

DEOMI Review and Recommendations based on readily available foreign military experiences with the repeal of “Don’t Ask, Don’t Tell”

Homosexuality and the Israel Defense Forces

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Technical Report # 03-12

The findings in this report are not to be construed as an official DEOMI, U.S. military services, or Department of Defense position, unless designated by other authorized documents.

Background:

While there are a number of countries that permit gay and lesbian soldiers to serve in the armed forces, some experts question whether it will have an impact on the effectiveness of military performance. The purpose of this article is to determine the effects of lifting a gay ban on military performance, readiness, cohesion, or morale. Specifically, the authors examined the impact of lifting a gay ban in Israel in order to determine whether the lessons from their experience would be relevant for the U.S., if it implemented the same policy. The authors completed a comprehensive literature review for articles and documents on this topic, as well as conducting over 35 interviews with experts on the issue of the gay ban in the Israeli military. There were no data that indicated that lifting the gay ban undermined the Israeli military performance, cohesion, readiness, or morale. The authors also reviewed three main arguments on how the Israeli experience is not relevant for determining what would happen if the U.S. Congress and Pentagon lifted the American gay ban. In particular, claims that most gay Israeli combat troops do not disclose their sexuality to peers, some gay and lesbian soldiers receive special treatment, and that cultural and organizational differences distinguish the Israeli and U.S. cases were considered. The authors agreed with these arguments; however, they interpreted each of the factors differently from the experts who claimed that Israeli military experiences are irrelevant. While no single case study can show decisively what would happen if the U.S. changed its policy, lessons from the Israeli experience seem to be relevant for determining what would happen if the U.S. Congress and Pentagon lifted the American gay ban.

Effect of Lifting the Ban:

Their findings suggested that the majority of military members are not concerned with the sexual orientation of their peers. This is mainly due to the fact that it is not relevant to the output or performance from that particular member. However, there are some who may have a problem with it and find it strange. Currently, there are no statistics collected on the number of incidents of harassment of known homosexual soldiers in the Israeli military. According to the authors, sexual orientation problems are rare, but they have tended to be handled as discrete situations rather than the symptom of a systematic problem. Furthermore, the authors' findings, reports from the U.S. General Accounting Office (GAO), and the RAND cooperation suggested that homosexual soldiers performed as well as heterosexual soldiers. Overall, the authors were unable to find any evidence that suggested Israel's decision to lift its gay ban undermined operational effectiveness, combat readiness, unit cohesion, or morale.

Reference:

Belkin, A., & Levitt, M. (2001). Homosexuality and the Israel Defense Forces: Did Lifting the Gay Ban Undermine Military Performance? *Armed Forces and Society*, 27(4).