

THE BROOKINGS INSTITUTION  
5 on 45: On the transgender military ban  
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(MUSIC)

PITA: You're listening to 5 on 45 from the Brookings Podcast Network, analysis and commentary from Brookings experts on today's news regarding the Trump Administration.

KAMARCK: I'm Elaine Kamarck, senior fellow and author of *Why presidents fail* from the Brookings Institution. Today President Trump tweeted out a major piece of national policy. What he did was, he said that the United States will no longer accept or allow transgender people in the United States military. This reverses the decision made two years ago under the Obama Administration by former Secretary of Defense Ash Carter. It became two years ago a real marker in the social progress that we had made in this country regarding rights for gays, lesbians, and transgender people. From then on it was supposed to be that anyone who could meet the tough qualifications of being in the United States armed services would be allowed to serve, regardless of how they thought of themselves sexually.

Well, apparently no longer. Trump, without consultation from the Pentagon, just went ahead and did this. Obviously it is a political play to his right-wing religious constituents who were objecting in Congress to pieces of the military defense bill that dealt with transgender people. It also, though, is more of what happens in the Trump administration on a regular bases, which is the president making policy without a real consultation process. In fact, over at the Pentagon there was a review going on of the effect of transgender people on military readiness, a study to see what had happened in

the last two years. And Trump just decided, obviously there was some pressure from the far right, to go ahead and make this decision. So today, when reporters are sending questions to the Pentagon, the Pentagon is sending those questions back to the White House. It's ironic that this announcement should come on the sixty ninth anniversary of President Harry Truman's decision to desegregate the armed forces. In fact, the United States military has always been a great experiment in the melting pot that is America. It took a long time to desegregate the military, even though Truman issued the executive order in July of 1948. It wasn't until 1954, six years later, that the army deactivated the ninety fourth Engineer Battalion, the last all black unit in the armed forces. Since then there certainly have been racial problems in the armed forces just as there has been in America. But today the armed forces is one of the more egalitarian and racially integrated organizations in all of American society. Frankly, under the Obama administration the same thing was beginning to happen for people who are gay, lesbian, or transgender.

Take, for example, the human interest story about Sergeant Shane Ortega, a 28 year old helicopter crew chief serving in Hawaii. He's about as good a soldier as you can find. He's got bulging muscles, a thick neck, copious tattoos, and a stellar record serving his country. You'd never guess frankly that he used to be a she. Or take the example of Lieutenant Ashley White stump, the first member of the newly created cultural support teams to be killed in action. These are groups of women assigned to special forces who undergo all the heavy lifting and nighttime attacks that the special forces carry out and they do this in order to go into the villages and be able to talk to women in the villages interrogate them and find some information about what's going on in the very segregated Muslim world of rural Afghanistan. This Ashley white stuff is featured in a book called

Ashley's War: The Untold Story of a team of women soldiers on the special ops battlefield. There's nothing that breaks down prejudices faster than feeling you know someone a gay soldier a female soldier or a transgender soldier that you can admire the U.S. military has been integrating people for 69 years now and doing it successfully. It's too bad that, today, President Trump tried to reverse history and go back on one of the most important movements forward in American society.

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