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September 30, 2009

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PENTAGON PUBLICATION ON GAY TROOPS REVEALS SHIFTING MILITARY VIEWS
Military Opponents of Gay Ban Increasingly Vocal; 'Unit Cohesion' Argument Suffers a Blow

SANTA BARBARA, CA, September 30, 2009 – An official Pentagon journal has published a report calling for the repeal of the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. The article, entitled, [“The Efficacy of ‘Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell.’”](#) was written by Col. Om Prakash, and appears in the new issue of Joint Forces Quarterly, a top military journal published for the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff. According to the article, “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 the Obama administration should not “reexamine the issue” but instead should “examine how to implement the repeal of the ban.”

“The publication of this article is a watershed in the debate over military service by open gays and lesbians,” said Dr. Nathaniel Frank, Senior Research Fellow at the Palm Center and author of *Unfriendly Fire*, a history of “don’t ask, don’t tell.” “It does not mean that Chairman Mullen has announced his support for repeal, but it does reflect a seismic shift in military opinion on the gay troops issue. It shows that even people inside the Pentagon are increasingly critical of the policy and are willing to air that publicly.” Frank cited recent research showing that, while many service members oppose a change in the policy, the vast majority are tolerant of and able to work with gay peers.

Col. Prakash’s study was selected as the first-place winner of the Secretary of Defense National Security Essay competition, which is sponsored by the National Defense University Foundation. He wrote it while studying at the National Defense University, early in 2009. Currently he serves in the Office of the Secretary of Defense, where he is Director of Operations for Industrial Policy.

In his article, Col. Prakash cites a wealth of data showing that openly gay service works, including an [article published by Palm Center Director, Aaron Belkin, in Parameters](#), the official journal of the U.S. Army War College. Col. Prakash's report follows a long line of military and government research which shows that allowing gays and lesbians to serve openly will not compromise military readiness. For a list of these studies, [see pages 9-10 of this report](#).

Col. Prakash said he chose the topic because he was interested in how it was approached as a policy decision. “I tried very hard to approach it as analytically as possible,” he said. “A lot of what’s written on this issue is really an appeal to emotions, but I was interested in looking just at the facts at hand.” He said he would not necessarily



read great meaning into the fact that his essay criticizing “don’t ask, don’t tell” won an essay competition sponsored by the military, or the fact that it was published in the Joint Chiefs’ flagship military journal. “They’re merely looking, I think, at how arguments are presented and how the facts are analyzed,” he said.

But experts on military policy say the article is among the first to express public criticism by active duty personnel of the gay ban. Many refuse to discuss the matter publicly, either because they fear repercussions for their careers or out of a concern that criticism of the policy will look to subordinates like an inappropriate vote of no confidence in standing military policy. But Col. Prakash said that, while aware of the risks, he had no problem conducting research into this issue and sharing his conclusions. “I’m not afraid to look at the facts,” he said. “I did not approach this with a point of view.” Asked if he had encountered blowback from the military, he said he was “still waiting to see if there’s any criticism or backlash.”

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The Palm Center is a think tank at the University of California, Santa Barbara. Since 1998, the Center has been a leader in commissioning and disseminating research in the areas of gender, sexuality, and the military. For more information visit www.palmcenter.ucsb.edu.