

# An analysis of the feminization of war



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Throughout history, women have found ways to interject themselves into combat roles, whether openly or undercover. Stories about women serving in combat roles during the American Revolution and the Civil War have spread to groups who support the idea of including women in such roles. However, a woman's traditional role during war has been to hold things together back home while the men were responsible for defending the nation. During the turn of the 20th century, the roles for women changed dramatically when it comes to the military. "Some 33, 000 women served in the US armed forces during World War I, most in the Nurse Corps; more than ten times that number served during World War II" (Field). Additionally, women fulfilled roles in manufacturing plants that produced the equipment vital to the war effort. Recently, women have been indirectly attached to combat ground troops where they have been placed in a position to defend themselves from enemy combatants when necessary. Female veterans such as Catherine Ross feels, "...she faced the same dangers as her male colleagues...why aren't women allowed to serve in full combat roles in the American army" (Horn). Supporters make a very convincing argument for overturning the current exemption prohibiting women from serving in direct combat roles. However, Elaine Donnelly from the National Review believes otherwise. She states, "Civil affairs, even in a combat zone, does not fit the definition of direct ground combat: deliberate offensive action, attacking the enemy under fire ... Rose has therefore not actually experienced the role she is advocating for her fellow women" (Horn).

The assertions that other countries have overcome the problem of allowing women in combat roles have been taken out of context when the details are

studied thoroughly. Israel is a country that is frequently mentioned when debating whether women should fulfill combat roles. Dorian de Wind of the Moderate Voice states, “ The Israeli military have actively recruited women since the start of the Israeli state in 1948, and now allow women to serve in any role that men may” (Horn). However, there are reports that contradict this statement. “ No Israeli woman has served in combat since the establishment of the state of Israel in 1948” (Van Creveld). The people of Israel, including feminist groups, have any objections to this situation (Dougherty). So the question remains, “ Should women be allowed to fulfill full combat roles within the United States military?” The answer should be unequivocally “ NO!” Women are physically incapable to handle the rigors of war, will cause a break-down in unit cohesion, and to be honest, Americans are not truly ready to see large numbers of young women returning home in body bags.

The first major problem deals with the physical capabilities of the average woman entering the military. When in a combat situation, each member of the team will need to be able to pull their load, many times without the assistance from anyone else. One critic states, “ Women on average do not have the physical capability to lift a fully loaded male soldier who has been wounded under fire, in order to save his life. No one should have to die because women do not [have the capability]” (Horn). Time is of the essence when in battle, and when a soldier’s life is at stake, the unit will need capable individuals to carry-out the duties and responsibilities required to bring everyone home safe from a dangerous mission. Most women lack those very important skills crucial to combat.

Some may argue to include those women who may be considered capable, but that will not be the correct answer due mostly to the difference in physical training standards. Proponents say, “ There are no current tests that specifically measure the physical skills required for each military occupation specialty – the only way to test this is have the soldiers simply go out and perform their task. The goal is to create these gender-blind specific tests that more accurately predict a soldier’s success in combat” (Willens). The promotion of such tests will be disastrous in the end. To merely, test a soldier on how well he or she carries a gun is a far cry from the unpredictability of an intense combat situation. There is no way to predict each and every task that maybe required of a soldier when a combat situation arises; therefore, the task test for every specialty would only be beneficial to those specialties while in peace time conditions and would be thrown out in combat.

As of now, men and women are held to two different standards. Men are required to do more, physically, than their female counterparts. Another critic states, “ If women were held to the same standards as men, more than 14 percent of our armed forces would not be women. Feminists aver that scrapping the double standard would be discriminatory” (Kirkwood). These remarks speak for themselves. Everywhere in society, the physical standards differ between men and women. Let’s consider the New York Marathon. The men and women start out at the same time and run the same course, but when it comes to finishing the race, the division begins. There is always a man that finishes the race first and shortly afterwards, the first woman crosses the finish line. When the top participants are identified, they are split

between the top man and the top woman. If this split does not occur, the top performing woman would never be recognized even though she may have finished before hundreds of male participants. Proponents, deep down inside, recognize there are strength differences between male and female, and really do not want to push for the physical standards to match. Besides, “ the strongest woman is usually only as strong as the weakest man” (Kirkwood). Does the military want a less than capable combat force? Most logical thinking human beings would say, “ No!”

The second major problem to be discussed is the disintegration of unit cohesion within the combat team. This disintegration takes place in many forms that are also found within civilian society such as mistrust and pregnancy. Trust within the unit is paramount. One scholar states, “ Just the perception of unfairness is often enough to poison the atmosphere” (Simons). This perception of unfairness will be experienced by both men and women. For example, certain tasks are perceived to be unfairly assigned to men due to the mixed gender environment. Leaders do not want to be on the wrong end of such an intense situation and therefore chooses men to complete the task because they would be the ones performing it in an all male environment. When this takes place, mistrust in the chain of command creeps in and starts the breakdown in cohesion. On the other hand, if the women are assigned these types of tasks, they too will feel that the leadership is treating them unfair based on gender. Where is the leadership to turn? It takes a delicate balancing act to make such a situation work. And when in combat, the leadership needs to know that each service member completely trusts their decision making ability or the whole unit is lost.

Take a look at the corporate world. Women are positioned throughout the company at all levels. Even though the women are there, they are still unevenly represented at the upper levels of management. Some may ask, “Why?” A simple explanation may be in order. There are things that only happen to women that may or may not impact their decision. The board of directors at these companies needs to be comfortable that their team will be intact for years to come and pregnancy disrupts this plan. In the corporate environment, “many women extend their maternity leave and then willingly surrender high-status positions (or resign their commissions) after giving birth in order to spend more time at home” (Simons). This type of behavior would not be acceptable in a Special Forces unit. These units spend years together perfecting their communication skills and fighting techniques. A decision of this magnitude cannot be made on a whim. No one has the right to tell a woman that she cannot start a family if she chooses to do so. The unit will suffer for this decision and will make it ineffective. Therefore, all women have to be considered potentially non-deployable for some length of time (Simons).

The final problem with women being assigned in combat roles is that Americans are not ready for their daughters to be brought home in body bags. During World War I and World War II (WWII), Americans accepted the fact that war produces casualties on both sides and seen it was necessary to participate in such a horrific act. However, over the past forty years, some Americans have changed their perceptions on the need for war. Statistics show that the number of casualties have drastically decreased since WWII with Vietnam combat casualties being listed at 58, 209 compared to the

5624 combat deaths of the entire Global War on Terrorism (Wikipedia). Now imagine that 14 percent of the deaths during the War on Terrorism were women. It paints a grim picture to know that nearly 800 women could have been killed in combat while performing a highly dangerous job that some feminists are advocating so strongly. If this was the case, the streets would be crowded with angry parents and family members protesting the use of their daughters in such combat roles.

Women are needed to play the counterbalancing role for the men in society. If society is composed of individuals who all think alike, the country would go down the path of no return. Women should be spared the carnage and cruelty of war and turning a woman into the kind of person who views such gore without blinking an eye, or who participates in the wanton killing war requires, is a step down to cultural suicide (Kirkwood). It is usually the mothers who teach the youth of America and by turning them into killing machines, Americans are essentially destroying their future because the sanity check would not be place to keep this country from becoming the war mongering state that some Americans believe it is today.

Movies make the case for including women in combat roles and there are some who have fought valiantly when thrust into a kill or be killed situation. However, the few women who have encountered such activities do not constitute the total restructuring of full combat units that are performing effectively as they now stand. Maybe in the future when strength capability and unit cohesion is not a part of the equation, then women will be utilized in a more modified combat role where service members will never come into contact with enemy forces. This would be the problem assigned to the

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Department of Defense Warfare engineers for a solution. How would combat units fight a close quarter without seeing the enemy face-to-face? When this problem is solved, then and only then women should be allowed to become a part of fully engaged combat unit.