



Integration of Women into Ground Combat: Status Report

Background:

- Under the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule, women in the US military were excluded from assignments in which the primary mission was to engage in direct ground combat, and were permitted to be excluded from other assignments in certain circumstances. That policy was rescinded on January 24, 2013, by then-Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta and Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Martin Dempsey, and the Services were directed to open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 positions and units to women not 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 capacity solely 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 reflects "on the ground" realities where women, particularly in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, have long served side by side with men in ground combat
- The integration of women must take place pursuant to the Panetta/Dempsey directive rescinding the 1994 policy and guidance set forth in a memorandum by Chairman Dempsey, and after required notifications to Congress. As part of the integration process, the Services must develop, review and validate gender-neutral occupational standards. If any Service wishes to recommend that a military occupational specialty (MOS) or unit remain closed to women, that recommendation must be personally approved first by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and then by the Secretary of Defense and based on "a rigorous analysis of factual data regarding the knowledge, skills and abilities needed for the position."
- DoD said the Panetta/Dempsey directive opens some 237,000 positions in two categories:
 - Opens positions in closed units to women in open MOSs, e.g., assigning a woman medic (an open occupation) to an infantry unit (a closed unit)--approximately 53,000 positions;
 - Opens closed MOSs to women (primarily in infantry, armor, artillery)--approximately 184,000 positions.
- The Panetta/Dempsey directive and guidance provide timelines for action. The Military Departments had to provide detailed plans for implementation on May 15, 2013, and provide quarterly progress reports to the Secretary of Defense thereafter. Each department must validate gender-neutral occupational standards not later than September 2015 and complete all studies by October 2015. Integration of women into newly opened positions and units must occur "as expeditiously as possible," but not later than January 1, 2016.
- The Services and the Special Operations Command (SOCOM) submitted implementation plans to the Secretary of Defense in May 2013, setting forth the process they will follow and the timetables they will meet to comply with the Panetta/Dempsey directive and guidance.

- The largest numbers of closed positions are in the Army and Marine Corps; there are fewer closed positions in the Navy and Air Force. All the Services have closed positions that are cross-assigned to SOCOM.
- Since the Panetta/Dempsey directive and guidance, as of March 2015, DoD has given notice to Congress of its intention to open approximately 91,000 total positions in the Army (including certain positions cross-assigned to SOCOM), Navy and Marine Corps. Most of these positions are in MOSs already open to women.

Concerns:

Calendar year 2015 is the last year of the transition period. Information has been scarce, progress to date has been spotty, and the Services' implementation processes raise several concerns.

- Inconsistent Plans, Lack of Transparency and Oversight. DoD has left it to each of the Services to develop its own methods for setting valid occupational standards and make other integration decisions. The resulting plans submitted by the Services and SOCOM have varying levels of detail and take very different approaches. This is so despite the fact that they cover occupations and units that are very similar, for example, infantry and armor occupations and units in both the Army and Marine Corps. Moreover, a year into the three-year transition period, after the Marine Corps did not meet its original plan deadline of December 2013 to validate physical standards, develop physical screening tests and recommend any exemptions, the Corps outlined a new integration plan, without explanation for the changes. How the Services and SOCOM are working together to validate standards or make integration decisions for positions cross-assigned to SOCOM is unclear. The required quarterly progress reports of the Services have not been made public. The extent to which the Department of Defense is overseeing the implementation of the plans is also unclear, but appears limited.
- Delay in Assigning Women in Open Occupations. There has been far too much delay in assigning women in open MOSs to closed units. Women have already qualified in these occupations and both the Army and the Marine Corps report that when women have been assigned to positions in previously closed units, they have performed well. The Army has opened all positions in closed units (with the exception of certain positions in Special Operations units) to women in open MOSs, but the Marine Corps has opened only a few such positions to women, none of which are in infantry or armor units. Among the Services, only the Army has opened any positions that are cross-assigned to SOCOM. There is no reason for delay in assigning women in open occupations to closed units, particularly because there are many currently serving women who are highly interested in serving in a greater range of positions and units.
- Purpose of "Cultural" Studies. The Army and SOCOM's studies of "cultural factors" or "social impacts" associated with the integration of women into closed MOSs and units are potentially problematic. Since "cultural issues" have often been cited as barriers to women's service (for example, that the very presence of women would undermine cohesion among males in a unit), these studies raise a caution flag. Both the Army and SOCOM have said

informally that their studies will be used to inform efforts to successfully integrate women. However, neither the Army nor SOCOM has provided information on how the studies are being conducted or how the results will be evaluated and used.

- Marine Corps' Implementation. The Marine Corps' implementation efforts raise particularly serious questions. Under the new Marine Corps plan outlined in 2014, the Corps is silent on how it is establishing and/or validating gender-neutral standards for all of its MOSs. Rather, the focus of the plan outline is on several studies involving women who volunteer for the Infantry Officers Course (IOC), the enlisted Infantry Training Battalion (ITB) and a new Ground Combat Element Integrated Task Force (GCE-ITF). Women volunteers must take time away from their career paths to participate but are not able to enter closed MOSs even if they qualify. Importantly, the Corps has not articulated what is being evaluated, how the results will be used, how data gathered will be used in deciding whether to request that any occupation and/or unit remain closed, and particularly whether/how the physical tests that are part of the studies have been validated as occupational requirements. The Corps has stated that the GCE-ITF study will test whether a gender-integrated unit will perform as well as a gender-restricted unit, review and refine gender-neutral occupational standards, and quantify the tasks, conditions and standards that have previously been "largely qualitative." This approach is questionable. It is hard to see how any test of performance is sound unless and until that performance is being measured against established and validated occupational standards, yet the Corps seems to be both setting and refining standards and measuring performance all in one effort. In addition, the stated purpose of testing whether a gender-integrated unit will perform as well as a gender-restricted unit is itself problematic, as it suggests that the performance of one particular group of women will somehow be used to evaluate the performance of all women. In the absence of other and better explanations, all of these studies suggest that unless a sufficient number of women can somehow "pass muster," the Marine Corps may recommend that certain occupations and/or units remain closed. If so, this would improperly be evaluating all women's qualifications based on the performance of a few women. Instead, both women and men should be evaluated on an individual basis – measured against valid occupational standards.
- Army's Ranger School Assessment. The Army's announcement that it is opening its Ranger School to women for a special assessment raises two concerns. First, the Ranger School should never have been closed to women because it is primarily a leadership and additional skills course that is open not only to candidates headed to the Army's Ranger Regiment (currently closed to women) but also to men who are not training for the Ranger Regiment and, indeed, who serve in occupations and units in which women also serve. In addition, men from other Services and foreign militaries have attended Ranger School for the valuable training afforded. But all women have been barred from Ranger School solely based on their gender. Second, if this Army assessment is intended to inform a decision on whether to recommend that Ranger units remain closed to women, it has many of the flaws of the Marine Corps' studies. Women are being asked to volunteer but will not be able to join a Ranger unit, even if they qualify by completing the school. The Army has not articulated what is being evaluated, how the results will be used, how data gathered will be used in deciding whether to recommend that any occupation and/or unit remain closed, and whether/how the physical tests involved have been validated as occupational requirements. In the absence of other explanations, this assessment suggests that unless a sufficient number

of women can somehow “pass muster,” the Army may recommend that Ranger or other occupations and/or units remain closed. If so, this would improperly be evaluating all women’s qualifications based on the performance of a few women. Instead, both women and men should be evaluated on an individual basis – measured against valid occupational standards.

Recommendations:

1. The Department of Defense should provide the oversight necessary to ensure a fair and deliberate integration process.
2. There should be greater transparency and clarity about the actions undertaken by the Services and SOCOM to achieve integration as outlined in the Panetta/Dempsey directive and guidance. Regular progress reports from the Services and SOCOM should be made publicly available.
3. All positions in closed units for which women already qualify, based on their MOSs, should be opened without further delay.
4. Any “studies of cultural issues” should be used to smooth transition of women into previously closed occupations and units and not to justify their exclusion.
5. By no later than January 1, 2016, all military positions should be open to both women and men, with assignments to those positions made based on the ability of an individual to meet scientifically validated gender-neutral occupational standards.

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