For God and Country
by James E. Parco, PhD.

Key Findings

- Institutional support for fundamentalist, evangelical Christianity in the military has spread and entrenched since September 11, 2001, beginning in haste during the Bush administration and remaining unchallenged by the Obama administration.

- Religious proselytizing and evangelizing have become most prevalent in three areas: Military training and education programs; While deployed overseas; Among leadership echelons, specifically the officer corps.

- Many of the military’s civilian overseers, along with many in the military’s commissioned leadership—to include flag officers, speaking on duty and in uniform—have repeatedly couched the American military’s civic and global role, and American military operations themselves, in the language of Christian religious crusades.

- Through explicit leadership messaging, senior officers have created cultures and atmospheres of religious sectarianism in their commands and institutions, including the various service academies, even instructing subordinates to partake in actions for the express purpose of Christian evangelizing and proselytizing.

- Senior fundamentalist evangelical Christian officers have used their rank and authority to undermine subordinate’s efforts (such as the Air Force Academy’s RSVP program) to maintain institutional neutrality toward religion and religious sects, and foment a culture of tolerance and professionalism.

- Pentagon oversight has been aloof and ineffective at recognizing and reigning in individual Christian fundamentalist officers and military institutions on matters of religion, all while the number of complaints continues to rise. Even the most egregious culprits have seen little in the way of serious punitive action.

- Officers who raise concerns about fundamentalist Christian proselytizing, such as Air Force chaplain Captain MeLinda Morton—when not ignored completely—have faced reassignment and other punitive actions.

- Since rule changes by the Reagan administration, the military’s chaplain corps has seen a severely disproportionate over-representation of Christianity. Whereas only 68.6% of military members identify as some manner of Christian, fully 98% of
Within that percentage, chaplains of fundamentalist and evangelical Christian denominations are dominant.

- During the Iraq War, military briefings by flag-level Pentagon officers to President George W. Bush were prefaced with direct quotes from the Bible lionizing war-making.

- Air Force training programs for Nuclear Missile Launch Officers featured Christian ethical justifications for the use of nuclear weapons and quotes from historical figures lauding morality guided specifically by the Bible.

- To gauge the mental health of Soldiers, the U.S. Army developed and has relied upon a "Spiritual Fitness" evaluation system that leans heavily on theistic religious concepts, and marks as "spiritually" deficient any non-religious or religiously unorthodox Soldier who answers honestly.

- Fundamentalist evangelical Christian organizations are given preferential access to numerous military installations, including the Pentagon and the various service academies, and have had their activities sanctioned and even promoted—in uniform and on duty—by religiously aligned military leadership.

- Fundamentalist evangelical Christian organizations have attempted to use the deployed U.S. military as international missionaries, providing units in Afghanistan with Bibles printed in the native Pashto and Dari languages, the distribution of which is in direct violation of standing general orders.

- With Department of Defense approval, fundamentalist Christian religious organizations printed and distributed camouflaged-covered Bibles prominently featuring trademarked official U.S. military service emblems, for sale in base exchanges and elsewhere.

- Fundamentalist Christianity's corrosively sectarian "religious-moral view," that one must be religious, or particularly religious, to be moral, undermines the professional culture and esprit de corps of the military. It creates tension within units, tension with leadership, undermines military effectiveness, and impinges on religious freedom.

- Although freedom of conscience and belief is critical, for the sake of good order and discipline military members must be cognizant of context and their professional responsibilities. When in uniform or in the midst of official duties, the appropriateness of sectarian religious behavior shifts. As for all official representatives of the U.S. government, military behavior on matters of religion is ultimately constrained by the Constitution.

- This paper provides 12 recommendations for beginning to deal with the pervasive fundamentalist evangelical Christian sectarianism within the U.S. military, from civilian leadership, to the officer corps, to the behavior and responsibilities of enlisted servicemembers.