

Religion and the Military

“There are no atheists in foxholes.”

Americans come from diverse backgrounds, with diverse belief systems. Our military personnel reflect this diversity. Since the earliest days of our country, the military has accommodated the beliefs of its members and provided for their religious needs.

Recently the military has been pressured by the call for political correctness to conform to standards that are at odds with the religious beliefs of servicemen, and to tolerate unconventional religious practices and beliefs that harm the good order and discipline of the military. Two most noticeable examples are:

- Muslim soldiers are integrated into all levels of combat formations with no regard to the obvious conflict of interest when our forces are engaged with Muslims who claim that their motive for fighting the USA is based in their faith.
- Military chaplains being forced to perform homosexual weddings, against their deeply held beliefs.

The Military’s approach to the religious needs of military members must not conflict with those needs, nor should it demand accommodation that will compromise the combat effectiveness of our military.

The Chaplain Corps

The Chaplain Corps of the United States Military consists of ordained clergy of multiple religions who are commissioned officers, and enlisted soldiers who serve as assistants. Their purpose is to offer religious services, counseling, and moral support to the armed forces, whether in peacetime or at war. The military chaplain answers both to his military chain of command and, more importantly, to the religious hierarchy of his faith. This hierarchy may have varying degrees of rigidity or be altogether nonexistent, depending on the faith affiliation of the individual. In their role as a religious counselor, the chaplain has a unique position where he can gauge and affect the moral of the service members he administers. Through this function he can be a valuable asset to the unit commander to provide necessary back-channel communications.

In recent years some elected political leaders have objected to the established policy of the US Chaplain corps, which states in Section 536 of the National Defense Authorization Act that no member of the armed forces may “direct, order, or require a chaplain to perform any duty, rite, ritual, ceremony, service, or function that is contrary to the conscience, moral principles, or religious beliefs of the chaplain, or contrary to the moral principles and religious beliefs of the endorsing faith group of the chaplain.” Political leaders who oppose such a commonsense measure should be held to account and not allowed to implement their aggressive ideological social agenda.

The United States constitution states that Congress shall make no law respecting an establishment of religion, or prohibiting the free exercise thereof. The key word here is free. When the US government, through military

regulation, or the coercive power of withholding promotions or assignments, interferes with the freedom of conscience of a religious leader, it clearly violates this critical fundamental right.

Army Chaplain Corps activities: http://www.apd.army.mil/pdf/af600_20.pdf

Chaplains and Prisoners of War

In the War on Terror, we've used Military chaplains to minister to Muslim detainees in a misguided attempt to show that we respect the values systems of even our enemies. The United States has no legal requirement to provide for the spiritual well-being of prisoners taken on the field of battle. Such efforts make us look weak and foolish to these detainees and have the effect of bolstering their morale and among other negative effects enable them to resist interrogation more effectively.

Further, since the motivating ideology of the Muslim detainees is based on tenets of the Islamic faith, this caused a significant conflict of interest among the Muslim chaplains. Their loyalties as American citizens and their oath of commission as officers in the US military seem in direct opposition to the espoused tenets of their Islamic faith as interpreted by Islamic detainees. A loyal Muslim chaplain should never have to face such a conflict, and a disloyal Muslim chaplain should have no contact with enemy detainees.

Religion and the Serviceman

The homogenous ethnic and religious makeup of the US military is a relatively recent phenomenon. Traditionally units were recruited along geographic lines, and could reasonably be expected to be composed of people with similar backgrounds, ethnically and culturally. Minority groups formed segregated units that almost universally performed exemplary service to the country – the 10th Cavalry "Buffalo Soldiers, the 442nd "Nisei" Regiment, and the 99th "Red Tails" fighter squadron all earned numerous combat citations.

With the great wars of the twentieth century, recruitment was on a far grander scale. These wars were fought overseas, and organized on a federal level, with soldiers and recruits being handled on a wholesale basis. For the first time in American history, the Texan cowboy went to war with the Irish, Polish and Italian from the boroughs of New York. Jews served with distinction alongside their Christian comrades, and friction between the diverse groups was, if anything, less than that experienced by those groups in civilian life. The camaraderie of training and combat erased many petty differences between ethnic and religious groups.

When President Truman ordered the racial integration of the Armed Forces in 1948, the philosophy was extended to assume that there was no legitimate reason to segregate any soldier for any reason. The mindset facetiously became that all soldiers are one color – green, and that you will subscribe to whatever religious belief the army issues you.

This automatic assumption that a serviceman's ethnic and religious background is irrelevant worked well in the cold war. When the Western democracies were at odds with international communism, there was no reason to consider a person's religion as suspect. The military certainly did discriminate, however. A person could easily be banned from certain jobs or clearances due to their political affiliations, if they had a history of sympathetic behavior towards communism, as evidenced by association with suspicious groups.

The Sikh Serviceman

The fundamental tenets of a serviceman's religion should not be in conflict with the mission objectives of the US military. For example, Amish or Mennonites would not be considered acceptable members of the military due to their pacifist requirements. To this extent, the military should be encouraged to accept *reasonable* accommodation of the religious requirements.

For example, Sikhs are from the Punjab region of India. They are frequently mistaken for Muslim because of their traditional headdress turban which contains their uncut hair. One of the five articles of faith for a Sikh is to not cut his hair. Sikh immigrants assimilate well into their host countries, despite maintaining a distinctive physical separation from their host culture. They are tolerant and respectful of non-Sikh religious groups, and are typically worthy of reciprocating tolerance. The Sikh ideals include honesty, equality, fidelity, militarism, meditating on God, and never bowing to tyranny. These are very compatible with Western cultures. Sikhs have served with honor and distinction in the militaries of their host countries, most notably those of the United Kingdom and the USA. They are fierce warriors in combat, and intensely loyal to their adopted countries. No one who has ever served with a Sikh would ever hesitate to have that person at their side when the bullets start flying.

Current Army regulations prohibit the wearing of beards in uniform. This is a barrier to Sikhs who find this regulation conflicts with their religious obligation according to the [Rehat Maryada](#), the code of conduct for Sikhism. Consequently, the US military has deprived itself of a source of prime military recruiting material. Ignorant pentagon bureaucrats should be encouraged to consider relaxing the grooming rules to accommodate the Sikh. http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Sikh_-_cite_note-36

The Islamic Serviceman

Our political and military leaders have failed to adjust our thinking towards recruitment and deployment to the realities of the current conflict. The fact that we're at war with an international Islamic movement in the form of radical Wahabbism has made this more difficult. Our leaders have displayed political cowardice for failing to publicly acknowledge that the enemy is a radical form of Islam that's far more pervasive in the Islamic world than most people care to admit, and is the professed sect of our erstwhile allies and prime source of international oil, the Saudi family. In spite of the Islamic identity of our enemy and the religious basis for their motivation, our leaders reel back from any suggestion that we discriminate because of religious belief when recruiting.

Muslim Americans who wish to serve in the military present a unique challenge in our current geo-political situation. The United States is at war with an ideological group whose basic unifying element is Islam. Islamic leaders around the world – including the United States are preaching a Wahabbist interpretation of Islam that expressly condemns the United States and expresses a holy requirement to fight the United States whenever and wherever possible.

Clearly not all Muslims subscribe to the Wahabbist interpretation of Islam, but there is no way to tell the difference between a "good" Muslim and a "bad" one. Indeed, a close examination of the Islamic faith reveals that a believing Muslim should place their faith above their national identity, and that solidarity with all Muslims should trump allegiance to what is essentially a nation of infidels.

For this reason, it's reasonable to expect that the loyalty of a Muslim soldier would be necessarily divided at best. At worst, a Muslim soldier could easily be a spy, saboteur or enemy combatant infiltrated into our organization. Discipline and order of the unit risks compromise with a Muslim member, as the non-Muslim members might correctly or incorrectly identify him with the enemy or the ideology that the enemy espouses. The result is an inability to develop esprit de corps. Such a rejection by fellow members could drive a Muslim soldier to accept the role of an enemy to his American counterparts, as testimony by Sgt. Asan Akbar of the 101st Airborne Division indicated after he fragged his commander's tent during the invasion of Iraq. The incidence of Sudden Jihad Syndrome among the occasional Muslims soldier, such as the shooting rampage of Major Nidal Hassan, calls the loyalty of all Muslims into question by their peers.

A realistic approach to the Muslim question in context of the current conflict is for the military to avoid exposing Muslim soldiers to the question of divided loyalties. Muslim soldiers should be segregated into all-Muslim units and excluded from any combat or support role in the ongoing war on terror. History gives us examples of this if we consider the elite all-Christian Janissary units of the Ottoman Empire, and our own experience with the 442nd "Nisei" regiment which served with honor in the Italian theater in WWII – well away from the Pacific theater against Japan. Short of simply excluding Muslims from military service, this action would address the question of divided loyalty among the honest American Muslims who truly desire to serve the country, would alleviate the problem of acceptance of Muslim soldiers among non-Muslim unit members, and would answer the natural national security issues that Muslims in the military necessarily raise.

The Atheist Serviceman

A multicultural, multi-ethnic military requires tolerance and respect for beliefs and practices that are different from your own. Most atheists understand this and are quietly respectful when a general religious sentiment is expressed in a group gathering, such as an opening prayer or benediction. Such observances, to the atheist mind, are generally harmless bits of superstition to mollify their religious colleagues. Some atheists, however, have a strange idea that the idea of a religious association with a "Government" organization such as the military is anathema, and challenge such practices. Such challenges consume valuable time and resources, and the result is that the religious majority is denied the opportunity to freely observe their beliefs, in direct violation of the constitutional right under the first amendment.

The efforts of these militant atheists is encouraged and abetted by an anti-theist political movement that seeks to remove all trace of God from the public forum. Even as these militant atheists proselytize their lack of religious belief with all the fervor of a religious fanatic, and they seek government sponsorship to enforce their belief system, they have violated the first amendment, which prohibits the establishment of a [state] religion – even if that religion is secular humanism, which seeks to prohibit and criminalize the freedom of conscience of those who profess a belief in God.

Compromising the Chaplain Corps mission

Military Chaplains have recently been placed in a position of conflict by politically motivated social engineers. The recent social pressure to accept alternate lifestyles and the controversy over the definition of marriage has

crept into directives that dictate the duties of a chaplain. The social engineering lawmakers mistakenly believe they have the power to force military chaplains into behaviors that violate their conscience. This is inexcusable, and violates the original mission charter of the Chaplain corps. The Chaplain corps is an adjunct of the military that administers to the spiritual needs of the individual servicemen. The military has no requirement to cater to the social “needs” of a select minority of servicemen who seek a “right” that has never been enumerated or accepted in mainstream American society.

It's understood that military service requirements limits the constitutional rights of service members in certain matters under the uniform Code of Military Justice. These limitations do not include requiring military chaplains to perform functions in violation of their religious beliefs. To do so would be a clear violation of the first amendment's right to freedom of association, as interpreted by [Roberts v. United States Jaycees](#) (1984). The purpose of a Chaplain is to administer the religious requirements to service members. It's contradictory and incomprehensible to require a Chaplain to perform duties which diametrically oppose the religious convictions that define his duty qualifications.

MilitaryValues.org Principles and Mission

The content of these topical white papers from MilitaryValues.org is aligned with the organization's principles and mission statement. At the core is the protection of America and the founding principles—mainly summarized by freedom and liberty for citizens and a federal government with limited and enumerated powers. All of this is made abundantly clear in our Constitution and the founder's many writings .The US military's role to protect this is made very clear by the oath that is taken by military officers today:

“I, [name], do solemnly swear (or affirm) that I will support and defend the Constitution of the United States against all enemies, foreign and domestic; that I will bear true faith and allegiance to the same; that I take this obligation freely, without any mental reservation or purpose of evasion; and that I will well and faithfully discharge the duties of the office upon which I am about to enter. So help me God.”

For details on the MilitaryValues.org principles and mission statement go to www.MilitaryValues.org.

About MilitaryValues.org

The effectiveness of the United States military has been significantly compromised over the last 20 years by social engineering and politically driven decisions. This is especially true and serious with military units that face front line combat duties. In stark terms, this problem has unnecessarily cost the lives of our front line men and women—while many more suffer various combat-related physical and mental traumas. And there are untold tangents of pain and loss suffered by families, fellow soldiers, and others.

Combat units, and those that support them, greatly benefit from a culture in which there is a focus of effectively prosecuting missions and wars—and rejects unnecessary risk to the military personnel. This culture creates trust and increases effectiveness and loyalty—which is truly critical for the best shot at success in the complex and dangerous endeavor called combat. However on the other hand, if a military is constantly beat down by forces that do not care about its well-being—then a culture of distrust, failure, and despair will increasingly result. This second culture is what we have today in America’s military.

MilitaryValues.org exists to educate millions of citizens on what has gone wrong and how it can be reversed. We hope you will continue to our website and learn more!

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