



Center for Military Readiness

— Policy Analysis —

April 2013

DEFENSE DEPARTMENT DRIVE TO FORCE WOMEN INTO DIRECT GROUND COMBAT: WHY CONGRESS MUST INTERVENE

On January 24, 2013, the **Obama Administration** set in motion a long-term plan to unilaterally abolish military women's exemption from direct ground combat (DGC) battalions. Unless Congress intervenes, this incremental process, concluding in January 2016, will impose unprecedented social burdens that would compromise training standards, reduce combat effectiveness, increase violence against women, and put both men and women at greater risk. In addition, federal courts eventually could issue orders making unsuspecting civilian women subject to **Selective Service** registration for a possible future draft on the same basis as men.

The administration's pretense of imposing policy changes incrementally, over a three year period, excludes Congress from the decision-making process. Long before decisions are "final" in 2016, military officers will be promoted or selected for high rank *only* if they support gender-based "diversity" in ground combat.

A better approach is needed to bring law and policy in line with current realities and lessons learned since September 11, 2001. Congress must support the *majority* of military women, and act to preserve high, uncompromised standards in tough training that saves lives. The only way to do these things, and to maintain the legal rationale for women's Selective Service exemptions, is to codify women's exemption from assignment to direct ground combat. Before incremental plans become irreversible, Congress must assert its authority and act.

Definitions and Facts Relevant to the Debate

1. *Direct Ground Combat Goes Beyond the Experience of Being "In Harm's Way."*

America is proud of our military women who have served and sacrificed with courage in the wars since 9/11. Unprecedented numbers have served "in harm's way," but not in direct ground combat battalions that seek out and attack the enemy with deliberate offensive action under fire. Conditions in the Middle East have changed, but the missions of **Marine** and **Army infantry, artillery, armor, Special Operations Forces** and **Navy SEAL** teams that liberated **Baghdad** in 2003 have not changed.¹ Because physical strength and endurance are factors in survival and mission accomplishment, these "tip of the spear" units should remain all-male.

2. *Military Women Will be Ordered Into Direct Ground Combat, Not Just "Allowed."*

Once a person joins the military, there is no such thing as "voluntary." Women will be required to go where they are ordered. On January 24 Joint Chiefs Chairman **General Martin Dempsey** called for the assignment of "significant cadres" of women to create a "critical mass" in formerly all-male combat arms battalions. Enlisted women, who outnumber female officers five to one, will not have the option or choice to refuse assignments that unfairly treat them like men in a military social experiment testing Amazon Warrior myths.

3. *Tough Combat Training Standards Will Be Made "Equal" But Lower Than They Are Now.*

No one should assume that gender-mixed training standards will remain the same. Instead of dual standards, there will be lowered standards – equal but far less demanding than male-oriented standards are right now. The tipoff came at the January 24 news conference, when Gen. Martin Dempsey said "if a particular standard is so high that a woman couldn't make it," the services will be asked, "Does it really have to be that high?" As in the

past, feminists will target "too high" standards as "barriers" to women's careers. In a single generation, high standards will be forgotten, and lives could be unnecessarily lost in battle. The only way to preserve uncompromised standards in tough training is to keep direct ground combat units all-male.

4. *Gender-Normed Standards Are Not "Gender-Neutral."*

In all forms of military training – except all-male combat arms where they are not needed – various types of gender-norming techniques are used to recognize "equal effort" instead of "equal results." Either training requirements are different for men and women, or they are scored differently.² Gender-normed standards in basic and pre-commissioning training reduce women's injury rates, but they cannot be justified if women become eligible for fighting battalions. Absent congressional action, all forms of gender-normed training must go.

Thirty years of studies and reports in the U.S. and the United Kingdom have provided abundant empirical evidence of profound physical differences between men and women.³ It is not realistic to expect tougher male-oriented training would be retained in Army Ranger, Marine infantry, Special Operations Forces/Navy SEALs.

5. *Assigning Women to Direct Ground Combat Would Increase, Not Reduce, Sexual Assaults.*

According to an Army Gold Book report, violent attacks and rapes in the ranks have **nearly doubled since 2006**, rising from **663** in 2006 to **1,313** in 2011.⁴ Even worse, the Army reported that violent sex crime was growing at an average rate of **14.6%** per year, and the rate is accelerating. (p. 122) According to the FY 2011 report of the Defense Department's **Sexual Assault Prevention & Response Office (SAPRO)**, reports of sexual abuse have risen by **22% since 2007**.⁵ In the Navy, ship captains, executive officers, and senior enlisted officers have been fired at the rate of two-per-month for the past three years, most often for reasons of sexual misconduct. Extending these problems into the land combat arms would aggravate and increase sexual tension and concomitant problems involving inappropriate relationships, pregnancy and non-deployability.

6. *Women-in-Combat "Diversity" Violates Military Traditions Recognizing Individual Merit.*

The administration has endorsed recommendations of the mostly-civilian **Military Leadership Diversity Commission (MLDC)**, which has assigned highest priority to the achievement of gender quotas, renamed "diversity metrics." The concept overrides recognition of individual merit – the key to successful racial integration in the military. The 2011 MLDC Report admitted that their plan for non-remedial "diversity management," enforced by a "**Chief Diversity Officer**" (CDO) reporting directly to the Secretary of Defense, "...is not about treating everyone the same. This can be a difficult concept to grasp, especially for leaders who grew up with the EO-inspired mandate to be both color and gender blind."⁶

7. *Eligibility for Direct Ground Combat = Eligibility for Selective Service.*

In the 1981 *Rostker v. Goldberg* case, the **Supreme Court** upheld Congress's right to register only men for Selective Service, tying women's exemption directly to their non-eligibility for direct ground combat assignments. Absent that premise, a new "men's rights" lawsuit, brought on behalf of men, could succeed. As a result, unsuspecting civilian women would have to register with Selective Service at age 18 or face penalties for failing to do so. All would be subject to a possible future draft on the same basis as men.

8. *Polls and Surveys Are Skewed by Misleading Terms.*

Polls and surveys of civilians usually include the permissive word "allowed" instead of "required," and fail to draw distinctions between contingent or incident-related combat ("in harm's way"), and direct ground combat units that engage in deliberate *offensive* action against the enemy. In recent civilian and military surveys, support dropped off dramatically when mandatory orders or a possible draft were mentioned, or when questions were asked about combat effectiveness. There is no evidence that enlisted women, who outnumber female officers five to one, want to be treated like men in the infantry.⁷

9. *There Is No Valid "Equal Opportunity" Reason to End Women's Combat Exemptions.*

Pentagon reports have consistently shown that for decades, military women are promoted at rates equal to or faster than men. There are fewer female three- and four-star officers for the same personal or family reasons that there are fewer female chief executive officers in civilian life. Nothing justifies the heavy burdens that would be placed on the majority of military women – many of them single mothers in need of medical benefits – who want to serve their country but don't want to be forced into formerly all-male combat units.

Superb female athletes win **Olympic** medals, but they do not compete against male athletes. Some women can run marathons faster than male colleagues, but not with 100 lb. loads and an enemy to fight at the end. The **National Football League** does not promote "diversity" by fielding female players in non-lethal "combat" on the gridiron. In contrast, our military is being forced to send women into *lethal* combat, where they do not have an equal opportunity to survive, or to help fellow soldiers survive.

There is no evidence that this radical, unnecessary change will improve direct ground combat forces in any way. And there is no other allied or potential adversary nation in the world, with a military comparable to ours, which assigns women in fighting land combat units.

The best way for Congress to show honor and respect for women and men in our military is to treat this is a serious national defense issue. Following action to codify sound policy for women in the military, Congress should hold extensive hearings. Proponents of further changes should be required to show how they would *benefit* both women and men while *strengthening* combat arms in the All-Volunteer Force. ■

¹ Activists often use the cliché, (as if they are the first) that "*There are no more front lines.*" Conditions are indeed different in Iraq and Afghanistan at the present time, but the missions of infantry and other DGC units have not changed. There is no guarantee that American troops will *not* have to fight aggressively on land sometime in the future.

² For example, the Marines are transitioning to a new physical fitness test (PFT). To graduate, women must do three pull-ups on a horizontal bar – a number barely above failure for a man. Women doing 8 pull-ups will earn a 100% score, but men will have to do 20. A Marine general called this gender-normed system "gender-neutral" – a typical example of Pentagon Orwellian double-speak. See ALMARS Active Number 046/12, "[Change to the Physical Fitness Test](#)," 12 November, 2012, and USMC Base Quantico report, Lance Cpl. Tabitha Bartley, "[Bye Bye Flexed Arm Hang](#)," Dec. 3, 2012.

³ William J. Gregor, Ph.D., [Unclassified Information Paper: Physical Suitability of Women for Assignment to Combat and Heavy Work Military Occupational Specialties](#), 26 April, 2012.

⁴ [Army 2020, Generating Health & Discipline in the Force Ahead of the Strategic Reset, Report 2012](#), (Figure 111-25, p. 121). See [CMR testimony filed with the House Armed Services Committee](#) on January 23, 2013.

⁵ [Defense Department Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military](#), FY 2011, released April 2012, Exhibit 3, p. 34.

⁶ MLDC Report, "[From Representation to Inclusion: Diversity Leadership for the 21st Century Military](#)," (p. 18 and Executive Summary, pp. xvii and xviii), available at <http://www.hsdl.org/?view&did=11390>. Also see [transcript](#) of Pentagon news conference and Executive Summary of the [Defense Department Report to Congress on the Review of Laws, Policies, and Regulations Restricting the Service of Female Members in the U.S. Armed Forces](#), February 2012.

⁷ In 1997-98 the British Army attempted to train both men and women with "gender-free" standards. Due to skyrocketing injury rates among women, the experiment was ended after 18 months. For that and other reasons, the British Ministry of Defence decided in 2002 and again in 2010 to retain women's exemptions from direct ground combat.

* * * * *

The Center for Military Readiness, an independent public policy organization that specializes in military/social issues, has prepared this CMR Policy Analysis, which is not intended to support or oppose legislation. More information is available at www.cmrlink.org

What Congress Can Do: Sound Policy for Women in the Military

To truly honor and respect our military women, **Congress** should take this issue seriously. Highest priority should be assigned to military necessity – not self-interest, political illusions, or ideology that denies differences between men and women. The following are suggestions and background for what could be called a **Sound Policy for Women in the Military Act**:

1. Define and codify women's exemptions from direct ground combat assignments.

To quote the late **Lt. Gen. Victor "Brute" Krulak**, a visionary Marine, "*Congress should draw the line at the point of the bayonet.*"

2. To avoid the expense and difficulties of trying to accommodate women in Army Ranger or Marine Infantry Officer Course training, DGC battalions should be designated all-male.

A complicated and expensive effort to modify tough training standards to accommodate women would not be necessary if direct ground combat positions remain all-male. Such an effort ultimately would be futile because high standards would be challenged as "barriers" to women's careers.

3. Use precise language. Do not confuse "gender-specific" or "gender-normed" standards that are different for men and women with training programs that treat everyone the same.

Some officials have used the misleading phrase "**gender-neutral**," which suggests identical training for both men and women. On the contrary, standards that are different and "gender-normed" to measure "equal effort" are not the same as combat-related requirements that are identical for everyone.

4. Recognize that gender-specific training may be used in entry-level training, provided that a) the program does not supply personnel to physically-demanding occupational specialties; and b) women are exempt from direct ground combat assignments.

Honest definitions about gender-specific standards in basic, pre-commissioning, and entry-level training would improve both training and morale.

5. Preserve women's exemption from Selective Service by keeping DGC units all-male.

Shortly after Defense Secretary **Leon Panetta** announced policy changes in January, a men's rights group filed a lawsuit in a California U.S. District Court challenging the legality of male-only **Selective Service** registration. Congress should act to establish sound policy, especially since President **Barack Obama** and Defense Secretary **Chuck Hagel** favor equal Selective Service obligations for women.

6. Reject "Diversity Metrics" Goals Set by the Military Leadership Diversity Commission.

DoD-endorsed recommendations for gender-based "diversity metrics," another name for quotas, are a radical departure from the military's honorable tradition of recognizing individual merit – the key to successful racial integration. None of this is necessary, since DoD reports consistently have shown that military women are promoted at rates equal to or faster than men.

7. Adopt policies that will reduce rates of sexual assault and misconduct, instead of extending them to the combat arms.

General **Martin Dempsey's** claim that assigning women to DGC units would reduce accelerating rates of sexual assault is completely unsupported and contrary to actual experience. The military should discourage inappropriate relationships and assaults – not extend them to the combat arms.

8. Act in a timely fashion, before incremental decisions become irreversible.

Congressional action to effectively "*draw the line at the point of the bayonet*" would provide a coherent, stabilizing baseline. Following that, there should be extensive hearings and an objective review of both historic data and recent research findings compiled in 2012. Proponents of further change should be required to bear the burden of proof, and to show how such changes would *benefit* and *strengthen* the **All-Volunteer Force**.