

Volume 21, No. 4 1991

ISSN 0091-8369

NEXT ISSUE: NEW VOLUME

# JOURNAL OF HOMOSEXUALITY™



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## Military Policies Regarding Homosexual Behavior: An International Survey

Stanley E. Harris, MD

University of Southern California

**ABSTRACT.** The military attachés of 110 non-Communist embassies in Washington, DC, were surveyed from 1982-1984 regarding their countries' military policies about homosexuality. Of the 57 that responded, 37% reported policies excluding persons who engage in homosexual behavior from military service, 14% reported policies that accept homosexual and bisexual persons, and 49% reported having no policies about homosexual behavior. Cultural factors appear to be related to the military policies.

The United States Department of Defense declares persons who acknowledge homosexual desire or behavior to be incompatible with military service and discharges them for "misconduct, moral or professional dereliction, or in the interest of national security" (Carlucci, 1982). Some are court martialed and imprisoned.

There is growing American concern that the Department of Defense exclusive policy on homosexuality is unsound, unfair, and unnecessary. Numerous military service veterans who have been

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The author acknowledges the assistance of Ken R. Tipton, MLA, in conducting this survey.

Journal of Homosexuality, Vol. 21(4) 1991

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discharged for homosexuality are challenging the policy in court, as yet without complete success. Internally, a Defense Personnel Security Research and Education Center study also questions the policy (Sarbin and Karols, 1988). Recently, the leadership of American higher education has called for an end to the policy because ROTC's discrimination on the basis of sexual orientation violates campus affirmative action and equal opportunity policies (Collison, 1990).

When the Department of Defense first published its current policy in 1981, the author was a Captain in the U. S. Army and questioned the need for the policy. Military supervisors gave assurance that homosexuality was incompatible with military service in all countries. However, the author knew that many homosexual and bisexual physicians had served effectively in the U.S. military (Harris, 1984). A review of the literature revealed many references to homosexuality in historic militaries and one article listed a few modern countries that accept homosexual persons in military service (McCrary and Gutierrez, 1979). The literature search failed to find any international studies on the subject. So, to gain a broader impression about international military policies on homosexuality, the author asked permission to survey military attachés or representatives of all embassies in Washington, DC. Permission was granted to survey only non-Communist military attachés. Since the completion of this survey in 1984, no one else has published a survey of non-Communist Washington, DC, embassies' military attachés about their militaries' policies on homosexuality.

The purposes of this survey are both to add international information about 1982-1984 military policies on homosexuality for historic value, and to stimulate interest in doing more comprehensive, current international research. This study does not attempt to document exact, complete, current information about all military policies.

### METHOD

Letters were mailed on U.S. Army letterhead to the military attachés of 110 non-Communist embassies in Washington, DC, in February, 1982. The letters asked, "Does your country's military

have a policy concerning same sex? If it does, what behavior? If no policy exists that would describe homocountry's military." In who had not yet responded, Military attachés or representatives provided additional information.

By 1984, 46 military writing and an additional 57 (52%) responses, which

1. 37% of respondents engage in homosexual behavior
2. 14% reported policies on homosexual behavior
3. 49% reported that they have a policy on sexual behavior.

Some respondents gave natural, religious, psychiatric, or other reasons listed as "Additional Comments." The results are summarized as follows: 47% approval of homosexual behavior, 28% report that it is condoned, 14% deny the existence of a policy, and 14% related to homosexual behavior.

Thus, of the 57 responding persons who engaged in such policies. Fifty-three did not respond, leaving

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have a policy concerning sexual behavior between members of the same sex? If it does, what does the policy say about homosexual behavior? If no policy exists, why not? Please send any information that would describe homosexual behavior and its meaning in your country's military." In April 1982, the author telephoned those who had not yet responded in writing and asked the same questions. Military attachés or representatives who could be reached provided additional information.

## RESULTS

By 1984, 46 military attachés or representatives responded in writing and an additional 11 responded by telephone, for a total of 57 (52%) responses, which were placed in three categories:

1. 37% of respondents reported policies excluding persons who engage in homosexual behavior from military service.
2. 14% reported policies that accept persons who engage in homosexual behavior as suitable for military service; and
3. 49% reported that no military policies exist regarding homosexual behavior.

Some respondents gave additional information regarding cultural, religious, psychiatric, and legal values and practices. This is listed as "Additional Volunteered Information" (Table 1) and summarized as follows: 47% of the respondents report cultural disapproval of homosexual behavior, 12% report religious disapproval, 28% report that it is considered a psychiatric condition, 32% report that at least some form of homosexual behavior is punishable by law, 14% deny the existence of homosexual behavior, 9% minimize its existence, and 14% report that their militaries have no problems related to homosexual behavior.

Thus, of the 57 respondents, 37% report military policies excluding persons who engage in homosexual behavior; 63% report no such policies. Fifty-three (48%) of the 110 non-Communist embassies did not respond, leaving their policies unknown.

Table 1

RESPONDING COUNTRIES'S MILITARY POLICIES  
REGARDING HOMOSEXUAL BEHAVIOR

Countries Reporting Policies Excluding Persons Who Engage in  
Homosexual Behavior from Military Service:

Argentina 1,3,6,7  
Australia 1,4  
Canada 1,3,4  
Columbia 1,3,4  
Cyprus 1  
Finland 3  
Great Britain 1,3,4

Greece 3  
Guatemala 1  
India 4,6  
Iraq 1,4  
Italy 3  
Jamaica 1,4  
Lebanon 1,2,3

New Zealand 1,3  
Pakistan 1,2,4  
Portugal 1,3,4  
Spain 1,4  
Trinidad and Tobago 1,4  
Turkey  
United States 1,4

Countries Reporting Policies Allowing Persons Who Engage in  
Homosexual Behavior to Serve in their Militaries:

Austria 7  
Belgium 3,4  
Denmark  
Norway

Netherlands 7  
South Africa 1,3  
Sweden 7  
Switzerland 3,4

Countries Reporting No Exclusive Military Policies Regarding  
Homosexual Behavior:

Bangladesh 1,2,4  
Barbados  
Benin  
Botswana 4,6  
Cameroon 5  
Cape Verde  
Egypt 2 3 4,6

Ghana 5  
Grenada 1  
Indonesia 1236  
Israel  
Japan 5,7  
Liberia  
Kenya 1

Madagascar  
Malawi 1,5,7  
Malta  
Mauritius  
Morocco 1,2  
Nepal 1,3,4,5  
Nicaragua

Nigeria 5,7  
Philippines  
Qatar 1,2,5  
Sri Lanka 7  
Tunisia  
Uganda JA0142004\_5-002908  
Zambia 1,5



Finland 3  
Great Britain 1,3,4

Jamaica 1,2  
Lebanon 1,2,3

United States 1,4

Countries Reporting Policies Allowing Persons Who Engage in  
Homosexual Behavior to Serve in their Militaries:

Austria 7  
Belgium 3,4  
Denmark  
Norway

Netherlands 7  
South Africa 1,3  
Sweden 7  
Switzerland 3,4

Countries Reporting No Exclusive Military Policies Regarding  
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Bangladesh 1,2,4  
Barbados  
Benin  
Botswana 4,6  
Cameroon 5  
Cape Verde  
Egypt 2,3,4,6

Ghana 5  
Grenada 1  
Indonesia 1236  
Israel  
Japan 5,7  
Liberia  
Kenya 1

Madagascar  
Malawi 1,5,7  
Malta  
Mauritius  
Morocco 1,2  
Nepal 1,3,4,5  
Nicaragua

Nigeria 5,7  
Philippines  
Qatar 1,2,5  
Sri Lanka 7  
Tunisia  
Uganda 1  
Zambia 1,5

Additional Volunteered Information:

1. Respondent reports cultural disapproval for at least some form of homosexual behavior (47%).
2. Respondent reports religious disapproval of homosexual behavior (12%).
3. Respondent reports that homosexual behavior is considered a psychiatric problem (28%).
4. Respondent reports that some form of homosexual behavior is a punishable offence (32%).
5. Respondent denies existence of homosexual behavior in the military (14%).
6. Respondent minimizes existence of homosexual behavior in the military (9%).
7. Respondent reports that there are no problems related to homosexual behavior in the military (14%).

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## DISCUSSION

Several factors may be considered in assessing the results of this survey. First, the survey was mailed on U.S. Army letterhead. Other countries' military attachés may have known that the United States military disapproves of homosexual behavior and considers it a sign of weakness. Military attachés' awareness of American disapproval of homosexuality may have contributed to their reluctance to respond, and may have influenced them to express more disapproval than actually exists in their countries.

Second, the quality of information from respondents varied. Some attachés sent copies of military policies, some sent personal opinions, and some sent a combination of both.

Third, each military attaché defined homosexual behavior in his own way, often meaning the form of homosexual behavior that was disapproved by his country. When disapproval of a form was mentioned, it was for anal intercourse. Some countries may approve of some forms of homosexual behavior while disapproving of others. Where disapproval or taboo exists, homosexual behavior continues covertly, but may be officially undetected and denied (Carrier, 1980). Lack of definition for "homosexual behavior" limits the value of attachés' responses. Further research could discover what feelings and behaviors are considered homosexual, as well as what same-sex feelings and behaviors occur but are not stigmatized as being homosexual.

Thirty-two percent of respondents volunteered varied amounts of information about the legal status of homosexuality in their countries and militaries. Some attachés reported that all homosexuality was illegal; some specified penalties for abuse of rank or for rape. Further research could discover what behaviors are punishable, and the relationship of civil to military law internationally.

Twenty-eight percent of respondents volunteered that homosexuality was considered a psychiatric disorder in their countries and that treatment was offered or required. In 1974, American psychiatry deleted homosexuality from its list of mental disorders. Apparently, many countries, or at least their military attachés, were not aware of or in agreement with that change. Further research might document the relationship between psychiatric opinion and military

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policy on homosexuality internationally. Where homosexuality is considered an illness, how is it treated and with what outcome?

Military policies appear to be related to prevailing cultural, legal, medical, and religious factors. What factors perpetuate the exclusive U.S. policy? Though homosexuality is no longer classified as an illness, dominant religious institutions consider it sinful and one half of the states maintain sodomy laws. The origin of sodomy law can be traced to Emperor Justinian's 6th century A.D. *Corpus juris civilis*, in which the sin of homosexuality was codified as crime for the Judaeo-Christian world (Bullough, 1976).

French law departed from its Catholic heritage in 1810 when Napoleon dropped laws against homosexuality (Bullough, 1976). Countries influenced by France—Austria, Switzerland, Belgium, Denmark, Norway, Sweden, and the Netherlands—did likewise, and now accept homosexual citizens in military service. By contrast, British laws against homosexuality remained until 1967 (Bullough, 1976), and appear to have influenced the exclusive military policies of its former colonies—the United States, Canada, New Zealand, Australia, India, and Pakistan.

Perhaps the United States military policy would be different if France had established greater colonial influence in North America than Great Britain. However, Great Britain prevailed. Since colonial days, though, the United States has become a melting pot of immigrants from many cultures. Does its dominant British heritage justify continued exclusion of gay, lesbian, and bisexual citizens from military service?

Sixth century A.D. Catholic dogma remains codified in U.S. sodomy law and is the basis for U.S. military policy that considers homosexuality evidence of "misconduct, moral or professional dereliction" (Carlucci, 1982). The exclusive policy may persist until the U.S. government gains greater appreciation for cultural diversity and religious freedom.

In summary, 63% of respondents reported no military policies excluding persons for homosexual behavior, or policies accepting homosexual and bisexual service members. 37% reported policies that exclude persons for homosexuality.

Further research could determine all current military policies and produce more understanding about why exclusive policies exist in



some militaries, but not in others. More comprehensive, current, and accurate information may be obtained by contacting military authorities directly in their homelands, rather than by surveying Washington, DC, embassies' military attachés again.

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