From Citizens' Army To Social Laboratory

by Charles Moskos

These are uncertain times for the armed forces of the United States. How could they not be? With the Cold War over, the very foundations of our thinking about national security have undergone profound changes. Short of a terrible accident, the likelihood of a nuclear war between major powers is slim. Indeed, wars among any major powers appear unlikely, though terrorism and internal wars triggered by ethnic and religious animosities will be with us for some time, if not forever. More to the point, nonmilitary threats—economic competitiveness, environmental pollution, and crime—have now moved to the fore of our national-security preoccupations.

Of course, no serious observer sees the imminent end of warfare. Clausewitz's dictum about war being the extension of politics by other means remains in the back of any thinking person's mind. Nevertheless, we are witnessing the dawn of an era in which war between major powers is rejected as the principal, much less inevitable, means of resolving conflict. At the same time, the citizens of the United States, like those of other advanced industrial nations, are increasingly reluctant to become engaged in uncertain, protracted wars in parts of the world where no vital interests appear to be at stake. In the absence of traditional threats, political support for military spending has slowly given way to expectations of a "peace dividend" for domestic social expenditures—a phenomenon that is as pronounced in Moscow as it is in Washington.

In this most unprecedented of historical epochs, we are also seeing important changes in the relations between the military and American society, changes that have been under way for at least two decades but that are now being accelerated by the end of the Cold War. Among these, perhaps the most consequential is the demise of military service as a widely shared coming-of-age experience for American males. Another change, more diffuse in shape and possible consequences, is a redefinition of the military's role in society. Once thought of as the institution through which citizens—at least male citizens—discharged their basic civic obligation, the military is now coming to be seen as a large and potent laboratory for social experimentation. Such changes and others are part of a larger movement, a trend toward what I call the postmodern military.

Postmodernism is not one of those words that tend to win friends or influence people, at least outside the academy. Indeed, its overuse by the tenured classes makes it seem, variously, pretentious, empty, or imprecise. That said, the concept has its uses. From its humble origins as the name of an architectural style blending whimsy, pastiche, and playful historical allusion, it has been generalized into an all-

embracing theory of society. Simply put, this theory posits a world in which the old verities are thrown into question, social institutions become weak or permeable, and uncertainty everywhere reigns.

In matters military as well as cultural, the adjective postmodern implies a modern precursor. In America, as in most of the Western world, the military acquired its distinctively modern form with the rise of the nation-state in the late 18th and early 19th centuries, reaching a kind of zenith during the two world wars of this century. The modern military was distinguished by two conditions. The first was sharp, clear distinctions between military and civilian structures. The second was universal male conscription. Both conditions allowed military leaders to stress the more traditional martial virtues, the virtues of combat. Some fraying of the modern military occurred during the last decades of the Cold War with the rise of a military establishment driven as much by technical and information imperatives as by those of the trenches. Still, the modern military remained recognizable, in form and mission, right up to collapse of the Soviet Union.

Since then—and particularly since the end of the Persian Gulf War in March 1991—American armed forces have been deployed in more than 20 different operations, few of which had traditional military objectives. The list includes two operations related to the Gulf War: the multinational Operation Provide Comfort in Kurdistan and Operation Southern Watch in southern Iraq. The American military has taken part in Operation Sea Angel for flood relief in Bangladesh, in the rescue of civilians following the volcano eruptions of Mount Pinatubo in the Philippines and of Mount Etna in Italy, in drug interdiction along U.S. borders as well as in Latin America, in a domestic mission to restore order after the Los Angeles riot, and in disaster relief following hurricanes in Florida and Hawaii. The United States has also joined other nations in rescuing foreign nationals in Zaire and it is now spearheading relief efforts in Somalia. To the success of most of these operations, administrative and logistical skills, not to mention health-care and social-work skills, were far more important than tactical insight, marksmanship, or courage under fire.

To be sure, Western militaries have performed nonmilitary roles in times past, but what is different about these post-Cold War missions is their frequency and multinational character. Although it may be hard to imagine a U.S. soldier becoming misty-eyed about duty served under the aegis of the United Nations or the Conference on Security and Cooperation in Europe, the move toward multinational forces will gain momentum. The next step may well be the formation of a genuine international army with its own recruitment and promotion systems, as outlined in the 1991 "Agenda for Peace" written by United Nations Secretary General Boutros Boutros-Ghali.

In the postmodern setting, the legitimacy of conscription has progressively weakened. The draft has either been abolished—as it was in the United States in 1973 and 10 years earlier in the United Kingdom—or severely cut back, as in various European countries during the last 15 years. The political forces pushing for an end to conscription, though unlikely bedfellows, constitute a formidable bloc. They in-

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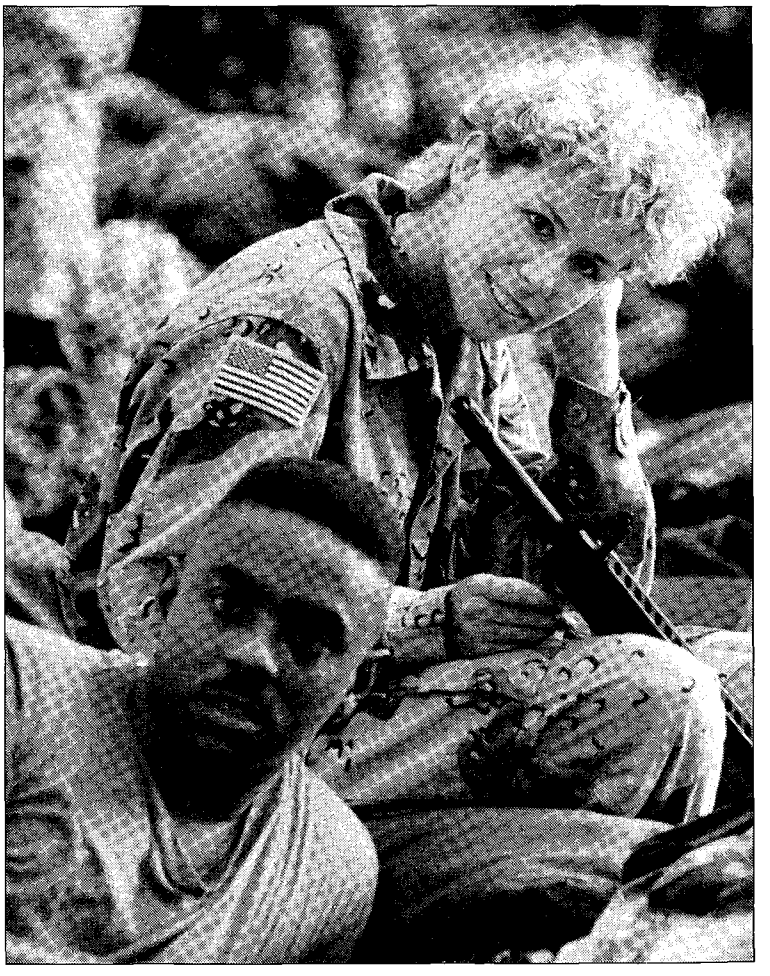
clude traditional peace organizations, assorted religious groups, political radicals who dislike the military establishment, libertarian conservatives, policy specialists who seek to transfer military spending to social programs, young people imbued with individualism and materialism, and even some military leaders.



The new army: Troops of the 24th Infantry await orders after arriving in Saudi Arabia in August 1990 as part of Operations Desert Shield and Desert Storm.

In America specifically, the abandonment of conscription jeopardizes the nation's dual-military tradition, one-half of which—and truly its heart—is the citizen soldiery. This institution antedates the Revolutionary War. The first colonists came to the shores of the New World anticipating conflict, and they prepared for it. Each colony formed its own militia on the principle that fundamental liberties entailed individual responsibilities. The militia, it must be stressed, was not a voluntary force. Every able-bodied man was obliged to possess arms and to train periodically. And every such man was subject to call-up when military needs dictated.

The military requirements of the Revolutionary War led to the creation of America's first professional army. This force remained small because of Americans' deep distrust of a standing army, but it marked the beginning of America's dual-military

tradition. Henceforth, a citizen soldiery of varying sizes was balanced by a permanent and professional force. Large forces consisting of short-term volunteers, draftees, or draft-induced volunteers came into being during the Civil War and World War I. But it was World War II that shaped our most recent understanding of military service.

In 1939, 340,000 men were serving in the U.S. military. By June 1941—six months before Pearl Harbor—American mobilization was well under way. America's first peacetime draft raised U.S. military strength to 1.8 million men. Shortly after it entered the war, the United States raised the largest military force in the nation's history. At war's end, more than 12 million people were in uniform.

By 1946, the number of servicemen had shrunk to three million. The draft was suspended in 1947, and the number of active-duty military personnel fell to 1.5 million. The draft was resumed in 1948, as the Cold War heated up, and though the Korean War never resulted in total mobilization, there were some 3.7 million Americans in uniform in 1952. During the ensuing decade, America's military posture was based on "nuclear deterrence" and large troop deployments abroad, notably in Europe and Korea. Between 1955 and 1965, the number of people in uniform hovered around 2.5 million, more than during any other peacetime period in American history.

A clear conception of the place of military service in American society survived from early in World War II right up to the beginning of the Vietnam War. According to this view, service in the military, and particularly the army, was almost a rite of passage for most American males. Eight out of 10 age-eligible men served during World War II, the highest ratio in U.S. history. From the Korean War through the early 1960s, about half of all men coming of age served in the armed forces. But the proportion began to fall—to roughly four out of 10—during the Vietnam War, as the children of privilege found ways to avoid service in an unpopular and ill-defined military quagmire. Since the suspension of the draft in 1973, only about one in five eligible males has been entering the military. And when the post–Cold War "drawdown" to the projected base force of 1.6 million is reached in 1995 (though it will likely be smaller), the proportion of young men serving will be down to one in 10, if that.

The changing social composition of the military—evident first in the Vietnam War—became even more obvious during the first decade of the all-volunteer force, when the military began to draw disproportionately from among racial minorities, particularly blacks and Hispanics, and from lower socioeconomic groups. By 1979, 40 percent of army recruits were members of minorities, and half of the white entrants were high-school dropouts. This shift in social makeup corresponded with a tendency on the part of Defense Department policymakers to redefine military service as an attractive career option rather than the fulfillment of a citizen's obligation.

Perhaps the best example of the loosening hold of the military experience in the United States is seen in the changing background of America's political leaders. For at least the first three decades after World War II, military service (or at least a very good reason for having missed it) was practically a requirement for elective office. The unpopularity of the Vietnam War and the termination of the draft both chipped away at this attitude. In 1982 the proportion of veterans fell below half in Congress for the first time since before Pearl Harbor. And as the Vietnam War generation replaced the World War II cohort, it brought with it a highly ambivalent view of military service.

Not surprisingly, this view reflected the electorate's changed attitude toward the importance of military experience to service in elective office. In 1988, the nomination of Senator Dan Quayle as a candidate for vice president created a stir because of his avoidance of active duty in the Vietnam War. In 1992, Governor Bill Clinton, who not only avoided all forms of duty but protested against the war, was elected to the nation's highest office.

The changed composition of the military and new attitudes toward military service raise the inevitable question: What has been lost? The answer is simple. Universal military service was the one way in which a significant number of Americans discharged a civic obligation to their nation. If this fact is obvious, its significance has been obscured by a political culture that ignores the importance of individual obligations while virtually enshrining individual rights—possibly to the detriment of our civic health. Universal military service did something else: It brought together millions of Americans who otherwise would have lived their lives in relative social and geographic isolation. No other institution has accomplished such an intermingling of diverse classes, races, and ethnic groups.

The racial dimension of this social intermingling—the integration of the armed forces and the impressive record of African-Americans in the services—is often cited as the great success story of the American military. Unfortunately, many people forget that this success came only at the end of what is in fact a rather ugly story, one that too faithfully reflects the larger national tragedy of racism. Until relatively recent years, African-Americans were a group resolutely excluded from equal participation in the armed forces. Even though they have taken part in all of America's wars, from colonial times to the present, they have usually done so under unfavorable and often humiliating circumstances, typically serving in all-black units with white commanders. And though they have served bravely, they often received less than glowing reviews from condescending, unsympathetic white officers. (By contrast, black units that served directly under the French in World War I received high praise from their commanders.)

The plight of blacks in uniform did not even begin to change until World War II. On the eve of that global struggle, there were only five black officers in the entire American military, and three of them were chaplains. Black soldiers during the war continued to serve in segregated units, performing mainly menial labor. Strife between black and white soldiers was common. Despite these conditions, blacks proved themselves when given the chance—none more so than the all-black 99th Fighter Squadron, whose performance in combat over Italy won the highest plaudits of the previously skeptical commander of U.S. tactical air forces.

In December 1944, during the Battle of the Bulge, African-American soldiers were finally given the chance to prove that segregation was not only unjust but militarily inefficient. Desperately short of combat troops, Lt. General John C. H. Lee, General Eisenhower's deputy for logistics, asked for black volunteers to fill the thinned-out ranks of white combat units. The soldiers who stepped forward performed exceptionally well in battle, gaining the respect of the white soldiers they fought next to and the high regard of the white officers under whom they served. Notably, there was none of the hostility that usually existed between white officers and black soldiers in the all-black units and none of the fighting that often broke out between whites and blacks in segregated units.

The unqualified success of this small ex-

A segregated unit of African-American troops in World War I constructing a railway line from Brest to the front.

periment in racial integration was cited after the war to support arguments for integrating the military. Those arguments prevailed in 1948, when President Harry S. Truman abolished segregation in the military. Little happened at first, but when the Korean War erupted manpower requirements in the field led to many instances of ad hoc integration. By 1955, two years after the end of the Korean War, the last remnants of military Jim Crow were gone.

Integration alone did not bring an end to the problem of race in the military. Between the wars in Korea and Vietnam, African-Americans made up about 11 percent of the enlisted ranks but less than three percent of the officer grades. Racial tensions mounted dangerously during the Vietnam War, the outcome of both real and perceived discrimination in the military and of spillover from the racial and political turmoil in society at large. Even after the war and the termination of the draft, there were frequent outbursts of hostility between blacks and whites in the all-volunteer force.

Thanks to decisions made by the military leadership in that "time of troubles," things have changed markedly for the better. Today, in terms of black achievement and a general level of interracial harmony, few civilian institutions approach the army. In 1992, blacks made up 30 percent of the enlisted force, over a third of the senior noncommissioned officers, 12 percent of the officer corps, and six percent of the generals. General Colin L. Powell became chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in 1989, the first African-American to head the American military. The army is still no racial utopia. Beneath the cross-race bantering, an edge of tension often lurks. Still, the races do get along remarkably well. Under the grueling conditions of the Gulf War, for example, not one racial incident was brought to the attention of the military police. Certainly the racial climate is more positive than that found on most college campuses today.

What has made the military in so many ways the vanguard of racial progress? I suggest three factors. The first is a level playing field, dramatized most starkly by basic training. For many black youths from impoverished backgrounds, basic training is the first test at which they can outshine Americans coming from more advantaged backgrounds.

The second factor is the absolute commitment of the military leadership to nondiscrimination, regardless of race. One sign of this commitment is the use of an "equal-opportunity box" in officer evaluation reports. While such a box may not eradicate

deep prejudices, it alters outward behavior, for any noted display of racism will prevent an officer's promotion. Just as effective have been guidelines for promotion boards—"goals" that are supposed to approximate the minority representation in the eligible pool. If this looks like a quota by another name, one should note that the number of blacks promoted from captain to major, a virtual prerequisite for a full military career, is usually below goal. (The most plausible explanation for this is that about half of all black officers are products of historically black colleges, where a disproportionate number of more recent graduates fail to acquire the writing or communication skills necessary for promotion to staff jobs.) By contrast, promotions through colonel and general ranks come far closer to meeting goals. Significantly, the military has avoided the adoption of two promotion lists, one for blacks and one for whites. While the army's system satisfies neither the pro- nor anti-quota viewpoints, it works.

Third, the armed forces developed an equal-opportunity educational program of unparalleled excellence. Courses with specially trained instructors were established throughout the training system during the time of racial troubles in the 1970s, and these courses stressed not who was at fault but what could be done. Mandatory race-relations courses sent a strong signal to black soldiers that the military was serious about equal opportunity.

The attractions of the military to African-Americans are worth pondering. To begin with, blacks find that there are enough other African-Americans in the military to provide a sense of social comfort and professional support. Just as important, though, they know that they are not in a "black-only" institution. They ap-

Blacks and whites served together in this U.S. Marine unit during the Korean War.

preciate the fact that the military provides uplift in the form of discipline, direction, and fairly meted-out rewards—and does so without the stigma of a social uplift program. The justification of the military remains—at least to date—national defense, not welfare or social engineering.

One cannot exaggerate the importance of this last point in evaluating the lessons of recent black success in the military. For the driving force behind formal and actual integration of the armed forces was *not* social improvement or racial benevolence but necessity (notably manpower shortages in World War II and the Korean War) and the belated recognition of the military superiority of an integrated force to a segregated one. Put another way, it was the imperative of military effectiveness that led to equal opportunity, not the imperative of equal opportunity that led to greater military effectiveness. Overlooking this fact, political leaders and scholars have come to think of the military as a social laboratory, in which charged debates over gender roles and homosexuality and national service can not only be addressed but possibly resolved. This lack of clarity about the military's primary function is indeed a cardinal characteristic of the postmodern military. It is also potentially harmful to the long-term security interests of the nation.

The issue of women in the military—and particularly in fighting roles—is important. Recent history sets the stage of the current controversy.

When World War II broke out, the only women in the armed services were nurses. By the end of World War II, some 350,000 women had served in the various female auxiliary corps of the armed forces, performing duties that ranged from shuttling aircraft across the Atlantic to breaking enemy secret codes. Following the war, a two-percent ceiling on the number of women in the military was set, and most women served in administrative, clerical, and health-care jobs. This situation remained basically unchanged until the advent of the all-volunteer force in 1973. Finding it difficult to recruit more than a few good men, the military allowed good women to fill the ranks. Today, women make up about 12 percent of the total armed forces.

Both before and after the draft was abolished, a number of important gender barriers within the military began to fall. Women entered the Reserve Officer Training Corps on civilian college campuses in 1972. Female cadets were accepted by the service academies in 1976. (Today, about one in seven academy entrants is a woman.) Congress abolished the separate women's auxiliary corps in 1978, and women were given virtually all assignments except direct combat roles. This meant that they were excluded from infantry, armored, and artillery units on land, from warships at sea, and from bombers and fighter planes in the air.

The combat exclusion rule, already opposed by feminist leaders and many women officers, came under renewed attack in the wake of the Gulf War. The performance of the some 35,000 women who served in that conflict received high praise from both the media and Pentagon officials. But surveys of soldiers who served in the Persian Gulf yield a murkier picture. Forty-five percent of those who were in mixed-gender units reported that "sexual activity had a negative impact" on unit morale. Over half rated women's performance as fair or poor, while only three percent gave such ratings to men. Nevertheless, almost as a direct result of the Gulf War, Congress lifted the ban on women in combat planes, even though service regulations effectively kept the ban in place.

The usual response to a thorny social impasse is a presidential commission, and,

true to form, one was established late in 1991: the President's Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Military. The 15-member panel (on which I served) took up three areas of consideration. The first was primarily factual. What, for example, were women's physical capabilities, and what would be the cost of modifying equipment or quarters to accommodate a woman's size or need for privacy?

A trickier area concerned questions of how mixed-gender groups would perform in combat. Here definitive answers are harder to come by, because apart from the defense of the homeland, no military force has ever used women in combat roles. Just as difficult to determine were matters related to the last area of concern: culture and values.

In addition to hearing opposing arguments, the commission sponsored a poll to determine whether the American public was willing to accept women in combat roles for the sake of equal opportunity. The answer that the Roper Organization came up with was a qualified yes. Three findings deserve mention. First, the public was split pretty much down the middle on the question of whether the combat-exclusion rule should be lifted. A large majority favored giving women the option to volunteer for combat arms, as long as no woman was ever compelled to assume a combat role. Second, most people believed that women already served in combat roles. Third, most respondents were more concerned with family status than with gender limitations. Three-quarters opposed mothers serving in combat; 43 percent felt the same way about fathers doing so.

By contrast with the general public, army women are much more wary about women in combat roles. One 1992 survey found that only four percent of enlisted women and 11 percent of female officers said they would volunteer for combat. But like the larger population, most military women favored a voluntary option.

The same survey disclosed that almost all army women—by a margin of 15 to one—opposed the adoption of uniform physical standards for men and women. Ironically, it was in support of such standards that two opposed groups within the policy community were rapidly coming to a consensus. Feminists supported it because of its egalitarian purity. Conservatives liked it because they believed it would reduce the number of women in the military across the board. Focusing on a strength definition of capability, both groups scanted the social and psychological problems that would likely arise with men and women fighting together in life-or-death situations.

Feminists and female senior officers do come together on the question of the *categorical* exclusion of women from direct combat roles. They believe that such exclusion is a limit on full citizenship. More recently, opponents of the exclusion rule, notably Representative Patricia Schroeder (D.-Colo.) of the House Armed Services Committee, have argued that if women were included in combat roles, sexual harassment would decline. But according to the 1992 survey of army women cited above, most respondents think the opposite is true—that sexual harassment would increase if women served in combat units. And in fact sexual harassment is far more common in the Coast Guard, the only service with no gender restrictions, than in any of the other services, at least as measured by reported incidents at the respective service academies.

Less dogmatic opponents of the exclusion rule favor trial programs, which on the surface sounds reasonable. Trial programs are not the same as combat, but they would tell us more than we now know. Yet even the most carefully prepared trials would

not address the biggest question: Should every woman soldier be made to take on the same combat liability that every male soldier does?

If the need arises, any male soldier, whether clerk-typist or mechanic, may be assigned to combat. True equality should mean that women soldiers incur the same liability. To allow women, but not men, the option of entering or not entering combat is not a realistic policy. As well as causing resentment among men, it would be hard to defend in a court of law. To allow both sexes to choose whether or not to go into combat would be the end of an effective military. Honesty requires that anti-ban advocates state openly that they want to put all female soldiers at the same combat risk—or that they do not.

By a one-vote margin last November, the presidential commission arrived at a surprisingly conservative recommendation: While approving of women's service on most warships (except submarines and amphibious vessels), it advised keeping women out of combat planes and ground combat units. President Bill Clinton has said that he will take the recommendation under consideration, but debate will surely continue before the matter is settled.

The vexed issue of homosexuals in the armed forces draws the postmodern military into another heated social controversy. And some of the solutions proposed would present just as great a problem to the military's combat effectiveness as do those proposed in the gender arena.

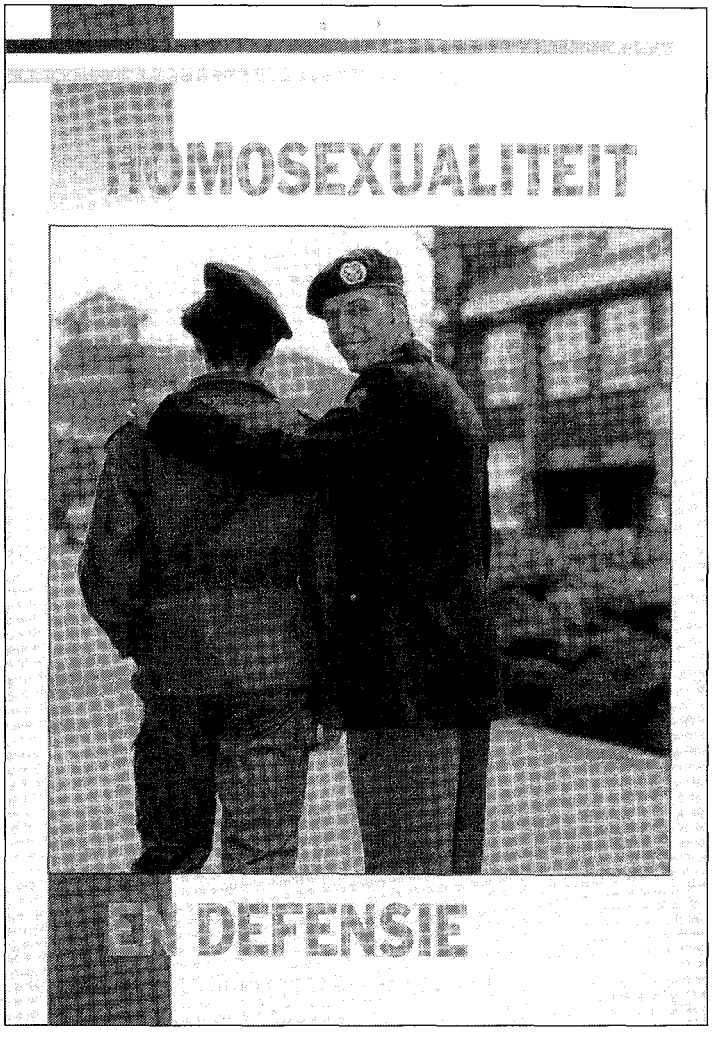
Again, some historical background. Up to World War II, the military treated homosexuality as a criminal act, punishable by imprisonment. During the war, however, service leaders came to adopt a psychiatric explanation of homosexuality: Discovered gays were either "treated" in hospitals or given discharges "without honor." From the 1950s through the 1970s, gays—defined almost always as people who had engaged in homosexual activity—were discharged under less than honorable circumstances. In 1982, in an effort to bring about a more uniform policy, the Department of Defense issued new guidelines that for all practical purposes made stated sexual orientation, rather than behavior (unless it was overt), the defining quality of homosexuality. The policy stipulated that a service member who declared that he or she was gay would receive an honorable discharge if his or her record was otherwise unsullied. However, if a gay service member was caught in a compromising situation, he or she might receive a less than honorable discharge.

The exclusion of homosexuals from the military has come under intense criticism not only from gay-rights groups but from civil libertarians and champions of equal opportunity. The 1992 Democratic platform pledged to remove the gay ban. And a threshold was crossed when the 102nd Congress introduced House Resolution 271, which called for the Department of Defense to rescind the ban. Editorials in the national press and sympathetic television accounts of gays in the military have added pressure to abolish the restriction.

Public-opinion polls show that the number of Americans favoring the admission of gays into the armed forces has been creeping upward. By 1992, about two-thirds of those surveyed favored abolishing the ban. Support for repeal is strongest among women and whites, and weakest among males and minorities. Without question, the growing support for ending the ban reflects a generally more tolerant attitude among the general public, but it may also be a sign of how distant most of the citizenry has become from the realities of military service.

Certainly, some of the reasons for ex-

cluding gays do not stand up to scrutiny. The argument that homosexuals are susceptible to blackmail is illogical. (If there were no ban, a gay service member could not be manipulated by the threat of exposure.) No evidence exists that homosexuals, under present rules; have been greater security risks than anyone else. Furthermore, no one can prove that homosexuals are any less effective than heterosexuals as soldiers, sailors, airmen, or marines.



This photograph appears on the cover of a brochure issued by the Dutch military to promote tolerance of homosexuality in the ranks. According to studies, one out of 10 Dutch service members is gay.

What is at issue today, however, is whether or not *declared* gays should be allowed to serve in the military. This is different from the question of tolerating the service of discreet homosexuals in uniform (though with some 1,000 gays being discharged each year, it is clear that not all are discreet). To condone discreet homosexuality in the services while opposing the official acceptance of declared homosexuals is to set oneself up for the charge of hypocrisy. And it probably does no good to say that a little hypocrisy may be the only thing that allows imperfect institutions to function in an imperfect world.

Whatever is done, policymakers should think twice before they invoke a misleading analogy between the dynamics of racial integration in the military and the proposed acceptance of overt homosexuality. Racial integration increased military efficiency; the acceptance of declared homosexuals will likely have the opposite effect, at least for a time. In a letter to General Powell last year, Representative Schroeder invoked the race analogy. His response was direct:

> Skin color is a benign, non-behavioral characteristic. Sexual orientation is perhaps the most profound of human behavioral characteristics. Comparison of the two is a convenient but invalid argument. I believe the privacy rights of all Americans in uniform have to be considered,

especially since those rights are often infringed upon by conditions of military service.

At the very least, the lifting of the ban will create a controversy over the issue of privacy, which in turn could make recruitment (particularly among minorities) even more difficult than it is today. Just as most men and women dislike being stripped of all privacy before the opposite sex, so most heterosexual men and women dislike being exposed to homosexuals of their own sex. The solution of creating separate living quarters would be not only impractical but an invitation to derision, abuse, and deep division within the ranks.

There is also the problem of morale and group cohesion. Voicing the conservative position, David Hackworth, a highly decorated veteran who writes on military affairs for *Newsweek*, acknowledges that equal-rights arguments are eloquent and theoretically persuasive. The only problem, he insists, is that the military is like no other institution. "One doesn't need to be a field marshal to understand that sex between service members undermines those critical factors that produce discipline, military orders, spirit, and combat effectiveness."

Foes of the ban point to the acceptance of homosexuals in the armed forces of such countries as the Netherlands, Sweden, Denmark, and Israel. In the Netherlands, an alleged 10 percent of the military is gay (though nine out of 10, studies say, remain undeclared), and a four-day seminar stressing sensitivity toward minorities, including gays, is mandatory in all Dutch services. Harmony is said to reign throughout the tolerant ranks of the Dutch army.

Those who object to the validity of national comparisons charge that the Dutch and Scandinavian cultures are far more progressive and tolerant than is mainstream American culture. Furthermore, they say, neither the Dutch nor Scandinavian armies have been in the thick of combat in recent decades. These objections are partially invalidated by the example of Israel's military, which inducts declared homosexuals. Israel is a conservative society, and its troops are among the most combat-seasoned in the world. Yet while it is true that gays in Israel are expected to fulfill their military obligation, it is also true that they receive de facto special treatment. For example, gays are excluded from elite combat units, and most sleep at their own homes rather than in barracks.

It is likely that the United States will soon follow the example of these and other nations and rescind the gay ban, despite widespread resistance within the U.S. military. One can of course argue that the United States now has such a decisive strategic advantage over any potential enemy that it can well afford to advance the cause of equal opportunity at possible cost to military effectiveness. Still, such a risk must be acknowledged.

Because we live at a time when the combat mission of the armed forces appears to be of secondary importance, it is easy for citizens and their leaders to assume that the military can function like any other private or public organization. But we must face certain realities if we accept this assumption. We must decide, for one, whether we will be willing to restore compulsory national service if dropping the gay ban makes recruitment even more difficult than it now is. (Most nations without such a ban do have obligatory national service, the military being an option in many cases.) Unless such realities are faced, we can only hope that our postmodern military never has to face the uncivil reality of war.

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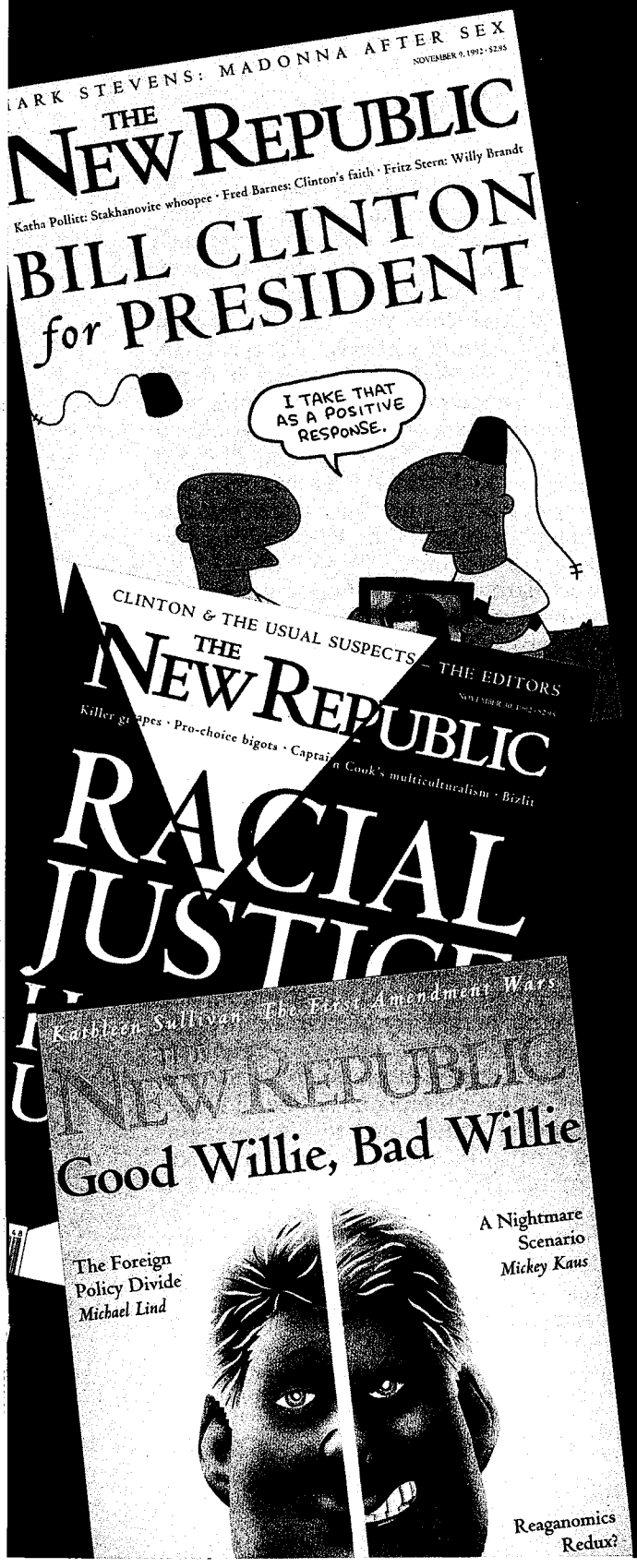

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