

FEARS OF RESIGNATIONS ARE NOT GROUNDED IN EVIDENCE

Why Predicted Disruptions Are More Fear Than Fact



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The CRWG report found that, although a majority of troops do not care if open gays are allowed to serve, some troops say that they might resign in response to the policy change. This finding is consistent with earlier opinion polling such as a 2008 *Military Times* poll that claimed that 10% of troops would leave the armed forces if the ban were lifted and another 14% would consider leaving.¹ Some political and military leaders subsequently concluded that the “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy should not be repealed because the risks of unit disruptions was too high, and because repeal would be inconsistent with the preferences of some troops.

Despite these concerns and pronouncements, however, scholarly data indicate clearly that allowing open gay service is highly unlikely to lead to a decrease in recruitment, retention or enlistment, and that such outcomes, though consistently predicted, did not occur in foreign militaries, police and fire departments, and in the U.S. military’s own history with racial minorities and women. Several factors explain why the concerns are over-predicted.

First, there is a significant gap between attitudes and behavior—what people believe, and how they behave. A pioneering study from the 1930s illustrates the gap between stated attitudes and actual behavior. During that era, a white man named R. T. Lapiere traveled with two Chinese people throughout America. Lapiere contacted hundreds of hotels and restaurants and told them he was traveling with Chinese companions and asked if they would mind accommodating and serving them. When trying to make reservations, they were uniformly told they would be refused service. But when they showed up anyway, all but one served them.² The study shows the yawning gulf between attitudes and behavior. Likewise, a Yale psychologist who sought to scare college students into getting tetanus shots through a fear campaign exaggerated the risks of the illness and found that his “fear” group insisted they would go get tetanus shots; but in follow-up queries, scarcely any of the students who said they would go had actually gone. The research shows the gap between how people claim they’ll behave when scared and how they actually do behave.

The findings of Lapiere and the Yale experiment were exemplified when both Canada and Britain debated lifting their gay bans in the 1980s and 1990s. During these periods, major poll results revealed far fiercer opposition than what was recently found in the U.S. military. In a 1985 survey of 6,500 male soldiers, the Canadian Department of National Defence found that 62 percent of male service members would refuse to share showers, undress, or sleep in the same room as a gay soldier, and that 45 percent would refuse to work with gays.³ A 1996 survey of 13,500 British service members reported that more than two-thirds of male respondents would not willingly serve in the military if gays and lesbians were allowed to serve. Yet when Canada and Britain subsequently lifted their gay bans, nothing of the kind transpired. At most two or three people resigned citing the policy changes (and reports suggested these people were planning to leave anyway).⁴ Several internal and independent assessments in both countries found that the change was good for the armed forces and that none of the dire predictions of doom came true.⁵ This pattern has repeated itself consistently, as shown in uniform data about foreign countries. In many of those countries, debate before the policy changes was highly

pitched and many people both inside and outside the military predicted major disruptions.⁶ In 1994, The U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences also studied the situation in Canada and concluded 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, the report stated.⁷

An assessment by the Canadian Forces itself reached an identical conclusion, finding there was no mass exodus and no indication of any impact on cohesion, morale, readiness, recruitment or retention. A review by a bureau of the Canadian military found that, “despite all the anxiety that existed through the late 80s into the early 90s about the change in policy, here’s what the indicators show—no effect.”⁸

During the debate over openly gay service in the United Kingdom, British government researchers issued a report on the situation in Australia, which concluded that, despite an early outcry, homosexuality quickly became a non-issue: any challenges in integrating open gays were regarded as “just another legitimate management problem.” Research on Israel by both the GAO and the Rand Corporation found the same results.⁹

Prior to the lifting of the military’s gay ban in Australia, it was the service chiefs who argued that allowing homosexuals to serve openly would jeopardize recruitment, troop cohesion, and combat effectiveness while also spreading AIDS and encouraging predatory behavior. Yet after the change, the director of the ADF’s Defence Equity Organisation, Bronwen Grey, reported that despite early fears of deleterious consequences, the lifting of the gay ban had no adverse effects on the capability or functioning of the Defence Forces. Following implementation, she said, “Nothing happened. I mean, people were expecting the sky to fall, and it didn’t.” Grey summed up the transition this way: “All I can say is, from the organizational point of view, while we were waiting for problems, nothing happened. There were no increased complaints or recruiting [problems] at all. I mean nothing happened. And it’s very hard to document nothing.”¹⁰

A Palm Center study of the San Diego Police Department, “Pink and Blue: Outcomes Associated with the Integration of Open Gay and Lesbian Personnel in the San Diego Police Department,” found that nondiscrimination policies in police and fire departments did not impair effectiveness even though many departments were characterized as highly homophobic.¹¹

RAND also 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. It also showed that social tolerance is not necessary to successful openly gay service, as the transition went smoothly even in departments characterized by high levels of homophobia.¹²

Finally, the historical record from episodes of social change in the U.S. military is also instructive. Polls around racial integration showed powerful opposition to equality—far more opposition that we see in the current debate around openly gay service—but the military was integrated anyway, more evidence that opinion polls are not the relevant data here.

A Gallup poll one month before President Truman issued his executive order showed that 63% of Americans supported segregating blacks and whites in the military; only 26% were in favor of integration.¹³ A 1949 survey found that 61% of white Army personnel opposed sharing sleeping quarters and mess halls with African Americans. 68% of white soldiers said they would accept integration of blacks and whites as long as they didn't share barracks or mess facilities.¹⁴

Other Army polls found that more than 80% of white soldiers opposed racial integration. High-ranking officials, including Gen. Eisenhower, argued integration would undermine trust and cohesion. Members of Congress said blacks had a higher incidence of sexually transmitted diseases and even used the Bible to argue that blacks and whites should be kept apart.¹⁵ There were many similarities in language and rhetoric to the current debate about gays in the military: integration would cause crime and disease rates to rise, blacks were less dependable in battle, blacks' presence would be disruptive in close living quarters (concerns about showers, sleeping arrangements), and white soldiers would quit the forces/ recruitment would stall.¹⁶

RAND also assessed the impact on unit cohesion of racial integration into the U.S. military beginning in 1948. It found that “racial integration did not ‘destroy’ unit cohesion and military effectiveness, as so many opponents had argued it would.” It also found even “unfavorable attitudes toward integration did not necessarily translate into violent or obstructionist behavior” among troops, and that initial resistance to change was overcome “through concerted civilian and military leadership.”¹⁷

The same was true with women. In the 1970s, far more than ten percent of officers said they would resign if women were admitted to West Point. According to research by David Segal, the renowned military sociologist at the University of Maryland, these survey responses failed to correlate with actual behavior. Professor Segal told the *Military Times* that officers who resisted “were expressing a strongly held attitude. But when women were admitted to West Point, there was not anything near [the predicted] kind of exodus from the service.” The opinions reflected a widespread cultural resistance to women in the military, but when integration became a reality, there was no mass exodus; the opinions turned out to be just opinions.¹⁸

These historical, political and social science data points at the most informed basis on which to assess the likelihood of repeal triggering serious recruitment or unit cohesion problems *even if* survey respondents *claim* that they would leave or misbehave in reaction to a lifting of the ban.

¹ Brendan McGarry, "Troops Oppose Repeal of 'Don't Ask,'" *Military Times*, December 29, 2008, available at http://www.militarytimes.com/news/2008/12/122908_military_poll_DADT/.

² R. T. Lapiere, "Attitudes Versus Actions," *Social Forces* 13, 1934, 230-237.

³ R.A. Zuliani, "Canadian Forces Survey on Homosexual Issues," Charter Task Force, Department of National Defence, Ottawa, 1986.

⁴ "Report of the Homosexual Policy Assessment Team," United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, February 1996; Robert Shrimmsley, "Forces Set for Legal Fight on Gay Ban," *The Daily Telegraph* (London), March 5, 1996.

⁵ "A Review of the Armed Forces Policy on Homosexuality," United Kingdom, Ministry of Defence, October 31, 2000; "Briefing Note for Director of Public Policy," Canadian Forces, Ottawa, August 25, 1995.

⁶ Nathaniel Frank, et al, "Gays in Foreign Militaries 2010: A Global Primer," Palm Center report, 2010, 2.

⁷ Rand, *Sexual Orientation*; Belkin and McNichol, "Canadian Forces"; Pinch, "Organizational Change in the Canadian Forces." See also <http://www.dtic.mil/cgi-bin/GetTRDoc?AD=ADA277746&Location=U2&doc=GetTRDoc.pdf>.

⁸ Richard A. Zuliani, "Canadian Forces Survey on Homosexual Issues," Charter Task Force (Ottawa: Department of National Defence, 1986); National Defence Headquarters, Canadian Forces, "Briefing Note for Director of Personnel Policy: Effects of Cancellation of Canadian Forces Policy Restricting Service of Homosexuals," August 1995.

⁹ U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), "Homosexuals in the Military: Policies and Practices of Foreign Countries," June 25, 1993; Belkin and McNichol, "Australian Defence Forces" citing Ministry of Defence, United Kingdom, "A Review of the Armed Forces Policy on Homosexuality," October 31, 2000; Belkin and Levitt, "Israel Defense Forces"; Rand, *Sexual Orientation*.

¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 72-6.

¹¹ 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," Palm Center White Paper, 2001.

¹² RAND, *Sexual Orientation*, 160, http://www.rand.org/pubs/monograph_reports/2009/MR323part1.pdf.

¹³ Scott Shepard, "The Vanguard of Integration: 50 years after Truman desegregation, Army remains in forefront of racial progress," *Austin American Statesman*, May 24, 1998.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁵ Nancy Cleeland, "Gays hesitant to recall black military fight," *The San Diego Union-Tribune*, May 23, 1993.

¹⁶ Cleeland. See also David Ari Bianco, "Echoes of Prejudice: The Debates over Race and Sexuality in the Armed Forces," in Craig A. Rimmerman, Ed., *Gay Rights, Military Wrongs* (New York: Garland), 1996, 47-52. Bianco on the comparison between the debates: "I was shocked at the similarity of the language and the modes of thinking...In no way do I argue it's the same thing, that somehow they're exactly parallel. My argument is about the rhetoric, the arguments. I'm comparing racists and homophobes. I'm not comparing blacks and gays," cited in Cleeland.

¹⁷ RAND National Defense Research Institute, *Sexual Orientation and U.S. Military Personnel Policy: Options and Assessments* (Santa Monica, CA: Rand Corporation, 1993).

¹⁸ David Segal quoted in Brendan McGarry, "Troops Oppose Repeal of 'Don't Ask,'" *Military Times*, December 29, 2008.