

Pentagon issues warning over anti-Clinton statements by military personnel

Shannon Jones
21 October 1998

Recent insubordinate remarks by military personnel about Clinton have prompted Pentagon officials to issue a warning against criticism of the president. Clinton has come under attack in both the *Army Times* and *Navy Times*, and through a Marine e-mail petition.

The Pentagon has warned officers and enlisted men that attacks on the president violate the military code, which bars use of 'contemptuous' words about the commander-in-chief. The policy flows from the constitutional principle of the subordination of the military to civilian authority.

Recent attacks on Clinton include a column by Marine Major Shane Sellers in the *Navy Times*. Sellers declared, 'One should call an adulterous liar exactly what he is--a criminal.'

Army Colonel John Baer returned the torn-up pieces of a letter of appreciation he had received from the president. In an accompanying letter he wrote, 'Character is important and you've negotiated yours away.' In a letter to the *Army Times*, Baer urged Clinton to stop issuing such letters to officers when they retire. At his retirement ceremony, Baer said, mention of the letter brought scorn from fellow officers.

The military Internet is awash with anti-Clinton jokes and comments, and Marine Corps officers have reportedly circulated an e-mail petition calling for Clinton's impeachment.

James McDonough, a retired officer now employed by the White House Office of Drug Control Policy, denounced Clinton three weeks ago in an op-ed piece in the *Wall Street Journal*. McDonough, who led troops involved in the 1995 US intervention in Bosnia, expressed disgust over allegations in the Starr report that Clinton was with Monica Lewinsky at the same time he was discussing troop deployments in Bosnia over the telephone with a congressman.

Asked if the White House had taken any action to censure him for his remarks in the *Wall Street Journal* article, McDonough said nothing had been done. 'I'm still here,' he declared.

The September 28 issue of the *Army Times* published a number of letters critical of Clinton for his role in the Lewinsky affair. One Navy lieutenant complained that the standards that had resulted in the dismissal of officers involved in adulterous liaisons were not being applied to the president.

Throughout Clinton's administration there have been repeated public demonstrations of hostility, bordering on insubordination, within the military, including upper echelons of the officer corps. Shortly after taking office Clinton's policy of allowing gays in the military provoked open opposition from the military chiefs.

In November 1994, following the Republican congressional landslide, Senator Jesse Helms of North Carolina, a figure in the extreme right wing of the Republican Party, warned of widespread hostility to the president at military bases in his state. 'Mr. Clinton had better watch out if he comes down here. He better have a body guard,' he declared. The senator said he had been approached by many military personnel, including general grade officers, who expressed dissatisfaction with Clinton.

The response of the Pentagon to the latest attacks on Clinton has been restrained. General Terrence Drake, the Marine deputy commandant, has advised Marine generals to stay out of the debate over Clinton. The Marine command said that it was reviewing the *Navy Times* column by Major Sellers to determine if disciplinary action is justified.

A memo circulating among Air Force officers warns that 'insulting, rude or disdainful' language toward the president violates military rules. However an Air Force

officer quoted by the *Los Angeles Times* noted that private criticism of the president is not an infraction.

There can be no doubt that the ongoing assault on Clinton by his right-wing opponents, culminating in the Lewinsky scandal, has emboldened those elements within the military who consider Clinton's foreign policy insufficiently aggressive. Many in the officer corps have been critical of the president for what they consider a reluctance to use American military power, and there was considerable opposition to his decision last February to accept a UN-brokered diplomatic settlement of the crisis with Iraq and forego an air and missile assault



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