

THE O'REILLY FACTOR

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Interview with Aaron Belkin

O'REILLY: In the "unresolved problem" segment tonight, another study of the "don't ask don't tell" military policy on homosexuals. Joining us now have from San Francisco is Aaron Belkin, director of the Center for the Study of Sexual Minorities in the military at the University of California- Santa Barbara. So what did you find out in your study, sir?

AARON BELKIN, UNIV. OF CA-SANTA BARBARA: Well, we looked at four foreign militaries that had lifted their gay bans, and interviewed every expert we could find, including people who were very much against the lifting of the ban, generals, admirals, people who predicted disaster would ensue if foreign militaries lifted their bans. And we found literally in every single case that there had not been any impact at all on military effectiveness or unit cohesion or performance.

O'REILLY: All right, now what countries were these?

BELKIN: These were studies of Canada, Israel, Britain, and Australia.

O'REILLY: All right, Canada, we know their military is -- let's put it this way -- inconsequential. They only have 53 military people. Israel, they have women in their military as well. And everybody almost serves in some capacity.

Australia and what was the other one?

BELKIN: Britain.

O'REILLY: And Britain. All right. Now the conclusion is that homosexuals can freely speak about their orientation.

BELKIN: No, that's not quite the conclusion.

O'REILLY: Go ahead.

BELKIN: It was just that the lifting of the ban had no impact on military performance. But, actually, part of the reason for that is that, contrary to the fears of people who predicted disaster, very few soldiers actually came out of the closet after the lifting of the ban.

O'REILLY: So why -- why not keep the ban in place? What's the point? If they're not -- if they're smart enough -- and I use that term very sincerely -- if the soldiers are smart enough not to discuss their sexual orientation on the job, you know, what's the point? Don't-ask-don't-tell just encourages them to be smart, does it not?

BELKIN: Good points. One kind of qualification and then an answer to your question is that, actually, many people were known to be gay or lesbian prior to the lifting of the bans. That's true in foreign militaries. It's also true in this country. It's just that lifting the ban did not cause many more to reveal their sexual orientation.

O'REILLY: OK.

BELKIN: Why get rid of the ban? Because the ban is undermining national security and it's causing a tremendous brain drain, a talent loss, when we fire Arabic linguists, wasting of money, driving a wedge between the military and civil society. So there are a lot of reasons.

O'REILLY: OK. Now I agree with you that the Arab linguist thing was bad, and I wish that had not happened, but I disagree with you in the sense that the military's being harmed by it, and I'll tell you why.

We saw a very effective military machine in Iraq, and we saw a military machine comprised mostly of young men from working-class backgrounds, many of them from traditional homes in the country in the South and the Midwest who had been raised to look askance at homosexuality, OK? That's what comprises the bulk of our troops. This isn't Canada here.

So it seems to me that the best policy is the one we have in place where this issue just doesn't come up, and, if somebody suspects, nobody cares. Mature people will live and let live. But to lift the ban, you open then the door of having maybe a flamboyant homosexual, you know, create conflict within the unit, and I see that as a detriment, sir, I have to tell you.

BELKIN: I totally understand, and I think your remarks perfectly captured the fears of other people overseas in Britain. Sixty-six percent of the military said they would resign if the ban was lifted, and then the ban was lifted, and only two or three people left.

So those fears are definitely real, but the point is that, if the United States were to lift its ban, there would be no negative effect on military effectiveness.

O'REILLY: I don't think so. I think there would be more incidents of this and more division within the various units. I could be wrong. Obviously, this is speculation. But I know the mentality. It's not...

BELKIN: Well, you don't have to...

O'REILLY: Homosexuality is not conducive to the military culture. That isn't to say that you can't be a good soldier and you're gay. That's not to say that. But it's not conducive traditionally to our military culture. So I...

BELKIN: You actually don't...

O'REILLY: Go ahead.

BELKIN: You don't have -- you actually don't have to speculate because the military itself actually suspends or relaxes the gay ban during wars. The number of discharges always goes down during wartime. And so the military itself lets gays serve during wartime when cohesion matters most.

And I think if your argument was correct, then we would have seen some problem in extremely effective militaries like Britain or Israel or we could have seen some problems in the Secret Service or the CIA.

O'REILLY: Maybe.

BELKIN: All these organizations have lifted their bans and not a single problem has...

O'REILLY: But just remember the different cultures in Britain, Israel, Australia, and the United States. Different cultures.

Professor, we appreciate your point of view. Thanks very much.

(COMMERCIAL BREAK)