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Sex as a Military Weapon

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Abstract. Disagreements about military personnel policies on sexuality may be based on the wrong criteria.

There has been much public analysis in the United States about five sex-related Issues concerning military personnel: Sexual harassment involves sexist remarks, unwanted sexual propositions and overtures, and unwanted physical advances and acts. Sexual discrimination involves both (a) barring or hindering qualified personnel from promotion, positions, responsibilities, or opportunities and (b) modifying qualification criteria to help reach desired ratios, absolute numbers, or other kinds of quotas for sexually defined personnel categories. Sexual style involves consensual sexual practices that are deemed criminal by military authorities, e.g., oral sex or anal sex. Sexual partner involves criminalizing sexual acts between married people who are not married to each other and between people of specific military categorizations, e.g., an officer and an enlisted personnel, a supervisor and supervisee. Sexual orientation involves mandating the removal of lesbian and gay, i.e., homosexual, personnel from the military for stating that they are homosexual and criminalizing admitted or legally validated homosexual behavior. A sixth Issue, Gender identity, involves the personnel status of men who desire to be women or insist that they are, and women who desire to be men or insist that they are. However, this has not been the object of much analysis as it affects military personnel.

What often is lost in the many analyses of sex among military personnel is that sexual policies--be they explicit, implicit, arbitrary, or unwitting--present opportunities for a political or military adversary to exploit. This will be the case regardless of what the policies are because most people (1) are sexual beings with sexual needs, for good or for evil, in sickness and in health and (2) differ in the extent to which they can understand the rationale for, believe in, have alternative understandings of, comply with, identify with, or actually internalize sexual policies. From this perspective, the following comments all miss a singularly vital perspective: "all people willing and able to serve should be able to"; "gays and lesbians prevent good order and discipline and are sinners"; "adulterers lack integrity and morals"; "sex between a supervisor and subordinates violates military custom and tradition"; and "sex has nothing to do with defending the country against all adversaries foreign and domestic"; all miss a singularly vital perspective.

Those entrusted with sexual policy of any military--including determining or maintaining that there will be no policy--need to contemplate criteria like the following. (1) Given that many people feel uneasy about exposing some of their sexual proclivities, what policy minimizes their vulnerability to blackmail and other psychological coercion from adversaries threatening to expose these proclivities? (2) What policy minimizes the preoccupation of as many people as possible with covering their true sexual selves not only against adversaries but one's own superiors, peers, subordinates, and others? (As preoccupation increases, work performance often decreases.) (3) What policy minimizes the possibility that personnel with poor sexual impulse control have the opportunity to discharge one's military responsibilities poorly and, also, harm the image of the military and the political entity it represents? (4) What policy minimizes deterioration of the chain of command through violations of mandated policy? Through lowered morale? (5) What policy maximizes the probability that people with the optimum

International Bulletin of Political Psychology

ability, personality, and motivation (the psychologist's Holy Trinity of performance) are optimally selected, managed, and led to discharge military responsibilities? (6) What policy maximizes internalization of military maxims exhorting excellence, integrity, and selflessness, as opposed to mere compliance, its simulation, or discounting? (7) What policy best allows the military to employ as much of its time, attention, and assets as possible on its very *raison d'etre*, e.g., some combination of political security and cultural value as decided upon--ultimately--by civilian and military authorities?

A very reasonable case can be made that all sides of public debate on sexuality and military personnel policy have been characterized by hypocrisy, hidden agendas, prejudice, bias, fear, righteousness, indignation, and ignorance--all ripe for reinforcement and exploitation by adversaries foreign and domestic. Why has public debate taken this route? An analogy with public health efforts in preventing acquired immune deficiency syndrome (AIDS) may provide an answer. Both the risk behaviors for AIDS and the best social psychological principles to convey this information to decrease these behaviors are largely known. Yet this knowledge has not been applied in any coherent and comprehensive manner. At least in the United States this nonapplication seems due to a number of beliefs--talking about sex (1) is wrong, sinful, and impolite; (2) leads to too much or the wrong kinds of sex or sex between or among the wrong kinds of people; (3) should not be engaged in because the right people already know what to do and not do, the wrong people will continue to go wrong. (This purposely does not cover nonsexual means of contracting AIDS.) A fourth belief is that people with AIDS deserve what they get.

So, people continue to needlessly contract AIDS. And adversaries in the debate on sexuality and US military personnel policy continue to ignore a key perspective. So sex can be employed and can have consequences like a weapon leading to loss--loss of value, loss of security, loss of life. A 3-letter word leading to a 4-letter one. (Davis, J.S. (1991.) Military policy toward homosexuals: Scientific, historical, and legal perspectives. *Military Law Review*, 131, 55-108; Sexual harassment of military women and improving the military complaint system. (March 9, 1994.) House Committee on Armed Services. (103-44.)) (Keywords: Conflict Resolution, Organization, Sex, Typology.)