

Justin Logan on Political Double Standards in the Military

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Justin Logan at Cato makes an important and neglected point:

America is still laboring under the idea that the uniformed military is apolitical. It isn't. Not only is the military increasingly politicized, it only expresses open political views on one side of the debate over America's wars. Given the military's influence on public opinion, that's an unhealthy situation.

The most recent example is an op-ed this week published in the *New York Times* by an active-duty Army officer. Titled "This War Can Still Be Won," the op-ed argues strongly for continuing the Afghanistan war. Although the piece is peppered with caveats, such as the author's curious admission that "'winning' is a meaningless word in this type of war," the argument is clearly a political one.

Now try to imagine for a moment an active-duty Army officer making the opposite argument, under his own byline, in the *Times*. It's unimaginable, and for good reason. To hear officers openly arguing "this war cannot be won" would be devastating for morale. Still, members of the uniformed military do hold that view. ...

It would be one thing to have a political military in which both sides of an argument could air their views openly, but the anti-war faction in the military is hamstrung by enduring norms of remaining outside politics and a noble abhorrence of doing anything to harm morale. ...

I would prefer a situation in which we had a genuinely apolitical military. But if we're going to politicize the military, we need to figure out a way to air the views of the uniformed skeptics, too.

As Logan goes on to argue, the American public is declined to defer to military personnel on questions of war and peace, thus suggesting that this dynamic — hawkish sentiments can be expressed, dovish sentiments can't — has the potential to create a misleading impression there is a consensus within the military around various strategic and tactical questions where none exists.