



Combat Integration Initiative

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Four Critical Elements of Successful Integration

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On January 24 2013 Defense Secretary Leon Panetta and General Martin Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff, announced that the Department of Defense (DoD) had rescinded the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule that prohibited women from serving in combat positions.ⁱ By eliminating the ground combat exclusion policy DoD started the process of opening 238,000 direct ground combat positions to women.

On June 18, 2013, each of the branches of the Armed Services released specific implementation plans outlining the proposed efforts toward integration of women, the expected timeframes in which each stage of integration will occur, and expected obstacles facing full integration.ⁱⁱ

Members of the Combat Integration Initiative (CII) and experts on integration efforts and policies in the United States (US) and abroad met on June 28, 2013 to discuss the four conditions that CII believes are critical to the successful integration of women into all combat specialties: (1) establishing specific, consistent, and validated physical standards; (2) integrating gender perspectives in the leadership of combat specialties; (3) understanding the role of

critical mass and mentors; and (4) clearly communicating policy changes and ensuring consistency and follow-through.

Physical Standards

Integrating women into combat roles will not require the US Armed Services to lower physical standards. On the contrary, universal basic physical standards and position-specific physical standards that have direct ties to job-related physical demands ensure that open occupational specialties are filled by the most qualified applicants. DoD has pledged to develop gender neutral physical standards based on job requirements rather than on subjective and socially constructed notions of the ideal warrior. The Armed Services must develop smart physical standards that determine fitness for combat positions while eliminating unnecessary barriers to women.

The Canadian Armed Forces have successfully implemented universal physical standards for all military personnel, following integration efforts beginning in 1989. The Canadian model is built on four core principles of physical fitness:

- *Standards should be reasonable.* Physical standards must be related to a legitimate work purpose and should reflect the demands of the job. Physical standards must be adopted in good faith and must not be adopted as justification for deliberately excluding any one group.
- *There is a duty to accommodate.* Variations in physical size, body type, and physical needs or constraints do not necessarily prevent individuals from meeting established physical standards, but individuals should not have to meet standards using one predetermined motion, strategy, or process. If personnel can adopt a different strategy, process, or movement to complete a required physical task in the required time, this strategy should be accepted. Personnel should also be given the opportunity to adapt to the work environment. Beyond physical accommodations, universal standards should permit personnel to work outside of normal working hours to accommodate home and family requirements.
- *There is a duty of care.* While physical standards should be universal and non-discriminatory, and should permit accommodation and adaption, personnel must be physically capable. Ensuring the physical fitness of each service member decreases the chance that service members will have to take on an undue burden to compensate for those who are not able to meet the physical demands of the occupation.
- *Standards should not place undue hardship on employers.* Accommodation of personnel should not impose excessive financial costs, negatively impact morale or the ability to work, or create safety concerns. Standards should also take into account the size of an organization, noting that very small organizations are often less able to be flexible in the provision of accommodations.

As the successful integration of women into combat roles in the Canadian Armed Forces demonstrates, physical standards do not need to be lowered to ensure the full integration of women. Basic universal physical standards for employability and specific branch requirements tied to each occupational specialty's demands will ensure that the best candidates, regardless of gender, are selected for every role.

In sum, when moving forward, the Armed Services should gather unbiased data on job-related physical standards in order to reevaluate existing physical standards and develop smart standards based on the demands of each occupational specialty.

Integration of Gender Perspectives in the Leadership of Combat Specialties

The support of military leaders, especially those in the newly open combat units, is essential to the integration effort's success. Branch and unit leaders must embrace gender perspectives to facilitate the full integration of women and to improve the Armed Services' success in current and future security challenges. Unfortunately, members of the US Armed

Services go through little to no training on gender perspectives before they attain leadership positions. Such limited exposure to gender issues affects the extent to which personnel and leaders are able and willing to incorporate gender considerations in their daily work.

‘Gender’ is not another word for ‘women’. To adopt a gender perspective is to consider men’s and women’s experiences and to maintain awareness of the relations between men and women and how those relations impact the organizational structure and the broader world. A gender perspective enables decision-makers to consider 100% of the population when evaluating policies, operations, and desired outcomes. Gender-balanced organizations function more effectively. Integrating a gender perspective in the work of the Armed Services will improve effectiveness in the leadership and function of the military, the nation’s current stabilization efforts, and future armed conflicts and security concerns.

To integrate a gender perspective in the military is to pursue two related goals: to increase gender balance in personnel throughout all levels of the military; and to help military leaders adopt gender perspectives in their work. The Swedish Armed Forces has worked to integrate gender perspectives and increase the number of female personnel since the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which calls for the equal participation of women in all aspects of peacebuilding and national decision-making. Through a gender coaching project leaders of the Swedish Armed Forces have been paired with senior gender advisers, who act as ‘on call’ advisers to those military leaders

whenever they have questions or concerns regarding gender issues.

In addition to adopting a gender coach model here in the US, it would be prudent to train military personnel on gender issues in basic training and the military academies. Instilling a positive outlook and avoiding a negative outlook on gender issues, including integrating women into combat positions, is a crucial aspect of ensuring successful integration and effective military operations by expanding leaders’ and junior personnel’s perspectives.

In sum, DoD and all branches of the Armed Services must strive to integrate gender perspectives in the daily tasks, early training, leadership training, and decision-making processes of military personnel at every rank. The successful integration of women is one outcome of a more gender-conscious military. Beyond achieving gender-balance in the Armed Services, however, integrating a gender perspective promises to improve the military’s overall functionality.

Understanding the Role of Critical Mass and Mentors

The effective and full integration of women into combat specialties will be more complete if young women have access to mentors who can guide them through promotion processes, help them to build networks, and help to ensure their safety and success. DoD has stated its intent to integrate women into the leadership chain of combat units to provide mentors for junior women in combat specialties. The small number of women who are currently serving in mid-grade positions and who would therefore

be eligible for leadership positions in combat units may make this notion impractical. Although mentorship is vital for young men and young women, the notion of 'critical mass' should be used with an abundance of caution when considered a component of integration.

The concept of 'critical mass' suggests that a unit should have a certain number of women who qualify for positions before integrating any women. The rationale is that being 'one of one', or the single woman in an otherwise all-male unit, presents an array of challenges and safety concerns. The critical mass argument holds that female leaders, who can serve as mentors to junior personnel, are especially helpful; as a result, integration may occur after a critical mass of women serve in leadership positions in a branch or unit.

The obvious downside to critical mass is that it can become a tool for systematic exclusion of women from occupational specialties. The specific number of women required to reach critical mass will vary across branches and units, which makes the issue less than clear and very easily manipulated for the purposes of exclusion. Both men and women can, and do, serve as valuable mentors to young women and men. The need for available and helpful mentors, both male and female, is real and the Armed Services must take care to foster integration, mentoring, and effective leadership without creating unnecessary barriers to women. Implementing the integration of women into all combat specialties is important regardless of critical mass.

The Armed Services should take care to facilitate constructive mentorship for

young women but these mentors can be male or female leaders. Women should not be excluded from combat positions solely because of a lack of available female mentors; leaders should be willing and able to provide mentorship to all junior personnel, regardless of their gender. Any effort to establish critical mass before opening units to women should be the subject of careful scrutiny and must be based on a specific, transparent, validated, and logical justification.

Communicating Policy Changes

Successful integration of women into combat specialties requires clear communication of policy changes within and outside of the military. Clearly communicating the inevitable changes required for integration ensures that policies will be implemented consistently, fairly, and in a timely fashion. To date, communication within military ranks and between the military leadership and civil society has been limited. The implementation plans released in June 2013 are not as specific, consistent, and transparent as they should be for successful integration.

To ensure the effective communication of policy changes, CII is committed to engaging with the US military leadership. CII provides a neutral space in which policy changes will be discussed and implementation plans will be evaluated. The members of CII look forward to the successful integration of women into all combat specialties and are dedicated to collecting and conducting research, engaging with DoD, and reaching out to members of Congress in order to promote constructive and reasoned dialogue. CII

will remain involved throughout the implementation process to ensure that DoD and each of the branches of the Armed Services are pursuing sound steps toward integration.

CII maintains a website that will serve as an informational hub to all who are interested in the integration of women into combat specialties. The website contains a consistently updated collection of research on integration policies and efforts in the US and around the world: <http://wiisglobal.org/wordpress1/combat-integration-initiative/>.

DoD and each branch of the Armed Services must make every effort to ensure clear, timely, and effective communication of policy changes and steps toward implementation. Engagement between civil society and military leaders will foster greater transparency and allow the integration effort to incorporate unbiased data and lessons learned from integration efforts around the world.

Summary of Recommendations and Ways Forward

Integrating women into all roles in the Armed Services is a matter of military and organizational effectiveness. Recruiting the best people for each position and integrating a gender perspective will help win today's wars and meet tomorrow's challenges.

The recommendations reached during CII's meeting on 28 June 2013 are as follows:

- The Armed Services must reevaluate existing physical standards and develop smart standards for universal employability and for each occupational specialty. Physical standards do not need to be lowered to ensure the full integration of women into the US Armed Services.
- The Armed Services must make every effort to adopt a gender perspective to ensure not only the successful integration of women but also to address military operations and challenges within the full range of options.
- The Armed Services must foster effective mentorship for female personnel, by both male and female leaders, and carefully consider the purpose and utility of critical mass.
- The Armed Services should communicate policy changes clearly and effectively. CII invites leaders to participate in working group meetings and to engage in neutral and constructive dialogue with the group.

ⁱ See the original press release from 24 January 2013: <http://www.defense.gov/releases/release.aspx?releaseid=15784>. In February 2012, DOD had already decided to open to women over 14,000 previously closed positions in ground combat units at the battalion level.

ⁱⁱ The Combat Integration Initiative (CII) is analyzing and monitoring these implementation plans, paying special attention to specificity, clarity, transparency, and consistency. A first report on implementation is currently under preparation and will be available on the CII webpage at www.wiisglobal.org.

About the CII

The Combat Integration Initiative (CII), which formed early in 2013, is a working group comprised of veterans, 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.ⁱⁱⁱ

CII will gather, discuss, and disseminate information on lessons learned from previous integration efforts, within the US and in the fourteen other countries whose armed services have fully integrated women.^{iv}

CII is sponsored by Women in International Security (WIIS) and the Stockholm International Peace Research Institute North America (SIPRI North America). CII's mission is to support the full integration of women across all branches and occupational specialties of the Armed Services.

To support the successful integration of women into combat positions CII will engage in five lines of effort:

- Public education and outreach
- Congressional education and outreach
- DoD engagement
- Implementation tracking
- Research

Organizational Information on CII

In addition to WIIS and SIPRI-North America the following institutions are standing members of CII:

National Women's Law Center
Women's Research and Education Institute
Service Women's Action Network
American Civil Liberties Union
University of Virginia School of Law

Project Directors:

Chantal de Jonge Oudraat, Executive Director SIPRI North America and President pro tempore WIIS
Ellen Haring, Colonel, United States Army
Anne Coughlin, Professor of Law, University of Virginia School of Law

Lead Project Officer: Masha Keller, SIPRI North America

For more information contact:

SIPRI NA/WIIS <http://wiisglobal.org/wordpress1/combat-integration-initiative/>

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ⁱⁱⁱ For information on the symposium organized February 1, 2013 and which led to the creation of CII see C-SPAN's coverage at <http://www.c-span.org/Events/Military-Personnel-and-Experts-Discuss-Women-in-Combat/10737437754/> and <http://www.c-spanvideo.org/event/214001>.

^{iv} Women serve in combat specialties in Australia, Canada, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Israel, the Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Romania, Spain, and Sweden