

US Joint Chiefs chairman declares homosexuality “immoral”

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The comments made by Gen. Peter Pace, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and thus the highest-ranking officer in the US military, describing homosexuality as “immoral” are both hypocritical in the extreme and a renewed attack on democratic rights.

In an interview with the *Chicago Tribune*, Pace remarked: “My upbringing is such that I believe that there are certain things, certain types of conduct that are immoral. I believe that military members who sleep with other military members’ wives are immoral in their conduct, and that we should not tolerate that. I believe that homosexual acts between individuals are immoral, and that we should not condone immoral acts.”

Pace went on to explain that the so-called “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy, under which gays are permitted to remain in the military as long as their conduct remains secret, “allows individuals to serve their country.” A policy that permitted homosexuals to serve openly “would be condoning what I believe is immoral activity. And therefore, as an individual, I would not want that to be my policy, just like I would not want it to be our policy that, if we were to find out that so-and-so was sleeping with someone’s wife, that we would just look the other way, which we do not. We prosecute that kind of immoral behavior between members of the Armed Forces.”

These are preposterous and reactionary notions. Homosexuality and adultery are matters of private personal behavior, which are “immoral” only to those who take their lead on these questions from religious doctrine. While numerous American states still have anti-adultery laws on their books, primarily products of the “anti-vice” atmosphere of the 1920s and 1930s (bound up with concerns at the time about threats to social stability), few enforce them and the general trend has been to repeal them.

In 2003, the US Supreme Court struck down a Texas law prohibiting homosexual sodomy. Finding that the law infringes upon individual liberty, the Court affirmed a line of precedent recognizing that the concept of “liberty,” as identified in the Constitution, encompasses private sexual behavior between consenting adults.

Pace’s diatribe should not be taken lightly. In January 1993, the Joint Chiefs launched an open rebellion when Bill Clinton proposed to end the half-century-old ban on gays in the US military. In response, the spineless Clinton retreated and agreed to negotiate the issue. The “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell” policy was the result in July of that year, a policy that maintained the ban and has had the net effect of intensifying the persecution of gays serving in the armed forces.

A US government audit in 1995 revealed that some 10,000 service members had been discharged from the armed forces under the law. A Zogby International poll recently indicated that 23 percent of troops who served in Iraq or Afghanistan knew someone in their unit who was gay. The Servicemembers Legal Defense Network, which condemned Pace’s remarks as “outrageous, insensitive and disrespectful,” asserts that there are some “65,000 lesbian and gay troops now serving in our armed forces.”

A federal court in Boston is currently hearing arguments in an appeal

filed by veterans, dismissed for their sexual orientation, who are asking that a lower court ruling dismissing their constitutional challenge to the law be reversed. One veteran, reports the Associated Press, compared the policy to government-sanctioned discrimination against blacks. “Systematically in the military today, gays are being harassed, hounded, harmed,” former Army Capt. James Pietrangelo II told the court. “This is segregation all over again.”

The military’s attitude toward gays is not simply an assault on the democratic rights of one section of the population, or an expression of the homophobia of the high command. As the *International Workers Bulletin*, one of the predecessors of the WWS, explained in July 1993: “The Pentagon has sought over the past two decades to create a military force suited for such colonial campaigns [the first Persian Gulf War, Somalia]. Universal conscription was abolished in favor of a volunteer army in an attempt to wall off the military from the type of social and political pressures which found explosive expression in the ranks during the Vietnam war.

“For the military command, the challenge to the ban on homosexuals was intolerable because it carried with it a suggestion that soldiers enjoy democratic rights, and that military discipline has its limits.”

A new “colonial campaign,” the invasion and occupation of Iraq, has brought disaster for the US military. Morale in its ranks is at a low point. The revelations surrounding the treatment of wounded veterans at Walter Reed hospital in Washington indicate the real attitude of the ruling elite toward the troops it publicly claims to “support.” Pace’s comments are an effort to appeal to and shore up the most reactionary elements in the military and the US population against the rising tide of disaffection and open political opposition.

Pace, the first Marine chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, has played a role in many of the major American imperialist interventions over the past 40 years. After graduating from the Basic School for Marine officers in Quantico, Virginia, in 1968, Pace served as a rifle platoon leader and later assistant operations officer in Vietnam. After performing in various functions, including as part of the security detachment at Camp David, Pace served as the deputy commander of the Marine forces during the US invasion of Somalia in 1992-1993.

As media reports have indicated, Pace’s attack on gays was not some off-the-cuff remark. He was quite “measured” and calm in the *Tribune* interview. Following criticism from gay rights groups, Pace’s senior aides were categorical that the general would not retract his comments. They told the press, according to the Associated Press, “that the general was expressing his personal opinion and had no intention of apologizing.”

Religious bigotry and backwardness no doubt plays a role. The existence of a layer of fundamentalist and apocalyptic Christians in the US military is hardly a secret. In 2003, Lt. Gen. William Boykin, the deputy undersecretary of defense for intelligence, openly expressed his fanatical views. Speaking of Islamic and Arab leaders, Boykin asked an audience in Oregon, “Why do they hate us?,” and answered, “because we are a

Christian nation.” In another appearance, he described “Satan” as the real enemy of the US.

Pace, then the vice chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, came to Boykin’s defense. In an appearance with then-Defense Secretary Donald Rumsfeld, he stated: “He [Boykin] mentioned to me how sad he was that his comments created the fury they had.” Speaking of Boykin’s views of the war on terror, Pace continued sympathetically, “He does not see this as a battle of religions; he sees it as a battle between good and evil.”

Pace has thoroughly identified himself with the “Christian family values” fraud propagated by the Bush administration and the Republican right. Sometimes with ludicrous results. In a commencement address to students at The Citadel, the military college in South Carolina, in May 2006, he intoned, “Families are fundamental, so fundamental in my belief that when I walk into my morning meeting every morning to the 15 or 20 individuals who are there to help me get the day started, I always say, ‘Cheery good morning, family.’” The reply of those 15 or 20 individuals was not immediately available.

In October 2006, Pace paid an extraordinary tribute to Rumsfeld, by then a thoroughly discredited and generally despised figure. He told a ceremony at the Southern Command (Southcom) in Miami, that Rumsfeld’s leadership was inspired by God: “He [Rumsfeld] leads in a way that the good Lord tells him is best for our country.”

Gen. Pace considers homosexuality “immoral.” This is pretty rich coming from an individual who presides over the American military machine. The illegal invasion and occupation of a sovereign country that represented no threat to the US, the leveling of entire cities, the deaths of hundreds of thousands of civilians—none of this apparently troubles Pace’s sleep.

Pace has responded to the various crimes committed by the American military—abuse and torture at Abu Ghraib and Guantánamo, the use of white phosphorus against the population of Fallujah, the massacre at Haditha—with a combination of stonewalling, evasion and denial.

The scandal at Abu Ghraib, according to his thinking, demonstrated that the system was operating extremely well. “Remember,” he told a questioner in February 2006, “that this was brought to the attention of all of us by a soldier who believed that what he saw was wrong, did the exact right thing and reported it to the chain of command. The chain of command did the exact right thing, which was to report it and investigate it. And we will continue to do the right thing, which is to report it as we know of it, investigate it, and prosecute as necessary.”

Contrary to Pace’s protests, the results of a military investigation, released in July 2005, revealed that the pornographic and sadistic interrogation techniques used at Abu Ghraib were first used several months before at the Guantánamo Bay detention center and were personally approved by Pace’s idol, Rumsfeld. The *Washington Post* noted, “The report’s findings are the strongest indication yet that the abusive practices seen in photographs were not the invention of a small group of thrill-seeking military police officers.”

On mistreatment at Guantánamo, before the same audience, Pace responded to a UN report urging the facility to be closed down: “I would feel a whole lot better about the report if the people who wrote the report had ever been to Guantánamo. When you write that kind of report and have that kind of impact and haven’t been to the place you’re reporting about, there’s something wrong with that. Having said that, Guantánamo is a facility that is run in a humane way. It has been the policy of the United States—it is now and will continue to be—that we will treat detainees humanely.”

Released detainees have testified to the horrifying conditions at Guantánamo. FBI reports detailed the systematic abuse: “On several occasions witnesses saw detainees in interrogation rooms chained hand and foot in fetal position to floor with no chair/food/water; most urinated or defecated on selves and were left there 18, 24 hours or more.”

On November 30, 2005, Pace defended the use of white phosphorus in Fallujah, declaring that such munitions were a “legitimate tool of the military,” used to illuminate targets and create smokescreens. He went on, “It is not a chemical weapon. It is an incendiary. And it is well within the law of war to use those weapons as they’re being used, for marking and for screening.” Pace contended that conventional weapons could be more dangerous than non-conventional weapons: “A bullet goes through skin even faster than white phosphorus does.”

As the WSWWS noted at the time, “White phosphorus releases heat on contact with moisture, and continues to burn as long as it has a supply of oxygen. It burns rapidly, right down to the bone, and there is no putting it out, except with the rapid application of wet mud. For men, women, children and animals caught in a cloud of it, however, the situation is hopeless. The weapon was used in Vietnam alongside napalm.”

Six months after the November 2005 massacre in Haditha, in which some 24 Iraqi civilians, including women and children were killed by US forces, as the facts began to trickled out to the public, Pace stressed that “to speculate right now wouldn’t do anybody any good.” He asserted that investigations were not yet complete. “But we should, in fact, as leaders, take on the responsibility to get out and talk to our troops and make sure that they understand that what 99.9 percent of them are doing, which is fighting with honor and courage, is exactly what we expect of them.”

In Haditha, according to eyewitnesses, a group of Marines went door to door killing inhabitants. In one house, shots “were fired at such close range that they went through the bodies of the family members and plowed into walls or the floor, physicians at Haditha’s hospital said.”

Inside another house “were 43-year-old Khafif, 41-year-old Aeda Yasin Ahmed, an 8-year-old son, five young daughters and a 1-year-old girl staying with the family, according to death certificates and neighbors. The Marines shot them at close range and hurled grenades into the kitchen and bathroom, survivors and neighbors said later. Khafif’s pleas could be heard across the neighborhood. Four of the girls died screaming.”

All of this speaks to the high moral standards of the American ruling elite, its armed forces and its military high command.



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