

UNFRIENDLY FIRE

HOW THE GAY BAN
UNDERMINES THE MILITARY
AND WEAKENS AMERICA

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Gays in Foreign Militaries

THE CLEAREST EVIDENCE that openly gay service does not undermine unit cohesion comes from the experience of foreign militaries. Twenty-four now have no ban on gay service members: Australia, Austria, Bahamas, Belgium, Britain, Canada, the Czech Republic, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, France, Ireland, Israel, Italy, Lithuania, Luxembourg, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Slovenia, South Africa, Spain, Sweden, and Switzerland. The United States, with its ban on open gays, stands in the company of Argentina, Belarus, Brazil, Croatia, Greece, Poland, Peru, Portugal, Russia, Turkey, and Venezuela. The list does not include those countries in which homosexuality is banned outright, such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and several other nations in the Middle East. These countries generally have no stated policy on gays in the military because they do not allow or acknowledge the presence of gays at all.

In the fall of 1992, just as Bill Clinton was clinching the U.S. presidency, Canada and Australia lifted their bans on gay service members. And in 1993, as the religious right and Sam Nunn were wooing the nation with their pro-ban messages, Israel followed suit. At the dawn of the twenty-first century, our staunchest ally and cultural compatriot, Great Britain, joined a growing tide of militaries allowing openly gay service. The cumulative picture is striking. The American military was certainly not alone in its opposition to gay service; indeed, much of the world has had formal or informal bans against gays in the armed forces (or, in the case of many countries with no written policy on gay service, collective illusions that gays don't exist). But as the late twentieth century saw an inexorable shift toward recognizing the rights of gays and other minority groups, the U.S. military distinguished itself through its willful resistance to change. Throughout the 1990s, as the American government dug in its heels despite mounting evidence that "don't ask, don't tell" wasn't working, other countries around the globe were taking the opposite tack.

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The effects of allowing gays to serve openly were, to the surprise of these militaries themselves, stunningly anticlimatic. It is perhaps one of the reasons why so few people knew about the changes—the media is not wild about stories in which, quite simply, nothing happens. But the lessons from other nations, despite efforts by pro-ban Americans to ignore and dismiss their relevance to the United States, are profound, and make a closer look at the experiences of foreign militaries a worthwhile trip.

UNTIL 1988, THE Canadian Forces had in place a policy nearly identical to the American ban: Gays and lesbians were barred from service and anyone who believed a peer was gay was required to report the suspicion to a superior. The Canadian ban was relaxed in 1988, as pressure mounted to bring the policy in line with the 1978 Canadian Human Rights Act and the 1985 Canadian Charter of Rights and Freedoms. The initial changes involved removing the reporting requirement and loosening enforcement, but unequal treatment of heterosexual and gay troops remained: Known gays and lesbians were routinely denied promotions, security clearances, and awards. The Department of National Defence continued to argue that a formal ban was necessary to protect “cohesion and morale, discipline, leadership, recruiting, medical fitness, and the rights to privacy of other members.”¹

Yet momentum was growing in favor of change. Inspired by other court decisions, five service members sued the Canadian Forces and won an initial ruling that the gay ban violated the Charter of Rights and Freedoms. Ultimately the Canadian military agreed to settle its case in 1992, acknowledging that it was unlikely to win the case on its merits.

It is commonly thought that progressive reform in Canada went over without a whit of resistance. In fact, opposition was intense. Surveys showed that majorities of those in the military would not share sleeping and bathing quarters with known gays, and many said they would refuse to work with gays or accept a gay supervisor. A military task force was formed during the debate; it recommended that gay exclusion remain, as “the effect of the presence of homosexuals would [lead to] a serious decrease in operational effectiveness.” Even when the military determined it would lose its case in court, the government delayed the change because of the vociferous opposition of Conservatives in Parliament. The similarities to opposition in the United States were striking.²

The Australian Defence Forces did not see quite the same fight. Until 1986 commanders were given wide discretion to decide when to boot gays, and leaders were able to rely on civilian laws against sodomy and homosexual re-

lations to root them out. Ironically, in 1986, at the very moment when the rest of society was liberalizing its limitations on homosexual behavior, the Australian military tightened its own regulations. State and federal laws banning sodomy fell during this decade as the country brought its laws into conformity with new international human rights accords. Unable to continue to draw on civilian laws against homosexual behavior, the ADF banned homosexual service outright in 1986.³

The short-lived Australian gay ban was always weaker than the policies in many of its ally nations. While there were reports of witch hunts and unequal treatment, the policy was often enforced unevenly and the tolerance and inconsistent enforcement extended to commanders throughout the services, who were often aware of gays and lesbians under their command and took no steps to kick them out. In the years leading up to the ban's formal end, the ADF had been pressed to respond to several cultural trends toward liberalization and to specific complaints that the military was not doing enough to recruit, retain, and respect women and racial and ethnic minorities. Such criticism could not be ignored, as the armed forces were finding it difficult to fill their ranks.⁴

It was in this context—one that highlighted the needs of the military as much as the social and cultural pressures for greater tolerance—that the Australian military began to consider formally ending its restrictions on gays and lesbians. Legal considerations also held sway: In 1980, the Commonwealth had adopted the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights, and while homosexuality was not mentioned, political leaders interpreted the covenant to ban discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation. When a lesbian soldier complained to the Australian Human Rights and Equal Opportunities Commission that her sexual orientation was the partial basis of her discharge, the ADA agreed to review its policy but chose to retain its formal ban.

Political pressure, however, was mounting and the government created a study group to look into the policy and make a formal recommendation. During the study period, those who opposed gay service made the familiar arguments: The presence of known gays and lesbians would compromise effectiveness by impairing cohesion and driving down morale. Nevertheless, the study group recommended in 1992 that the gay ban be replaced with a policy of nondiscrimination, and the liberal government of Prime Minister Paul Keating, helped by the health minister's argument that keeping homosexuality secret exacerbated efforts to fight AIDS, ordered the new policy implemented immediately.⁵

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As was the case elsewhere, the changes were vehemently opposed. The major veterans group in Australia insisted that tolerating known gays would undermine cohesion and break the bonds of trust that were essential to an effective military. Some claimed that the presence of gays would increase the spread of HIV through battlefield blood transfers. It didn't seem to occur to them that the best way to fight this prospect was to identify gays with AIDS rather than require them to remain in the closet.

Like Australia, Israel did not have a long-standing, explicit ban on homosexual service members, but used discretion to determine when commanders believed gay or lesbian troops were problematic and worthy of exclusion. For most of the country's short history, not surprisingly, routine prejudice meant that the Israel Defense Forces dismissed known gays because leaders assumed their sexuality made them unsuitable. A 1983 regulation made clear that service members were not to be discharged simply because they were gay, but required them to undergo a mental health evaluation and banned them from top-secret positions.⁶

A decade later, while the United States was embroiled in an agonizing discussion about gay service, Israel began its own, more tempered debate. Ironically, given how American policy ended up, Israeli officials acknowledged that President Clinton's support for gay service had been influential in driving debate in Israel, where the issue of gay rights had never been discussed at such high levels of government. The discussion was also prompted by an unusual hearing at the Knesset, when Uzi Even, the chairman of the Chemistry Department at Tel Aviv University and a senior weapons development researcher, told the nation he had been stripped of his security clearance when his homosexuality was revealed. Even had supplied the government with top-notch security research for fifteen years. He was deemed a security threat even though he had just come out of the closet, thus neutralizing any possibility of blackmail.⁷

With the vocal support of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin, who stated, "I don't see any reason to discriminate against homosexuals," and the military chief of staff, Lieutenant General Ehud Barak, a military committee was created to review the policy and make recommendations for change. With no military officials testifying against reform,⁸ the review committee recommended new regulations that officially "recognized that homosexuals are entitled to serve in the military as are others." In response, the Israeli military banned any restrictions or differential treatment based on sexual orientation and ordered that decisions about placement, promotion, and security clearances be based on individual aptitude and behavior without regard to orientation.

The absence of official resistance did not mean that Israel had ceased to be a homophobic culture—founded, as it was, on biblical precepts, with a government heavily influenced by religious Jews and a society enamored of macho men. A study conducted in the 1980s found that Israeli attitudes toward homosexuals were more negative than American attitudes. Even in the 1990s, Israel's organized gay rights lobby was minuscule compared to its American counterpart, thus limiting the strength of voices pressing for reform. And the military was, as in the United States, a particularly conservative institution within the larger society. During induction, gays were referred to a psychologist for an evaluation. “Based on the assumption, correct or incorrect, that sometimes along with homosexuality come other behavioral disturbances, we conduct a more in-depth clinical interview,” said Dr. Reuven Gal, who was chief psychologist for the IDF.⁹

In the early 1990s, Ron Paran, a psychologist working with gays and lesbians in Israel, found marked homophobia in Israeli society, particularly in the military. “I think there are still a lot of people in the psychiatric profession and in the army who still see homosexuality as a problem,” he said, “and this policy is their way of expressing that.” Paran said Israel was a “paradox” in which the laws are “much more liberal than the general society.” As in society generally, he said the military was instinctually uncomfortable with homosexuality. “I work with a lot of teachers and parents who may cognitively understand homosexuality, but in their emotional response to it are still very backward. The army is the same way.”¹⁰

Yet as a nation with compulsory service, which recognized the formative role of that service in creating a sense of citizenship, Israel determined by 1993 that it was unfair, unwise, and unnecessary to bar an entire group of people from the military. Its new regulations said that “there is no limit on the induction of homosexuals to the army and their induction is according to the criteria that apply to all candidates to the army.”¹¹

That spring, Congress sent researchers from the General Accounting Office to Israel and three other countries to learn from the reforms implemented there. But because the IDF was a conscription military, in which service was mandatory for most Israeli citizens,¹² some opponents of gay service in the United States dismissed the notion that any lessons could be learned from Israel. Lifting the remaining ban in Israel, they pointed out, was less perilous than in other nations, which relied on volunteers to staff their armed forces (the term more properly should be “voluntary recruits” since “volunteer” implies someone who is unpaid, but the language employed here is the traditional usage). Recruitment and retention were therefore not at risk in Israel,

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where citizens had no choice about whether to join the armed forces and could not be scared off by the presence of open gays.

But the same could not be said of Great Britain, a powerful western European nation that shares cultural roots with the United States, and whose military is strong, voluntary, and combat-tested. Indeed, British troops routinely fight alongside American troops, sharing everything from logistical support to personnel, including commanders. What happened, then, when Great Britain lifted its ban?

Like the United States, Britain banned gay service throughout the twentieth century, just as its civilian laws initially criminalized sexual relations between men. (Because Queen Elizabeth purportedly refused to believe that lesbianism existed, there were no laws against female same-sex relationships.) Depending on the service branch, the military dealt with homosexuals either by banning them outright or by charging them with “disgraceful conduct of an indecent kind,” “conduct prejudicial to good order or discipline,” or “scandalous conduct by officers.”¹³

Reflecting the similarities of American and British culture, the same rationales were invoked to justify the exclusion rules in Britain as in the United States. Only the spelling was different. “Homosexual behaviour can cause offence, polarize relationships, induce ill-discipline, and as a consequence damage morale and unit effectiveness,” argued the British Ministry of Defence. One retired general told the BBC that letting gays serve meant “striking at the root of discipline and morale” since service members had to “live hugger-mugger at most times.” The general summarized his opposition on behalf of straight troops by arguing that “the great majority do not want to be brought into contact with homosexual practices.” Another retired officer who commanded UN forces in Bosnia recalled that when he had two gay soldiers in his battalion, he “had extreme difficulty in controlling the remainder of the soldiers because they fundamentally wanted to lynch them.”¹⁴ In neither country did ban defenders ever explain how denying the presence of gay people who everyone knew were there actually helped preserve privacy, nor why service members who had signed up precisely to leave behind their privacy and risk their very lives should be expected to wither, wilt, and crumble when knowingly exposed to the gaze of gays.

The British rationale for gay exclusion also shared much of its history with the United States. Its language spoke of “sexual deviancy” and “feminine gestures,” of mental illness and sexually transmitted diseases. The same distinctions between identity and behavior were made, followed by the same collapsing of those distinctions: Like the American policy, the British rules

specified that the admission of homosexuality was grounds for dismissal even if no behavior was involved. The history of gays in the British military is replete with surveillance, informants, blackmail, stakeouts, investigations, and psychological exams.¹⁵

By the time the British High Court heard a major challenge to the gay ban in 1995, most of the above rationales had been annihilated. Although the court rebuffed the service members' challenge and allowed the military to continue its ban, the Ministry of Defence created the Homosexual Policy Assessment Team to evaluate its policy. The move was a response to a warning by the court that, despite its current ruling in favor of the military, the gay ban was unlikely to survive a direct challenge in the European Convention on Human Rights, which, unlike the British High Court, had the authority to force the military's hand.

The assessment team consulted the experiences of other countries, including Canada, Australia, and Israel. In their visits, they were told by official after official that gay service had not undermined military performance. In response, British researchers acknowledged that the ban could be lifted, but that such a change would be unlikely not because of a military rationale but because of political resistance. The team also took extensive, but flawed, surveys indicating that large majorities of British troops opposed gay service. Questions were stacked ("Do you agree that all homosexual acts are perverted?") and anonymity was compromised by the requirement that respondents disclose numerous personal details, including their service branch, unit, rank, and birthplace.¹⁶

Ultimately, the team recommended that the military retain its ban. But the rationale it focused on revealed the collapse of all but one of the justifications for gay exclusion. The assumption that gays were a threat to security and a predatory menace to young troops, said the report, was unfounded.¹⁷ Rather, the problem was that straight soldiers disliked gays; letting known gays serve would therefore undermine cohesion and threaten recruitment. Prejudice had become a justification, once again, for continuing itself. Lifting the ban, said the report, "would be an affront to service people" and lead to "heterosexual resentment and hostility." Reform at the urging of civilian society would be viewed by military members as "coercive interference in their way of life."

And there you had it. The self-image of the British military, its members' sense of entitlement to preserve a way of life they saw as besieged, and to carry things out in the way they saw fit—these were the currency of the debate. That "way of life" was a polite way of describing heterosexual supremacy

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or prejudice against gays. The report made clear that there was no evidence that gays were unsuited to military service. But, as in the American debate, the moral opposition of straights was cleverly tied to military needs, allowing senior leaders to argue that military effectiveness justified gay exclusion.

Leaders of the British forces were not stupid, however, and they were not blind to the changes in society taking shape around them throughout the 1990s. Bracing for a heftier challenge in the European Court of Human Rights, which threatened to cost the government billions in wrongful dismissal claims, the military ordered a relaxation of enforcement of the ban, telling commanders only to investigate suspected homosexuals if an unavoidable problem arose. For gays, the change was minimal: They continued to lose their jobs, receive unequal treatment, and operate in a climate of discrimination, fear, and uncertainty.

It was not until the European Court of Human Rights issued its ruling, in the fall of 1999, that the British government agreed it would have to lift the ban. The court in Strasbourg, France, whose decisions are binding on all member nations, was composed of judges from Britain, France, Cyprus, Lithuania, Austria, Norway, and Albania. The unanimous ruling found that the British Defence Ministry had violated the European Convention's guarantee of an "equal respect" to "private and family life" and that the policy and the investigations it prompted were "exceptionally intrusive."¹⁸ The court soundly rejected the military's claim that the unique circumstances of life in the armed forces justified anti-gay discrimination and ruled that heterosexual bias against gays was no more compelling a reason to ban them than would be animus against groups with a different race or ethnic or national origin. It swiftly dismissed the military's contention that gay service would endanger morale, saying the foundation of such arguments in opinion polls made them unconvincing. A better way to address these worries, said the court, would be with a uniform code of conduct, not a blanket ban on individuals with a particular orientation.

The Ministry of Defence immediately announced that it accepted the ruling and it ordered a halt to all discharges while it studied how to abide by the court's decision. The chief of defence staff general, despite expecting some tough scenarios for commanding officers, expressed confidence in the military's ability to make the changes, saying that "times have changed" since the gay ban was first formulated. "I don't believe that the operational efficiency of the Services will be affected," he said, "although I'm not saying we won't have some difficult incidents." Ultimately, he concluded, "We think we can make it work."¹⁹

In trying to figure out how to “make it work,” the British military considered the American “don’t ask, don’t tell” policy. What they found was that it was a “disaster,” which “hadn’t worked,” was “unworkable,” and was “hypocritical.” Instead, the British military opted for full repeal and based its new regulations on the Australian model, which simply banned public displays of affection, harassment, and inappropriate relationships. The Ministry of Defence formally lifted its gay ban on January 12, 2000, inviting ousted troops to reapply for service and squirreling away millions of dollars for anticipated legal complaints for unfair dismissal.

AFTER RUNNING OUT of rationales for gay exclusion, the British military, like the U.S. military, had justified discrimination on the basis of discrimination. The European Court of Human Rights was unconvinced that this reasoning showed a compelling need to ban gays from service. Still, if the prejudice of young straight troops and potential recruits truly meant that forced tolerance would undermine military performance and the capacity of the British government to keep its people safe, and if no leadership or management skills were capable of mitigating this harm, shouldn’t this reality have justified continuing discrimination against gays?

Answering this question is necessarily, in part, an ethical question, subject to a cost-benefit analysis. It requires assessing the value of equal treatment and comparing it with the damage that would be wrought—if any—by the ensuing impairment to military performance. But the link itself—between equal treatment and damage to cohesion—remains totally unproven. Worse still, the evidence from country after country shows the link to be false. In the real world, the hypothesis is testable—and it has been tested. So, after all the caution, after all the anxiety and the doomsday warnings about what would happen when open gays were officially allowed to serve, what happened when Britain, Israel, Canada, Australia, and numerous other militaries lifted their bans?

Nothing. Well, almost nothing. The only effects of lifting gay exclusion rules have been positive ones. Militaries in Great Britain, Australia, Canada, and Israel have seen reductions in harassment, less anxiety about sexual orientation in the ranks, greater openness in relations between gays and straights, and less restricted access to recruitment pools as schools and universities welcomed the military back onto campus for dropping their discriminatory practices. Above all, none of the crises in recruitment, retention, resignations, morale, cohesion, readiness, or “operational effectiveness” came to pass.

One of the strongest pieces of evidence came from the British military

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itself. Six months after lifting its ban, the Ministry of Defence turned to study the consequences. The report was intended for internal use only and not for public release—which suggests that it represented an accurate, comprehensive assessment of the policy change, without risk of being swayed by the requisites of politics or public relations. And it had the benefit of full access to all available data.

The conclusions were definitive. The report, dated October 31, 2000, and eventually leaked to the press, said the lifting of the ban was “hailed as a solid achievement” that was “introduced smoothly with fewer problems than might have been expected.” The changes had “no discernible impact” on recruitment. There was “widespread acceptance of the new policy,” and military members generally “demonstrated a mature and pragmatic approach” to the change. There were no reported problems with homosexuals harassing heterosexuals, and there were “no reported difficulties of note concerning homophobic behavior amongst Service Personnel.” The report concluded that “there has been a marked lack of reaction” to the change.²⁰

Independent assessments by senior government and military officials in Britain consistently confirmed the military’s findings that lifting the gay ban in Britain had no negative impact on performance. “At the end of the day, operational effectiveness is the critical matter, and there has been no effect at all,” reported a high-level official. Just nine months after the new policy was instituted, this official said that “homosexuality doesn’t even come up anymore—it’s no longer an issue.” One lieutenant colonel reported that “there has been absolutely no reaction to the change in policy regarding homosexuals within the military. It’s just been accepted.” He said that emphasis on fair treatment and personal responsibility meant people had ceased to focus on sexual orientation and cared far more about individual performance and responsibility to the team. Even the very vocal worries about privacy and sharing showers and berths with gays—a perpetual focus of resistance in the United States—turned out to be a dud. A press official at the Ministry of Defence said that “the media likes scare stories—about showers and what have you. A lot of people were worried that they would have to share body heat in close quarters or see two men being affectionate, and they would feel uncomfortable. But it has proved at first look that it’s not an issue.”²¹

Again and again, experts expressed surprise at how little the change had meant, and how much easier the transition had been than what they expected, given the vocal resistance before the ban ended. The military’s director of personnel said, “We’ve had very few real problems that have emerged, and people seem to have, slightly surprisingly, settled down and accepted the

current arrangements. And we don't really have the problems that we thought we'd have." An official of the Personnel Management Agency said, "The anticipated tide of criticism from some quarters within the Service was completely unfounded." One commander attributed the smoother-than-anticipated transition to a generation gap, finding that "our youngsters have just taken it in stride." He concluded that "it's a major nonissue, which has come as a considerable surprise."²²

What's surprising, really, is that the results in Britain should have surprised so many people. The finding of "no impact" there was simply an echo of what had happened (or hadn't happened, to be more precise) in Canada, Australia, and Israel the decade before. Perhaps people had put too much stock in the 1996 Ministry of Defence opinion survey of 13,500 British service members, which showed that two-thirds would refuse to serve with gays. Instead of the tens of thousands of resignations this poll predicted, officials estimated the actual number as between one and three, and two of those were reportedly planning to leave the service anyway.

But even this contrast between anticipated doom and yawning reality was a replay of the scenario in Canada. Before the Canadian Forces lifted the gay ban, a survey of 6,500 male service members found that 62 percent would refuse to share quarters with gay soldiers and 45 percent would not work with gays. But more than two years after gay exclusion ended, there was no mass exodus and no indication of any impact on cohesion, morale, readiness, recruitment, or retention. An assessment 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."²³

What was true for Britain and Canada was also true for Israel and Australia. Indeed, the results of ending gay exclusion rules in every nation studied have been so uniform, so uneventful, so tediously boring and repetitive that they are almost too dull to describe. A small sampling will have to suffice, so as not to grind book sales to a halt. The Rand report, released in the United States and effectively ignored in the spring of 1993, included an exhaustive assessment of homosexual policies in Canada, Israel, and Britain, as well as Norway, the Netherlands, France, and Germany. At the time, Britain was the only nation to have a full ban on gay service. Of those that allowed gays to serve, Rand found that "none of the militaries studied for this report believe their effectiveness as an organization has been impaired or reduced as a result of the inclusion of homosexuals." In Canada, where the ban had just ended, Rand found "no resignations (despite previous threats to quit), no

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problems with recruitment, and no diminution of cohesion, morale, or organizational effectiveness.” Ditto Israel. 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.²⁴

Also in 1993, the GAO reported its findings from its study of twenty-five foreign militaries. In Australia, the GAO found, “Effects on unit cohesiveness have not yet been fully determined. However, early indications are that the new policy has had little or no adverse impact.” Research over time, however, confirmed that openly gay service there caused no trouble. In 1996, when Britain was considering lifting its ban, government researchers issued a report on the situation in Australia, which concluded that, despite an early outcry, homosexuality quickly became a nonissue: Any challenges in integrating open gays were regarded as “just another legitimate management problem.” The GAO found precisely the same results for Israel.²⁵

In 2000, after Britain lifted its ban, the Palm Center at the University of California, Santa Barbara, conducted exhaustive studies to assess the effects of openly gay service in Britain, Israel, Canada, and Australia. Researchers there reviewed over six hundred documents and contacted every identifiable professional with expertise on the policy change, including military officers, government leaders, academic researchers, journalists who covered the issue, veterans, and nongovernmental observers. Palm found that not one person had observed any impact or any effect at all that “undermined military performance, readiness, or cohesion, led to increased difficulties in recruiting or retention, or increased the rate of HIV infection among the troops.” Those interviewed—including generals, civilian defense leaders, field commanders, and many officials who had predicted major problems if gays were permitted to serve openly—uniformly reported there had been “no impact.” Again and again, researchers heard the same thing: Lifting the ban was “an absolute non-event.” Openly gay service was “not that big a deal for us.” Open gays “do not constitute an issue [with respect to] unit cohesion” and the whole subject “is very marginal indeed as far as this military is concerned.” Whether gays serve openly or not “has not impaired the morale, cohesion, readiness, or security of any unit.” The policy change has “not caused any degree of difficulty.”²⁶

The results did not mean that everybody was happy with openly gay service. Nor did researchers conclude that such resistance and resentment were entirely without consequence. Many, many people were upset about the idea.

Male service members, in particular, continued to express concern that the presence of known gays in a unit might damage morale, and the anti-gay sentiment sometimes manifested itself in harassment or abuse. But the evidence has been consistent that these reactions to the policy change did not translate into overall impairment of morale, readiness, or cohesion.

The British military was so convinced by these findings that, in 2006, the Royal Air Force announced it would hire Stonewall, the largest gay rights group in Britain, to help it attract gay and lesbian recruits. The deal meant the RAF would be placed on Stonewall's Workplace Equality Index, a list of Britain's one hundred top employers for gays and lesbians, and that Stonewall would provide intensive training about how to create an inclusive workplace environment with greater appeal to gays and lesbians. The RAF also agreed to provide equal survivor benefits to same-sex partners and to become a sponsor of the gay pride festival. "The Armed Forces are committed to establishing a culture and climate where those who choose to disclose their sexual orientation can do so without risk of abuse or intimidation," said the Ministry of Defence.²⁷

The RAF action was prompted in part by recruitment shortfalls. But the move also makes clear that the British Forces believe that a climate of inclusivity and equal treatment makes for a superior military, further evidence that the only impact of gay inclusion is a positive one. At the 2007 British gay pride parade, a Royal Navy commander made this point, stressing that what mattered to military effectiveness was teamwork. "If the team is functioning properly, then we're a professional fighting force," he said. "We want individuals to be themselves 100 percent, so they can give 100 percent and we value them 100 percent." Background, "lifestyle," and sexuality were not a part of the equation, he said, adding that the British military recruits "purely on merit and ability" and new members become a "member of the team and are valued as such."²⁸ As the year 2000 British Ministry of Defence internal assessment had suggested, the replacement of a group-specific ban with a policy of equal treatment had helped to shift focus away from sexual identity, precisely the aim of the new policy and, incidentally, the opposite of the effect that the American policy of "don't ask, don't tell" has had. Because the new Code of Social Conduct in the British Forces emphasized good behavior and fair treatment for all, sexuality was now regarded as a private matter and service members were freed to concentrate on the duty of each member to behave in ways that were beneficial to the group. The report indicated that the policy change had produced "a marked lack of reaction. Discussion has rather been concerned with freedom of individual choice and exercising personal responsibility across the board, rather than a focus just on sexual orientation."

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The Ministry of Defence report also indicated that, because colleges no longer banned the military from campus, recruitment prospects were brightened by greater access to potential recruits: “Some areas that had previously closed to the Forces, such as Student Union ‘Freshers’ Fairs,’ are now allowing access to the Services because of what is seen to be a more enlightened approach.” Indeed, the Ministry of Defence called recruitment “quite buoyant” in the year after the ban was lifted. After several years of shortfalls, the year both before and after the policy change finally saw recruiting targets filled.²⁹

Reports from many countries now suggest that ending gay exclusion policies may be the best way to move beyond the worrisome focus on sexual identity and its effects on military cohesion. This is certainly true for the gay and lesbian service members themselves, who generally “breathed a sigh of relief”³⁰ when they learned they no longer had to lie to serve their countries. But the effects of liberalization go beyond just the obvious impact on gays to impact straight people, too. These effects reach to the heart of heterosexual’s anxiety about their own role in the military, about how they should behave with respect to homosexuality and how they should interact with those they suspect or know to be gay. And whether such concerns are conscious or not, anyone who serves in a modern Western military must at some point confront the issue of sexuality. The only question is whether they will do so in a way that is healthy or unhealthy for the group.

Chief Petty Officer Rob Nunn, who had been discharged from the Royal Navy in 1992 for being gay, rejoined the British Forces after the ban was lifted in 2000. The response from his comrades was overwhelmingly positive when he returned, and he was even asked casually if his partner would be accompanying him to the Christmas ball. But what’s most instructive about Nunn’s experience is the impact of the new transparency not on him but on his straight comrades. Immediately after his reinstatement, Nunn found his colleagues were unsure how to respond to him. “It’s the old, ‘I don’t know quite what to say,’” he explained in an interview. With one other service member, in particular, Nunn decided to guide him to a place of greater comfort, now that he could take advantage of the option to speak freely. This “one guy that I talked to who couldn’t sort of talk to me, I said, ‘Right, I’m going to ask the questions that you want to ask, and answer them.’ So I did.” Nunn reported that the greater openness, whether it came from him or from others, allowed any remaining discomfort to evaporate and gave him the chance to counter stereotypes, expose friends to greater understanding, and put people at ease. After Nunn helped his reticent comrade out of his shell, the person became “nice as pie.”³¹

Having the choice to speak out when it's necessary or desirable yields another highly important fruit: It allows those who are threatened by anti-gay harassment to confront their perpetrator or inform authorities without fear of coming under investigation themselves and facing discharge. Fear of reprisal has been a serious problem in the American military, particularly for women, who are all too often the victims of lesbian-baiting. The term describes a scenario when women who rebuff the advances of men are tarred as lesbian, whether they are straight or not. The phenomenon helps explain why women are discharged at higher rates than men: Many may come out to take control of a situation that otherwise threatens to end in a discharge that's out of their control. Stark evidence of the positive impact of ending gay exclusion is found in the case of Canada, where the number of women who experienced sexual harassment dropped by a whopping 46 percent after the ban was lifted. The drop may not have been exclusively caused by reforming the gay policy, but the statistic can't be ignored. Given the heavily documented evidence for lesbian-baiting as a cause of harassment against women, the decrease in Canada clearly shows the positive, rather than negative, effects of gay inclusion on military cohesion.³²

Even when harassment statistics are not this clear, though, there is no doubt that the pressure generated by gay exclusion rules to fixate on the private lives of service members is itself a threat to cohesion and morale. This is why Australia's human rights commissioner said he believed his country's termination of the ban had positive effects on the military. "It's bad for morale to have your guys snooping on other of your guys," he concluded. This conclusion is borne out by evidence from gay service members, who reported after the ban ended that the liberalized policy allowed them to spend less energy monitoring what they and others said and more focusing on their work. One army captain, Squadron Leader Chris Renshaw, said that under Australia's new policy, "you can be more honest. That's one of the key things about being in the military—honesty and integrity. Because you haven't got to worry about if someone's saying something behind your back, or is someone gossiping or something, because if they gossip, I don't care. So I'm more focused on my job, I'm more focused on what I'm achieving here, and less worried about [rumors] and what people think. In terms of productivity, I'm far more productive now. . . . Everything's out in the open, no fear, no nothing, no potential of blackmail, no security implications . . . nothing." Renshaw spoke of the positive impact of the new opportunity for casual banter, so much a part of the military bonding experience. Planning to take his male partner to the Christmas party, he told his superior as a courtesy. "He just

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looked at me with a bit of a pained expression and said, 'I expect you to behave.' And I just sort of looked at him and said, 'Look, knowing the other people that work on this floor and how they behave with booze, you're worried about me?'"³³

An enlisted member of the Royal Australian Navy echoed the importance of teasing as a form of bonding and the positive role of joking even about sexual orientation: "I'm quite open about my sexuality. Sometimes the boys decide to give me a bit of a ding-up with a joke or something like that, but that doesn't bother me. We work really well together, and I'm sure it's the same for other gay and lesbian soldiers and sailors who are out, and they're accepted by their peers. O.K.—they're the object of ridicule sometimes, but everybody is." Military experts must surely understand how central it is for young people in the armed forces to navigate their relationships, in part, through playful insults and oneupmanship, at times becoming caustic or even aggressive. It's no secret that the military functions as a proving ground, both as part of the training process and apart from it. Yet many of these experts have cherry-picked instances of gay-straight tension and cast them as dangerous examples of social strife, when in fact it is part and parcel of the military bonding experience.³⁴

The Palm Center study on the Australian Defence Forces in 2000 reported that working environments had improved significantly for gay service members following the end of the ban. But yet again, the most telling lesson from that experience is the impact of reform on the rest of the military. In conjunction with lifting the ban, the ADF issued new instructions on sexual conduct and equal treatment, and leaders made a visible commitment to taking these seriously. As a result, service members saw a marked improvement in a military climate that had failed in the past to adequately respect the promise of equal opportunity not just for gays but for women, for blacks, and for ethnic minorities. The climate of fear and instances of betrayal that had accompanied life for gays in the Australian military carried over to affect the lives of straights, too. In one case, a service member who was reportedly heterosexual committed suicide after coming under investigation for his association with a gay sailor.³⁵ Suicide is obviously the product of a complex array of personal and social issues. But there's no question that living in a repressive climate of unnecessary, unspoken taboos is an aggravating factor in yielding such a tragic result.

IT IS POSSIBLE, in theory, that all the nations of the world could integrate open gays seamlessly and the United States of America could still be incap-

ble of doing the same. The world's superpower is unique culturally, historically, and militarily—so goes the argument. It cannot afford to take its cues from other, weaker nations, and a traditional streak running through its society bodes ill for imposing liberal norms of sexuality onto the more conservative military population. As more and more countries lifted their bans in the 1990s, conservatives in the United States rushed to make the "irrelevance" case, not long after ban defenders had used those very same countries (before they lifted their bans) as models of appropriate policy on gays.

Bill O'Reilly summed up this case succinctly: "Just remember the different cultures in Britain, Israel, Australia, and the United States," O'Reilly said on his immensely popular television program, *The O'Reilly Factor*. "Different cultures."³⁶ O'Reilly's point was that eighteen- and nineteen-year-olds from middle America were not the gay-loving, French wine—swilling soldiers of progressive Europe, and whatever went over well there would not necessarily go over well here.

As retired colonel David Hackworth put it, "I don't think gays will ever be openly accepted in the military . . . [by] corn-fed guys from Iowa." Hackworth, who served four tours in Vietnam and ratcheted up over a hundred medals, played the typical "it's not me, it's them" card, saying, "In the views of thousands of soldiers I've spoken to, it won't work." But his own position was hiding in plain sight. When questioned by a group of newspaper editors at the U.S. Naval Academy, Hackworth said he believed gays would make sexual advances if allowed in the military because "it's their nature," and cited an army captain from his Vietnam days who had propositioned another man while drinking at a party. Asked if straight army men ever drank and made passes at women, he said that in airborne units, "we never did anything like that."³⁷ Hackworth seemed to be trying to prove that the United States was far more boorish than our allied countries, a point for which he was all too happy to sell gays down the river—while, of course, drawing the line when it came to the vaunted behavior of his fellow straight troops.

How different, though, was the United States from other cultures, in actual fact? As previously discussed, evidence suggests that Israel was slightly more homophobic than the United States in the 1990s. In Britain, a law was passed in 1987 banning any discussion in schools that promoted the acceptability of homosexuality. Even in the 1990s, a majority of the British, according to polls, believed sex between members of the same sex was always wrong. In Canada, in the years preceding the admission of open gays, polls showed strong moral disapproval of homosexuality. Military researchers at the U.S. Army Research Institute for the Behavioral and Social Sciences regard the

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Anglo-American nations (the UK, Canada, Australia, New Zealand, and Ireland) as sharing “a more-or-less common cultural heritage” with the United States. The researchers pointed to a 1992 study in Germany that found that respondents viewed homosexuals as less acceptable neighbors than foreigners, Hindus, racial minorities, and Jews, and equated gays and lesbians with criminals, AIDS patients, and the mentally handicapped. In France, “deviant behavior” was tolerated because, as it was a Catholic country, the possibility of forgiveness for sin was always available.³⁸ Not exactly a ringing endorsement for homosexuals. Corn-fed Iowans, it turns out, may not be all that different from their military brethren in the rest of the world.

IN ANY CASE, the U.S. military has never found it irrelevant to learn from other countries, big and small. In 1986, it created the Foreign Military Studies Office in order to research and learn “about the military establishments, doctrine and operational and tactical practices of” foreign armed forces. The FMSO, which expanded its work after the fall of the Soviet Union, studies not only technological, strategic, and tactical operations of foreign militaries, but those relating to cultural aspects of service, such as housing, health care, and personnel policy.³⁹

The FMSO was apparently meaningless to Calvin Waller, who had referred in his congressional testimony to “China men” and lumped gays and lesbians in with liars and thieves. Waller’s confused testimony both compared the U.S. military to foreign armed forces and simultaneously rejected doing so. The general said he was “dismayed” that so many would compare the U.S. military—the world’s sole superpower—to that of other countries. “When we allow comparisons of smaller countries to this great nation of ours, the comparison between these countries with their policies regarding known homosexuals serving their country, it is my belief that we do a grave disservice to our fellow American citizens.” Other militaries, he said, have unionized forces, seldom deploy abroad, and let their troops return home at night.⁴⁰

Given his indignant repudiation of the relevance of foreign militaries, it was bizarre that in the very same testimony, he cited the small nation of Korea as a model for the United States: “Now, . . . my experience in Korea leads me to understand that their policy is ‘no toleration of known homosexuals in their ranks.’” He didn’t stop there. “In all my dealing with the many nations who provided military forces to Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm,” he continued, “the vast majority of those nations, as you have heard here today, did not allow known homosexuals to serve in their military units, who

were part of the Persian Gulf forces. This is something that was not lost on this old soldier.”⁴¹

Like Waller, Charlie Moskos had testified at Nunn’s hearings about the limited relevance of foreign militaries. “No neat and tidy lessons can be drawn from one country to another,” he said. Moskos told the senators that studying foreign militaries could yield some insight into the matter of gay service. But ultimately, he said, “inasmuch as the United States has the most formidable military force in the world, it could be argued that such countries might draw lessons from the United States.”⁴² The remark seemed snide. Did he really believe that if the famously tolerant Dutch armed forces reinstated their ban on gay troops so they looked more like the U.S. Army, then the Netherlands might finally become a true world power? Put the other way around, was he suggesting that the Dutch armed forces were small potatoes largely because they tolerated gays? The thrust of Moskos’s congressional testimony, along with his public remarks elsewhere, was that no matter what gay activists and media hacks said about foreign militaries, he knew the truth, and it wasn’t gay-friendly.

Moskos acknowledged that many foreign militaries allowed gays to serve, on paper. But he disputed their relevance to the United States, saying other militaries had different cultures or lesser combat obligations or that their practices regarding gay troops were actually less tolerant than their formal policies would suggest. Of the Dutch and Scandinavian militaries, Moskos said, “These aren’t real fighting armies like the Brits, the Israelis and us. If a country has a security threat,” he argued, that country would then implement “a policy that makes it very tough for gays.”⁴³ But he was wrong. Britain’s ban was lifted in 2000 and its powerful military became the chief partner to the United States in its wars in Afghanistan and Iraq beginning the next year. No one ever mentioned the idea of rolling back the clock to start rooting out gays again, in hopes of keeping its military strong enough to do the job. But Moskos had perfected the roving rationale, allowing him to defend his policy, to mutate his answers in order to evade whatever evidence might be put before him.

His discussion of Israel makes this crystal clear. In his effort to dismiss the relevance of foreign militaries to the United States, Moskos told Congress that gay troops in the Israeli military did not fight in elite combat units, did not serve in intelligence units or hold command positions, and did not serve openly in high positions. About this last point, he was adamant. “I can categorically state that no declared gay holds a command position in a combat arm anywhere in the IDF,” he stated. Open gays, he said, “are treated much in

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the manner of women soldiers,” in that they are excluded from real fighting and serve primarily in support roles from “open bases” where they can go home at night. He repeated these assertions in a companion essay and op-ed, and in radio broadcasts as late as 2000, saying there were no open gays in combat or intelligence positions in the Israeli military.⁴⁴

But his argument was virtually impossible to defend, given the famous difficulty of “proving a negative,” suggesting that Moskos cared more for rhetorical flourish than sound argument. After all, it only takes one person to come out of the woodwork and point out a single example of what is alleged not to exist to undermine the assertion that it doesn’t exist. But more than one stepped forward. Dr. Reuven Gal, former chief psychologist for the IDF and later director of the Israeli Institute for Military Studies, wrote that even before Israel liberalized its policy in 1993, gay soldiers in the IDF did serve in “highly classified intelligence units” and that, even when their sexuality was revealed to their commanders, they were allowed to keep serving.⁴⁵

The Palm Center’s study on the IDF found repeated instances of openly gay service in combat and intelligence positions, while noting that cultural norms continue to encourage most gays and lesbians to keep their sexual orientation private. According to Palm, “some IDF combat and intelligence units have developed a reputation as particularly welcoming to gay and lesbian soldiers and some have developed a gay culture.” One tank corps soldier said his base had “a large gay contingent” and that it was sometimes “even easier” to come out of the closet in the military “because you are protected from society. You don’t have friends from the same town, so you can be more open in the Army.” The Palm study also reported interviewing over twenty gay IDF soldiers who served in combat units, several of whom said their sexual identity was known by others in their combat unit. A related study, published in 2003 in *Parameters*, the professional journal of the U.S. Army War College, found that at least one-fifth of IDF combat soldiers knew of a gay peer in their unit, with roughly another fifth saying they “might” have known a gay peer. This suggests that hundreds of Israeli service members were serving openly.⁴⁶

The Palm study concluded that the Israeli case is, indeed, relevant to the situation in the United States, even though many Israelis choose to keep their sexual identity private. In fact, such voluntary discretion is a reminder that the prospect of gay pride floats drifting onto U.S. military bases, replete with scantily clad men in pink boas, is largely the concocted fear of pro-ban champions. “The fact that many gay Israeli soldiers choose not to reveal their orientation does not indicate that the Israeli experience is irrelevant for determining what would happen if the U.S. lifted its gay ban,” concluded the Palm study.

"On the contrary, the evidence shows that both Israelis and Americans come out of the closet only when it is safe to do so." The 2003 article in *Parameters* discussed the oft-cited fear among ban defenders that ending discrimination would result in a mass coming out in the military. Until his dying day, Charles Moskos answered questions about why the ban should remain by throwing back rhetorical questions about whether gay pride parades in the military are going to be next. Senator John McCain wondered during Nunn's Senate hearings if lifting the ban might lead to gay service members marching in parades with "bizarre" or "transvestite" clothing. But the fear was not based in fact. "This belief is premised on the flawed assumption that culture and identity politics are the driving forces behind gay soldiers' decisions to disclose their homosexuality," says the article. "What the evidence shows is that personal safety plays a much more powerful role than culture in the decision of whether or not to reveal sexual orientation."⁴⁷

Still, important differences between the Israeli and U.S. militaries remain and have provided defenders of the American gay ban with reasons to continue to dismiss its relevance. Israel is a conscription force, which means recruitment and retention cannot be jeopardized by the presence of gay troops. Owing to the small size of the country and the long periods of mandatory military service, Israeli soldiers spend less time in military quarters than their American counterparts, and more time at home, potentially alleviating concerns about privacy and unit cohesion.⁴⁸

Not so the British. Discharged from the Royal Navy in 1997 for homosexuality, Lieutenant Rolf Kurth was invited to reenlist after the UK lifted its ban in 2000. During the war in Iraq, Kurth was deployed to the Persian Gulf aboard the Royal Navy's largest amphibious ship. As it happened, American sailors also served on his ship, and Kurth worked closely with them, serving as a principal liaison for the American team. Kurth served as an openly gay man in this multinational force, and said it was "fairly well-known around the entire ship" that he was gay. His sexual orientation was "common knowledge," a fact he confirmed by the banter of his colleagues, who playfully told him, when several men convened to discuss an attractive woman, that Kurth was clearly "not the best person to judge!" He characterized his relationship with the American sailors as "great," saying he "got along very well with them." He added that the Americans "didn't behave any differently from British colleagues" toward him, even though he was known as a gay sailor.⁴⁹

AFTER SEPTEMBER 11, 2001, it became far harder to take Moskos seriously when he dismissed foreign militaries as irrelevant. In addition to the UK's

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forty-five thousand troops that were stationed mostly in southern Iraq since the invasion began, thirty other countries joined the coalition, many of which allowed open gay service. The coalition included two thousand troops provided by Australia, along with submarines and other naval support from Denmark.⁵⁰ In Afghanistan, the number of countries contributing troops or support was even higher, numbering nearly fifty at one time. As NATO forces took over the occupation, troops from these countries took on greater combat roles.

In 2006, American, Canadian, British, and Afghan troops led the charge against a resurgent Taliban in Operation Mountain Thrust, the largest offensive to root out Islamic radicals since 2001. Insufficient water meant some troops had to give each other IVs to survive. Enduring heavy mortar attacks, suicide bombings, regular ambushes, and scorching desert temperatures, over ten thousand troops worked together to lug more than seven thousand pounds of supplies from the bottom of a rocky mountain range to its peak, where they had their greatest chance to best the Taliban. The powerful artillery and targeted airstrikes of the coalition took their toll on enemy forces, and by the end of the offensive, over fifteen hundred Taliban fighters had been killed or captured.⁵¹

Afterward, a NATO International Security Assistance Force, consisting of troops from nearly forty countries, took over operations in some of the most dangerous regions of southern Afghanistan, with Britain, Australia, Canada, Denmark, and the Netherlands doing the heavy lifting. That fall, Canadian forces led American, British, Dutch, and Danish troops in a bloody battle in which five hundred suspected Taliban fighters were surrounded and killed. The defeat prompted complaints by the Taliban that so many of its forces had been wiped out that it was having trouble finding sufficient leadership.⁵²

The Canadian “experiment” with open gays was now fourteen years old, its start a distant memory for most. But the proof was in the pudding. Canada, Australia, even the Netherlands, were hardly “irrelevant.” Their combat-tested fighting forces, replete with gays and lesbians serving openly, were critical partners in the American national defense strategy, and the United States was all too happy to enlist their indispensable fire power in the wars in the Middle East. The truly irrelevant argument was Moskos’s—that these countries were not “real fighting armies.” Perhaps in 1992 they hadn’t seen much combat; by 2006, the world was a far different place. And nothing was heard from President George Bush, or Colin Powell, or Sam Nunn about cracking down on gays to preserve the fighting spirit of the “coalition of the willing.”

The presence of gay service members in multinational military units is

another nail in the coffin of the crumbling rationale for gay exclusion. Since the end of the cold war, multinational forces have mushroomed. The United States has participated in at least forty joint military operations, with half involving direct deployment with foreign service members. Many of these participating countries allow open gay service, from Canada to Britain and beyond.⁵³ Lieutenant Rolf Kurth's service in a multinational force in the Iraq War is only one example of documented evidence that openly gay foreign troops are actually serving right alongside Americans—without causing the kinds of disruptions that naysayers predicted would result from gay service.

Others come from training operations on foreign ships deployed in the Middle East, NATO and UN peacekeeping missions around the world, joint operations at the North American Aerospace Defense Command in Canada and the United States, the Multinational Force and Observers in Sinai, the Multinational Force in Lebanon, U.S. and foreign war colleges, training grounds, and military and diplomatic centers of operations, including NATO headquarters in Belgium. In some cases, U.S. troops are directly under the command of foreign military personnel, some known to be gay. And these cases suggest that coming out of the closet can help improve the working climate in the armed forces. In one example, Colonel René Holtel of the Royal Netherlands Army commanded American service members, including a U.S. tank battalion, in NATO and UN missions. In 2001, he served as chief military observer and chief liaison officer at the headquarters of the UN Mission in Ethiopia and Eritrea. UNMEE was tasked with monitoring the cease-fire between the two nations in the demilitarized security zone running along their mutual border. Six American service members served with him as military observers. Holtel found that when others in his unit knew he was gay, it caused "some relaxation in the unit," reducing the guesswork and allowing people to focus on their jobs. "They are not having questions anymore about who or what their commander is," he said. By telling them who you are, "you pose a clear guideline and that is, 'don't fuck around with gays, because I'm not going to accept that.'"⁵⁴

If the presence of known gays violates the privacy and undermines the morale and cohesion of American troops, then shouldn't foreign gays present the same threat? Shouldn't everyone from Sam Nunn and Colin Powell to Charles Moskos and Gary Bauer be up in arms about the U.S. role in international coalitions where heterosexual troops are exposed to open gays and lesbians? The continued insistence on barring known gays from the U.S. military while inviting foreign militaries, with their open gays, to join us in military operations around the globe raises suspicions that opponents of gay

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service care more about the image of the U.S. military than about what works for a good fighting force. The loud silence from policy makers in the face of joint operations that bring U.S. service members into fighting teams with declared gays from other countries also shows how the pragmatic need for troop strength has finally outweighed moral qualms about the sexual purity of the American force, with no one complaining it's been a detriment to the operation.

The use of multinational forces is also a reminder that armed services worldwide are trending toward what experts call "the postmodern military." In an age of terrorist threats, where guerilla attacks are more likely than traditional acts of war, the term refers to the blurring of several kinds of boundaries, including national borders, as well as fading distinctions between the different branches of the military and even between the military and civilian society.⁵⁵ Nothing has demonstrated this evolution more grimly than the Iraq War. Rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), snipers, and suicide bombers do not distinguish between civilians and designated fighters, between combat Marines and female supply clerks riding in the rear of a convoy, between uniformed military personnel and field intelligence agents. As it becomes harder and harder to tell who is a civilian and who is a combatant, and to distinguish which jobs fall into the intelligence sphere and which are uniformed, it becomes less and less rational to maintain a policy that draws lines around groups that simply don't exist in the same ways as they did in the past. This is a fact about not only the postmodern military but the postmodern world—it's hard to contain people and restrict behavior by resorting to familiar lines of exclusion when these old categories have a totally different meaning, or none at all.

WHAT, THEN, ARE the lessons that can be learned by studying the evidence from foreign militaries and other analogous institutions where gays serve openly?

First, twenty-four nations now allow gays and lesbians to serve in their armed forces; none has seen any impairment to cohesion, recruitment, or fighting capability.

Second, in closely allied nations such as Britain and Israel, gays actually do serve openly in the highest positions, despite claims that gay tolerance is much more limited in practice than in policy. Even in those situations where gays received unequal treatment in practice, the differences were rare and inconsequential. Based on their review of extensive evidence and their own additional interviews, Palm researchers found that unequal treatment mostly

consisted of “local attempts to resolve problems flexibly” and were ultimately no different from countless other, varied responses to managing a large, diverse fighting force. There was no evidence that these infrequent and minor cases of differential treatment undermined performance, cohesion, or morale.⁵⁶ The cumulative weight of the evidence from the two dozen countries that permit openly gay service makes for highly relevant, if also imperfect, analogies, which strongly suggest that the U.S. military would be no more crippled by removing gay exclusion than any of these other nations.

Third, the nations that allow open gays to serve have a wide range of different cultures and deployment obligations, which run the gamut from the conservative culture of Israel with its world-renowned, combat-tested military to the relatively liberal Dutch society with its limited combat engagements. Thus some of the countries are more socially liberal than the United States, but some, like Israel, are not.

In either case, a fourth lesson is that social tolerance, while it may be an advantage in making the transition from gay exclusion to gay inclusion, is not required for such a change to work effectively. Anti-gay sentiment, it seems, does not translate into impairment of military performance. Inevitably, there have been scattered, high-profile cases of hostility that cause management problems for commanders—cases that are frequently exploited by defenders of the ban, as happened when Keith Meinhold’s reinstatement occasionally generated tension and headlines. But just as social conflict born of a thousand other causes must be managed by effective leaders, dealing with these instances of homophobia is a part of the job; they simply are not, as some would have it, a compelling rationale to exclude an entire group from the U.S. military. Many of the nations that ended their gay bans since the early 1990s faced enormous resistance beforehand, reflecting widespread homophobia, but none of the doomsday scenarios that were bandied about came true after the bans were lifted. The Rand study reported that even in those countries where gays were allowed to serve, “in none of these societies is homosexuality widely accepted by a majority of the population.”⁵⁷

This point is strengthened by looking at the historical example of racial integration. In 1943, when the military began talking about integrating black troops, the Surveys Division of the Office of War Information conducted opinion surveys and found that 96 percent of Southerners and 85 percent of Northerners opposed it. When President Truman ordered the military integrated in 1948, opposition had softened, but remained a majority, at 63 percent.⁵⁸ On this issue, the military was out in front of society, and the military subculture itself was by no means gung-ho over integration. But as Charles

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Moskos had eloquently explained, its hierarchical, bureaucratic organizational structure makes it the ideal institution to implement this controversial policy, despite great intolerance around it. While racial integration of the military was a long and difficult process, political and military leaders did not change course because of opinion polls, and history now holds these champions of integration in high esteem for doing the right thing, both morally and militarily.

The fifth, and related, lesson is that the attitudes people express about homosexuality frequently do not predict how they will actually behave. Recall the thousands in Britain and Canada who said they simply would refuse to serve if open gays were allowed in, and the massive nonevent that resulted when they were. This discrepancy is consistent with social science data that show a poor correlation between stated intentions and actual behavior in paramilitary organizations. The 1993 Rand study 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. A Palm Center study of the San Diego Police Department in 2001 echoed the finding, adding that nondiscrimination policies in police and fire departments did not impair effectiveness even though many departments were characterized as highly homophobic. Research also shows that heterosexual responses to gay service in police and fire departments were more likely to be positive when expressed privately than in front of their peers. Other polls on attitudes toward gays in the military show that most respondents believe their peers are less tolerant of gay service than they, themselves, are.⁵⁹ These data are revealing: They show there is a widespread belief that homosexuality is viewed negatively, but when individuals are asked their own views in private, they express a more tolerant attitude.

An article in *Armed Forces and Society* concludes from this data that there is a "cultural-organizational pressure within the armed forces to appear as though one is either uncomfortable or intolerant of homosexuality" and indeed to "pretend to be uncomfortable" with gays, but which belies greater actual comfort than what is stated. It means that when polls say 59 percent of military men would resign if the ban is lifted,⁶⁰ careful observers must recall the differences between stated opinions and actual behavior. Opinion polls sometimes say more about perceived norms than about likely behavior, and they often serve primarily as opportunities to register approval or disap-

proval. Biased attitudes may not translate into discriminatory behavior. More to the point, the biases may not be nearly as strong as out-of-touch politicians and other cultural leaders believe, especially if they base these beliefs on limited surveys or anecdotes.

A sixth lesson is that, despite fears that gays could turn fighting forces into gay pride floats, the majority of gays serving in foreign militaries and American police and fire departments conform to expected norms of their organization. This means either they do not come out, or they come out to selected peers or supervisors but succeed at fitting in with their units in dress, appearance, and comportment. A lesbian who was a lieutenant in the Canadian Forces, for instance, said that “gay people have never screamed to be really, really out. They just want to be really safe from not being fired.” Rand researchers found the same was true with police and fire departments.⁶¹

Rand found no basis for worries that stereotypical behavior and mannerisms, particularly of effeminate men, would “compromise the image of their force.” Gays and lesbians, said the report, “were virtually indistinguishable from their heterosexual peers.” Gays were reported and observed to be “sufficiently innocuous in their behavior and appearance to have been able to pass as heterosexual members of the force.” Some may question the implication here that “acting gay” would somehow not be “innocuous.” But conformity to the mainstream is widely considered a necessity for military and paramilitary organizations. As a gay police officer said, “You can’t be flamboyant. Most gay men who are police officers are probably on the ‘butch’ side. You have to look like a police officer.”⁶²

The fact that many gay people remain discreet even when they’re permitted to disclose their identity has been used by some to argue that “don’t ask, don’t tell” doesn’t need to be repealed—after all, why fuss over a policy that requires gays to do what they’re already doing anyway? But it could just as easily be used to argue that the policy is not needed. If social norms and expectations keep gays in check (just like most everybody else), why should a law force people to do what they’re going to do anyway? It’s an argument conservatives should love: The federal government is a lousy regulator of individual identity; no one is better than individuals at choosing when an open discussion about who they are is going to help form bonds of trust in a unit and when discretion is the better part of valor. Even more important, a blanket policy against honest discussion ends up blocking gay troops from seeking out military chaplains, doctors, and psychologists, the support structures that are essential to preserving morale and readiness, and who are not remotely threatened by knowing a service member is gay. But more on this to come.

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Lesson number seven is what makes gay inclusion work: clear, consistent rules governing behavior. In many cases, the countries that lifted their bans on gay troops issued strict guidelines holding gay and straight service members to the same standards of conduct. The rules prohibited sexual behavior that undermined the group or involved the abuse of power, rather than summarily excluding an entire group of people. They also made clear that harassment would not be tolerated. In the militaries they studied, Palm researchers found that, “in each case, although many heterosexual soldiers continue[d] to object to homosexuality, the military’s emphasis on conduct and equal standards was sufficient for encouraging service members to work together as a team” without undermining cohesion. In Australia, an official noted that “our focus is on the work people do, and the way they do the work, and that applies to heterosexuals, bisexuals and homosexuals.” In the case of Great Britain, the Ministry of Defence issued guidelines and speaking notes that emphasized that sexual orientation was to be considered a private matter, that harassment would not be tolerated, and that the new policy “makes no moral judgments about an individual’s behavior. Palm researchers concluded that if people are seen as working hard and contributing to the team effort, “individual differences in opinion or in their personal lives are not considered relevant.” As a lieutenant colonel in the Royal Army’s public relations office put it: “Our great strength as an Army is that we treat everyone [as] an individual who contributes to the team. We’ve won three recent wars—Sierra Leone, Kosovo and East Timor—because we place a lot of importance on personal responsibility.”⁶³

The focus on individual responsibility and behavior—instead of either what homosexual troops say or how they act, or the beliefs or attitudes of heterosexual troops—is an essential part of this lesson. Much of the opposition to gay service, particularly from religious conservatives, remains grounded in the objection that the government should not force people to accept homosexuality (never mind that the current ban is, among other things, precisely an expression of public beliefs about homosexuality). Lifting the ban, it is argued, would be tantamount to a government endorsement of something that traditional religious belief considers anathema. But service members do not need to be pro-gay in order for gay inclusion to work effectively.

We have learned this lesson again and again, from a large body of research that includes the military’s early efforts to address racial tension. The assumption of the first advocates for integration was that discriminatory behavior against blacks could best be reduced by changing whites’ attitudes and beliefs about minorities. But researchers found that the sensitivity training

and educational programs designed to achieve that goal caused resentment and even hostility and so failed to resolve the problems. Instead, better results were achieved when outward behavior was the focus. Over time, the requirement to treat African Americans respectfully did effect attitude changes, as whites internalized equal treatment as being consistent with the values of the institution. But even these attitude changes, which followed rather than preceded changes in policy and behavior, did not always translate into pronounced “pro-black” beliefs; rather, they amounted to an endorsement of fair and equal treatment as a principle embraced by the larger group.⁶⁴

Lesson eight—perhaps the single most important lesson to be learned from the research on foreign militaries and analogous institutions—is the centrality of leadership. In the British case, the chiefs of staff were highly involved in creating the new policy and supported it both privately and publicly. Michael Codner, the assistant director for military sciences at the Royal United Services Institute, noted that one reason for the British military’s success was that those at the very top lined up behind the policy change. “If you look at the thinking of senior personnel, they have invested a great deal of credibility and authority into this policy shift,” he said. “They want to see it fully implemented.” Chief Petty Officer Rob Nunn felt this clearly when he reenlisted: “To a person, everybody I’ve talked to, commander downwards, has said—if you’ve got problems, come and see me.”⁶⁵

Scholars who observed the lifting of the gay ban in Britain reported that fundamental attitudes did not change as a result of the ban being lifted—and they didn’t need to. It is, however, crucial for controversial new policies to be perceived as coming from inside the institution, and from strong leaders within the group, as anything that emanates from external pressures can be seen as a threat to the organization’s culture and survival. This perception of outside meddling—from gay rights groups to liberal politicians—formed a large part of the resistance to lifting the gay ban in the United States. In Britain, one of the only officials who reportedly resigned over the lifting of the ban specified that his departure was not prompted by anti-gay beliefs or even opposition to gay service per se, but by his belief that the policy change was spurred by outside political forces rather than sound considerations for the military’s interests.⁶⁶

Patrick Lyster-Todd agreed that strong military leadership was essential to the success of Britain’s policy reform. An officer in the Royal Navy before the ban was lifted, Lyster-Todd later became head of Rank Outsiders, a group dedicated to lifting the ban. “Our MoD and serving chiefs take equality and diversity issues—including the rights of serving gay personnel, whether out

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or not—incredibly seriously,” he said. “Their approach is that if you want to be a capable force for good in the 21st century, then you need to be of that century and its people.” Again, this observation is corroborated by mounds of research showing that controversial new rules are most effective when top leaders make their genuine support absolutely clear so that the next layer of leaders, those who actually must implement the new rules, come to identify their enforcement of the new policy with their own self-interest as leaders of the institution.⁶⁷ This is why it is no exaggeration to say that the individual actions of a tiny handful of top military and political leaders—from the determination of Colin Powell and Sam Nunn to the indecisiveness of Bill Clinton—were ultimately responsible for the ongoing policy of gay exclusion. And that policy, which we are still reckoning with today, has been from the beginning an unmitigated disaster.

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