

### ***For DADT repeal to work, inclusion and respect must be extended to all***

*By Al Shine, Colonel, U.S. Army, Retired, and Don M. Snider, Colonel, U.S. Army, Retired*

Michael Allsep Jr., David Levy and Lt. Col. James Parco, in their article “The culture war within” [Armed Forces Journal, January/February], addressed the challenges and possibilities for the military in adapting to the open service of homosexuals. They accurately pointed out that the military is a sub-culture of the American culture, which is to a degree separate from that culture and has a strong sense of self-identity; that it has resisted integrating open homosexuals into that culture; and that the integration of a previously banned class of Americans into the military culture is not something new.

In suggesting that the integration of homosexuals, like the integration of African-Americans and women, can in a relatively short time be successful, Allsep, Levy and Parco are probably right: The military obeys orders and is a meritocracy; one of its most strongly held values is that of judging its members on their military performance irrespective of their beliefs. It is reasonable to expect, and the November Johnson-Ham Report on issues associated with the “don’t ask, don’t tell” repeal agreed, that if approached correctly, the same will happen with this integration.

Where the authors are off the mark, however, is in their prescription as to how this integration should come about. In particular, they fail to suggest an effective way for the services to be fair to homosexual service members while at the same time being equally fair to those who believe homosexual behavior is morally wrong. This becomes clear when they address the “question of morality.” Narrowly focused almost solely on chaplains — the “question of morality” is one for many currently serving in the military, not just for chaplains — the thrust of the Allsep, Levy and Parco position is that those who see no error in homosexuality will approach their duties “embracing themes of inclusion, respect and compassion,” while “for those who embrace themes of exclusivity, the untold story remains.”

The problem with this approach is in how it defines “inclusion, respect and compassion.” In discussing the moral concerns of chaplains, for example, the authors selected as their model the “good-hearted” chaplain of MASH who “never denounce[d] others [or] attempt[ed] to create divisiveness” and “emerged as an exemplar of tolerance, compassion and understanding.” This contrasts with those chaplains who would “promote messages that could be considered divisive

and exclusionary in accordance with the tenets of their faith.” In other words, those who come down on the side of “homosexuality is morally OK — or at least ‘not an issue for me’” are showing the “inclusion and respect” demanded of service members and their leaders; they are the good guys. Those whose beliefs and consciences require them to see homosexual practice as inherently immoral are “divisive” and “exclusionary” — clearly the bad guys.

### **ANOTHER PERSPECTIVE**

Let us consider the issue from a different perspective. Is the belief of many serving members of our armed forces that homosexuality is morally wrong a morally wrong position itself? The belief could be based on a number of grounds, but most frequently it is religiously based. (For the purposes of this article, we are using the term “homosexuality” in the way it is used in the Johnson-Ham report and by most writers: to include both homosexual desire and homosexual behavior. From a moral perspective, the key issue is behavior.)

The belief that homosexuality is morally wrong has long been and continues to be the traditional belief of the majority of Protestants and Jews, the Roman Catholic Church and almost all Muslims. Noting that within various faith groups not all agree on this point is not to say that those who hold to the position are wrong. It is not for the military to decide in favor of a particular theological position; that is the prerogative of those who profess the particular faith.

The thrust of the Allsep, Levy and Parco article is to argue that the military must favor the “inclusive” theological position, and then “[d]emand leaders at all levels take accountability and responsibility to foster inclusion and respect through their words, deeds and examples.” Thus, they arrive at a correct policy prescription, but for the wrong reason and with an implied definition of “inclusion and respect” which is too narrow.

This position presents problems that are both ethical and practical. Following the implementation of the new policy, there will be two distinct minorities within the military society: open homosexuals and those who believe that the practice of homosexuality is immoral. Both minorities will believe that the position held by the other is wrong: the second group because they believe their fellow soldiers have chosen to behave in a way that is inherently immoral, and the first group because they believe the other group is bigoted and judgmental — a different form of immorality. Is it the business of the military to choose between them, or to demand that each treat the other fairly and respectfully even while disagreeing about the moral position the opposite group holds?

The thrust of the [Allsep, Levy, Parco] article is to require the second group to be silent, saying, in effect, “You may believe what you wish but you must not speak of it outside some very narrow confines.” Is this just, is it necessary, is it consistent with the constitutional guarantees relating to religion and conscience, and is it the course most likely to foster cohesion and military effectiveness? We believe it is not.

In our opinion, to uphold the Constitution, to maintain good order and discipline, to treat all fairly and to avoid becoming a battleground for society’s culture wars, the services must take a decidedly neutral stance between the two groups; they must implement the policy in a way that respects and supports the moral views of both camps.

This issue is different from the integration of race and women in that it is an issue of personal morality — the rightness or wrongness of a behavior, and the rightness or wrongness of beliefs relating to that behavior. Homosexuals, and many service members, believe that homosexuality is a morally neutral alternate lifestyle. The reason for this belief does not need elaboration: Homosexuality exists, and if it is not wrong then it is either morally neutral or a positive good.

Another group believes that homosexuality involves a behavior that is inherently wrong. This belief is based primarily, but not exclusively, on religion. While religion is not the only grounds for determining right from wrong, it most certainly is one such ground, and one professed by many Americans. To them, if God exists as a moral God, and if he has revealed some of his moral precepts, then his followers are not at liberty to contradict him.

That religions disagree in some areas, and that individuals within the same religion disagree on some particulars, and that some disagree with the validity of religion altogether, does not change the fact that if a person does believe some construct of religion — and the overwhelming majority of Americans do — he is foolish and inconsistent not to look to his religion for understanding of right and wrong. The fact that the four major faith groups in America in their traditional understanding all consider homosexuality to be a violation of the moral law of God does not mean that these traditions are right. That is not our point; rather, our point is to note that it is not the duty of the U.S. government or its military to insist that they are wrong.

So we are left with a situation in which two groups each consider the other to be wrong in its

beliefs. We profess that the U.S. military must say to both groups: Judge duty-related performance; don't go out of your way to raise issues of conflict; but at the same time protect the freedom of conscience of both groups. Get along and "soldier on" even through your disagreements. Indeed, each of you are to protect the other's right to be wrong.

In addition to the foundational issues discussed above, there are at least four specific problems with the Allsep, Levy and Parco solution to avoiding the "culture war within": First, by the standards it uses, it is itself exclusionary, divisive and disrespectful in that it judges the beliefs and words of one group to be wrong, and seeks to exclude the expression of those beliefs from normal discourse in the military society. Second, it asks of those who believe homosexuality to be immoral to either violate their consciences or their reasonable free speech. Third, it would exclude some good soldiers from military service; forced to violate their consciences by effectively endorsing (as opposed to accommodating) a behavior they believe to be wrong, those who follow their conscience will feel forced to vote with their feet.

This will be a significant denial of their rights and a loss to the defense of the nation. A major part of the argument against "don't ask, don't tell" was that it effectively deprived people of the right to serve their nation in uniform and deprived the military of the service of some good soldiers. It is neither wise nor right to do the same to a different group.

And finally, the Allsep, Levy and Parco approach asks the military to take sides in a theological-philosophical debate; in doing so, it effectively endorses the position of one group while silencing that of another.

### **FAIRNESS, DIGNITY AND RESPECT**

To be fair to both groups, we believe the services should make it clear that, from private to flag officer, all are free to hold, speak and live their beliefs as they live their lives of service. This need not be difficult or detrimental to good order and discipline. It is entirely fallacious to assume that an American, especially one imbued with the meritocratic mindset and respect for the rule of law that characterizes the military culture, cannot treat another with fairness, compassion, dignity and respect while believing that the person in question is in some ways acting immorally.

We have long dealt with differences in religion, politics and views on sensitive behaviors (such as abortion), demanding respectful, fair and equal treatment of all, without the military as an institution either taking a side in the debate or demanding silence of those on one side or another. This will require wisdom and maturity in implementation, but it is not a new challenge.

The disagreements on this issue, as on many others, involve deeply held personal moralities. Wise leadership will ensure that such disagreements do not evolve into personal attacks, but leaders should not, as representatives of the institution, take sides, nor should they stifle honest debate on the topic where such debate is relevant. As a subset of this, terms such as “fag,” “queer” and “gay” (used pejoratively) should be weeded out of the military vocabulary, especially the vocabulary of officers and noncommissioned officers. At the same time, such labels as “bigot” and “homophobe” should be weeded out when applied to those who hold to a belief that homosexuality is morally wrong.

The message coming through training and the chain of command must be clear: Homosexual soldiers will be treated with dignity and respect. They will be evaluated based on the performance of their military duties irrespective of their sexual orientation. Concurrently, those who believe homosexuality is wrong are not silenced; they are free to hold, express and discuss those beliefs in appropriate settings and without personally demeaning other soldiers. They, too, will be treated with dignity and respect and evaluated on the performance of their military duties irrespective of their views relating to homosexuality. This is how a military serves a pluralistic democracy.

The intra-cultural debate regarding homosexuality will become a war within the military only if one side insists on winning the debate. Congress has said that homosexuality is not a barrier to good soldiering. It has not said, nor should it or the services say, that believing homosexuality is wrong is a barrier to good soldiering. The military has long led the way in showing that Americans can live, work and thrive together even when their backgrounds and beliefs are different. The services know how to defend the nation’s values and interests while respecting fellow soldiers’ right to be wrong. This is another opportunity to do the same.

---

**Al Shine** and his wife, Sandra, live in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. They participate actively in the chapel programs of the U.S. Army War College.

**Don M. Snider** and his wife, Caroline, live in Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and also participate actively in the Army War College Chapel programs. He is a member of the Adjunct Faculty at the AWC and also serves as Senior Fellow in the Center for the Army Profession and Ethic (CAPE).

The original version of this article appeared in the “Commentary” section of the *Armed Forces Journal*, May 2011, published by the Army Times Publishing Company, copyright 2011. Republished by permission. The views expressed in this commentary are those of the authors. Thus they are not necessarily the official views of any U.S. Government agency with which these authors are connected.