

## STARS AND STRIPES

Max D. Lederer Jr., Publisher  
Lt. Col. Michael C. Bailey, Europe commander  
Lt. Col. Brian Choate, Pacific commander  
Harry Eley, Europe Business Operations  
Terry M. Wegner, Pacific Business Operations

## EDITORIAL

Terry Leonard, Editor  
leonard.terry@stripes.com  
Robert H. Reid, Senior Managing Editor  
reid.robert@stripes.com  
Sam Amrhein, Managing Editor International  
amrhein.sam@stripes.com  
Tina Croley, Managing Editor for Content  
croley.tina@stripes.com  
Sean Moores, Managing Editor for Presentation  
moores.sean@stripes.com  
Joe Gromelski, Managing Editor for Digital  
gromelski.joe@stripes.com

## BUREAU STAFF

## Europe/Mideast

Teddie Weyr, Europe & Mideast Bureau Chief  
weyr.teddie@stripes.com  
+49(0)631.3615.9310; cell +49(0)173.315.1881;  
DSN (314)583.9310

## Pacific

Paul Alexander, Pacific Bureau Chief  
alexander.paul@stripes.com  
+81-3 6385.5377; cell (080)5883.1673  
DSN (315)225.5377

## Washington

Joseph Cacchioli, Washington Bureau Chief  
cacchioli.joseph@stripes.com  
(+1)(202)761.0908; DSN (312)763.0908  
Brian Bowers, Assistant Managing Editor, News  
bowers.brian@stripes.com  
Amanda Trypanis, Design Desk Supervisor  
trypanis.amanda@stripes.com

## CIRCULATION

## Mideast

Robert Reismann, reismann.robert@stripes.com  
+49(0)631.3615.9150; DSN (314)583.9150

## Europe

Van Rowell, rowell.van@stripes.com  
+49(0)631.3615.9111; DSN (314)583.9111

## Pacific

Mari Matsumoto, customerhelp@stripes.com  
+81-3 6385.3171; DSN (315)229.3171

## CONTACT US

## Washington

tel: (+1)202.761.0900; DSN (312)763.0900;  
529 14th Street NW, Suite 350, Washington, DC  
20045-1301

## Reader letters

letters@stripes.com

## Additional contacts

stripes.com/contactus

## OMBUDSMAN

Tobias Naegele

The Stars and Stripes ombudsman protects the free flow of news and information, reporting any attempts by the military or other authorities to undermine the newspaper's independence. The ombudsman also responds to concerns and questions from readers, and monitors coverage for fairness, accuracy, timeliness and balance. The ombudsman welcomes comments from readers, and can be contacted by email at naegele.tobias@stripes.com, or by phone at 202.761.0900.

Stars and Stripes (USPS 0417900) is published weekdays (except Dec. 25 and Jan. 1) for 50 cents Monday through Thursday and for \$1 on Friday by Pacific Stars and Stripes, Unit 45002, APO AP 96338-5002. Periodicals postage paid at San Francisco, CA. Postmaster: Send address changes to Pacific Stars and Stripes, Unit 45002, APO AP 96338-5002.

This newspaper is authorized by the Department of Defense for members of the military services overseas. However, the contents of Stars and Stripes are unofficial, and are not to be considered as the official views of, or endorsed by, the U.S. government. As a DOD newspaper, Stars and Stripes may be distributed through official channels and use appropriated funds for distribution to remote locations where overseas DOD personnel are located.

The appearance of advertising in this publication does not constitute endorsement by the Department of Defense or Stars and Stripes of the products or services advertised. Products or services advertised shall be made available for purchase, use or patronage without regard to race, color, religion, sex, national origin, age, marital status, physical handicap, political affiliation or any other nonmerit factor of the purchaser, user or patron.

© Stars and Stripes 2016

stripes.com

## OPINION

## Past time to allow Sikhs in the military

By AJIT MAAN  
Foreign Policy

On Veterans Day last year, 27 retired U.S. generals, 105 members of the House of Representatives and 15 senators signed a letter demanding that the Pentagon lift the ban prohibiting American Sikhs from serving in the military. But the ban persists.

Their arguments, like all the other arguments in favor of lifting the ban, are based on the American ideals of inclusion, diversity and religious tolerance. While I am in favor of diversity, inclusion and religious tolerance, I would like to make the argument from another perspective — that of concern about the credibility of the American narrative. It is in the strategic and pragmatic best interests of the United States to allow observant Sikhs to serve in the military while bearded and turbaned.

Sikhs served in the U.S. military from World War I until 1981, when new regulations requiring uniformity of facial hair and headgear forced them to decide between violating their faith or serving their country — a very un-American choice to have to make.

The ostensible reason behind the military restrictions against beards and turbans is that both restrict the use of helmets and gas masks in case of a chemical attack. But the new Canadian minister of national defense, a veteran of three deployments to Afghanistan while bearded and turbaned, developed and patented a gas mask that

can be worn over a beard and turban. That was 10 years ago.

So what is the real reason behind the ban? I suggest that it is the lack of visual conformity that Sikhs represent.

The beard and turban are not matters of personal style but part of five articles of faith that originated during Mughal rule in India (1526-1707), when there was a price on the head of every Sikh — including women and children. In a show of force and resolve in defiance of the Mughal charter to convert to Islam or die, Sikhs distinguished themselves with their appearance, by growing their hair, as though to say, "Here we are, come and get us if you dare."

The second association of the beard and turban is with Sava, or Service. Sikhs are obliged to help those in need and defend the defenseless, irrespective of religion. Again, the appearance is intended to make Sikhs stand out, as people who can be approached for help.

Warrior/Saint ethos is what Sikhs bring wherever they go; military service is embedded in the culture. Described as a "martial race," they have been actively recruited by the British military. Sikhs remain the backbone of the Indian military; the Sikh regiment is the most decorated in the Indian military. Almost half the Indian Army's brigadier generals and half its major generals are Sikhs. There are almost 500,000 Sikhs in the U.S. and many of them want to serve their country, just

as they did, primarily in combat roles, in World War II when over 80,000 Sikh soldiers gave their lives serving with allied forces.

The Pentagon's stance on this issue runs counter to what our armed forces are designed to protect.

How must this blatant inconsistency look to other nations? How can we have the moral authority to encourage ethnic cohesion among those we are trying to influence when we resist doing it on our own soil?

Our diplomatic and influence operations are not augmented by the appearance of not walking our talk.

It is in our strategic best interests to demonstrate that our policies are consistent with the ideals we promote. We need to maintain whatever credibility we have and shore it up where it has been damaged. We are sending operators into conflict zones to influence populations while saddling them with the burden of eroded credibility that policies like this create.

When this policy is overturned, and it will be, it ought to be done very publicly. Doing so will feed into the American narrative — a narrative that is in desperate need of nourishment. I am not promoting allowing Sikhs to serve. I am advocating welcoming them to do so and letting the visible symbols of the Warrior/Saint ethos work in our favor.

We ought to get this policy out of the way and let our values take the lead.

Ajit Maan is president of Narrative Strategies.

## Help young Americans expand their horizons

By NOAH SMITH  
Bloomberg View

At a total estimated cost of \$1.5 trillion, the F-35 fighter plane is the most expensive weapons system in history. Acquisition costs alone for F-35s totaled more than \$8 billion in fiscal 2015, and that's expected to almost double in the years ahead. Unfortunately, the plane doesn't really work yet, despite over a decade of spending, and there are rumbling questions over whether it ever will work. Such are the perils of the military-industrial complex.

What else could we spend \$8 billion on that would yield greater benefits for the U.S.? The government could mail some checks to poor people, repair the roads or plow the money into next-generation battery research. All of those would be good uses of the money. But I also thought of a new, highly speculative idea for an \$8 billion program that might do the U.S. a world of good.

I suggest we give every young American a trip overseas.

This idea is actually the reverse of Israel's Birthright program, which offers to pay for any Jewish person in the world between the ages of 18 and 26 the chance to visit Israel once. The policy presumably creates connections between Israel and the Jewish diaspora. Greece, Hungary and Armenia have implemented similar programs.

The U.S., however, is in a very different situation from these small nations. Much of the world is clamoring to move to the U.S. The problem is more that Americans don't get outside the country enough. Fewer than half of Americans have passports. Few U.S. students study foreign languages, and the number seems to be shrinking. Only 7 percent of Americans report speaking languages other than English that they learned in school.

That insularity may have political and



Courtesy of the Sound of Music Bicycle Tour

**Young people participate in a bicycle tour in Salzburg, Austria. Overseas trips can help teach young Americans that there are different ways to organize a society.**

social costs. Americans' lack of understanding of the outside world fuels isolationism, and could lead to ham-handed foreign policy mistakes. It might make the country less likely to support global initiatives like the fight against global warming. It even might fuel xenophobia of the type now being whipped up by presidential candidate Donald Trump.

So I propose a Reverse Birthright program. Every American ages 18 to 26 would get a certain amount of money toward an overseas trip of his or her choice. A reasonable amount would be \$2,000 per person, which will pay for a plane flight and 10 days of lodging anywhere in the world. The U.S. government, of course, can use its negotiating leverage to get good prices.

How much would this cost? About 4 million children are born in the U.S. every year. That would make for a maximum average yearly cost of about \$8 billion — about the same as the federal government now spends on the F-35.

These overseas trips would be exciting adventures, for sure, but that's not all they would be. An overseas trip can have a huge impact on a young person — when I went to Japan for 10 days as a college student, I decided to move there after graduation. Foreign travel can increase people's understanding of other cultures, open them to business and career ideas, and create the sense that the world is a wider, more interesting place than they had ever realized.

America's poorer people, especially, would benefit from experiencing the wider world. Seeing new places can open one's mind to the possibility of moving away from one's hometown. And research has shown that when poor people move out of their neighborhoods, they tend to benefit. In fact, the U.S. population in general is suffering from a decline in geographic mobility, which may be hurting economic dynamism. If that lack of mobility is in any part psychological, overseas trips might help.

Finally, overseas trips would alert young Americans to the important fact that there are different ways to organize a society. Traveling to Japan or Europe and seeing the excellent train systems there might make Americans less fixated on cars as the only way to get around. Observing the factories of China might fuel a renewed interest in manufacturing. Visiting low-crime developed countries might make Americans realize that high rates of violence don't have to be permanent. There is no end to the interesting things one can learn from visiting other countries.

So that's my idea for how to spend \$8 billion a year. Older generations of Americans (mostly men) saw the world by going to fight in overseas wars. Maybe it's time for a more peaceful way to give kids the broadening that comes with travel.

Noah Smith is an assistant professor of finance at Stony Brook University and a freelance writer for finance and business publications.