

This an excerpt of a book chapter by CMR President Elaine Donnelly titled “Defending the Culture of the Military,” published in May 2010 by the Air Force University Press as part of a book titled *Attitudes Are Not Free: Thinking Deeply about Diversity in the U.S. Armed Forces*. Footnotes are in sequence but different from the original text, which begins on page 249. The chapter is available at <http://books.google.com/books?id=5FnvJEclewC&lpg=PP1&pg=PA249#v=onepage&q&f=false>.

Statement of Priorities and Overview

Any discussion of the issue of gays in the military should begin with a statement of priorities. In the formulation of personnel policies, equal opportunity is important, but if there is a conflict between equal opportunity and military necessity, the needs of the military must come first.

Assigning higher priority to equal opportunity, at the expense of military necessity, opens the door to a wide range of problematic social policies. The campaign to repeal Section 654, Title 10, U.S.C., the 1993 law regarding homosexuals in the military, which is usually mislabeled “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell,” is a prime example of misplaced priorities.

Members of Congress should ask a basic question: Would repeal of the law Section 654, Title 10 improve or undermine discipline, morale, and overall readiness in the all-volunteer force? In 2009 more than 1,160 high-ranking retired flag and general officers—51 of them retired four-star officers—personally signed a public statement expressing great concern that repeal of the law would weaken unit cohesion, discipline, and combat effectiveness:

We believe that imposing this burden on our men and women in uniform would undermine recruiting and retention, impact leadership at all levels, have adverse effects on the willingness of parents who lend their sons and daughters to military service, and eventually break the All-Volunteer Force.ⁱ

Some advocates argue that this statement reflects only the views of a previous generation, which are not relevant to young people today. But there are reasons why twenty-somethings do not make policies for an institution that puts men and women into harm’s way. Experience matters. The counsel of leaders with invaluable experience should not be dismissed so lightly. Nor should younger counterparts—the flag and general officers of tomorrow—be punished and forced out of the military if they hold similar views.

The armed forces are organizationally strong. All branches and communities of the military have proud histories, cultural traditions, and members motivated by patriotism as well as personal career goals. The institutional strength of the military, however, makes it vulnerable to political pressures that can undermine its culture. Military tradition requires obedience to lawful authority that is—as it should be—subject to civilian control.

Controversy occurs when civilian officials attempt to impose questionable policies and practices on the armed forces in pursuit of misplaced priorities. Such policies, designed to put egalitarian goals to the ultimate test, frequently conflict with classic elements of military culture. Because the armed forces differ from the civilian world in many respects, an inherent tension exists between sociological goals and the needs of the military.

Unit cohesion, for example, is essential for a strong military force. Cohesion is more than being liked by others; it is a willingness to die for someone else. Horizontal cohesion within a given unit involves mutual dependence for survival in combat.ⁱⁱ Vertical cohesion is the bond of trust that must exist between the commander in chief, subordinate leaders, and the troops they lead.ⁱⁱⁱ

Both types of cohesion develop from strong bonds of mutual confidence, trust, and discipline that make survival possible under chaotic wartime conditions. Military discipline does not just happen—it must be taught by leaders who have the trust of people who will live, and sometimes die, under their command. Essential elements of military culture foster qualities that are not duplicated anywhere in the civilian world, including selfless courage under fire during war far from home.

Without essential factors such as unit cohesion, discipline, and high morale, the armed forces would degrade into disorganized cohorts of self-interested and leaderless young people armed with lethal weapons. This is why morale and the culture of the military, defined most simply as “how things are done,” must be guarded at all times and never taken for granted. As columnist Thomas Sowell wrote, “Military morale is an intangible, but it is one of those intangibles without which the tangibles do not work.”^{iv}

ⁱ. The Flag & General Officers for the Military (FGOM) statement, dated 30 March 2009, was delivered to Pres. Barack Obama, Pentagon officials, and senior members of Congress on 31 March 2009. The statement and a brief issue overview are available at www.flagandgeneralofficersforthemilitary.com. Personal signatures were requested by a Steering Committee of seven four- and three-star retired officers via regular postal mail (not e-mail). A clear majority of the Army officers listed, for whom retirement dates are available, were in command after 1994, when the 1993 Eligibility Law was in effect. As of 4 February, 2010, 1,164 handwritten signatures were received and are on file with the Center for Military Readiness, which provided administrative support for the FGOM project.

ⁱⁱ. In his address to the “Boys of Pointe du Hoc” on the 40th anniversary of D-Day 1984, Pres. Ronald Reagan described the force of military cohesion: “You were young the day you took these cliffs; some of you were hardly more than boys, with the deepest joys of life before you. Yet, you risked everything here. Why? Why did you do it? What impelled you to put aside the instinct for self-preservation and risk your lives to take these cliffs? . . . We look at you, and somehow we know the answer. It was faith and belief; it was loyalty and love.”

iii. William Darryl Henderson, PhD, testimony before the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces, 26 June 1992, and Commission Report to the President, 15 November 1992, Finding 2.5.1, page C-80-81, quoting Dr. Henderson's book, *Cohesion: The Human Element*, National Defense University Press, 1985.

iv. Thomas Sowell, "The Anointed and Those Who Aren't," *Washington Times*, 8 February 1993, E3.