

Gender Integration and Citizenship

A Civil-Military Perspective

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Abstract: In the debates over the inclusion of women in combat specialties, the arguments raised by those opposed to female inclusion almost always default to women's physical capabilities. As those issues are quickly becoming reconciled, this article proposes a shift in the discussion to the topics of the meaning of military service, its connection to the national concept of citizenship, and the impact of these concepts on the issue of women integrating into combat roles.

Keywords: women, combat, civil-military relations, citizenship, women in combat specialties, meaning of military service, military service and citizenship, integration of women into combat roles

In November 2015, when Secretary of Defense Ashton B. Carter opened all military occupational specialties (MOSs), including combat roles, to women, he defied a military norm that some thought was cultural more than tactically relevant. The United States Marine Corps, however, two months prior had released reports indicating that combined units (men and women) were potentially less combat effective than all-male units.¹ While the Marines have resisted gender integration, the leaders of other Services have moved forward with adapting their respective forces with new policies to incorporate women into combat specialties. Yet Carter's unilateral, universal, top-down shift in policy has not resulted in a concomitant change in combat units. Resistance

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is palpable among some while others accepted the obvious next step in the all-volunteer force of the twenty-first century military.

A summary of the arguments protesting the integration of women into combat roles nearly all center around two main premises: physiology and readiness. This article intends to move the discussion of this topic away from these two problematic criticisms to a conversational space of greater social and philosophical significance. Rather than fixating on the question of how much a woman can carry, the inquiry should instead focus on who serves and why they serve as well as who matters, both within the military and American society. Solutions to reconcile the difference in physical capabilities between men and women in the armed forces will eventually be found. It is imperative that we as a society engage the challenging philosophical and sociocultural questions that will impact the debate and change in national civil-military relations. In this piece, the operative concept in this intellectual debate is not the study of physical strength but instead focuses on the concept of citizenship.

Although nearly all of the literature that opposes women in combat specialties relies on physical strength-based arguments, it is not going to be the primary focus of this particular essay. The universal fear of nearly all those in the combat arms community is that physical standards will be lowered to accommodate female success. This modification of requirements, they assert, will reduce the overall quality of the graduates and have a cascading effect of declining fighting effectiveness of the total force.²

The dilemma with this position is two-fold. Female servicemembers interested in entry into combat arms do not want a reduction in standards to facilitate their success.³ They, like their male counterparts, are drawn to this career path because of the challenge and prestige of the combat arms branches. The easing of any standards would undermine their rationale of pursuing equal opportunity, especially for women who hope to advance to high-level leadership positions.⁴ Moreover, the overall intent of this initiative is the search for equality. Female servicemembers demand the equality of experience and standards, not accommodation or preferential treatment. The skewing of requirements specifically for their success would unlevel the playing field that they all pursue in the military profession. Finally, a slowly growing number of women have passed the requirements of the Army Infantry courses, Ranger School, and the Marine Corps Infantry Officer Course, so the concern over needing to reduce the physical standards should be receding.⁵

Second, a historical examination of physical requirements for combat training reveals a surprising amount of inconsistency over the years. Although there are many challenges to these assertions, perhaps the best refutation comes from political scientist Robert Egnell, who contends that the two main arguments that traditionalists consistently use in their defense—standards and combat ef-

fectiveness—have proven to be historically “fungible” concepts.⁶ The physical fitness criteria that used to vet incoming combat arms candidates has varied a tremendous degree over the years, often driven by the personnel requirements at the time.⁷ Additionally, the idea of combat effectiveness has proven similarly as problematic, as those in the military profession can neither find consensus as to what measures demonstrate a military’s effectiveness nor a clear causal variable that undeniably indicates what makes a unit become ineffective. The elasticity of these concepts cast considerable doubt on their sacrosanctity and on the immutability of physical requirements for men or women. Currently, there is no doctrinal publication, study, or policy that provides a clear and accepted definition of *combat effectiveness* in either the Marine Corps or Department of Defense (DOD). Yet, those who vocally oppose the inclusion of women in combat arms (or who opposed social inclusion of other minority groups in the military) have relied on this concept as their primary argument with remarkable success.

Nearly all of the debate regarding women serving in combat specialties fixates specifically on female physiology. This is understandably so as the preponderance of studies conducted by the DOD on gender integration place heavy emphasis on the physical capabilities of women servicemembers. Far too much of the research, debate, and focus has been directed to the singular myopic inquiry of whether or not a female can carry a heavy pack. Instead, the argumentative energies would be better directed to investigating far more important philosophical issues and implications introduced by this controversy. This article proposes a redirection of the conversation from the physical carrying capacity of an infantryman to the relationship between the military and its government and people, and more broadly, the meaning of military service writ large.

In fairness, opponents to female integration into combat units do not dismiss the broader civil-military relationship issue out of hand. The most frequently articulated protest by military traditionalists when reacting to issues such as this is that the armed forces should not be a petri dish for social experimentation; this coincides with the argument that the pursuit of a “liberal political agenda” too often takes precedence over national security and readiness. For defenders of military exclusion, this broadly means any citizen who had traditionally been barred from service (homosexuals, transgender individuals, and women in combat). They consider their inclusion into military service as only serving a political purpose for liberal politicians and not driven by military necessity. Opponents frequently reference variations of the terms liberal political agenda or social experimentation as the true inspiration for inclusion.⁸

The position of not letting the military become part of the aforementioned social experimentation gets less attention than the physical arguments but warns that such a misplacement of priorities puts the nation’s safety at risk.⁹ The

military, they believe, should be left alone to determine the means (manning, equipping, and training) to fight and win the nation's wars. Their complaint inspires a broader question: Should a military that is an all-volunteer force be made to demographically reflect the society it serves? Traditionalists frame this question in a frightening dichotomy. In deciding whether to allow women to serve in combat specialties, the American people are choosing between social diversity or the nation's safety. One has to question, however, whether this choice results in these mutually exclusive outcomes, or whether the military can pursue equality and still maintain its superiority in military effectiveness. Those who champion this argument always frame diversity as inherently reducing the military's effectiveness and never consider that it could actually enhance it by offering a variety of opinions and backgrounds representative of our diverse American society—which many others would consider our strength.¹⁰

Supporters of this stance find intellectual reinforcement in what is arguably the foundational source of military professionalism, Samuel Huntington's *The Soldier and the State*. In his thesis, which calls for objective control of the nation's military, Huntington warns his readers that the "gravest domestic threat to national security" is the American liberal tradition.¹¹ Liberalism, according to Huntington, represents a singular focus on the individual at the cost of the collective, a championing of social justice versus social order as well as embracing pacifism. Therefore, he argues that liberalism is then the greatest enemy of military profession. Huntington calls for the distinct separation of the military profession from the spheres of politics and broader society. The military professional should only embrace obedience and recognize the values of liberalism as antithetical to his own professional ethos.

To be sure, women with the right to serve in the armed forces is not at issue today, as they have served in uniform in some capacity for more than a century. Moreover, their role has expanded to nearly every MOS, including piloting helicopter aircraft and commanding warships. Women currently comprise more than 20 percent of the U.S. Air Force's total personnel.¹² During the last several decades, women have served bravely in uniform, deployed to combat zones, and held high levels of command in all the Services. But the question still remains—do women in the U.S. military enjoy the same social and professional equality as their male counterparts? And is denying their ability to serve in combat billets evidence of that inequality?

The soldier has played a crucial role in the sociopolitical construct of the republic and has been a foundational concept in the Western political tradition since ancient times. The earliest Western civilizations, the Greeks and Romans, embraced the concept of republicanism in their population, demanding that all citizens have to sacrifice for the common good of the republic. This sacrifice would come most commonly in the form of taxation, serving on juries, or most

importantly, the nation-state's defense. Both of these civilizations can attribute much of their nationalistic rise partially to their adoption of the citizen-soldier ideal, as they demanded that all free, able-bodied men provide military service as a condition of their citizenship.¹³ This construct was revitalized with the rise of the modern nation-state and was championed by such theorists as Machiavelli and Jean Jacques Rousseau. This requirement of military service as an application of citizenship was brought to the New World in the form of the first militia systems in America, as the first permanent English settlements in the seventeenth century required all free men of military age (usually 18–35) to serve in defense of their colony. This connection of military service as a duty to the state and the representation of attachment and obligation to the state directly connected it to the ideals of citizenship.¹⁴

However, the conversation about what military service means in the American tradition has become less frequently engaged as the nation nears half a century of the All-Volunteer Force (AVF) instituted in 1973.¹⁵ For most citizens, the AVF is all they have ever known and remains the understood reality of who serves in the military and why. As a result, a decreasing number of Americans have worn the uniform and have accepted that doing so has been and will continue to be done by a microscopic percentage of the population. As a result of these decreasing numbers, many observers are noting now that U.S. service-members enjoy privileged status among the citizenry as the military continues to reign as the institution most trusted by the population (nearly triple the popularity of the elected government) and that individual troops are bestowed with praise, congratulations, and gratitude.¹⁶ In essence, soldiers in America enjoy elevated social and cultural status as military service is seen as unique, and because it is only pursued by a handful of citizens, it receives recognition beyond the expectations of normal citizenship.¹⁷

Since the Civil War, military service in the United States has most frequently been applied to national conscription. Traditionally, conscription is viewed as the practical necessity used by the federal government to meet the overwhelming manpower needs of the military in times of large-scale wars. But the modern Selective Service System (and its capability to facilitate a military draft) means much more than the simple requirement to man a mass army. Military sociologists and political scientists identify two primary positive impacts from conscription.¹⁸ The first is that a draft demands broader sacrifice by a larger group of citizens, thereby increasing the shared burden in the defense of the republic. This creates a greater sense of patriotism and connection to the state. Second, conscription draws from a wider pool of talent, as it demands service from all able-bodied citizens, regardless of economic background or social status. Today, similar sentiments can be applied to broadening the field of applicants and opportunity for ground combat arms. Recent statistics indicate that

the pool for qualified recruits is shrinking as recruiters struggle to meet quotas for an operating force that has greater demands put upon it by national security commitments.¹⁹ Philosophically, this could be a questionable time to embrace an exclusionary policy toward manpower requirements. Expanding the pool of the eligible, the draft demonstrates, expands the amount of talent available.

The connectivity between citizenship and military service has gradually eroded with the advent of the AVF as military service is now a choice—one that is made by an increasingly smaller part of the population. Nearly all those who do so argue that they serve out of sense of patriotism, duty, and obligation to protect the republic. Defending the republic allows for the actualization of citizenship and subsequently access to the opportunity that it provides to those who do answer the call to serve. It is the most conspicuous method for any person in society to demonstrate their worth through their selfless sacrifice for the good of the nation. The nation, therefore, demonstrates gratitude and offers privilege to citizens who serve. The greatest value and respect of citizens who serve, however, is reserved for those who serve in combat. African Americans recognized this connection between combat and citizenship in every conflict since the Civil War, as they demanded the opportunity to serve on the front lines to prove their worth as citizens and their commitment to the nation by placing their lives on the line in the fiercest combat.²⁰

This intersection of the government, military, and citizenry also needs greater attention in the debate of women in combat roles as opponents frequently rely on the social petri dish argument. Advocates for maintaining the combat arms as an all-male force lament that efforts at gender integration are motivated only by liberal politics and that efforts to use the armed forces for sociocultural experimentation is an abuse of the nation's military.²¹ They assert that such changes (e.g., race, gender, or sexual orientation/identity) is unnecessary, intrusive, counterproductive, and potentially dangerous. Politicians and social reformers who seek to use America's military for social justice causes have no business doing so and both elected officials and the citizenry have no business or right to meddle in manpower policies and should leave the armed forces alone.

History, however, does not support them in this effort as the broader dynamics of civil-military relations throughout the nation's history need to be properly contextualized. The American armed forces are funded by a popularly elected government and are staffed by volunteers from the citizenry. The federal government gives the military its mission, designs the system of service (in this case, all-volunteer), its organizational structure through federal law, and a social service network during their service to facilitate their lifestyles (medical, housing, education, family support, etc.). All of the DOD is supported by federal taxpayer dollars as Congress appropriates spending for the military annually as one of the largest portions of the national budget, and the public continues to

support the armed forces socially and culturally as the most popular institution in the United States.²² However, surveys also show wide support from the American public of women having combat-related billets, although the military is usually slow to adopt new societal norms.

Historically, the American military has been consistently resistant to both political and social policy initiatives that it views to be a violation of its own expert assessment of the ideal conditions to fight and win the nation's wars. However, historian (and retired military officer) William A. Taylor, in his study on American military service, is keen to point out that the government has labored to ensure that the armed forces remain consistent with broader American values when it comes to the issue of who serves. Moreover, he notes that nearly every episode in which the military has thought that it knew what was best for the defense of the republic in these situations has proven the government—and not the military—right in the end.²³

The military frequently does itself a disservice in this debate through its inconsistent assessment of the civil-military gap. The military professionals in the age of the AVF have often identified themselves as isolated, misunderstood, and underappreciated by the government and people they serve. They demand a better connection with society and a greater closeness in understanding.²⁴ But when asked to share and incorporate values and ideals from civilian politicians and society to better connect them, the military professionals recoil at such notions as senseless manipulation and exploitation.²⁵ The closing of the civil-military gap consists not just of the public's increased awareness of how the military functions but, more importantly, the need to conjoin values, participation, and share common ideals. The military outwardly desires more engagement and connection to the broader population, but when it comes to certain recruiting policies that could connect them to that population, it wants to be left alone. The American military will always be a national institution, and in situations where that responsibility causes discomfort within the institution and inspires resistance in society, it will cause the civil-military gap to widen.

An examination of the more than 200-year history of the American civil-military tradition portrays a larger give-and-take and back-and-forth relationship between the civilian government and the armed forces.²⁶ When assessing the requirements necessary for maintaining the nation's security, Congress and the executive branch have had to weigh countless factors (economic, social, and political). They have rarely given the military a proverbial blank check for all that it demands to accomplish in its mission. Indeed, the military experience is one of never truly being satisfied with what the government has allocated for them and will always view themselves as having to pursue overwhelmingly demanding tasks with deliberately restricted resources in personnel, materiel, technology, and overall funding. Every attempt by civilian lawmakers to give

the military less than what it requests is often met with incredulous threats that doing so could come at the risk of national security or inability to win the nation's wars.²⁷ Yet, even with two centuries of Congress willfully not fulfilling their wishes, the military continues to succeed on the world's battlefields and maintain its dominance, financially and technologically, among its competitors.²⁸

Much as in other historical examples, traditionalists who resist social changes within the military nearly always fixate their protests on the negative outcomes of said changes. However, they rarely identify the consequences for maintaining the status quo. In this case, if the military becomes more exclusionary, it may invite the risk of reducing the pool of talented applicants for various duties. The DOD is already weighing the potential effects on recruiting/retention and public relations for its perceived embracing of misogyny, bias, and prejudice. The Marine Corps, for example, in reaction to the Marines United scandal, has created the Personnel Studies and Oversight (PSO) Office to "ensure that the institution is properly recognizing, investing in, and leveraging the diversity of our Marines." The Assistant Commandant, General Glenn M. Walters, who pioneered this organization, asserts that attitudes such as bias and contempt actually damage the Corps' mission readiness. He vocally argues that a force that embraces inclusivity, equality, and tolerance create a better fighting force, not the opposite.²⁹ By standing up and championing PSO's mission, it will lead to reduced resistance from fellow general officers to the inclusion of women in ground combat specialties.

By extension, the concept of egalitarianism and the question of who can serve extends to equality within the force itself, particularly in the AVF professional force. Those in combat arms demand egalitarianism in the maintenance of common standards of entrance and performance—and rightfully so. Perception of inequality has a negative impact on morale within units and the profession itself, as they believe that all share an equal burden in meeting the same standards—and burden sharing creates unit cohesion.

Those in the combat arms communities benefit from the absence of egalitarianism between the MOS communities themselves, specifically with career progression and institutional leadership opportunities. For the highest flag officer billets, preference is given to those in ground combat specialties for the two ground Services (the Marine Corps and the Army). Nearly all the Joint Chiefs during the last half of a century from both of those Services have come from the infantry community as with countless other high-level flag officer billets.³⁰ Without access to opportunities to combat arms billets, female servicemembers are by default denied the access to the highest levels of command and responsibility. So the question of who gets to serve in the military broadly then trans-

lates to who matters and is given preference within the institution itself. This question of who matters broadens the discussion to the value of servicewomen overall to the nation's security and, again, to the connection of military service to their broader value as citizens.³¹

The issue also demands a more nuanced assessment of the military's role in the twenty-first century. The arguments from those who oppose women in combat, particularly those who fixate on physiological evidence, base their assessment exclusively through the lens of combat and conventional war.³² However, the realities of the post-9/11 world have forced the military to evolve and has broadened its role in our national security strategy. Fighting and winning the nation's wars no longer adequately encapsulates the military profession's universal role as it now more accurately serves as a key instrument in the projection of American interests, ideas, and values. The best means to accomplish this mission is to fashion a military that looks like America.³³ As the forward-deployed military consistently represents the face of America, should it not look like America to those to whom the nation looks to influence, embrace, and inspire? For example, the traditional model of assessing a military's power through individual strength or toughness may be becoming more anachronistic and possibly counterproductive. To be sure, traditional hard power should seek to demonstrate strength to potential enemies and serve as a weighty deterrent to all adversaries.

However, as the military increasingly functions as the ambassadors of Western liberal values in their effort to win "hearts and minds," it contributes to this mission more effectively by being a visual representation of equality and opportunity for all as demonstrated by those wearing the uniform. This is a concept that is explicitly mentioned in America's 2018 National Defense Strategy published by the DOD.³⁴ This grand strategy demands a military of talent, intelligence, and judgment rather than pure physical endurance.³⁵ Air Force fighter pilots and Marine Corps infantry continue to embrace the theories of Colonel John Boyd, who contended that military success comes not to the strongest or best-equipped force but to the one that can think faster than its enemy.³⁶ If the conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan are any indication of the requirements of conflicts to come, these wars will be determined by the sharpest minds, not the strongest backs.

If recent history indicates that this type of war has indeed become the reality for America's fighting forces, then it may call into question some of Samuel Huntington's premises regarding the perceived dangers of liberalism. Experts can agree that much of his civil-military theory viewed the role of the military profession through the lens of the existential threat of the Soviet Union during the Cold War in which the future conflict would most certainly be a total war

with only one nation surviving the outcome. This paradigm may not accurately reflect the conflicts of the twenty-first century, which may call for a different philosophical framework to understand the role of the military professional. Perhaps a more useful model is the one proposed by sociologist Morris Janowitz, whose seminal work, *The Professional Soldier*, offers two concepts that better fit this dynamic. First, Janowitz challenges the idea that the military professional eschews the ideals and values of civilian society and instead argues that they should be leveraged to create a more dynamic officer corps. Second, he notes that most combat American service personnel are likely to encounter is that of “limited war”—small, political wars that require a much more nuanced, thoughtful, and varied collection of soldiers. He notes that America’s military is more likely to engage in a “constabulary” role versus a large, conventional war and will act more as “police” in irregular environments, instead of functioning in conventional combat.³⁷ History demonstrates that conflicts of these kinds are best resolved by demographically diverse military forces who bring thoughts and experiences from differing perspectives to situations that present a variety of challenges.

The greatest challenge to this issue is that the only way to truly assess if gender integration in ground combat arms impacts combat effectiveness is through war itself.³⁸ In the absence of kinetic conflict, military thinkers, planners, and commanders are left to ponder and prognosticate what will make their force the most successful in the next fight. They must tirelessly deliberate over which doctrine, demographic, organizational structure, and technology will give U.S. forces the best advantage against their potential adversaries.

In the absence of real fighting (and killing), the military elite must rely on training, exercises, and history to provide any insight into what methods will be the crucial keys to victory, though history can be a poor predictor of what will work best in future conflicts. For the issue of gender integration, perhaps the latter can shed the most light as to its impact on the military’s future. The past cases of the armed forces having to engage in social equality issues, or the perennial debate of rights versus readiness may be a false dichotomy. For each instance where issues such as this have reached national attention, the social reforms forced upon the military by American society have never identifiably caused a regression in their fighting capability. Those who have claimed the inevitable decline in combat effectiveness as a result of such reforms have yet to provide valid data to prove their predications; therefore, the false correlation between inclusion in the military and its relation to so-called combat readiness should not determine the outcome of this decision. It would seem that the U.S. military could actually have both and still remain a prestigious military power on the world stage, while also reflecting our democratic, egalitarian values that

are the hallmark of American democracy and demonstrate our values of opportunity for all for the rest of the world to hopefully emulate.

Notes

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- approximately 71 percent of the nation's youth are not qualified to serve under the current recruiting standards. In the last two years, studies conducted for Marine Corps Recruiting Command cite decreased interest in military service in the eligible population and increased recruiter workload to meet recruiting goals in the last several years.
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 22. "Confidence in Institutions," Gallup, 11 June 2017.
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 33. Commandant of the Marine Corps, White Letter No 3-14, "Diversity Task Force Initiative," 16 June 2014; and Commandant of the Marine Corps, White Letter 2-13, "Commandants [*sic*] Diversity Task Force Initiative." The Marine Corps conducted a talent management study, led by current Commandant Gen Robert B. Neller to examine how the Corps allocates talent. The study validated that greater diversity in

- personnel improved institutional effectiveness. The results of the study were never formally published or circulated.
34. *Summary of the National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military's Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: DOD, 2018), 9. Page 9 states that America must “uphold a foundation of mutual respect, responsibility, priorities, and accountability. Our alliances and coalitions are built on free will and shared responsibilities. While we will unapologetically represent America’s values and belief in democracy, we will not seek to impose our way of life by force. We will uphold our commitments and we expect allies and partners to contribute an equitable share to our mutually beneficial collective security, including effective investment in modernizing their defense capabilities. We have shared responsibilities for resisting authoritarian trends, contesting radical ideologies, and serving as bulwarks against instability.”
 35. *The National Military Strategy of the United States of America: The United States Military's Contribution to National Security, 2015* (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2015), 14. The latest *National Military Strategy* reinforces this concept: “We are adapting our organizational culture. To enhance our warfighting capability, we must attract, develop, and retain the right people at every echelon. Central to this effort is understanding how society is changing. Today’s youth grow up in a thoroughly connected environment. They are comfortable using technology and interactive social structures to solve problems. These young men and women are tomorrow’s leaders and we need their service. Therefore, the U.S. military must be willing to embrace social and cultural change to better identify, cultivate, and reward such talent.”
 36. Robert Coram, *Boyd: The Fighter Pilot Who Changed the Art of War* (Boston: Little, Brown, 2002), 327–44.
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