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SCHOLAR ASSESSES COLIN POWELL'S LATEST REMARKS

Powell is Second Joint Chiefs Chair to Urge Review of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

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SANTA BARBARA, December 14, 2008 – General Colin Powell said this week that the nation “definitely should re-evaluate” the current ban on openly gay troops. “It’s been fifteen years and attitudes have changed,” he told CNN in an interview. Powell, who was Secretary of State under George Bush, was Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1993 when “don’t ask, don’t tell” became law. The policy requires gay and lesbian troops to conceal their sexual identity and remain celibate.

Dr. Nathaniel Frank, a historian and senior research fellow at the Palm Center, says that Powell’s remarks reflect a small but important change in the General’s public position. “In previous comments,” Frank said, “Powell called for reviewing ‘don’t ask, don’t tell’ at the same time that he said he was not ready to advocate its elimination. This time is different: in the wake of Obama’s victory, repeal has a real chance, and Powell’s slightly stronger remarks—that we should, instead of could, reconsider the policy, add more to the momentum for change.”

Frank’s forthcoming book, *Unfriendly Fire: How the Gay Ban Undermines the Military and Weakens America*, includes a chapter on Powell’s participation in the 1993 debates, and documents Powell’s central role in assuring the legislating of the ban. “Powell almost single-handedly ensured that some kind of ban on gays remained in place,” said Frank. He reportedly wrote a “moral argument” against gay service which was distributed to top brass at the same time that the architect of the ban, sociologist Charles Moskos, acknowledged quietly that moral concerns rather than unit cohesion were the true basis of its rationale.

General John Shalikashvili, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff from 1993 to 1997, called for an end to the gay ban in a 2007 *New York Times* op-ed.

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