

Rare Source of Attack on 'Don't Ask, Don't Tell'

By ELISABETH BUMILLER

WASHINGTON — In an unusual show of support for allowing gay men and lesbians to serve openly in the armed forces, an article in an official military journal argues forcefully for repealing the "don't ask, don't tell" law, which requires homosexuals in the services to keep their sexual orientation secret.

The article, which appears in Joint Force Quarterly and was reviewed before publication by the office of Adm. Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, says that "after a careful examination, there is no scientific evidence to support the claim that unit cohesion will be negatively affected if homosexuals serve openly."

Although the article, by an Air Force colonel, Om Prakash, carries no weight as a matter of policy, it may well signal a shift in the official winds. It won the 2009 Secretary of Defense National Security Essay competition.

Colonel Prakash, who researched the issue while a student at the National Defense University, in Washington, and who now works in the Pentagon, concludes that "it is not time for the administration to re-examine the issue." Instead, he writes, "it is time for the administration to examine how to implement the repeal of the ban."

The article, which was first reported Wednesday by The Boston Globe, also says the law has been costly — about 12,500 gay men and lesbians have been discharged from the service as a result of "don't ask, don't tell" since it took effect in 1993 — and argues

that it undermines the unit cohesion it has sought to protect.

"In an attempt to allow homosexual service members to serve quietly, a law was created that forces a compromise in integrity, conflicts with the American creed of 'equality for all,' places commanders in difficult moral dilemmas and is ultimately more damaging to the unit cohesion its stated purpose is to preserve," Colonel Prakash writes.

The article says that in countries where bans on homosex-

*In a Pentagon journal,
an article seeking a
gay-policy repeal.*

uals' serving openly in the military were lifted, including Australia, Canada and Britain, there was no "mass exodus" of heterosexual service members and no impact on military performance.

The article does not necessarily reflect the views of Admiral Mullen or Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates, who have publicly said only that they are assessing the issue and that any change in the law is up to Congress. Geoff Morrell, the Pentagon press secretary, said Colonel Prakash worked in the Office of Acquisition, Technology and Logistics and was "an individual writing in a personal capacity for an academic journal."

Still, the article may put more political pressure on President

Obama, who promised during the 2008 campaign to overturn the ban but has so far moved slowly, much to the dismay of gay rights groups.

The Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, which represents some of those discharged from the military because of the ban, hailed the article as a "breakthrough development." In a statement, the group said it was time "to move out on the specifics of when and how to implement a new policy of nondiscrimination."

But an opponent of changing the law condemned the article. Elaine Donnelly, president of the conservative Center for Military Readiness, called the essay "one-sided" and said allowing homosexuals to serve openly would be similar to having women in the service cohabit with men.

"We don't have policies that require women in the military to live in close quarters with men, for good reason," said Ms. Donnelly, who was an organizer behind a letter, sent by more than 1,000 retired officers to Mr. Obama this year, saying they were "greatly concerned" about the effect that changing the law would have on recruitment, morale and unit cohesion.

Joint Force Quarterly is the official publication of Admiral Mullen and carries a column by him in each issue, but he had no comment on the article. "We did not encourage or discourage this story in any way," said his spokesman, Capt. John Kirby. "The chairman wants this magazine to be a place where officers of all ranks and services can discuss the key issues of the day."