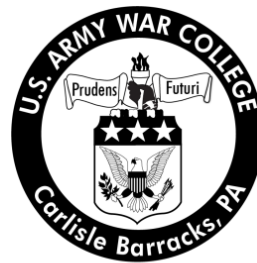


# Women Combat Exclusion Policy: Relevant or Obsolete?

by

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United States Army War College  
Class of 2012

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**WOMEN COMBAT EXCLUSION POLICY:  
RELEVANT OR OBSOLETE?**

by

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## ABSTRACT

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Combat is a core element of the profession of arms and the military has the right to expect servicemembers to engage in combat. For the past ten years in Iraq and Afghanistan, women have participated in combat in both direct combat situations or in supportive combat roles. Yet U.S. servicewomen are still precluded from serving in certain specialties, positions, and units based solely upon their gender. This SRP reviews the history of women in the U.S. military and the evolution of women's roles and increased duty responsibilities in our military in the context of the current combat exclusion policy. It then describes the current 21<sup>st</sup> century security environment that recognizes no front lines and the fluidity of the current battlefield. It documents servicewomen's contributions to the current operations in Iraq and Afghanistan, especially in the global counterinsurgency strategies. Finally, this SRP recommends that the Department of Defense rescind all laws, policies, and regulations that restrict and prohibit the assignment of women to any unit below brigade level when the unit's primary mission is direct combat on the ground. Our military should fully employ all of its human resources, regardless of gender, in fighting our nation's wars.



## WOMEN COMBAT EXCLUSION POLICY RELEVANT OR OBSOLETE?

We need them there. We need their talent. This is about managing talent. We have incredibly talented females who should be in those positions. We have work to do within the [Defense Department] to get them to recognize and change.<sup>1</sup>

—General Ray Odierno (2011)  
Army Chief of Staff

Women have become an essential part of the U.S. Armed Forces. They contribute significantly to current missions. Both military men and women make identical life-threatening sacrifices each day to protect our country. Nonetheless, current DoD policies exclude women from most combat positions. The modern battlefield, however, makes application of these exclusions difficult – if not impossible. Over the past 20 years, our security environment has changed from a static, well-defined Cold War construct to a “volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous (VUCA) global environment.”<sup>2</sup> As our military has adapted to operate effectively in these constantly changing environments, there has been a steady increase in service women’s missions to the Armed Services, especially in the Global War on Terrorism (GWOT). Today’s battlefield has no front lines. Armed combat explodes in a 360 degree radius around servicemembers. It is time to review the combat exclusion policy. Army policy must be realigned in view of current conditions in order for commanders to make full use of all human resources on the modern asymmetrical battlefield. To continue such exclusion is to ignore talents and leadership that women bring to the military.

### Evolution of the Combat Exclusion Policy

Over time, women’s roles in the military have evolved. Women are now significant contributors to the nation’s military operations. Unofficially, women have been

-serving since the American Revolution. Some women, like Deborah Samson, dressed as a man to enter the Continental Army. Others, like Margaret Corbin, accompanied their husbands to camp and then onto the battlefield.<sup>3</sup> They performed traditional female roles for the time such as, caring for and supporting troops and served as cooks, laundresses, and nurses.

It was during the Civil War that the U.S. government first recruited women to serve with the armed forces as nurses, although without military status.<sup>4</sup> The most famous military servicewoman of the Civil War was Dr. Mary Walker, who is still the only woman to be awarded the nation's highest military award, the Congressional Medal of Honor.<sup>5</sup> After the war broke out, she came to Washington and tried to join the Union Army. She was denied a commission as a medical officer, so she then volunteered as a field surgeon. She worked as an unpaid field surgeon near Union front lines during several engagements, including the Battles of Fredericksburg and Chickamauga. She continuously crossed the Confederate lines without regard to her safety to treat wounded civilians; she was later captured and held as a prisoner of war (POW) by the Confederates. For her many contributions during the Civil War, Dr. Walker was awarded the Congressional Medal of Honor in 1865. However, in 1917, her medal was revoked when Congress revised the Medal of Honor standards. But in 1977, an Army board reinstated her medal posthumously, citing her "distinguished gallantry, self-sacrifice, patriotism, dedication, and unflinching loyalty to her country, despite the apparent discrimination because of her sex."<sup>6</sup>

During the Spanish-American War, Congress authorized contracting female nurses to support the war. They assisted in the treatment of malaria, typhoid, and yellow

fever epidemics among the troops. These military nurses became known as Army “contract nurses.” Although they were not given military status, over 1500 nurses served in overseas U.S. hospitals, and on the hospital ship Relief.<sup>7</sup> The exemplary performance of these Army contract nurses prompted U.S. military leaders to develop a corps of trained nurses who were familiar with military culture. Consequently, in 1901 the Nurse Corps became a permanent component of the Medical Department under the Army Reorganization Act of 1901 and the Navy Nurse Corps in 1908.<sup>8</sup>

During World War I, over 21,000 Army nurses served in military hospitals in the United States and overseas in Europe.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the Army recruited and trained bilingual female telephone operators to work the switchboards and sent female stenographers to France to work with Quartermaster Corps. The Navy enlisted over 11,000 women as Yeomen (F) to serve stateside in shore billets and thereby release sailors for sea duty. The Yeomen (F), or Yeomanettes as they were popularly known, primarily served in secretarial and clerical positions. The Marine Corps enlisted female reservists to expedite the processing men to the front so they could join the fight. At the end of the war, more than 34,000 U.S. women served in uniform, and over 400 U.S. military women nurses died in line of duty.<sup>10</sup> Many Army nurses were decorated, including three who received the Distinguished Service Medal, a combat medal second to the Medal of Honor.<sup>11</sup> After the war, all women except nurses were discharged. Then laws were passed to prevent their future enlistment.<sup>12</sup>

During World War II, there was an unprecedented recruitment of women by all services for a wide variety of non-combat assignments. Their most recent past performance in WWI laid the foundation for the formal integration of women into the

U.S. military. In 1942, the Army established the Women's Army Auxiliary Corps (WAAC); in 1943, it was converted to the Women's Army Corps (WAC). Women then were accorded full military status. And they were authorized to serve overseas.<sup>13</sup> More than 150,000 women served in WAC during the war, in both the European and Pacific theaters.<sup>14</sup> Women also served in uniform as part of the Women Air Force Service Pilots (WASPs), in the Navy Women's Reserve known as Women Accepted for Volunteer Emergency Services (WAVES), in the Marine Corps Women's Reserve, in the Coast Guard Women's Reserve known as the SPARs (after the motto *Semper Paratus* – Always Ready), and in the Women's Medical Specialist Corps (WMSC).<sup>15</sup> From 1942-1945, over 400,000 women served at home and overseas in nearly all non-combat jobs.<sup>16</sup> More than an estimated 543 military servicewomen died in the line of duty during World War II, including 16 from enemy fire. Accidents and illnesses accounted for the remaining casualties.<sup>17</sup> After WWII, all women were again demobilized.

The Women's Armed Services Integration Act of 1948 gave women a permanent place in the regular military services, but contained provisions that restricted their assignments.<sup>18</sup> Women were permitted to serve in the regular active peacetime forces under the following conditions:

Women can constitute no more than 2 percent of the total force. The number of women officers can total no more than 10 percent of the 2 percent. The promotion of women officers is capped above paygrade O-3 (Captain/Lieutenant). The paygrade O-5 (Lieutenant Colonel/Commander) is the highest permanent rank women can obtain. Women serving as directors of WACs, WAVES, WAFs, and Women Marines are temporarily promoted to paygrade O-6 (Colonel/Captain). Women are barred from serving aboard Navy vessels (except hospital ships and certain transports) and from duty in combat aircraft engaged in combat missions. Women are denied spousal benefits for their husbands unless they depend on their wives for over 50 percent of their support. By policy, women are precluded from having command authority over men (i.e., authority to award Non-

judicial Punishment in accordance with Article 15 of the Uniform Code of Military Justice or to refer to a Court Martial). The Coast Guard is not included in this legislation, but a few SPARs remain in Women's Coast Guard Reserve.<sup>19</sup>

The passage of the act contributed greatly to incorporating women to the active duty Army. Many women who served in WWII hoped that this Integration Act would serve as a springboard for eventual women's equality in the services. However, the Integration Act did very little to improve equality. It failed to give women equal status by limiting the number of women allowed in the service; by restricting promotions of women above lieutenant colonel; by denying female officers command authority over men; and by restricting women's training and duties to noncombat activities. Instead, women's roles in the military in the 1950s and 1960s reflected women's on-going struggle to be accepted outside their traditional roles.

During the Korean War, servicewomen who had joined the reserves following WWII were involuntarily recalled to active duty.<sup>20</sup> Even though there were approximately 120,000 women in uniform during this war, only 500 Army nurses served in the combat zone. Many more servicewomen were assigned to large hospitals in Japan. Though the number of men far outnumbered the women in uniform, women performed the same duties and were excluded from combat during the Vietnam War. From 1965 to 1975, approximately 7,500 women, again mostly nurses, deployed to Southeast Asia.<sup>21</sup>

During the late 1960s and 1970s, changes in policies and laws slowly opened opportunities to women in uniform. In 1967, the Women's Armed Services Integration Act was modified to remove the 2 percent ceiling on the total number of women allowed in uniform and to remove the cap on officer promotions above paygrade O-3.<sup>22</sup> In 1972, several new opportunities were provided to women: They became eligible for

attendance to the War College and to joining the Reserve Officers' Training Corps (ROTC) programs.<sup>23</sup> In 1973, the draft ended with the expiration of the Selective Service Act. Shortly thereafter, the military transitioned to the all-volunteer force.<sup>24</sup> At the same time, the Navy and the Army opened flight training to eligible women in non-combat aircraft, and the Coast Guard began accepting women for regular active duty.<sup>25</sup> In 1976, Congress passed a law that allowed women to attend service academies.<sup>26</sup> In 1977, the United States Air Force opened non-combat aircraft to women and the Coast Guard assigned women to shipboard duty.<sup>27</sup> Also in 1977, the Secretary of the Army issued the Combat Exclusion Policy that stated: "Women may not serve in Infantry, Armor, Cannon Field Artillery, Combat Engineer or Low Altitude Air Defense Artillery units of Battalion/Squadron size or smaller."<sup>28</sup> Additionally, the Army defined Direct Combat as:

Engaging the enemy with individual or crew-served weapons while being exposed to direct enemy fire, a high probability of direct physical contact with the enemy's personnel and a substantial risk of capture. Direct combat takes place while closing with the enemy by fire, maneuver, and shock effect to destroy or capture him while repelling his assault by fire, close combat, or counter attack.<sup>29</sup>

In 1981, the Army created the Women in the Army Policy Review Group (WITA). Its mission was to conduct a comprehensive review of all policies and programs relating to women serving in the Army and to determine the effect these policies had on providing an environment conducive to the continual professional growth of all soldiers while improving combat readiness of the Army. One of WITA's recommendations was creation of the Army Direct Combat Probability Code (DCPC).<sup>30</sup> This system codified the probability that each position would be in direct combat. All Army positions were assigned a code, P1 through P7. The code P1 identified the highest probability of participating in direct combat, while P7 identified the least. In 1981, P1 positions were

closed to women. In addition, WITA recommended that aside from using DCPC in assigning duty positions, Physical Demands Categories should also be applied. These categories did classify each Army Military Occupational Specialty (MOS) duty position based on the physical demands required. Additionally, WITA recommended that assignment policies for each MOS must recognize the combat probability of each duty position and exclude the assignment of women in MOSs with high probability of routinely engaging in direct combat.<sup>31</sup> The DCPC is still used as a means of identifying which Army duty positions are closed to women.

In 1988, the DoD Risk Rule was created to help standardize assignments of women for non-combat positions in the Armed Forces. The purpose of this rule was to enable women to volunteer for military service without being forced to serve in units operating in or near the front lines. The rule stipulates that, “risks of direct combat, exposure to hostile fire, or capture are proper criteria for closing non-combat positions or units to women, when the type, degree, and duration of such risk are equal to or greater than the combat units with which they are normally associated within a given theater of Operations.”<sup>32</sup> The Risk Rule reflected the prevailing view that female soldiers should not be needlessly exposed to risk of capture while serving in the proximity with close combat units such as infantry, armor, and field artillery units. Additionally, it also reflected, at the time, the majority view of enlisted women who had long opposed involuntary assignments in or near close combat units.

In 1994, DoD rescinded the Risk Rule. In its place, Secretary of Defense Les Aspin established the current ground combat exclusion policy which broadened the definition of “direct combat.” DoD conceded that the “Risk Rule was no longer

appropriate based on experiences during Operation Desert Storm where everyone in the theater of operation was at risk.”<sup>33</sup>

The DoD’s current version of the Combat Exclusion policy was promulgated in 1994: “Servicemembers 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.”<sup>34</sup> The policy defines direct combat 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 hostile force’s personnel. Direct ground combat takes place well forward on the battlefield while locating and closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, and shock effect.”<sup>35</sup> The policy also specifies additional restrictions on the assignments that women are allowed to receive. Women cannot be assigned to positions in which any of the following conditions exist:

Where the Service Secretary attests that the costs of appropriate berthing and privacy arrangements are prohibitive; where units and positions are doctrinally required to physically collocate and remain with direct ground combat units that are closed to women; where units are engaged in long range reconnaissance operations and Special Operations Forces mission; and where job related physical requirements would necessarily exclude vast majority of women service members.<sup>36</sup>

The policy excludes women from infantry, armor, and artillery units below brigade level in the Army and Marine Corps, Navy ships with restrictive living spaces or close quarters, and in Special Forces units in all service branches. In addition, as a matter of policy, service women are excluded from serving in support units that collocate with any of these ground combat units. According to the 1998 Government Accounting Office (GAO) report, approximately 221,000 of DoD’s 1.4 million positions were closed to women: 101,733 due to engagement in direct ground combat, another 89,755 as a

result of the collocation policy, 25,663 attributed to living arrangements, and the remaining 3,935 associated with Special Operations status.<sup>37</sup>

The 1998 GAO Report concluded that, “ground combat experts in the Army and the Marine Corps note that, in the post-Cold War era, the nonlinear battlefield is becoming more common. Should this trend continue, defining direct ground combat as occurring ‘well forward on the battlefield’ may become increasingly less descriptive of actual battlefield conditions.”<sup>38</sup> To craft a relevant and viable policy on women’s roles in our military, DoD must take into consideration the nature of current warfare, women’s performance in Iraq and Afghanistan, technology, the transformation of the Army, and the associated challenges of recruiting an all-volunteer force in wartime.

In February 2012, with the steady evolution of U.S. servicewomen in war, the Pentagon took a small step and unveiled its plan to allow women to serve in crucial and dangerous jobs closer to the front lines reflecting the realities of the last decade of wars. This change in policy will allow women to be permanently assigned to a battalion ground unit as medics, radio operators, tank mechanics, and other critical jobs that were previously closed to women. These changes open the door for greater opportunities to women. The new rules break down more of the official barriers that have restricted the military positions women can hold. However, the changes stopped short of officially permitting women to serve in combat arms such as infantry, armor, and special operations forces.

### 21<sup>st</sup> Century Environment

The 21<sup>st</sup> century environment is marked by the rising threat of violent extremist movements that seek to create instability throughout the world. Conflicts created by terrorist cells are not isolated only to Southwest Asia in areas such as Afghanistan and

Pakistan; they are a global concern. Terrorist attacks have also occurred in Europe, Southeast Asia, Africa, and North America. Diverse emerging groups and factions are dissatisfied with the status quo; they are seeking a new global balance of power. Current threats come not only from terrorism or religious fanatics but also from dictators of fragile states unable to or unwilling to provide basic needs for their people. The 21<sup>st</sup> century is marked with uncertainty. We live in a volatile, complex, and ambiguous environment in which the line separating war and peace is no longer clear. Rapid social, cultural, and technological advancements affect our global security environment. Unlike combat of the last century, the modern battlefield is asymmetric and noncontiguous: there are no clear front lines or rear areas. In 21<sup>st</sup> century warfare, female servicemembers are routinely exposed to combat and, in some cases, direct ground combat. Our armed forces continue to fight a transnational, dispersed enemy that employs irregular tactics and asymmetric warfare. More female servicemembers, by the very nature of this environment, are engaging in direct combat despite the current policy's intent to protect them.

Predominant and persistent irregular conflict challenges are arising from armed groups and other non-state actors, sometimes aided by authoritarian regimes that employ irregular tactics and methods. These non-state and state actors are waging irregular warfare at the local, regional, and even global levels. This emerging paradigm is unrecognizable through the lens of the 20<sup>th</sup> century conflict. The prosecution of conflict and war has fundamentally changed. This new trend will prevail for the foreseeable future; it portends a prevalent pattern of instability and conflict that will continue to affect different regions of the world. The current assignment policy must be

amended to enable our military to make appropriate and effective use of the nation's human resources.

### Women's Contributions to U.S. Combat Operations

Even though the current combat exclusion policy seeks to prevent female service members from participating in direct ground combat operations, the reality is that everyday U.S. servicewomen are engaging in direct combat. The wars in Iraq and Afghanistan are not being fought on traditional battlefields; enemy insurgents do not discriminate between U.S. male and female servicemembers. Consider the following accounts of women's contributions to Iraq and Afghanistan operations which reflect this new reality.

As the conflict in Iraq evolved, U.S. military leaders created new roles for female soldiers. While their roles are mainly in support of combat units, servicewomen are nonetheless consistently engaging the enemy. The combination of guerilla insurgency tactics and Muslim gender taboos necessitated the attachment of female soldiers to combat units. The best example of this new interaction occurred in 2003. The US Army established all-female teams (Lioness)<sup>39</sup> who were specifically assigned to accompany male Marine combat units into the insurgent-infested areas of Ramadi, Iraq. The Lioness Teams originated from the military's need for servicewomen to be present during home raids, at checkpoints, or at any site where Iraqi women's honor could be threatened by the presence of or contact with male troops. These all-female teams were primarily used to search Iraqi women for weapons or explosives. Their mission was to eliminate potential threats from a few Iraqi women, who account for 50 percent of the country's population. Lioness Teams have also greatly assisted in collecting information from Iraqi women during intelligence-gathering operations. Their calming influence on

Iraqi men, women and children encouraged local people to divulge useful information. In these missions, Lioness Teams routinely engaged in direct ground combat as their peacekeeping activities encountered firefights or ambushes. The Lioness Teams have performed admirably in combat situations; they have been recognized for their outstanding contributions. As good ambassadors, they have demonstrated our nation's observance of cultural sensitivities during stressful and dangerous collection of intelligence. In addition, they have proven their readiness for combat. The Lioness Teams have proved that female soldiers are effective in evolving and complex combat situations.

Major Kate Guttormsen, US Army, was one of the five women profiled in the film *Lioness*. She served with the 1<sup>st</sup> Engineer Battalion, 1<sup>st</sup> Brigade Combat Team, 1<sup>st</sup> Infantry Division, Camp Junction City, Ar Ramadi, Iraq, between September 2003 and August 2004. Her unit consisted of approximately 20 women who participated in a mission in Iraq. A West Point graduate and the highest ranking female in the battalion, she clearly articulated the distinction between what her team trained for and what they were called upon to do: "I don't think my experiences were any different than my male counterparts. I think some of my coping mechanisms were different. For example, I'm sure I cried more than my male counterparts—behind closed doors."<sup>40</sup>

Specialist Rebecca Nava, US Army, was also one of the five women profiled in the film. In her interview, she claimed, "We did more than our jobs on a daily basis, we also went on patrols with our male counterparts in which we participated in raids and other combat missions, which included TCPs (Traffic Control Points) and Lioness

missions. During those Lioness missions, we searched the women and children and tried to hold conversations with them.”<sup>41</sup>

These combat-tested women exemplify what it means to be a warrior; they affirmed the complex roles that women play in direct combat. The Lioness Team displayed strength and candor as they closed the gap between the current policy and the reality of the essential role women are playing in Iraq’s irregular warfare.

The concept of Female Engagement Teams (FETs) was based on the Lioness Teams in Iraq. FETs have been successfully utilized to search female Afghans for concealed weapons and contraband items during a wide variety of missions. Since then, the teams have evolved into an important resource that can now engage Afghan communities in new ways. In July 2009, the Marine Corps officially began training its FETs, which were formed and trained to enable our military to better engage with Afghan communities. These teams contribute vitally to the U.S. military’s counterinsurgency strategy. They are attached to infantry units performing combat missions or, in cases of Marine FETs, to male maneuver units.<sup>42</sup> Current counterinsurgency doctrine advocates interacting with and building trust among locals. However, due to religious customs, males in Afghanistan are not allowed to speak to or interact with females unless they are married or considered a part of the family.

But FETs enable U.S. forces to gather and communicate information to women without violating cultural standards. Consequently, FETs allow our military to develop relations within the various villages in their area, to build trust, and to become familiar with attitudes and perceptions of the local population regarding relevant issues. The FETs interact with Afghan women and children to obtain critical information enabling the

implementation of community development programs that will serve the needs of the local villages. The FETs build relationships with Afghan women in order to empower them through economic development programs, employment opportunities, education, training and women's governance. FETs are now fully integrated and imbedded with their maneuver counterparts. They complement the coalition's counterinsurgency strategy by reaching out to Afghan communities in a culturally sensitive ways. The positive impacts that FETs have made are numerous.

In Sangin district, the FET conducted numerous health initiatives to educate women and children on basic medical and hygiene practices. Several local Afghan women and children attended the training, demonstrating the FET's success at reaching out to the local community.<sup>43</sup>

In Garm Ser, the FET helped a local female Afghan National Police officer in establishing weekly meetings with other women to discuss issues. This meeting has helped establish and develop the beginning of women's governance in the Garm Ser district.<sup>44</sup>

In Now Zad, the FET worked with the district governor and other local leaders to establish a school for women where they can receive vocational and literacy training. The FET has been instrumental in helping to identify instructors, develop local female leadership, and teach women the skills necessary to create economic opportunities.<sup>45</sup> Throughout American military history servicewomen have proven their courage. Here are but a few examples of their valor in both Afghanistan and Iraq areas of operations.

Sergeant Leigh A. Hester has been recognized for her heroic actions during combat in Iraq. While assigned to the 617<sup>th</sup> Military Police Company, a National Guard

unit from Kentucky, Sergeant Hester received the Silver Star service award, along with two other members of her unit. The Silver Star is the third highest combat military decoration awarded to a member of any branch of the U.S. armed forces for valor in the face of the enemy. On 20 March 2005, Sergeant Hester's squad was escorting a supply convoy when Iraqi insurgents ambushed the convoy. Her squad quickly moved into position to cut off the enemy's escape route. Sergeant Hester led her team through the kill zone and into a flanking position, where she assaulted a trench line with hand grenades and an M203-grenade launcher.<sup>46</sup> She and Staff Sergeant Nein, her squad leader, cleared two trenches, killing three insurgents with small arms fire.<sup>47</sup> At the end of the firefight, 27 insurgents were dead, 6 were wounded, and 1 was captured. Sergeant Hester is the first female soldier since World War II to be awarded the Silver Star Medal. When asked about being the first woman soldier to receive such an award since WWII, she said, "It really does not have anything to do with being a female. It's about the duties I performed that day as a soldier."<sup>48</sup>

Another female soldier who demonstrated superior courage and combat skill is Captain Kellie McCoy. She earned a Bronze Star with a combat "V" for her actions in Fallujah – the first woman assigned to the 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division to receive a Bronze Star with "V" device. The "V" device signifies combat decorations that are awarded specifically for valor. In September 2003, while commanding the Headquarters and Headquarters Company, 307<sup>th</sup> Engineer Battalion, 82<sup>nd</sup> Airborne Division, Captain McCoy's convoy encountered a chain of improvised explosive devices (IED). This was among the first IED attacks by Iraqi insurgents. After the initial blast, she jumped out of her vehicle and directed fire as she moved along the convoy's damaged trucks.

Shouldering her rifle, she killed at least 2 insurgents as her fellow paratroopers tried to break out of the kill zone. At one point, the insurgents closed within 20 feet of Captain McCoy. Throughout the engagement, Captain McCoy led her soldiers to repel insurgents during a complex roadside bomb attack and ambush. Her quick reactions prevented any U.S. fatalities. Her award citation reads: "CPT McCoy willingly and repeatedly took action to gather up her soldiers under enemy fire and direct fire attack from the enemy. Her actions inspired her men to accomplish the mission and save the lives of her fellow soldiers."<sup>49</sup> When asked about these actions, she responded, "It's a six year story. This has been going on a long time. There are lots of other soldiers and paratroopers who have performed much more heroically. I think I am just one story."<sup>50</sup>

These examples exemplify the changing nature of warfare. The time is long overdue for our policy to catch up with this reality. The absence of a clear line between a combat zone and rear echelon territory produces warfare in which both males and females are always exposed to the possibility of combat. This genuine possibility means that every service member must be trained to perform effectively in this myriad of complex and constantly evolving combat environments. More importantly, all soldiers regardless of gender must be permitted to demonstrate the skill and courage they possess.

### Recommendation

The current combat exclusion policy does not reflect the realities of the current or future combat environment. Clearly, the policy limits our military's access to personnel available to ensure that our military forces have the appropriate resources to fight and win our nation's wars. This must change. The Combat Exclusionary Act must be repealed; women must be granted equal and full opportunities to serve in all levels of

the national security system. Because of the very nature of the current battlefield, female servicemembers are inevitably placed in combat situations. The perils of contemporary combat are not limited to male servicemembers. Properly trained female servicemembers have fought successfully in this irregular battlespace and have demonstrated their military skills on many occasions. Exempting them from combat is neither relevant nor fair to male servicemembers who equally share the burden of combat. The DoD should review current policy and develop gender-neutral policies and procedures. Some of the changes will require Congressional approval – such as requiring all 18-year olds to register for selective service.

If direct ground combat is opened to women, and if the Fifth Amendment requires that both men and women comply with the selective service obligations, women just like their male counterparts will be eligible for military conscription and for ground combat. This issue will require support from both internal and external stakeholders since it will represent a tremendous cultural change for our armed forces and for our nation. However, the current double standards crafted to protect women will have to be eliminated if women want to have genuine equal opportunities.

Furthermore, rules must be established and enforced for women who serve in combat units. For example, the DoD will need to rescind the policy that allows women to end their commitment to the military due to pregnancy. Our armed forces must create a climate that enables commanders to counsel female servicemembers on their responsibilities while serving in positions in which pregnancy would prohibit them from performing their duties. Women servicemembers must understand that it is not in the

best interest of the Army or their organization for them to get pregnant while serving in a deployed environment.

Finally, recommend a pilot study to allow women to serve in combat arms MOSs be conducted to evaluate feasibility, effectiveness and risks associated with this change in policy prior to full implementation. A pilot study of women's service in combat arms positions will enable our leaders to eliminate all gender discriminatory policies and to draft new policies that will ensure that our nation is served by a gender-neutral armed force.

### Conclusion

Women play key roles in our military missions in both Iraq and Afghanistan. They have proven their combat readiness in both areas of operation. The nature of modern warfare requires our leaders to align their policies with the reality of today's combat environment. The United States is engaged in a long-term war. To fight this war, we must field a highly qualified and capable military force. An effective policy must assign both men and women to positions for which they are qualified, with no arbitrary exclusions. Policy must be based on physical and intellectual capabilities, leadership skills and aptitude for service. To build our best possible military, our Secretary of Defense must notify Congress of his intent to repeal this final barrier to fully utilizing our women in uniform.

### Endnotes

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