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Should Women Serve in Direct Combat Roles?

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Why Women Should Not Be In Combat Units (MSG Jackson).....

The issue of women serving in combat has been a point of ongoing debate in the U.S. military since its establishment. Female Soldiers today often find themselves embedded with combat units supporting the War on Terrorism. Congress has examined the issues surrounding females in combat at several levels. However, the current policy, established in 1994, is no longer relevant. Many institutions have conducted studies to evaluate the physical prowess of females and almost unanimously, these studies have concluded that with the proper training, females can meet the Army's combat arms specialty standards. It is the determination of this research group that given today's asymmetrical battlefield, the Army should give females the option to serve in combat military occupational specialties as long as they meet the requirements.

To counterpoint this there are three main reasons why women should not serve in combat. They include physical ability, psychological concerns, and political will.

From a physical fitness viewpoint, on average female Soldiers are four times more likely to sustain injuries during combat than male Soldiers are. In one study female and male cadets conducted rigorous, combat-like training. The rate of female injuries was fourteen times greater than that of male Soldiers, and 61 percent of the women failed to complete the exercise.

A female's body composition is different from a male's body composition. The female's muscle groups and bone structure are smaller than the male's, therefore during extreme physical conditioning, they are more prone to injuries. If female Soldiers cannot endure the strenuous training during normal operations, it would almost be impossible during combat. Many studies have highlighted women in combat.

Even when males are willing to lead women into combat, the potential for increased stress will hinder the unit's mission. Male Soldiers must compensate for any female Soldier who cannot sustain the physical demands of combat.

The evidence gathered from several tests and studies indicate that females lack the necessary physical ability required for combat (Hoge, Clark, & Castro, 2007).

The chairman of the Department of Military Science at the University of Michigan conducted a test of Army officer cadets. The University took the top 20 percent of females and administered an Army Physical Fitness Test. The top 20 percent scores for females were the bottom 20 percent for males. Less than seven percent of the females completed 60 push-up repetitions on the test while 78 percent of the males completed more than 60 repetitions.

Most 20-30 year old healthy women have the aerobic ability of a 50-year-old man.

Women by nature have 40 percent less upper body strength than their male counterparts (Bork, 2005).

The study results above show that females do not have the same physical abilities as males. If these statistics are not convincing enough, there have been countless reports in the media, which support the inabilities of women in combat. On Feb. 23, 1991, CNN focused on Army MAJ Rossi, who was the first female helicopter pilot to fly in a combat zone. A few days after CNN aired her story, she died. Rossi flew her helicopter into a 375-foot tower in Saudi Arabia, killing herself and five other Soldiers. Navy LT Kara Hultgreen was the first woman to fly the F-14 Tomcat. Hultgreen was also the only female to qualify to fly Navy carrier operations. In October of 1994 while attempting a daylight landing on the USS Abraham Lincoln, Hultgreen crashed her plane and died. Her navigator ejected, but she did not react fast enough, losing her life.

The second argument concerning women's inability to conduct combat operations relates to emotional stress. Female Soldiers are more likely to allow their emotions to over-escalate during stressful situations and events. Some military leaders believe most female Soldiers do not possess the psychological state of mind to take a life without hesitation. Infantry and special operations Soldiers require a killer instinct. These combat specialties also require physical and mental abilities to survive with limited resources.

Studies among civilian populations have shown that compared with men, women have significantly higher rates of depression and anxiety disorders, including post traumatic stress disorder (PTSD). Studies of general military populations in garrison have paralleled findings from civilian studies. Research on the gender differences associated with military deployments,

such as the Vietnam War, the Persian Gulf War, or peacekeeping operations, have found somewhat consistent results. These studies are consistent with current extended combat deployments in Iraq or Afghanistan – war zones that lack traditional front lines place women in roles that put them at greater risk than in the past.

If a female Soldier becomes pregnant, she may undergo psychological and physiological changes. She is exempt from training and combat deployments. When female Soldiers cannot deploy due to pregnancy, the mission is at risk. For every Soldier exempt from combat duty, additional stress is placed upon the other Soldiers in the organization.

The 1992, testimony provided to the Presidential Commission for Women in the Armed Forces revealed that although women would improve combat effectiveness, the sensitivities associated with female POWs provided the greatest amount of political debate. Interviews conducted on former male POWs from previous conflicts and wars described in great detail brutal atrocities of torture but no incidents of rape or sodomy (Women In Combat Frequently Asked Questions, 2004).