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SHOULD ROTC RETURN TO THE IVY LEAGUE?

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The repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” (DADT) has opened the possibility of Reserve Officer Training Corps (ROTC) programs returning to Ivy League and other elite (highly selective) universities and colleges. These institutions have not supported initiatives to maintain ROTC programs on their campuses due to the discriminatory nature of DADT, or perhaps they used the DADT policy as a rationale to keep programs, which had been closed during the Vietnam era, from returning. Now, with the impending change in policy, all appears to be forgiven, and these universities are preparing to invite ROTC back with more or less open arms. Should the military accept the invitation? In deciding this question, the military should not just consider the direct military utility of having ROTC programs at these elite universities, but the potential benefit of the interaction between future officers and the students and faculty at these institutions.

To be clear, few of these institutions actually banned (prohibited students from participating) ROTC.¹ In fact, some elite universities, including Princeton, Cornell, and the University of Pennsylvania, maintained their ROTC programs. For most, the military chose to close ROTC offices on their campuses during the 1960s and 1970s due to student protests, votes by faculty senates that denied academic credit and removed facility support, and lack of interest by students. Only Harvard actually refused to accept ROTC scholarships as payment for tuition from 1971-1977.² Since then, interested students have been able to enroll in ROTC and attend classes at other nearby schools which do have programs. For example, students from Harvard, Yale, Endicott, Gordon, Salem, Wellesley, and Tufts—where there has been no ROTC presence on campus—take their ROTC classes at MIT. However, the students receive no academic credit for their ROTC participation. If ROTC programs are to return to these elite campuses, it is assumed that the schools will provide adequate office and classroom space and that there will be some official recognition, perhaps academic credit, for the ROTC courses.

Despite the proposed invitations, there is little direct incentive for the ROTC programs to return to these schools. The increased personnel costs to reestablish programs would be unlikely to generate commensurate numbers of new officers for the military. New programs would require additional cadre (officers and NCOs) at a time when the Services are critically short of personnel and have been increasingly turning to contrac-

tors to serve as ROTC recruiters and instructors. The few interested students could still take classes at one of the existing programs near their school. Presently, Army ROTC maintains about 273 programs nationwide; the Air Force has 140; and the Navy about 75. The cost of an ROTC scholarship at elite universities is much more expensive, and recipients tend to leave the military after completing their initial service obligation, rather than remaining for a career.

While there is not likely to be a direct return on investment from the return of ROTC programs to elite universities, there is the potential to reap indirect, longer-term benefits. For example, it is in the best interest of the military to increase its presence and visibility on the campuses of elite universities as part of a broader effort to enhance the relationship between American society and its military. Senior leaders, to include the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, have spoken about the growing gap between the military and society.³

Few Americans have served in the military or have a family member, friend, or co-worker who has. Those who do join the military come from predominantly southern and rural areas. The relative lack of interest in the military among Americans who live in the northeastern sections of the United States is not just limited to the universities, nor easterners enlist at far lower rates as well.⁴ While the military and its service members are treated with a welcome deference compared to the 1960s, there is little understanding of the implications of that service. Most Americans have not experienced firsthand the pain of deployments or casualties of war. To them, military service is an abstraction. They may understand it in theory, but they have no personal or emotional connection to the service personnel who employ force in America's name. Likewise those who do choose to serve may not identify with or respect the values and perspectives which are common in much of America. It may become easy for the military to dismiss the opinions of those who do not serve as "others" who cannot understand, and therefore cannot judge or comment upon military activities.

This increasing gap between Americans and their military has significant implications for U.S. policy. These include: problems in recruiting and retention; friction between military and political leaders; loss of sensitivity by the military to the desires of the American people; and a loss of the sense of ownership that Americans feel for their military. These implications raise some important questions: Will Americans care how the military is employed when they don't know anyone who is actually in the military? Will they feel the same sense of passion when this military is committed to combat operations? Will they continue to support the military leaders who must make difficult and controversial decisions in combat? Will society hold the military to unrealistic standards of behavior when it is composed of "those soldiers" vs. "our soldiers"? Will military leaders guide the actions of their soldiers with the knowledge that America expects them to exemplify American and professional values?

The potential disconnect between the political decision to use military force, and the human passion that normally accompanies bloodshed, is the most detrimental impact of the growing gap between American society and the military. War is never simply a rational act on the part of governments. It is an act of force that cannot help but involve

emotions.⁵ Once a war is begun, this passion will take the war in directions that policymakers find difficult to control. Such initial disinterest by American society could allow policymakers to commit the U.S. military to conflicts without having to initially consider the support or passion of the American people. However, it can become very difficult to sustain such a policy once the human impact of combat operations becomes clear. This inability to sustain a conflict would have significant consequences for U.S. security. The decision to go to war should never be easy and U.S. policymakers should always have to justify the use of force to the American people and obtain their commitment to sustain that force throughout the conflict.

The necessity to gain and maintain the support of the American people for the use of military force should always be foremost in the minds of policymakers, and is one of the primary reasons why the military should maintain a presence, to include ROTC, on the campuses of elite universities. Although few of the students are likely to serve in the military, they are likely to serve as key leaders in government, academia, and industry. Students at these universities should be exposed to ROTC cadets, cadre, other service members, and especially to the values that these military professionals display by their willingness to sacrifice their lives in defense of their nation. American society should understand that war is not remote, bloodless, precise, predictable, or impersonal. ROTC programs can narrow the civil-military gap, especially among those students who so regularly go on to hold powerful and influential positions in American society. In addition to influencing the elite universities, ROTC cadets and other service members will be positively influenced by those universities. They will benefit from the interaction with the faculty and students and from the exposure to a diversity of ideas and values.

ENDNOTES

1. Diane H. Mazur, "The Myth of the ROTC Ban," *New York Times*, October 24, 2010. See also Leah Greenbaum, "ROTC Members raise flag, break ban," *Columbia Spectator*, November 12, 2010.

2. Bora Fezga and Evan Roseman, "Harvard sets tone for future of ROTC", *The Crimson.com*, June 2, 2009. The Harvard Corporation directed the removal of ROTC in 1971 after a faculty senate vote. It refused to accept ROTC scholarships as well. It rescinded this administrative policy due to a challenge by a student in 1977.

3. Secretary Gates, speech at Duke University, September 29, 2010.

4. Available from www.heritage.org/research/reports/2008/08/who-serves-in-the-us-military-the-demographics-of-enlisted-troops-and-officers.

5. Carl von Clausewitz, *On War*, Michael Howard and Peter Paret, eds. and trans., Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1976, p. 89.

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