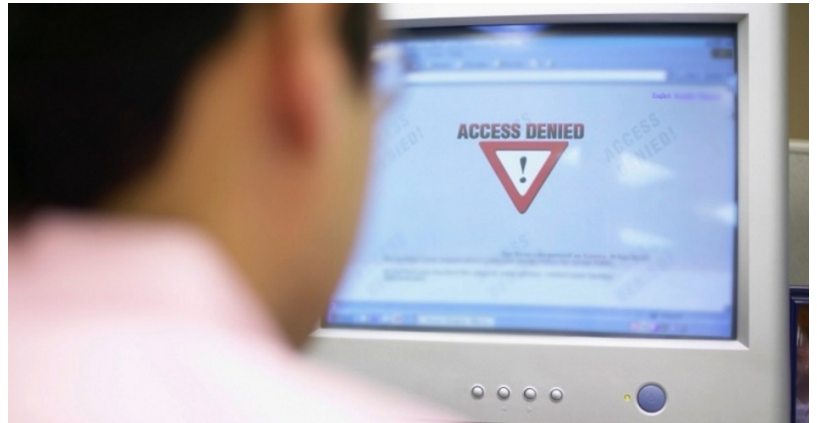




Written by [Dave Bohon](#) on April 25, 2013

## U.S. Army Bases Block Access to Southern Baptist Website

Weeks after religious leaders blasted the military for training material that [labeled evangelicals, Catholics, and orthodox Jews among “extremist” elements](#) in the United States, the U.S. Army has reportedly blocked access to the Southern Baptist Convention’s (SBC) website at some military bases. The [American Family Association](#) (AFA) reported that it was notified by an Army officer at a U.S. base that he was denied access to the SBC website when he attempted to access it on his government computer. The SBC, a conservative evangelical fellowship, is the nation’s largest Protestant denomination.



The officer said that a message came up notifying him that the site was being blocked by the Army’s Team CONUS [Continental United States] for alleged “hostile content.” Team CONUS is tasked with protecting computer networks throughout the Defense sector. “So the Southern Baptist Convention is now considered hostile to the U.S. Army,” the officer complained in an e-mail to the pro-family group.

Officials from the denomination have been in contact with the Defense Department in an attempt to bring clarity to the situation. “This is deeply disturbing,” SBC spokesman Sing Oldham told [Fox News](#). “While the Deputy Chief of Operation of the U.S. Army has assured us this is a random event with no malicious intent, the Army must run this to the ground to assure that this is the case.”

Army officials could not pinpoint exactly what supposedly “hostile content” had caused the SBC site to be blocked, and while few other military personnel had complained publicly, several military bases across the country appeared to be affected. Oldham said the precedent was troubling. “If the government blocked any portion of the [SBC.net](#) website for any purpose, that would be an unconscionable breach of trust with the American public,” he told Fox News. “The First Amendment exists to protect the church from governmental censorship of or infringement upon religious speech and the free exercise of religion.”

Richard Land, past president of the SBC’s [Ethics and Religious Liberty Commission](#), called the situation “outrageous,” noting that “Southern Baptists make up a higher percentage of the all-volunteer military than in the general population. It’s outrageous that our website would be blocked for Southern Baptists serving in the military and defending the freedom to access websites.”

The AFA’s Randy Sharp concurred, calling the situation “one more example of the Defense Department leadership allowing hostility towards faith and religious freedom in our military.” Sharp told Fox that the “growing list of offenses is overwhelming and [Defense] Secretary Chuck Hagel should no longer ignore it.”

In early April a [U.S. Army Reserve training briefing](#) raised the ire of Christian leaders for specifically identifying “Evangelical Christianity” and “Catholicism” as examples of “religious extremism” similar to



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al-Qaeda, Hamas, and even the Klu Klux Klan. Ron Crews, a retired military chaplain and director of the group [Chaplain Alliance for Religious Liberty](#), said at the time that “men and women of faith who have served the Army faithfully for centuries shouldn’t be likened to those who have regularly threatened the peace and security of the United States.”

As for the Army blocking content from a respected Christian denomination, Crews noted that “the Southern Baptist Convention has the largest number of chaplains in the military representing Southern Baptist soldiers and churches. Those chaplains need access to their denomination’s website.”

While the Defense Department confirmed that the SBC site had indeed been blocked at an undisclosed number of military locations, an official insisted it was unintentional. “The Department of Defense is not intentionally blocking access to this site,” said Lieutenant Colonel Damien Pickart in a statement. “We are working diligently to investigate what might be causing access issues for some of our service members and to correct the situation as quickly as possible.”



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