

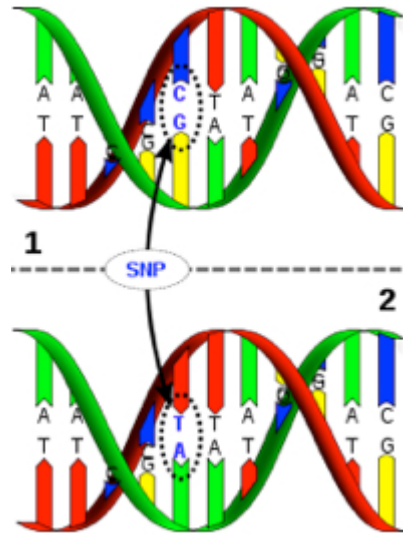


Written by [Joe Wolverton, II, J.D.](#) on January 24, 2011

Pentagon to Use Genetic Code to Identify Perfect Soldier?

Old soldiers never die, they just pass on their genetic code? A report issued by a defense science advisory panel suggests that the Pentagon may begin collecting DNA from military personnel to identify the genome sequence that defines a good soldier.

Findings reported by [JASON](#), an independent group of scientists which advises the U.S. government on matters of science and technology, recommends that the Pentagon take advantage of “the rapidly falling cost of gene sequencing by preparing to engage in the mass sequencing of the genomes” of the men and women of the armed forces.



The physicists, biologists, chemists, oceanographers, mathematicians, and computer scientists that comprise the JASON project, point out that the Department of Defense and the Department of Veterans Affairs (VA) have access to an untapped source of valuable genetic information and are “uniquely positioned to make great advances” in the science of genetic research in this crucial field. Specifically mentioned are the decades of archived medical records and DNA samples already on file at the VA.

A [commentary](#) on the report published by the ACLU claims:

Specifically, the report recommends that the Pentagon begin collecting [and] sequencing soldiers’ DNA for “diagnostic and predictive applications.” It recommends that the military begin seeking correlations between soldiers’ genotypes and phenotypes (outward characteristics) “of relevance to the military” in order to correlate the two. And the report says — without offering details — that both “offensive and defensive military operations” could be affected.

The privacy concerns of such a program are obvious. The threshold question that the Pentagon would have to answer would be whether the collection of such samples (whether archival, contemporary, or future) presents a thorny legal problem in that the blood or other substances derived from the body of subjects is the property of that subject and therefore protected by the Constitution’s prohibition on the deprivation of life, liberty, or property without the due process of law.

Congress has legislated in this general area. In 2008, Congress passed the [Genetic Information Nondiscrimination Act \(GINA\)](#), which prohibits group health plans and health insurers from denying coverage to a healthy individual or charging that person higher premiums based solely on a person’s genetic predisposition to the possible of development of disease. The law also bars employers from using individuals’ genetic information when making personnel decisions.

While GINA does not apply to the military, it is certainly an indication of the opposition any similar use of genome sequences would face in Congress were the Defense Department to attempt such a project.

Regardless of whether the DoD makes such use of the DNA of soldiers, airmen, and marines, there is no



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doubt as to the surprising amount of such data already under the control of the Pentagon.

As reported in an [article](#) published in the *American Journal of Human Genetics*:

Currently, DoD collects and uses the genetic information of service members in several ways. All U.S. service members, including active duty and reserve military personnel, must provide a DNA sample that may be used to identify their remains should they die in battle (see Armed Forces Institute of Pathology database online). These samples are housed in the Armed Forces Repository of Specimen Samples for the Identification of Remains. As of 2002, the United States military's DNA repository contained 3.2 million samples.

Inarguably, the accurate identification of battlefield casualties is an appropriate use of DNA material; however, the use of that very personal data as a sample for compiling the specific genetic code of the perfect soldier is much more controversial for a few reasons.

First, there is the question of how the Pentagon would use the identification of the sequence. Would this or that recruit be placed in the infantry rather than in a support billet based solely on his genetic code?

Second, there is the irrefutable scientific fact that a person's genetic code is only one factor in his behavior. Apart from DNA, there are cultural, education, and other influences that also affect the way a person reacts to his surroundings and to the challenges he faces.

The [ACLU article](#) makes a good point regarding the potential abuses latent in such a controversial project:

If the Pentagon has strong, nonspeculative reasons to believe that genetic research could help military effectiveness, or if it wants to make use of genetics to help with medical care just like the rest of the medical world, then let it operate in exactly the same way that civilian scientists would, under accepted scientific protocols, including meaningful informed consent, Institutional Review Boards, and other accepted standards of human-subject research.

Soldiers, having signed away many of their rights upon enlistment, should not be used for research that would not otherwise comport with our values, just because they are conveniently available.

Perhaps the most alarming aspect of this report and the suggestions made therein is the uses to which this data could be put by a government intent on singling out a particular group from among its citizens. As has been [chronicled many times](#) by *The New American*, the government of the United Kingdom has amassed a database that is the most extensive in any developed nation. The database was established in 1995 and is the world's largest. It contains the DNA material of over five million Britons, a figure that represents 8 percent of the population of England and Wales. The recording system was initially developed ostensibly to aid the police in the investigation of crime scenes and function as a "vital crime-fighting tool" in tracking down elusive offenders.

Should the government of the United States or any agency thereof begin cataloging the DNA of military servicemen, the balkanization of Americans may be accomplished not just by ethnicity, but also by one's genetic predisposition to accept the tyrannical abolition of freedom.



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