Advocates for Women in Combat Value Diversity over Victory

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The prospect of drafting women is exposing some of the second-order consequences of fully integrating the combat arms. Constitutionally speaking, women’s combat exemption was the primary circumstance standing between America’s young women and registration for Selective Service. Now that women’s exemption has been repealed and the House and Senate are weighing amendments that include forcing women to register as part of the FY17 NDAA (National Defense Authorization Act), the nation-wide debate is revealing a lot of confusion on the draft and its purpose. Some have used the opportunity to call for an end to the draft altogether, others say women are not full and equal citizens unless they, too, have to register to fight the nation’s wars. The large majority of Americans have no connection to the military and had no skin in the game when considering full integration of U.S. combat units. They vaguely supported the idea because they support women generally and think it’s what women want. The idea of their daughters actually being drafted for combat against the likes of ISIS, Syria, Iran or North Korea is the catalyst for more realistic consideration on what’s at stake. Although women can be assigned to combat units, there are a myriad of excellent reasons that they should still be excluded from the draft.

Selective Service registration exists in order to induct “combat replacements” in a large-scale national emergency. It is not to fill desk jobs and support roles, it is to replace infantrymen who are dying by the thousands at the sharp end of our military spear. Technology has not lessened the face-to-face bludgeoning that our infantrymen are doing when the gun jams or ammo runs out as they’re fighting house to house and cave to cave on foot. While both women in combat and now drafting women have been framed as issues of equality, the priority when making military policy is the needs of our combat readiness and effectiveness, not equal opportunity or equal rights. That which diminishes readiness and effectiveness has no business being
considered let alone implemented. Adding women to the draft is militarily unnecessary, would impose a bureaucratic nightmare in a crisis with little to no return on investment, and would imperil our ability to achieve victory with the fewest casualties. It is problematic for the same reasons as integrating our elite combat units, the infantry, armor, artillery, and Special Forces.

We know this because scientific testing has shown it for decades. The Marine Corps’ 9-month integration study (http://www.sandiegouniontribune.com/documents/2015/sep/24/usmc-report-women-combat/) was only the latest in such testing. Top-performing female Marines ranging in ranks from PFC to Sergeant who achieved men’s minimum physical fitness standards or better and also completed the enlisted infantry training were paired with average male Marines of the same ranks. The hypothesis to prove was that coed teams would perform the same or better than all-male teams, but the results were the opposite, the hypothesis disproved. Out of 134 tasks, all-male units outperformed coed units 69 percent of the time. It’s not that women couldn’t do some of the tasks at all, but where they could, they couldn’t perform as fast, struggled with heavy-lifting tasks like casualty evacuation, fatigued faster and suffered greater rates of injury. All of their weaknesses were amplified when they were fatigued like after a long march under load (typically around 80lbs), and the heavier the weapon, the less accurate the shooting. If the margin was even 5 or 10 percent, that would be abundant validation against integrating the units in which speed is a weapon and any weakness means sacrificing victory and personnel. But 69 percent disparity is a catastrophic blow to survivability and lethality in direct ground combat. The Obama administration ignored these facts. Supporters of women in combat have no interest in victory or troop welfare. What matters to them is forcing the socio-political agenda of diversity metrics on an entity that has no choice but to follow orders.

Unchanging physical differences between the sexes will always render women at a stark disadvantage in offensive kill missions. In the Marines’ testing, women suffered 2-6 times the injuries of their male counterparts. Active-duty women average 2-10 times the injuries compared to men before even attempting to achieve men’s standards or the combat arms’ much more grueling demands. It should go without saying that higher rates of injury are a liability to units that have to endure and withstand the toughest physical demands as they hunt and kill our enemies. Drafting women for this will result in much higher turnover, weakened combat effectiveness and fewer of both men and women coming home alive and victorious against our enemies.
The military is tough on anyone but it’s much tougher on women because we don’t have testosterone coursing through our bodies. We have to exert far more effort into the same training to meet the arduous physical demands. That makes us all the more impressive for serving in the first place, but it doesn’t make us interchangeable with infantrymen or render all risks equal in the most violent activity known to man. Just the opposite. There are few to no women who can not only achieve combat unit standards but maintain them over time. We break hundreds to find two who can make it past day one in the Marine Corps’ Infantry Officer Course (IOC) or through Army Ranger’s School. You can bet your life that women have to be a damn sight better than men’s minimsms to survive, let alone succeed, in the direct ground combat they’ll be drafted to engage in. Of the thirty female Marine officers that were deemed eligible to try IOC, none were able to pass or even able to make it past the first two weeks. The females who graduated Ranger School were given additional training and recycled at least twice through each phase where men are only allowed two recycles—at most—over the whole program. The third graduate got three recycles in at least one phase of Ranger School. Their graduation was planned in advance and the Army shredded their records less than a month after. Those records are usually kept for one to two years at the least, but the Army saw fit to destroy them for these individuals. Their graduation was presented as proof that women are just as capable as men of succeeding at combat. The reality was quite different, but why let the truth get in the way of a good story?
It would be an administrative nightmare to sift through thousands and thousands of female registrants to test and find the one or two who can do the typical combat tasks required of the infantry. Regardless of standards, women face additional and higher risks than men which also make ground combat and drafting thereto a very unequal prospect. We face the most savage, barbaric enemy imaginable. They are raping their way across the Middle East and now Europe, using their creativity to devise new forms of torture and murder. Women are higher-value targets to be raped and tortured, used for psychological warfare against their units and as propaganda to devastate the country. For these reasons Congress would be amply justified in deciding that the little to no return on investment and the much greater risk and damage would not be worth the added administrative burden, and great expense in time, effort, personnel and defense dollars.

Where adding women palpably degrades combat effectiveness and adds significantly more risk and liability, there is no decent reason to draft women. The draft, like integrating combat units, is about the needs of the military, not equal career opportunity. We always need men to fight, we don’t need women to. Women now being able to join combat units when they volunteer for military service does not render all other considerations moot. As Elaine Donnelly of the Center for Military Readiness points out (http://cmrlink.org/data/sites/85/CMRDocuments/SelectiveServiceDAD_051216.pdf), “The Rostker decision did not consider other rationales for continuing women’s exemption from direct ground combat and Selective Service. A case could be made for limiting Selective Service to men, if Congress supported that policy with facts that already exist.”

The “Draft Our Daughters” amendment was struck from the House language of the FY17 NDAA in May, but behind closed doors Senator John McCain (R-AZ) who also chairs the Senate Armed Services Committee added the language on the Senate side. It will be voted on later this week.

Just as there should be open deliberation on combat unit integration, there should be a full and open debate on Selective Service and whether or not women should be included. These responsibilities rest with congress because they are accountable to us, not unelected appointees like Ashton Carter and Ray Mabus pushing Obama’s agenda through regardless of consequence. We are cannibalizing museum pieces (http://www.militarytimes.com/story/military/2016/03/30/marine-corps-broke-plane-parts-museum-raid-aviation-thornberry/82416918/) to fix our aircraft, suffering many more training accidents (http://www.stripes.com/news/marine-corps-army-leaders-blame-budget-cuts-for-increase-in-fatal-aircraft-incidents-1.399546) due to budget cuts, the military is being
bombarded with politically correct garbage, and our generals are telling Congress (http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/2016/03/16/army-marines-readiness-war-congress/81876210/) our military is not prepared to fight the next war, especially on multiple fronts. The last thing we need to do is add more bureaucracy to our beleaguered force.

(By Jude Eden)

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