of step with the values of the military and the nation, and widens the gap between civilian and military culture. It concludes that the “personal prejudices” and “faulty logic” that undergird the policy “not only fail to meet standards for reasonable policy but undermine the very legitimacy of the institution Army policy should serve.”¹⁴
14. A January, 2008 article in *Armed Forces & Society* presents original empirical research to argue that the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy harms the military’s reputation in several important ways: it is inconsistent

with public opinion, it prompts many journalists to criticize the armed forces while attracting almost no favorable media coverage, it provides a vehicle for antimilitary protesters to portray military culture as conflicting with widely accepted civilian values, and it is inconsistent with the views of junior enlisted service members.¹⁵

15. In July 2008, a bipartisan panel of retired flag officers released a report called the “Report of the General/Flag Officers’ Study Group,” that represented what John Shalikashvili called “one of the most comprehensive evaluations of the issue of gays in the military since the Rand study” in 1993. The panel, which studied the issue for over a year by drawing on live and written testimony from experts and a review of literature, found that lifting the ban is “unlikely to pose any significant risk to morale, good order, discipline, or cohesion.”¹⁶
16. In October 2009, *Joint Force Quarterly*, a top military journal published for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, published a study entitled, “The Efficacy of ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’” written by Col. Om Prakash, an active duty officer in the Air Force. The report found “there is no scientific evidence to support the claim that unit cohesion will be negatively affected if homosexuals serve openly.” Based on this research, it concludes that “it is not time for the administration to reexamine the issue; rather it is time for the administration to examine how to implement the repeal of the ban.” The article was selected as the first-place winner of the Secretary of Defense National Security Essay competition.¹⁷
17. A 2009 study by the University of Florida professor Bonnie Moradi and the Rand researcher Laura Miller, entitled “Attitudes of Iraq and Afghanistan War Veterans toward Gay and Lesbian Service Members,” and published in *Armed Forces & Society*, was the first-ever statistical analysis of whether openly gay service has any impact on military readiness. The study shows that knowing a gay or lesbian unit member has no bearing on the unit’s cohesion, concluding that “the data indicated no associations between knowing a lesbian or gay unit member and ratings of perceived unit cohesion or readiness.”¹⁸
18. A 2009 study published in the journal, *Military Psychology*, has documented the tangible costs of forcing service members to conceal their identities. The study, “Sexual Orientation Disclosure, Concealment, Harassment, and Military Cohesion: Perceptions of LGBT Military Veterans,” is the first empirical analysis of the relationship between sexual orientation concealment and unit cohesion in the military. The study found that sexual orientation disclosure is positively related to unit cohesion, while concealment and harassment are related negatively, meaning they appear to reduce cohesion. This means that the only empirical evidence linking assessing the relationship between open homosexuality and unit cohesion shows the link to be positive, not negative, because of the damage of the closet to the morale and readiness of gay troops, and by extension to the readiness of units.¹⁹
19. Lt. Col. Irene V. Glaeser wrote a study entitled, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell: Time for Change,” at the U.S. Army War College as a 2009 Strategy Research Project as part of a paper submitted for a Master of Strategic Studies Degree. The paper cites “exhaustive studies” of both “don’t ask, don’t tell” and the experience of foreign militaries to argue that openly gay service does not impair the military and that current policy “needs to be revised and lifted.” Glaeser states that the U.S. has “entered an era of persistent conflict,” and must be “broad-minded and agile enough to adapt.”²⁰
20. In Spring 2010, Air University Press, the government-owned publishing arm of the U.S. Air Force, will publish a comprehensive volume on diversity in the Armed Forces. The book, entitled *Attitudes Aren’t Free: Thinking Deeply about Diversity in the US Armed Forces*, offers a range of perspectives and a framework for improving policy on religious expression, open homosexuality, race, gender, and ethics in the Armed Forces. Palm researchers have written a chapter for the book in light of President Obama’s stated intention to end “don’t ask, don’t tell.” The chapter addresses questions about how best to execute and manage the transition from exclusion of openly gay personnel to inclusion. The Palm chapter addresses the political, legal, regulatory, and organizational steps necessary to ensure that the implementation process goes smoothly.²¹

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- ² Theodore Sarbin and Kenneth Karols, *Nonconforming Sexual Orientations and Military Suitability*, Defense Personnel Security Research and Education Center, December 1988, http://www.dod.mil/pubs/foi/reading_room/229.pdf; Michael McDaniel, *Preservice Adjustment of Homosexual and Heterosexual Military Accessions: Implication for Security Clearance Suitability*, Defense Personnel Security Research and Education Center, January 1989; http://www.dod.mil/pubs/foi/reading_room/228.pdf.
- ³ "DOD's Policy on Homosexuality."
- ⁴ "Homosexuals in the Military: Policies and Practices of Foreign Countries," U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO), June 25, 1993, <http://archive.gao.gov/t2pbat5/149440.pdf>.
- ⁵ National Defense Research Institute, *Sexual Orientation and U.S. Military Personnel Policy: Options and Assessments* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1993), http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/MR323/index.html.
- ⁶ Rand, *Sexual Orientation*.
- ⁷ Aaron Belkin and Jason McNichol, "Pink and Blue: Outcomes Associated with the Integration of Open Gay and Lesbian Personnel in the San Diego Police Department," white paper, Palm Center, University of California, Santa Barbara, 2001, <http://www.palmcenter.org/files/active/0/sdpd.pdf>.
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- ¹³ Aaron Belkin, "Don't Ask, Don't Tell: Is the Gay Ban Based on Military Necessity?" *Parameters*, Summer 2003, <http://palmcenter.org/node/617>.
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¹⁸ Bonnie Moradi and Laura Miller, “Attitudes of Iraq and Afghanistan War Veterans toward Gay and Lesbian Service Members,” *Armed Forces & Society*, XX(X) (October, 2009): 1-23, [http://www.palmcenter.org/files/active/0/randstudy\(3\).pdf](http://www.palmcenter.org/files/active/0/randstudy(3).pdf).

¹⁹ Bonnie Moradi, “Sexual Orientation Disclosure, Concealment, Harassment, and Military Cohesion: Perceptions of LGBT Military Veterans,” *Military Psychology*, 21:513-533, 2009.

²⁰ Lt. Col. Irene V. Glaeser, “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell: Time for Change,” U.S. Army War College, Strategy Research Project, March 2009.

²¹ Aaron Belkin, et al, “How to End ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell’: A Roadmap of Political, Legal, Regulatory, and Organizational Steps to Equal Treatment” in Lt. Col. Jim Parco and Dr. Dave Levy, eds., *Attitudes Aren’t Free: Thinking Deeply about Diversity in the US Armed Forces* (Maxwell Air Force Base, AL: Air University Press, 2010).