

Cohabitation of Deployed Married Couples

by

MSG Cindy D. Blassingame

SMSGT Hank Herrick

Group R04

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The Army has specific orders regarding conduct for Soldiers deployed in Iraq. Alcohol and pornographic material, for example, are strictly prohibited. The policy for cohabitation, however, differs from unit to unit. There are thousands of military couples serving in the Army and there are many husband-wife teams deployed to Iraq. Leaders are now faced with the ethical question of cohabitation of married couples in Iraq. Does cohabitation affect the morale of the unit? My observation of married Soldiers residing together while deployed only affect morale if the command decision is not fair and executed equally amongst the ranks.

Certain areas of operation in Iraq are not suitable for cohabitation and in those situations it is understood why the separation exists. However, there are areas in Iraq where the situation doesn't obviously indicate the commander has made the right decision for his policy on cohabitation. The ethical decision becomes even more difficult when one considers the close proximity of the units. Soldiers would readily make the comparison of each commander's decision. There is no right or wrong answer in this situation. Making an ethical decision is often tougher than any kind of decision that you will ever have to make. Making an ethical decision deals with one's moral beliefs and values. Ethical decisions many times are difficult to prove right or wrong in the same way as factual statements. Proving that a moral belief of one person is valid or that someone else's beliefs are wrong is as equally difficult.

When exploring the pros and cons of cohabitation of married couples in Iraq, a commander may use existing camp policy letters, laws, and regulations to help define the morale issue of fairness. The Army prohibits fraternization between Soldiers of the opposite sex to retain discipline and cohesion. Commanders can establish policies that restrict times of visitation of the opposite sex in living quarters. These policies must be explicit in definition and in execution.

Those policies should not allow visitation to compromise the rights and considerations of other Soldiers.

General Order Number 1 defines prohibited activities for U. S. Department of Defense personnel assigned to the Multi-National Corps, Iraq (MNC-1) or present within the MNC-1 area of responsibility. Commanders must rid the belief that General Order Number 1 states that sex in the desert is prohibited. Punishment administered to Soldiers under UCMJ is usually not for having sex in the desert. Instead, Soldiers subject to UCMJ are for such offenses as committing adultery, breaking curfews, or cohabitation of males and females except for lawfully married spouses. To an uneducated Soldier, it may be perceived as being punished for having sex while deployed. Soldiers that are not aware of the conduct that is prejudicial to the maintenance of good order and discipline while deployed can affect morale. An uninformed Soldier's beliefs and values are corrupt based on false information. False information can comprise the ethical decision of cohabitation of married Soldiers.

Commanders are charged with ensuring that all Soldiers are briefed on the prohibitions and requirements of General Order Number 1. Commanders are also expected to exercise discretion and good judgment in enforcing General Order Number 1. Commanders may restrict their units, as they deem necessary to maintain good order and discipline.

As an Army leader, you are expected to make decisions that preserve order and maintain discipline without violating Army values. General Order Number 1 allows married couples to cohabitate in the MNC- I theater of operation at the commander's discretion. By commanders not allowing married couples to cohabitate would violate several of the Army values. The commander's ethical decision making process implies Soldiers will not do the right thing. The confidence that the Army values are trying to instill in all leaders was not present in the

commander decision. The building blocks that unite a unit was ignored in favor of the easy decision.

The Army value I most contribute to this situation is respect. The Army defines respect as the treatment of people as they should be treated. This discipline says that I represent a free country that relies on me in battle and doesn't mistreat me as a person. It allows me as a leader to impart instructions and give commands without infringing on the laws of God, country, or marriage.

In the Army, respect means recognizing and appreciating the inherent dignity and worth of all people. This value reminds all Army leaders that the greatest Army resource is Soldiers. This value promotes consideration of others in respect of their culture and shows respect for others as you seek to understand their perspective and appreciation for what is important to them.

When a commander supports cohabitation of married couples, they are also fostering a climate within their unit that treats others with dignity and respect regardless of race, gender, creed, or religious beliefs. A leader that respects the Army values and combines them in his actions and deeds promotes fairness in all his dealings.

Regardless if you are deployed with your spouse or if you are a single Soldier, the fairness of cohabitation of married couples strengthens the power to discern right from wrong in any situation. The Army values tell all Soldiers what they need to be, everyday, in every action. No one value stands alone and all Army values are consistent with each other. A commander that supports cohabitation in MNC-I says a lot in their decision to do the right thing. If executed precisely and equally amongst the ranks, the commander have continued to strengthen their unit and treat others as they wish to be treated. The decision to allow married couples to cohabitate would only strength morale.