

Integration of Women in Ground Combat: A Snap Shot One Year Later

Background:

- Under the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule, women in the US military were prohibited from being assigned to jobs (military occupational specialties), positions and units whose primary mission was to engage in direct ground combat. That policy was rescinded on January 24, 2013 by then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey and the Services were directed to open closed occupations, positions and units to women no later than January 1, 2016.
- The underlying principle behind repeal of the 1994 policy is that no individual who wants to serve her or his country should be forbidden from competing for or serving in any military job, position or unit because of gender. Instead, every Soldier, Sailor, Airman and Marine should be judged on individual merit and ability. Merit-based military assignments strengthen and enhance our nation's military readiness and effectiveness. The change in policy also correctly reflected "on the ground" realities where women, particularly in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, had long been serving side by side with men in ground combat.
- The integration of women in combat jobs, positions and units must take place pursuant to guiding principles set forth in a memorandum by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and after required notifications to Congress. This directive required the development, review and validation of gender-neutral occupational standards. Additionally, the Services and Special Operations Command (SOCOM) could recommend that an occupation or unit remain closed but any such recommendation would have to be personally approved first by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and then by the Secretary of Defense, based on a rigorous analysis of factual data regarding the knowledge, skills and abilities needed for the position.
- The directive provided a timeline for action. Each Service and SOCOM had to provide detailed plans for implementation on May 15, 2013, along with quarterly progress reports to the Secretary of Defense. Each has to validate gender-neutral occupational standards not later than September 2015 and complete all studies by October 2015. Integration of women into newly opened jobs, positions and units must occur as expeditiously as possible, but not later than January 1, 2016.
- The Services and SOCOM submitted implementation plans to Secretary Hagel by the May 2013 deadline, setting forth the process they will follow and the timetables they will meet to comply with the 2013 directive.
- At issue is the opening of some 237,000 positions :
 - Opening positions in closed units to women in open military occupational specialties (MOSs) (e.g., assigning a woman medic [an already open occupation] to an infantry unit) (approximately 53,000 positions);
 - Opening closed MOSs to women (primarily infantry, armor, artillery) (approximately 184,000 positions).

- The largest number of closed jobs, positions and units are in the Army and Marine Corps. Navy and Air Force have relatively few closed jobs or positions and most of those positions are in Special Forces.

Concerns:

- The individual plans submitted on May 15, 2013 by the Services and SOCOM raise some concerns and deserve careful scrutiny. For example:
 - The plans are inconsistent, sometimes in ways that raise questions about whether the plans and actions undertaken pursuant to them are consistent with the directive. For example, Army intends first to open assignments in units that have been closed to women who already qualify in open MOSs while working to develop and validate occupational standards for closed MOSs. Yet, the Marine Corps plans first to validate standards and make a decision on whether to open closed MOSs while continuing to study whether to open assignments in closed units to women who already qualify in open MOSs.
 - The pace of integration under these plans is slow, despite the directive that it “occur as expeditiously as possible.” One year later, all MOSs that were closed to women on January 24, 2013, remain closed to women. Although opening closed MOSs requires having gender-neutral occupational standards in place, and the deadline for validating those standards is September 2015, the Services and SOCOM need not wait until 2015 to complete their work. The Services are in danger of losing many currently serving women who need more information and clarity about career paths available to them. Additionally, substantial numbers of women who already qualify in open MOSs have not been permitted to be assigned to positions or units closed to them a year ago. There is no reason to delay opening assignments to women in open occupations. We applaud Army’s recent action to address this specific issue by opening 33,000 positions to women in open MOSs. With this action, Army has now opened all positions to women in open MOSs. The Marine Corps has not taken similar steps.
 - Army and SOCOM plans include studies and surveys of “cultural factors” or “social impacts” associated with integration of women into closed MOSs and units. “Cultural issues” have often been cited as barriers to women’s service, yet certain aspects of military culture (professionalism, teamwork and discipline) can be positive factors in integrating women. The Army plan states that the studies will be used to evaluate “mitigation strategies,” but the SOCOM plan does not state the purpose of its studies. Neither plan gives much information about how the studies will be conducted or how the results will be evaluated and used.
 - Aspects of the Marine Corps plan raise grave doubts about its efforts. There has been little progress on the integration of women in jobs where they already qualify even though this should be the first and easiest change to make. Additionally, there is uncertainty about the credibility of the USMC process for developing and validating physical standards. Of particular concern is the “research” involving women who volunteer for the Infantry Officers Course (IOC). In this experiment, women from the Officer Basic School must take time away from their career paths to go to IOC but cannot qualify to be infantry officers even if they complete the course. The Marine Corps has said it seeks 92 such volunteers. There is no indication how or why that number was determined and it would take decades to secure that number at the current rate. Further, there is no indication of what is being

evaluated, how the results will be used, how long the experiment will last, how data gathered will be used in deliberations on opening infantry or other closed occupations, and whether the physical tests that are part of IOC have been validated as occupational requirements for an infantry officer. In the absence of other explanation, this experiment suggests that if an insufficient number of women can complete the course, the Marines may recommend infantry or other occupations should remain closed. If so, this would improperly evaluate women's qualifications on an average, rather than individual basis.

Going Forward:

- 1- Each Service and DoD should ensure that gender-neutral physical standards are based on a scientifically rigorous process, validated as job-related (based on actual, regular and recurring duties to be performed) and determined to measure individual, not average, performance accurately.
- 2- No occupation, position or unit should be closed to women because of gender. All military assignments should be based on the ability of an individual to meet validated standards. "Research" like the Marines Corps' IOC experiment has no place in this process.
- 3- Positions, in closed units, for which women already qualify should be opened without further delay.
- 4- Any "studies" of "cultural issues" should be used to smooth transition of women into previously closed jobs, positions and units and not to raise barriers.
- 5- Having a sufficient cadre or critical mass of women to move into previously closed jobs, positions and units may be desirable. However, jobs, positions and units should not remain closed or assignments of women to them be unduly delayed because of the absence of such a cadre.
- 6- There should be greater transparency and clarity about the actions undertaken by the Services and SOCOM to achieve integration as outlined in the 2013 directive. Regular progress reports from the Services and SOCOM should be made publicly available.
- 7- Active leadership by Secretary Hagel and the Services is required to ensure that progress is deliberate and that plans are accomplished as expeditiously as possible, but no later than January 1, 2016.