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Gay Soldiers Don't Cause Disruption, Study Says

By Elisabeth Bumiller
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A comprehensive new study on foreign militaries that have made transitions to allowing openly gay service members concludes that a speedy implementation of the change is not disruptive. The finding is in direct opposition to the stated views of Pentagon leaders, who say repealing a ban on openly gay men and women in the United States armed forces should take a year or more.

The study, "Gays in Foreign Militaries 2010: A Global Primer," is to be released Tuesday by the Palm Center, a research group at the University of California, Santa Barbara.

The Palm Center has no official position on "don't ask, don't tell," the American law that bans openly gay service members, but the group has become a leading force among advocates for repeal. The principal author of the study is Nathaniel Frank, who also wrote the book "Unfriendly Fire: How the Gay Ban Undermines the Military and Weakens America."

The 151-page study, which updates existing studies on gay service members in Britain, Canada, Australia, South Africa and other countries, offers the first broad look at the issue in foreign militaries since Defense Secretary Robert M. Gates and Adm. Mike Mullen, the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, called for an end to "don't ask, don't tell" earlier this month.

The report concludes that in foreign militaries, openly gay service members did not undermine morale, cause large resignations or mass "comings out." The report found that "there were no instances of increased harassment" as a result of lifting bans in any of the countries studied.

In addition, the report says that none of the countries studied installed separate facilities for gay troops, and that benefits for gay partners were generally in accordance with a country's existing benefits for gay and lesbian couples.

On implementation, the study said that most countries made the change swiftly, within a matter of months and with what it termed little disruption to the armed services. Mr. Frank said the study did not look at what happened if the change was implemented gradually because, he said, "I don't think any of the militaries tried it."

Mr. Frank's report cited a 1993 RAND study on the effects of allowing openly gay members to serve in the American military, which concluded that "phased-in implementation might allow enemies of the new policy to intentionally create problems to prove the policy unworkable." On personnel policy decisions of this nature, the RAND study said, "Any waiting period permits restraining forces to consolidate."

But Gen. David H. Petraeus, the commander of United States Central Command who oversees the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, joined with other American military leaders when he said Sunday that a lengthy review of "don't ask, don't tell" was warranted. On NBC's "Meet the Press" program, General Petraeus said that a review currently under way by the Pentagon, which is to include a poll of military attitudes on the change, "is very important to this overall process." The review, General Petraeus said, "will suggest the policies that could be used to implement a change if it does come to that."

General Petraeus, who said that allowing openly gay service members in Britain and Israel had in the end been “uneventful,” declined to give his own view on the merits of allowing openly gay members of the United States military. “I support what our secretary and our chairman have embarked on here,” he said, adding that he would offer his own opinion if he was asked in a hearing on Capitol Hill.

On the same program, Gov. Tim Pawlenty of Minnesota, a potential Republican candidate for president in 2012, said that he continued to support “don’t ask, don’t tell” because “if it’s not broke, don’t fix it.”