

How Today's "Diversity" Damages our Military

By Brig. Gen. Chris Petty (USA, retired)

Diversity sounds great. That's part of the problem. Today's "diversity," however, isn't what it used to be. Rather than diverse experiences, backgrounds, and perspectives – to promote healthy group decisions and outcomes – "diversity" has come to mean only race, ethnicity, and gender. Today's "diversity" has subsumed our long, and largely successful, journey towards equal opportunity and moved the goal posts to the end of a new field – a field where equal racial and gender outcomes determine the score. In this new world, "diversity" has become an end unto itself, undermining the purpose of our military: winning wars. Here is why it is so damaging.

Today's diversity advocates measure organizational success by race/ethnicity and gender. These factors have nothing to do with performance or potential, and yet they influence accessions, advancements and promotions. Race and gender priorities undermine the importance of performance and merit across the force. Military leaders too often are purposely downplaying talents, attributes and skills in favor of skin color and gender to shape the force. The result is less capable leaders at all levels.

This new push for diversity also weakens our fighting force by diminishing merit and performance. As excellence gives way to quotas and ethnic/gender scoring, servicemembers understand that the leaders being selected may no longer represent the best. Not only is this disheartening, but it also makes them question their leader's abilities. This erodes trust and confidence. If a commander is seen as a "diversity hire," they will always be suspect. It is also devastating to the thousands of deserving minorities and women who are rightfully rising to the top on merit alone. Amid growing doubt and mistrust, unit cohesion suffers.

Diversity programs also destroy the warrior culture by robbing it of its core ethos. This ethos is built, first and foremost, on accomplishing the mission. As soon as we elevate racial and gender quotas above this, the culture suffers. After all, diversity and unity are opposing concepts. Now, instead of focusing on molding diverse people into a unified team, we are elevating diversity above the "unified" team, causing divisions. A warrior doesn't care about skin color, gender or background. He cares about one thing: Do you have what it takes to perform when the going gets tough and the consequences are life and death? They want everyone to be judged by what they bring to the team – no favors, no quotas, no special considerations. LTG (Ret.) H. R. McMaster recently commented on this, writing "nothing could be more debilitating to combat effectiveness than adherence to CRT's [Critical Race Theory's] proposal that people be judged by identity category rather than by character and the ability to contribute to a team."

Finally, the sheer volume of diversity programs creates an unacceptable cost on military training. A training calendar is a zero-sum game. The more requirements we place on servicemembers to learn about diversity, equity, inclusion, gender bias, and other social justice constructions, the less time they have to focus on critical warfighting skills. Ask any servicemember about the volume of non-warfighting topics they are required to train on each year, and you will be astounded. They continue to pile up and rarely go away.

Our adversaries are taking note. In a recent speech, Vladimir Putin encouraged us to stay the course on our diversity efforts, even as he sees what we are doing as "worse than the agitprop department of the Central Committee of the Communist Party of the Soviet Union." It doesn't take a military genius to

understand that when your adversary takes note of your self-destruction it might be time to change course.

It's time for our military leaders to find their moral courage on this issue and prioritize military readiness above social justice. Be proud that our military has led the nation in racial and gender integration. Stand firm in your convictions that we will always value real diversity – not the new “diversity” – and continue to look for ways to attract underrepresented groups to our ranks. But do not waiver in your commitment to maintaining standards of excellence and performance as the bedrock of personnel decisions, without regard to political pressures. It is your upmost duty. For the compromises you make today will only yield bloodshed and defeat tomorrow.

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