A Security Analysis of DADT: Prescription for Blackmail

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Many readers are no doubt aware of the recent back-and-forth legal decisions affecting the rights of lesbian, gay, bisexual and transgender (LGBT) military personnel in the US armed forces.<http://www.hrc.org/15008.htm> Although I am proud to be actively committed to LGBT equality in every aspect of life<http://www.mekabay.com/opinion/gay_pride.pdf> I don’t want to talk about politics in today’s column: I want to talk about the security implications of what I consider to be one of the stupidest personnel policies on the planet.

Let’s see: how about we establish a policy that allows people with a specific predilection to work in our organization, but then also subject them to dismissal if they admit to their prediction? Sounds like a prescription for blackmail, doesn’t it? Just think of how spies – national or industrial – could take advantage of such a policy to coerce their victims into collaboration against the interests of their employer – or of their nation.

A policy that lets people into an organization and then punishes them for letting their sexual identity become known opens the individuals to coercion and the organization to compromise. The problem in analyzing the situation is that homosexuality is such an emotionally-charged issue that many people cannot think, ah, straight about the implications. So let’s shift the discussion to a completely neutral topic to get rid of heated emotions. Instead of talking about LGBT rights in the military, consider the following story I just made up and think about the implications of blackmail for any organization’s security.

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“Hey Sarge,” said the snot-nosed recruit sitting at the scarred bar in the local watering hole. “C’mon o’er here for a minute,” he slurred, motioning vaguely at a vacant, slightly tilted barstool next to him, a few feet from 15-year veteran Master-Sergeant Donald R. Witherspoon.

Master-Sergeant Witherspoon (“Spoon” to his buddies) was mildly surprised at the youngster’s alcohol-induced nerve. Corporal Yabashnik had been nothing but trouble since his arrival in the platoon stationed at Syrtis Major. He seemed to be in the wrong career: he did everything at the lowest level of performance he could get away with. His hair was just at the limit of regulation length for Earthforce troops; he wore his breather askew; and he had been caught just last week putting his environmental suit on without going through the checklist -- and would have died if a buddy hadn’t noticed that his air supply was good for only 30 minutes just before the platoon left on a six-hour drill at zero atmospheres.

Curious to know just how drunk this imbecile had gotten himself – and what kind of insubordination was going to land him in the brig this time – Spoon snarled, “Get your ass over here, soldier.”

Yabashnik sidled clumsily over the intervening stools, nearly falling over at one point.

“Whaddyawant, Yabashnik?”
The corporal looked unsteadily at Spoon, his unfocussed eyes moving a bit independently as his head wobbled slightly.

“Well, sarge,” he said indistinctly, “I think you’re going to stop hassling me from now on. You see, I know your secret.”

Spoon kept a straight face, but inwardly he could feel his guts tensing as if he were going into battle. Could it be that this jerk had actually discovered the closely-guarded secret that he and a few others in the unit had kept so quiet? The Don’t Ask Don’t Tell policy in Earthforce was under attack by a number of civil-liberties groups on Earth, but so far the situation was that anyone who wanted to stay in Earthforce on good terms had better shut up about their “deviant” tastes.

“Well, thought Spoon, there goes my career. Ever since the Church of Enlightened Dieting had achieved political power on Earth back in the 2240s, they had pushed their strict moral and religious injunctions against eating chocolate into the legal codes all over the planet – and Earthforce had not been immune. Eating chocolate – and even liking chocolate – was grounds for imprisonment in some jurisdictions; in Earthforce, letting anyone know that you liked chocolate, whether or not you ate any, was grounds for possible dismissal – and with a dishonorable discharge to boot.

The pity was that there were many servicemen and servicewomen in Earthforce who liked chocolate and were exemplary, dedicated members of the military, sworn to uphold what liberties and freedoms were left on the home planet and in the colonies. But they were constantly subject to the danger of blackmail: one jerk who happened to notice the exchange of an illicit chocolate kiss could ruin the career of a dedicated veteran after decades of service.

“It had been a nice career while it lasted.

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