

WRITTEN STATEMENT OF WOMEN IN INTERNATIONAL SECURITY

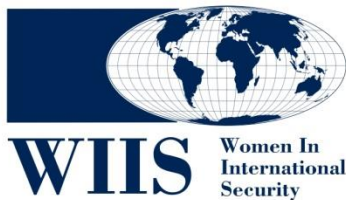
FOR A HEARING ON

WOMEN IN THE SERVICES

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Combat Integration Initiative

On January 24, 2013, the Department of Defense (DOD) announced its decision to eliminate the ground combat exclusion policy and begin the process of opening 238,000 direct ground combat positions to women. With this historic development, the U.S. joins a growing list of countries in which all military positions are open to women on an equal basis to men.¹

To support the successful and expeditious integration of women into the newly opened combat positions, Women In International Security (WIIS) and the Stockholm International Peace Research (SIPRI) North America have teamed up to establish the Combat Integration Initiative (CII).

The Combat Integration Initiative (CII) is a working group composed of veterans, servicemembers, lawyers, scholars, and members of civil society who are committed to the full integration of women across all branches and occupational specialties of the Armed Services.

Background

Since 2001, nearly 300,000 female service members have been deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan. More than 900 women have been wounded in those theaters, and more than 150 have died.² As of February 2013, 16,407 female service members were deployed in contingency operations around the world. As DOD recognized in its January 2013 decision, constructs such as ‘direct ground combat’ or ‘forward deployed’ are irrational and arbitrary in the context of contemporary military operations. Today, the effect, if not purpose, is to discriminate against women. For example, women involved in convoy escort operations, or those serving on female engagement teams are as likely to come under fire as the men who serve in direct ground combat units.

That said, implementation of the new policy will require sustained efforts at multiple levels. Indeed, previous experiences with integration policies have shown that as women assume new roles and responsibilities they encounter a multitude of challenges. For example, when women first integrated aviation units they met structural barriers that prevented them from accomplishing their assigned duties. Early Navy female helicopter pilots were restricted to land based operations since women were excluded from Navy ships. These contradictory policies reduced the women’s effectiveness and created resentment among male colleagues who had to shoulder additional duties. Similarly, when combat restrictions were removed in the early 1990s, female fighter pilots encountered strong and often debilitating cultural resistance to their employment in combat cockpits.

As the military opens up the new positions, it must take into account lessons learned from previous experiences, which establish that many potential problems can be overcome through good planning, training, mentoring and monitoring. Successful implementation of the policy will depend on four critical conditions:

¹ Women serve in close combat specialties in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, and Sweden.

² David F. Burelli, *Women In Combat: Issues for Congress*, CRS, May 9, 2013, p.ii (Summary)

- 1. Communicating policy changes clearly and ensuring consistency and follow through.** Past experiences demonstrate the need for transparent and comprehensive implementation of the steps required to achieve integration. For example, in February 2012, DOD made a policy change that was intended to open 14,000 new positions to women. Under the new policy, women in open specialties were to be permanently assigned and no longer temporarily attached to ground combat units. However, it took almost 18 months to fully notify Congress of the changes. Worse still, the notification imposed ceilings on the number of women who could be assigned to certain units. As a result, many in and outside of the military services became confused as to the stated and practical requirements imposed on the services. This confusion led to uneven implementation and unfair practices.
- 2. Establishing gender-neutral occupational standards.** DOD has pledged to develop gender-neutral occupationally driven standards that are based on precise job requirements and not on culturally constructed notions of the ideal warrior. It is crucial that the services use objective and rigorous methods to gather the data to formulate these standards. Fortunately, other countries have developed such methods, so that we need not reinvent the methodological wheel. For example, the Canadian Defense Forces now employ quantitative monitoring of soldiers during combat operations. The CDF arrived at this methodology over a period of years and after many mistakes, which we need not repeat.
- 3. Training leaders and addressing unit culture.** Early integration efforts establish that unit leaders can make all the difference in how new groups are accepted and assimilated. A robust and effective training program for leaders is critical to creating and fostering a productive integration climate. This type of training should be provided to all combat units that are newly opened to women and DOD senior leaders must make clear that integration is a top priority.
- 4. Understanding the role of critical mass and mentors.** DOD plans to integrate mid-grade women into the leadership chain of combat units in order to establish a mentoring mechanism before junior women. However, the low numbers of women currently serving in mid-grade positions may make this approach impracticable. More to the point, it is critical that we begin to define and provide mentoring that itself is free of gender bias. The lack of female leaders/mentors should not close off certain units for women. Certainly, we have seen that men make good mentors too and with the right training and mentoring they can successfully guide junior women as they join all-male units. The Swedish military piloted the use of “gender coaches” in 2005, and they found that these coaches had a significant impact on the leadership and training of men and women in combat specialties.

Implementation Monitoring

Each of the military departments and the U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) submitted their proposed plans for eliminating the remaining restrictions imposed by the now rescinded direct ground

combat assignment rule in writing to the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) in June, 2013.³ On June 27, 2013, CII teams reviewed the plans for their clarity, specificity, and transparency; their analysis is presented below.

General Observations: As required by OSD’s order rescinding the direct ground combat assignment rule, each branch has submitted a separate plan for opening to women career fields that formerly were closed. In its review, CII studied each plan, and, in sections below, we offer commentary and questions about each of the plans as a standalone effort. However, it also is essential to study the plans as a whole and to compare, even closely cross-reference, their provisions for consistency. In a number of crucial instances, decisions made in one plan will affect decisions made by others. Thus, there will be a need to identify and reconcile potential conflicts between the plans to ensure that they support, rather than undercut, each other. To pick just one salient example, it is clear that SOCOM’s policies will directly affect each of the service’s implementation plans because all of the services’ special operations forces (SOF) will have to work for SOCOM at varying points in their careers in order to ensure career progression. Likewise, it seems to be the case that the standards for employment in some Navy specialties may conflict with Marine Corps policies and implementation timelines. At this point, it is not clear how these conflicts will be managed. In order to avoid confusion and unnecessary duplication of effort down the road, OSD must recognize this problem up front and develop a process for identifying and resolving these inherent conflicts.

Each plan contains provisions that explicitly rely on the “guiding principles” invoked by the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff in his memorandum of January 9, 2013, entitled “Women in the Service Implementation Plan.” As tends to be the case with general guidelines, some of the terms used in the Chairman’s “guiding principles” are abstract and/or not clearly defined. In more than one instance in the implementation plans, some of these crucial terms have been given different and potentially conflicting interpretations by different departments. We highlight some of the significant points of difference here, together with additional general remarks.

First, the Chairman stated that the implementation plans should ensure “that a sufficient cadre of midgrade/senior women enlisted and officers are assigned to commands at the point of introduction to ensure success in the long run.” This directive raises some important questions.

(a) What constitutes “a sufficient cadre” of midgrade and senior women? The Chairman does not define that term, and the implementation plans contain varying interpretations of the requirement.

(b) What happens in the short term if there is no “sufficient cadre” of mid-level and senior women available “at the point of introduction”? Most crucially, will women who satisfy all other qualifications for elite positions be barred from serving in those positions on the grounds that the cadre is insufficient?

³ All of the implementation plans as well as the General Dempsey’s Memorandum regarding Women in the Service Implementation Plan of 9 January 2013 are available for review at: <http://wiisglobal.org/wordpress1/combat-integration-initiative/dod-implementation-plans-and-announcements/>

(c) The answer to the prior question depends, in turn, on the reason for imposing the cadre requirement in the first place. Why does “success in the long run” depend on having a sufficient cadre of senior women in place before junior women arrive? We fear that the cadre requirement itself may prove to be one of the “unnecessary gender-based barriers to service” that the Chairman declares must be eliminated. That is, the requirement seems to rest on the assumption that men either are unwilling or cannot be trained to support the introduction of small numbers of well-qualified women into their ranks. This premise is belied by the experiences of many servicewomen and veterans in CII, including those of us who served as combat pilots when no “cadre” existed and those of us who deployed to Iraq and Afghanistan as parts of small teams of women accompanying large, all-male units of ground combat troops. At a minimum, therefore, the cadre requirement must be closely monitored so that it does not make it impossible for women to enter some of the formerly closed occupational fields at all.

Second, the Chairman directed the services to develop, validate, and implement gender-neutral “occupational performance standards, both physical and mental, for all military occupational specialties (MOSs), specifically those that remain closed to women.” Once again, the implementation plans take inconsistent positions with respect to this crucial directive. Some plans propose to satisfy this requirement by conducting rigorous research. Other plans assert that there is no need to follow this directive because the branch in question already has in place valid, gender-neutral occupational standards. For example, SOCOM and the Marine Corps assert that their standards are already gender neutral because they are task based. However, at this juncture, it is critical for each department to follow the Chairman’s directive carefully, to take a fresh look at all standards to assess their occupational relevance, and to develop and validate new standards as necessary. To say the least, a decision to rely on the current standards creates a significant risk that the branches will reinforce unnecessary gender-based obstacles to service. It is likely that traditional, invalid, and outmoded notions of warrior competencies have heavily influenced the current standards. If that is the case, the current standards are unlikely to satisfy the Chairman’s mandate, and a decision to keep them in place could result in not only criticism but also potential legal challenges.

Third, the Chairman’s memo established several clear benchmarks for the timing of integration. The dates are:

1. 15 May 2013: Implementation Plans due (completed and released to the public on 17 June 2013)
2. September 2015: Gender neutral occupational standards set
3. December 2015: All studies complete
4. January 2016: All positions open unless an exception to policy is requested
5. Quarterly update reports are due NTL 10 days after the end of each quarter: 10 July 2013, 10 OCT 2013, 10 Jan 2014, 10 APR 2014, 10 JUL 2014, 10 OCT 2014, 10 JAN 2015, 10 APR 2015, 10 JUL 2015, 10 OCT 2015

By contrast, the timelines provided in the plans themselves are unclear and difficult to decipher. Indeed, the various plans present varying timelines, with some steps being completed in advance of set deadlines, others coming after deadlines, and still others impossible to pin down with any precision. This

lack of clarity creates confusion, as well as the potential for inconsistent results, which will impair military readiness.

Finally, none of the plans details a mechanism or process for obtaining external input to support the necessary studies for data collection, the creation of best practices, and so forth. Likewise, none of the plans identifies any mechanism for communicating to the force or to the public the results of the studies, research, and decisions made along the road to integration. Soliciting external input and engaging in strategic communications could reduce the risks of methodological errors, limit the spread of misinformation, facilitate getting buy-in from the force by increasing servicemember confidence in the process, and ease Congress' oversight duties.

About CII: CII's mission is to support the full integration of women across all branches and occupational specialties of the Armed Services.

CII will have achieved its mission when all military occupational specialties are based upon specific, consistent, and validated standards and are open to all applicants without regard to gender.

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