

Alliance for National Defense (AND)

ISSUE: Women in Combat

AND POSITIONS:

The Department of Defense (DoD) should revise the definition of Direct Ground Combat (DGC) to reflect the reality on the ground and in the interest of national defense.

The Army and Marine Corps policy on collocation should be rescinded.

Women should be considered for military assignments and duties based on the training, experience, leadership potential and characteristics required to accomplish the mission and the specific requirements/tasks of the job.

Performance standards for military jobs should be based on the scientifically developed and empirically verified elements of the job's tasks and not based on personal opinion.

DISCUSSION

Throughout most of recorded history, war fighting has been officially considered a "males only" activity with laws and policy established to reflect and maintain that exclusivity. Yet, women have always served, even if "unofficially." During the last fifty years significant changes have occurred both in the nature of war and in determining who is eligible to "officially" participate in those wars. Technological advances in weaponry and the diminished desire of men to serve in the military coupled with the evolution of the societal roles of women emerge as pivotal components driving that change. For example, the launching of an all-volunteer military force depended heavily upon women to provide the "manpower" for meeting the personnel requirements essential to maintain military readiness and end strength. Today, women comprise about 14% of the active force and roughly 17% of the Reserve Components.

In recent decades, changes in both law and policy have altered women's roles and the military jobs they are allowed to perform. Evolutionary rather than revolutionary, several of the most dramatic changes occurred following the first Gulf War with the repeal of both the ban on women serving aboard combat aircraft (Title 10 USC 8549) and combat ships (Title 10 USC 6015). Policy changes followed these legislative actions. In 1994, DoD rescinded the "Risk Rule," which had included a matrix assessing the threat of combat exposure on a linear battlefield. This surprising action was followed by another directive from the new Secretary of Defense. He directed the Army and the Marine Corps to study opening more specialties and assignments to women and to submit their expansion plans for his approval. The outcome of this action effectively opened tens of thousands of previously closed military positions to the assignment of women. However, the Secretary permitted significant policy restrictions to remain

that will be highlighted later in this paper. Nevertheless, there are **no** laws that restrict women from serving as combatants or that serve to protect women from risk or danger.

The year 2010 heralded several notable changes for the assignment of military women. In February, the Secretary of Defense notified Congress of the Navy's intent to lift the ban on women serving aboard submarines. This dramatic policy change was initiated and supported by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs and both the Secretary of the Navy and the Chief of Naval Operations. This policy shift represented one of the last places in the military from which women were totally excluded. Soon after in June, the Secretary of Defense again, notified Congress that the Department intended to expand the role of women in the U.S. Marine Corps (USMC) by opening two previously closed military occupational specialties (MOS) to the assignment of women. However, the USMC indicated that women occupying these MOS would be assigned to division level units or higher allowing its collocation policy to remain intact. Lastly, in November the USMC announced that Female Engagement Teams (FET) are being assigned to Marine Expeditionary Units (MEU) "where cultural sensibilities can preclude male Marines from interacting with local women". This places women "shoulder-to-shoulder with infantry units yet, there is no mention of rescinding the USMC collocation policy.

In spite of these restrictive policies, military women continue to excel. They are in leadership positions, they are earning Silver Star Medals and recently a woman was named as the Army's 2010 "Soldier of the Year -- Best Warrior Competition".

What is Combat?

There is no one operational definition for combat because for each of the military Services, engaging the enemy takes a different form. While there are overlaps, the overall Navy mission and subsequent definition of combat differs significantly from that of the Air Force and the Army. Certainly similarities exist between the Navy and the Coast Guard (maritime Services), the Marines and Army (ground Services), and aviators (regardless of Service), but the point that must be made is that combat is more than "boots on the ground."

Women are eligible for combat duty and are combatants in the Air Force, Navy, and Coast Guard and in Navy, Marine and Army aviation specialties. Since the early 1990s, women have officially been combatants so engaging in combat per se is not the restriction that limits military women's roles.

Key Issue I: What is Direct Ground Combat?

If women are "in combat" and have been for over a decade, what is the issue? The topic that receives the most attention concerning women and their combat participation involves "direct ground combat" (DGC). Since 1994, DoD has defined DGC as:

"...engaging the 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. [It] *takes place well forward on the battlefield* while locating and closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, or shock effect.” [Emphasis added]

The criticisms leveled at DoD’s definition of DGC are that it is not relevant and makes no sense when describing the asymmetric battlefield of today. The phrase “well forward on the battlefield” implies a linear array of military forces that were envisioned during the 20th Century Cold War and not today’s conflicts in the middle-east and other hot spots around the world. In short, the wars waged in Iraq and Afghanistan bear no resemblance to this definition – does that mean they are not DGC?

Flawed as it is, there are two policy matters that emanate from the DGC that have an impact on military women and where (and how) they may be used. The first, the ground combat exclusion rule, dictates that women may not occupy any assignment (in any capacity) to a unit below brigade level which has the primary mission of engaging in DGC. This restriction allows the Army and the Marine Corps to retain their existing policies excluding women from serving in Infantry and Armor, with the Marines also excluding women totally from Field Artillery. The Army excluded women from serving in Special Forces (including aviation). Interestingly, the Army, unlike the Marine Corps, did not totally exclude women from Field Artillery using this rule. But for the most part, this restrictive policy is clearly understood and easily defined. However, the second policy restriction adopted by the Army and the Marine Corps, referred to as the collocation policy, is not clearly understood and is frequently the subject of debate and review as follows in the next section.

Key Issue II: Collocation Policy

Primarily the collocation policy refers to the placement of combat support and combat service support positions relative to DGC. However, the term collocation seems to mean different things to different officials and/or commanders. The 2007 RAND Monograph Report, *Assessing the Assignment Policy for Army Women*, documented two definitions operating for collocation: one that uses proximity exclusively as a determiner and another that uses both proximity and interdependence to be considered as collocation. The Army policy prohibits the routine collocation with a unit whose primary mission is to engage in DGC. Introducing the term, routine without a common definition makes the situation needlessly more complicated. NOTE: The Army also specifies that the collocation policy prevents women from serving in the Army Combat Engineers and portions of the Field Artillery.

In short, Army and Marine Corps policy is and remains more restrictive than DoD policy. In 2005, it was the collocation policy and how the Army implemented that policy that precipitated then Chairman the House Armed Services Committee to seek broad legislative restrictions on how Army women were assigned and deployed. The proposed legislation was later expanded to restrict all military women, but failed to gain support outside of the House Armed Services Committee. While the restrictive legislation was unsuccessful, it served to resurrect the issue about how military women would serve and where they would serve.

Women are in combat – this is nothing new. They serve in Afghanistan and Iraq with pride and honor. In both war zones, many of the distinctions regarding combat have constantly blurred because there are no front lines, and DGC is not isolated to being *well forward on the battlefield* – it is asymmetrical. Current DoD and Service doctrine and policy have outlived past usefulness, and obviously beg revision to reflect actual practices that are essential to wage this type of war.

The time to re-examine the policies that govern women’s military service that were established nearly 15 years ago is overdue. Laws, policies and practices change in wartime as military exigencies require – this was true during WWI, WWII, Vietnam and other conflicts. “Lessons Learned” are available today and we do not have to wait just because the “War on Terror” is a different kind of war. It was during Vietnam that women were first trained as Naval aviators and after Vietnam that women were first permitted on Naval vessels and the Women’s Army Corps disbanded to allow the integration of women into the line Army. After the first Gulf War, combat aviation was opened to women and the combatant ship exclusion was repealed.

Today, we are seeing changes in the policies that govern military women and how they may be assigned. Recently, the Secretary of Defense opined that he envisioned a day when women would serve in the “elite special forces” but that it would be a “careful step in that direction”. Soon after the Secretary of Defense statement, the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs told an audience at the US Institute of Peace, Women and War Conference that resources for women were lagging behind those for men and that “the military system does not yet understand the unique challenges of women in uniform”. The Chairman went on to promise that while there are only two women who have achieved 4-star rank, “many more are on the way”. At this point, it is probably fair to ask “how” these changes will occur when the changes aimed at affecting direct ground combat and collocation appear “piece meal” without any integrated thought or joint planning.

Words from senior leaders are important however, now is the time to act! The Alliance supports the continued evolution of women’s military roles and service in a professional and rational way that best serves our nation. The Department of Defense should immediately redefine DGC with the Army and the Marine Corps following suit to officially rescind their collocation policies. The initial actions would begin to align DoD and the Service policies with accepted operational practices and procedures. These immediate actions should be followed by significant changes in the remaining policies and regulations that govern the assignments, duties, training and developmental opportunities of military women. Lastly, empirical performance standards should be established for military jobs to reflect actual job requirements eliminating the need for personal opinions.

The Alliance for National Defense provides educational material on the contributions of women in the military and related national security issues to legislators, decision makers, educators, and military members on this and other issues. For more information go to www.4militarywomen.org.