

**WOMEN IN COMBAT – A
POLICY PARADOX FOR
COMMANDERS**

BY

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USAWC STRATEGY RESEARCH PROJECT

WOMEN IN COMBAT - A POLICY PARADOX FOR COMMANDERS

by

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ABSTRACT

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Even though Congress repealed statutes from 1948 that excluded women from serving in combat, the Secretary of Defense's combat exclusion policy restricts the use of women in the military. Commanders are at risk of violating this policy as they assign women to areas of responsibility in Iraq and Afghanistan. With 15% of the US military comprised of women – and given the current operational and personnel tempos – it is imperative for commanders to have policies that allow maximum effective utilization of all military members to accomplish their missions. This is a case of combat capabilities. Reports from the battlefields describe an enemy who is not easily distinguishable from the civilian population and who fights and kills without discrimination. The combat exclusion policy does not meet the needs of the nation and the combatant commanders. Given current significant resource constraints and unprecedented pressure on the military, now is exactly the time to notify Congress that DoD plans to rescind the combat exclusion policy. The Secretary of Defense must use this sense of urgency to persuade an attentive Congress to make this policy change that will allow maximum utilization of all human resources in fighting our nation's wars.

WOMEN IN COMBAT - A POLICY PARADOX FOR COMMANDERS

Even though Congress repealed statutes from 1948 that excluded women from serving in combat, the current combat exclusion policy restricts the effective use of women in the military. Specifically Title 10, U.S.C. 8549¹ was repealed in 1991 that excluded women from duty in aircraft engaged in combat missions, by the Kennedy-Roth Amendment to the FY 1992-93 Defense Authorization Act² and Title 10, U.S.C. 6015³ was repealed in 1994 that excluded women from serving on warships⁴. The Secretary of Defense and the Service Secretaries maintain the combat exclusion policies that restrict women in military occupational specialties and assignments.⁵ Each service and the Coast Guard have different policies. The only existing statute that has the effect of restricting women in combat is the requirement that the Secretary of Defense must notify Congress prior to making any changes to restrict or open up positions or assignments to women. Public Law 103-160 was signed on 30 November 1993.

Subtitle D: Women in the Service - Repeals a Federal provision restricting the manner in which women members of the Navy and Marine Corps may be trained and qualified for military duty. Requires the Secretary to notify the defense committees at least 30 days in advance of proposed changes in the combat assignments of women in the armed forces. Requires 90 days' notice with respect to proposed changes in the ground combat exclusion policy for such women. Directs the Secretary to utilize gender-neutral occupational performance standards in the case of any career field that is open to both male and female military personnel.⁶

Today, military commanders are at risk of violating policy when they assign women to certain roles in combat operations. With 14% of the US military comprised of active duty women (24% women in the reserve and 15% in the National Guard)⁷ and given the current operational and personnel tempo necessary to conduct operations in

Iraq and Afghanistan, it is imperative for commanders to have policies that allow effective utilization of all military members to accomplish their mission. According to a U.S. Naval Historian,

The combat exclusion law currently prohibits women from being assigned to submarines, Special Forces, and combat units. However, the Global War on Terrorism and the fighting in Iraq and Afghanistan has made the restriction difficult to comply with because there is no delineated line of combat. Furthermore, there are critical shortages of personnel with certain military occupational specialties and there are instances where a female is the most qualified or only qualified person available for the mission.⁸

Reports from the battlefields in Iraq and Afghanistan describe an enemy who does not wear a distinguishable uniform and who fights asymmetrically on a non-linear battlefield. Commanders from these battlefields and the military members who worked for them are routinely placed in combat situations due to the nature of the conditions on the ground. This places Commanders in a policy paradox – they can keep a valuable asset, trained women, under their command out of harm's way, in compliance with service policy; or they fight our nation's wars with the best qualified personnel under their command. The combat exclusion policy simply does not meet the needs of the nation and allow commanders the flexibility they need to accomplish their mission.

Colonel Paul Grosskruger commanded a battalion in Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF) and shared his observations in a monograph.⁹ He described the position of women in the Army as being “caught between the policies rooted in the Cold War and the realities of the 21st century battlefield”.¹⁰ As a battalion commander coming off the battlefield, he provides an eye-witness perspective of women serving in combat – and the challenges he faced regarding his female soldiers. His experience is based on commanding his junior officer corps, fifty percent of whom were women.¹¹ He believed

that, prior to OIF and Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF), the combat exclusion policy produced a generation of male leaders with limited experience commanding female engineers in combat.¹² Colonel Grosskruger observed females serving in several critical leadership positions; they planned deployments, breached international borders, constructed highways and air strips, all while transiting extremely dangerous terrain.¹³

He offers a compelling observation on his women soldiers:

I certainly gained a deep respect for our junior officers as I observed their actions during OIF. My experiences confirmed that effective leadership is based upon a number of factors – not one of them being gender. What I also saw was the desired leader attributes in female leaders that were indistinguishable from those of their male counterparts – their patriotism, technical and tactical expertise, leadership and professionalism.¹⁴

Colonel Katherine M. Cook commanded the 203rd Forward Support Battalion (FSB), 3rd Infantry Division (Mechanized) for OIF 1.¹⁵ Her personal monograph reports her experiences before and during combat. Because of the FSB's location it was considered a training location; her unit had a large number of females assigned as "medics, cooks, supply specialists, and drivers of fuel tankers and other transportation assets".¹⁶ Along with normal readiness issues, because of the composition of her unit, she had to consider pregnancy as a deployment readiness issue. Accordingly she dealt with it as a personnel management issue. Learning lessons along the way through training and preparing the unit, after 9/11, her unit was deployed to Kuwait and Iraq,

We did not know we would be going to war, but my training experience in the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) and my wartime experience as a company commander taught me that all soldiers should expect to go to war with no notice – and it was incumbent upon the leadership of the unit to make certain that soldiers had the skill and confidence to execute those tasks.¹⁷

When the 203d was assigned guard duty at Iraqi schools, she dispatched female soldiers to guard girls' schools and all the while her soldiers were at risk of small arms

fire.¹⁸ This combat commander reports that “At no time during the execution of any missions with the 3d BCT did I, or any other commander ever take gender as a consideration for what missions these soldiers would or would not do, with the exception of the request for women soldiers to guard the Muslim girls’ school”.¹⁹ Obviously due to cultural norms, only women could perform guard duties at the girls’ school. She described the constantly changing battlefield and the expectation that they would face direct combat on a daily basis.²⁰

Lieutenant Colonel Randall E. Twitchell shared his experiences as the 95th MP Battalion commander in Iraq.²¹ He reports how female soldiers are called on to directly engage the enemy. He had female soldiers in all levels of the MP unit, with no position or location excluded.²² His unit saw combat in Baghdad, Fallujah, Karbala, and Najaf, with females serving in all locations.²³ In one specific example that demonstrated the contributions of his battalion, he recounted the experiences of how First Lieutenant Brittany Meeks, a platoon leader under his command, responded to a convoy under attack. After securing the area, laying down suppressive fires, and evacuating the wounded, she responded to a helicopter crash that was providing close air support to the battle scene.²⁴ Lieutenant Meeks’ mission was to save the crew and secure the area until help arrived. However, the aircrew was killed in the crash. In this combat environment, with all the requisite chaos and danger, she and her team were successful at securing the crash scene to prevent the enemy from capitalizing on the tragedy by photographing the crash site so it could be used in Arab news broadcasts. After help arrived, Lieutenant Meeks and her team searched the surrounding urban area and

found weapons.²⁵ He used this example to illustrate how his teams were able to suppress enemy ambushes and secure downed aircraft.²⁶ He noted that,

The female MPs in the 95th were no different from male MPs. All qualified with their assigned weapons, certified in all required training prior to and during deployment, met the Army standards for physical fitness, and were prepared to fight in combat conditions. They have demonstrated on numerous occasions their ability to perform all MP missions to include engaging the enemy in direct combat situations. For all of the MP soldiers, male or female, there was no 'combat exclusion'.²⁷

With experience as an Infantry officer and Infantry Battalion Commander in Operation Desert Storm, Colonel Robert J. Botters shared his observations on how the collocation rule of the Combat Exclusion Policy poses problems for battlefield commanders.²⁸ The nature of his unit's mission brought medical teams close to the front lines of the operation, putting female soldiers in harm's way. But they saved lives.²⁹ Colonel Botters suggested the combat exclusion policy as written is "untenable". Even so, he advises commanders to attempt to adhere to it until Congress modifies the law "to allow women to engage in combat".³⁰ An enlightened policy will acknowledge: "The expectation now is that combat will occur anywhere. All units and service members have a reasonable expectation of contact with the enemy."³¹

Not to violate Muslim culture, in searches of homes and women, the Marines developed the Lioness Program. In this program female Marines volunteer to receive basic Marine Corps martial arts training, language skills and search techniques. They learn how to identify improvised explosive devices. They study Muslim culture in order to assist Marines in searching Muslim women at checkpoints and during home searches.³² Three members of the Lioness Program died performing their duties.³³ Army female soldiers have also joined this program and perform this invaluable mission in Iraq. These Lionesses indisputably serve in combat areas.

Military personnel should be allowed to compete for military occupational specialties and considered for military assignments based on their training, experience, and leadership potential. In military specialties or assignments that require additional testing to perform the missions in the expected environments, testing should be done for all personnel expected to accomplish the mission.

As early as 1942, General George C. Marshall considered the idea of women serving in combat units.³⁴ General Marshall reviewed the role British women played in Anti-Aircraft Artillery (AAA) units and asked General Eisenhower to look into it further.³⁵ After a positive review of the British women in AAA units, General Marshall conducted his own test on a combination of 21 officers and 374 enlisted women in AAA duties.³⁶ The results proved that women and men met the same standards and efficiency levels, so the commanding officer recommended the test be expanded and continued.³⁷ Due to other factors concerning the use of women in the Army, and the perceived lack of a real threat to the US proper, General Marshall directed that the test results remain confidential and he stopped the test and relieved the women of their test duties.³⁸

In response to recommendations by the DoD Task Force on Women in the Military, DoD opened up additional positions to women by establishing the 1988 "Risk Rule" that established a standard by which positions and units could evaluate positions suitable for women.³⁹ The Risk Rule opened up 30,000 new military positions for women.⁴⁰ Former Secretary of Defense Les Aspin, by memo on January 13, 1994, rescinded the risk rule and promulgated a rule and definition of ground combat, excluding women from combat based on this new rule and definition.⁴¹ Titled the Direct Ground Combat Rule, this opened up 32,700 Army positions and 48,000 Marine Corps

positions to women.⁴² The Direct Ground Combat Rule specifically excludes women from serving in combat: “Service members are eligible to be assigned to all positions for which they are qualified, except that women shall be excluded from assignment to units below the brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground.”⁴³ Direct ground combat is defined as “engaging an enemy on the ground with individual or crew served weapons, while being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with the hostile force’s personnel.”⁴⁴ A further qualification declares that “Direct ground combat takes place well forward on the battlefield while locating and closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, or shock effect.”⁴⁵ The Aspin memo also cites four additional restrictions on positions and assignments for women: 1) “where the Service Secretary attests that the costs of appropriate berthing and privacy arrangements are prohibitive,” 2) “where units and positions are doctrinally required to physically collocate and remain with ground combat units that are closed to women,” 3) “where units are engaged in long range reconnaissance operations and Special Operations Forces missions,” and 4) “where job related physical requirements would necessarily exclude the vast majority of women Service members.”⁴⁶ Despite the ebbs and flows of statutes and policies that restrict women’s access to certain positions and assignments, 239 females have received the Purple Heart since WWII.⁴⁷

“The military police mission in Iraq, previously considered ‘combat support’, has broadened almost to the point of being a branch of the combat arms.”⁴⁸ Because military police (MP) are used for reconnaissance, patrol missions, convoy and route security and similar missions, they have received more training on combat survival

skills.⁴⁹ Private First Class Teresa Broadwell Grace, USA, was an MP serving in Iraq on 16 October 2003 when she was involved in a firefight in Karbala.⁵⁰ She and her team killed twenty Iraqis in this fight. Three U.S. soldiers died and seven more were wounded in that fight but her actions saved many lives. She was awarded the Bronze Star with 'V' for Valor and the Purple Heart.⁵¹ Three other female soldiers were involved in this fight; they indisputably served in combat.⁵² Captain Kelly McCoy, USA, the first female Soldier in the 82nd Airborne Division to be decorated with the Bronze Star with 'V' device for her service in Iraq, says it plain and simply, "They most definitely are [in combat]. There are women who drive the same roads men do. Roadside bombs aren't discriminatory. There are no safe areas in Iraq to drive. There [are] really no front lines in Iraq".⁵³ Master Gunnery Sergeant Rosemarie Weber, USMC, was deployed in April 2003 to Baghdad, Iraq, where she provided support to building the Iraqi Army.⁵⁴ When describing her work in Iraq, she says

First of all I was never looked at as being a woman. I was simply a Marine in Iraq at that time.... But as a woman, looking back on it now I feel that it was an opportunity to prove ourselves right. For years we have been hearing the question, 'Can women go into combat?' Oh, absolutely not according to the many naysayers... Well we proved them wrong....we're doing it alongside the men...⁵⁵

First Lieutenant Rebecca Moore, USMC, was deployed to Ar Ramadi, Iraq, as part of her duties, she sent subordinate Marine females to augment the regimental combat teams in Fallujah.⁵⁶ These female teams searched Iraqi women coming into and out of the city. In June 2005, one of her female Marines was killed and another injured along with many other team members.⁵⁷ Corporal Holly Charette, USMC, was killed when her convoy was attacked by a vehicle-borne IED, and Corporal Teresa Fernandez was burned in an attempt to pull Corporal Charette out of her vehicle.⁵⁸

Although not in direct physical contact with the enemy, the hostile environment was lethal for Corporal Charette and her comrades. Lieutenant Moore observed that, “People who say that women shouldn’t be in combat and get caught up on that kind of thinking are generally people who don’t really know a lot about what’s going on over here.”⁵⁹ Lieutenant Colonel Sarah Cope deployed to Iraq in 2003 as an MP. She and her team were responsible for clearing buildings in Fallujah, where she attracted the attention of Iraqi women and children, who were amazed to encounter a female soldier.

Under the Department of Transportation, the Coast Guard is not subject to statutes or policies that prohibit women from Coast Guard specialties or assignments.⁶⁰ Approximately 12% of the active Coast Guard (USCG) and 15% of the Coast Guard Reserve is comprised of women.⁶¹ Lieutenant Commander Holly R. Harrison, USCG, was one of four commanders of 110 patrol boats supporting OIF by patrolling the Northern Arabian Gulf.⁶² She described this location as “on the front line”.⁶³

No current statutes prohibit the services from applying combat exclusion policies. The Navy, Marine Corps, and Army have implemented combat exclusion policies and rules. There is also no statutory definition of a "combat mission"; such definitions are left to the discretion of the Secretary of Defense and the Service Secretaries. Military specialties and assignments are closed to women on the basis of these arbitrary definitions that no longer fit today’s circumstances. Since 1983, the Army has used a “Direct Combat Probability Coding System” to identify positions that exclude women.⁶⁴ Perhaps we can learn from our NATO partners, some of whom have no statutory or policy restrictions on women’s roles in their militaries, such as Canada, Norway, Portugal, Luxembourg and Denmark.⁶⁵ Currently the FY06 National Defense

Authorization Act (NDAA) directed the Secretary of Defense to notify Congress of any proposed changes in policies regarding females' eligibility for assignment to specific positions or duties.⁶⁶ This statutory requirement does not in itself restrict women in combat; however, the statutory oversight may in fact have a discouraging effect on the policy makers, thus limiting policy change recommendations.

The Navy recently announced it is considering opening up submarine service to women by 2011.⁶⁷ The Navy has submitted the statutory notification to Congress for this policy change. Other countries already permit women to serve on submarines: Australia, Canada, Norway, Spain, and Sweden.⁶⁸ A former US Naval Base Commander was quoted as saying "If you work with women in the workplace, you should be able to work with them on submarines."⁶⁹ In 2005 the Navy described its human capital strategy as appropriate for the 21st century; this strategy was formulated "in order to create and shape a workforce that provides the right skills, at the right time, to accomplish the right work."⁷⁰ However, Navy policy at the time did not consider women suitable human capital for submarine service.

The issue of women trained for combat roles or serving in combat or in combat support roles has stirred emotion not unlike controversies regarding right to life and gun control. However, evidence suggests that the public is changing its attitudes toward increased support of women in combat and combat roles. A *New York Times*/CBS news poll in January 1990 reported 72% of those surveyed as supporting women serving in combat units. Likewise, a *McCall's Magazine* telephone survey in February 1990 revealed that 79% of the 755 people surveyed supported women serving in combat by choice.⁷¹ A CNN/*USA Today*/Gallup poll of 1,006 adults also showed "that a

majority of Americans support women serving in combat zones as support for ground troops and serving anywhere in Iraq".⁷² Significantly, the percentage of women in the U.S. labor force increased from only 38% in 1970 to now almost 50%. Pew Research Center data shows the public is changing its views on the roles of women in society.⁷³ Seventy-five percent of the people surveyed in 2008 stated they disagreed that women should return to a more traditional role in society, as opposed to 66% in 1987. Surveyed respondents who agreed that women should return to traditional roles declined from 30% in 1987 to only 19% in 2008.⁷⁴

Stories of commanders and experts in the field also reveal changing attitudes. Many commanders report that both women and men under their command in Afghanistan and Iraq have capably performed their missions. They also report that they felt constrained by exclusionary policies which complicated their personnel assignments to certain positions. Lance Corporal Jessica Kane, USMC, a Field Radio Operator, deployed to Iraq, was assigned to be the driver for her commander.⁷⁵ In addition to driving her commander into and out of Fallujah, she was responsible for his security while in the vehicle and while walking among the Iraqi people "outside the wire."⁷⁶

Many experts, including David W. Barno, a retired lieutenant general who commanded forces in Afghanistan; Dr. Mansoor, who now teaches military history at Ohio State University; and John A. Nagl, a retired lieutenant colonel who helped write the Army's new counterinsurgency field manual, say it is only a matter of time before regulations that have restricted women's participation in war will be adjusted to meet the reality forged over the last eight years.⁷⁷

In a Strategic Studies Institute forum on Women in Combat Compendium, participants agreed that "the nature of combat for the U.S. Army has changed, and the existing rules governing the employment of women do not fit this new situation; and there is not the slightest doubt that women can perform their assigned duties in the

combat zone, including engaging in combat actions essential to their personal and unit's self-defense, with skill and valor equal to their male comrades."⁷⁸

The reality is that women service members are now serving in combat and they are dying in combat. As of 15 Sept 09, the Congressional Research Service provided the following data, see Table 1, on casualties (killed and wounded in action) from Operation Enduring Freedom (OEF) and Operation Iraqi Freedom (OIF).⁷⁹

OEF Deaths	7 Oct 01 – 1 Aug 09	OEF Wounded in Action	7 Oct 01 – 1 Aug 09
Males Total = 741	Females Total = 18	Males Total = 3,414	Females Total = 28
Army = 563	Army = 9		
Navy = 46	Navy = 3		
Marine = 96	Marine = 1		
Air Force = 36	Air Force = 5		
OIF Deaths	19 Mar 03 – 1 Aug 09	OIF Wounded in Action	1 May 03 – 1 Aug 09
Males Total = 4,217	Females Total = 103	Males Total = 30,314	Females Total = 598
Army = 3,068	Army = 82	Army = 20,988	Army = 524
Navy = 91	Navy = 10	Navy = 614	Navy = 5
Marine = 1,012	Marine = 8	Marine = 8,322	Marine = 41
Air Force = 46	Air Force = 3	Air Force = 390	Air Force = 28

Table 1:

The Congressional Research Service categorized OIF casualties according to “major combat operations” that occurred from 19 March 2003 to 30 April 2003 and “post-combat operations” from 1 May 2003 to 1 August 2009.⁸⁰ This breakdown confirms that military personnel are serving in post-combat operations but are still in a combat environment as they are killed and wounded in post-combat operations. During OIF “combat operations,” which lasted 43 days, 138 males and 1 female died. The remainder of deaths occurred during “post-combat operations”. So the conflict is no longer neatly designated by the categories of “combat” and “post-combat”. The enemy persists. Our service members operate in a perilous environment as they wage a fierce post-combat counterinsurgency fight, see Table 2.

OIF Deaths – post major combat operations 1 May 03 – 1 Aug 09	
Male = 4,079	Female = 102
Army = 3,003	Army = 81
Navy = 87	Navy = 10
Marine = 947	Marine = 8
Air Force = 42	Air Force = 3

Table 2:

Just as there is wide-ranging support from the public and our senior military commanders to eliminate artificial barriers to women serving in all military positions and operations, there are those who oppose opening up more opportunities to women. Indeed, some want to tighten up the rules already in existence. Elaine Donnelly, president of the Center for Military Readiness, has been a leading spokeswoman of this

opposition. In her 2005 testimony to Congress, she claimed that the military was not doing enough to keep women out of harm's way and was skirting the exclusionary regulations. Former Congressman and Chairman of the House Armed Services Committee Duncan Lee Hunter (R.-Calif.), prepared a bill that would impose further restrictions on women in the military. But his proposal subsequently changed after former Secretary Rumsfeld met with him and negotiated a compromise that required a notification period before the services changed policies with regard to women in combat. Despite Donnelly's apprehensions, data shows that 73% of adults surveyed by the Pew Research Center stated that women should not return to their traditional role in society.⁸¹

Since women now contribute 46% of the nation's civilian labor force⁸², a more progressive policy would optimize the military's uses of its Soldiers, Sailors, Marines and Airmen, in a force that is hard pressed by the current operational tempo. Throughout history, women have contributed to the nation's security by dressing as men to serve in combat, by serving as spies, by working in factories in World War II, and by ferrying aircraft from production sites to military facilities. Today women are competently filling positions and assignments that are open to them in our military services. Women have become prisoners of war throughout history: one in the Civil War, 90 in World War II, two in Desert Storm, and three during Operation Iraqi Freedom.⁸³ Seventy-seven Army nurse POWs survived "bombing, artillery, shrapnel, dysentery, malaria, dengue fever, malnutrition, starvation, and mistreatment" for three years of imprisonment in the Philippines during WWII.⁸⁴ Indeed women have served in our wars from our country's inception, see Table 3:⁸⁵

# of Women in the Nation's Military Conflicts	
Conflict	# of Women who served
Civil War	Unknown
Spanish-American War	1,500
World War I	35,000
World War II (era)	400,000
Korea (in theater)	1,000
Vietnam (in theater)	7,500
Grenada (deployed)	170
Panama (deployed)	770
Desert Storm (in theater)	41,000

Table 3:

Our military is the strongest and most lethal force in the world. But we now face a new enemy. Removing laws and policies restricting women from opportunities to compete for positions provides a force multiplier, increasing our capabilities to confront new enemies and perform the full spectrum of operations expected of the military. We are handicapping commanders with antiquated policies that no longer fit the mission parameters and significantly restrict women serving in the military. As of 30 September 2008, women serving in active duty were as follows, see Table 4⁸⁶:

Active Duty (As of 9/30/08)	Women	Total	% Women
Army	73,902	543,645	13.6%
Marine Corps	12,290	198,505	6.1%
Navy	50,008	332,228	15%
Air Force	64,137	327,379	19.6%
Total DoD	200,337	1,443,119	14.3%
Coast Guard	5,059	41,362	12.2%
Total	205,396	1,443,119	14.2%

Table 4:

Comparable numbers of women were serving in our Reserve and National Guard units, see Table 5:⁸⁷

Reserve & Guard	Women	Total	% Women
Army Reserve	46,935	150,088	31.3%
Marine Corps Reserve	1,862	37,523	5%
Navy Reserve	13,330	68,136	19.6%
Air Force Reserve	16,634	67,565	24.6%
Total DoD	78,761	323,312	24.4%
Coast Guard Reserve	1,201	7,970	15.1%
Reserve Total	79,962	331,282	24.1%
Army Guard	50,988	360,346	14.1%
Air Guard	19,829	107,679	18.4%
National Guard Total	70,817	468,025	15.1%

Table 5:

Removing restrictions for women would attract more female volunteers and improve readiness capabilities, eliminating the need for quotas on women because they could fill any positions for which they are qualified.⁸⁸ Operation Desert Storm revealed how the modern battlefield blurred the boundaries between combat and non-combat areas.⁸⁹ If current conflicts do not exhibit traditional combat zones, how can we logically and realistically keep women out of zones that do not exist? Removing restrictions on women will simply increase our military effectiveness.

The enemy and the operational environment now include different cultures and norms, particularly with regard to women in the Muslim world. We need military women on the battlefield, trained in combat operations to deal with indigenous women who are being used to disrupt our efforts by suicide bombs and other lethal threats. Men are not permitted to search host country women's bodies because of cultural laws and norms in Muslim countries.

We are putting commanders in the battlefield in a policy paradox: either they devise work-arounds or ignore the policy to get the mission done. A survey of three hundred 2006 Army War College students was conducted on the issue of women in combat.⁹⁰ Of the 236 students who took the survey, the survey sought respondents who were "familiar with the ground combat exclusion policy for female soldiers, but their perception is that, because of the asymmetric nature of the war in Iraq and Afghanistan, the Army does not follow the policy and female soldiers are engaged in direct ground combat".⁹¹ Fifty-three percent of the respondents (76% of survey participants were Army and 89% were male) indicated "the regulation that prohibits females from collocating with direct combat units is rarely enforced or not enforced at all." Seventy

percent agreed that the policy should be revised.⁹² Survey respondents were invited to provide their opinion or recommendation concerning “women in combat.”⁹³ Typical responses follow:

As a battalion commander in combat arms battalion, 29 of 630 soldiers were female (mechanics, cooks, medics, personnel, supply specialist, and three officers). They all did their job exceptionally well – same as the men did. Gender was not an issue”.⁹⁴

DoD and Congress need to reexamine the policy and update it to reflect the 360 degree battlefield.⁹⁵

I commanded a combat engineer battalion in OIF 1 within 3ID. I had female medics and a female warrant officer that had to move forward into the combat areas frequently to accomplish our mission. Based on the army policy to assign females to my unit in positions ‘thought’ to not be a combat role, quickly changed during OIF 1. Regardless, we now have women in these roles and if held to standards, they are as capable as males and any distinction between combat and non-combat just muddies the battlefield – we have to be able to rely on all soldiers to be infantryman when needed.⁹⁶

I have personally served with females in combat and had them at my side during direct fire engagements...several females in my unit received ‘valor’ awards for actions in combat.⁹⁷

Believe that the opinions against women assigned to combat units have not been in combat with women. I have. My driver in Iraq was a woman and she performed superbly. Two of my company commanders were also women. Although only one of them performed to a very high standard it had nothing to do with their gender.⁹⁸

An all-volunteer force of female Marines comprised the Female Search Force (FSF) in Fallujah, Iraq, in 2004.⁹⁹ This force was created by the USMC to perform a unique mission in Iraq, to support an effort to win Iraqis’ hearts and minds..¹⁰⁰ These Marines received training in “how to take a woman to ground if needed and to remove weapons or suicide bombs if they were found during a search.”¹⁰¹ The Marines were prepared to act as warriors or as humane women performing a difficult task on their Muslim sisters – whatever the situation demanded.¹⁰² Whatever their role, they were

performing in a very dangerous environment. Lance Corporal Alicia Waters, a member of the FSF, revealed, “I thought that seeing me as a woman in a position of power, that knowledge made them feel good about themselves as women.”¹⁰³ A suicide bomber killed three female FSF members and one female Seabee, and wounded 13 women in a convoy from Fallujah.¹⁰⁴

Lieutenant Colonel Cope, an MP on her second deployment to Iraq, observed that the female Iraqis were not being engaged while on foot patrols in their neighborhoods.¹⁰⁵ She then proposed a “Female Information and Operations Civil Affairs Team – FIOCA.” This team of female Marines went into the “female venues out west in Al Anbar province,” such as sewing shops, in which 50% of the Iraqi population conducted business out of the public eye.¹⁰⁶ Lieutenant Colonel. Cope believes that Iraq “would go a long way if they started concentrating on the 50 percent that they’re ignoring – the females.” But she acknowledges that there are simply not enough female Marines to realize the potential of this opportunity.¹⁰⁷ Staff Sergeant Gianniana Pinedo, an MP and FSF member was asked to go on a patrol in the city because of the perceived threat and presence of Iraqi women in the area, but the tasking was eventually withdrawn because “Female Marines are not allowed to go out [in combat situations].”¹⁰⁸ This policy is inconsistently applied at best; at worst it interferes with the mission and may in fact put our military personnel at unnecessary risk. 2nd Lieutenant Samantha Kronschnabel, USMC, is a combat engineer and the commander of Charlie Company.¹⁰⁹ She and her team built many things to include Marine housing in the city.¹¹⁰ Along with being the only female in her unit, she lived with 32 members of her unit in a room –they used buckets for showers and trenches for toilets. While

performing their engineering tasks, they became involved in several firefights.¹¹¹ 1st Lieutenant Anna Reves, a USMC platoon commander, was charged with leading a team of men who collected dead enemy and Iraqi civilian bodies to bury them in Fallujah.¹¹² She expressed her confidence in performing her duties in combat: “I knew it was possible to be in combat, but that’s the really great thing about the Marine Corps. All your officers, regardless of whether you’re a supply officer or a public affairs officer, all go through the same six-month long infantry officer training. You learn how to call in artillery fire, air support, you learn how to fire all the weapons, use grenades, and you go out there, back up in the hills, and practice tactical warfare.”¹¹³

Sara Sheldon, a journalist, embedded with the 1st Marine Expeditionary Force in Iraq reports that:

While the debate continues in the U.S. Congress about assigning women to combat positions, the Marine women I interview who tell me they have been in combat situations all say they were ‘just doing my job’. That their job is often something that could be defined as an ‘assignment in or near land combat units’ (the Department of Defense regulation that exempts women from combat) is not a matter of concern to them. In fact, several of the Marines comment that requiring congressional oversight and approval of personnel changes that involve their assignment seems to be uninformed interference in conducting the war in Iraq.¹¹⁴

Former Secretary of Defense Donald H. Rumsfeld stated “While transforming and seeking processes to make us more efficient, everything we do boils down to enabling soldiers to continue to fight and win our Nation’s wars.”¹¹⁵ Why handicap our military with policies that are no longer relevant to the battles we’re in, that exclude a capable group of people? “In this new era, successful military operations demand much greater agility, adaptability, and versatility to achieve and maintain success.”¹¹⁶ Sara Sheldon shared her assessment after seeing women serve in Iraq:

This war in Iraq, politics aside, is a turning point for all women in the military. From the older women Marines who shared their stories of the early years and fought silent battles to build careers as Marines and prove their value to the Corps, to the young women of today who come into the Marine Corps aggressively eager to contribute in the same open manner they would in civilian life, the decision of the Marine Corps to use their skills forward, in a combat zone, has put them all in a position to change forever the acceptance and perception of women as a vital part of the military.¹¹⁷

The Army's move to reorganize into Brigade Combat Teams that are designed for direct combat, continues to obfuscate women's roles in the Army:¹¹⁸ "Army leadership is preparing female soldiers for direct combat, employing them in direct combat situations (although officially not coded as such), and stating the exclusion policy does not need to change. Policy and practice are out of synch."¹¹⁹

After observing no significant gender-related performance differences between male and female subordinates under his command in OIF, Colonel Grosskruger allowed that:

A contingency operation is conducted in a continuously stressful, challenging, uncertain, and dangerous environment in which soldiers can be killed just as easily by an accident as by direct enemy action. It is the alertness, professionalism, staying power, poise, and personal courage of a leader that is most desired in the marathon called OIF....Females possessed all the abilities required for conducting operations in the complex, volatile, dangerous, and uncertain environment of the 21st century.¹²⁰

He recommended expanding assignments of females in engineer battalions across all "engineer modules." This would also serve to expand the experience of commanders serving with women as they prepare to execute the mission.¹²¹ Colonel Grosskruger believes "the time is right to reflect, to share our views, and to develop a comprehensive personnel policy that recognizes the contributions of female leaders and thus postures the military for future success."¹²²

Clearly, if the restrictive policies are removed, follow-on studies will be necessary, specifically to track personnel systems, incentive systems and other related organizational force structure components that are affected. For example, a review of logistics plans to include making sure something as simple as feminine products and medical items are included in forward deployed packages. Also important for our senior leaders is to consider Colonel Katherine Cook's recommendation that, as a matter of health and welfare of the force, females take mandatory pregnancy tests prior to deploying and within 3-4 weeks of arriving in theater and throughout the deployment to the AOR.¹²³ Women play a key role in today's fight, to win the hearts and minds of the Muslim populations where we're involved in COIN. Today, more than ever, we are committed as a military strategy to winning the hearts and minds of local populations where we fight. We are opening our own minds to religious and cultural sensitivities and force multiplier effects on the battlefield; now it's time to recognize, value and optimize all human resources in our military services for what they have done, are doing and will do to protect our nation. Opening up all positions to all military members will also bring cultural change to the force, particularly to military leaders who will be obliged to lead a positive cultural change that maximizes the potential of all military members. Further study may be needed on the best cultural change model to implement this policy change. But first, the policy must change!

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