



The Realities of War: Assessing the Operational Risk of Revoking the Combat Exclusion Policy (Defense)

U.S. Army Command and General Staff College

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In January 2013, Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff General Martin E. Dempsey informed Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta of his intent to rescind the military's gendered combat exclusion policy and fully integrate all military occupational specialties. The following study assesses the operational risk associated with this decision by comparing the assumptions made by the 1992 Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women in the Armed Forces regarding the conditions and requirements of combat to the realities of war as experienced and reported by soldiers over the last three decades. Case study analysis indicates that while the Presidential Commission's concerns regarding the combat environment remain valid, its assumptions regarding the performance of U.S. Army soldiers are no longer accurate. The evidence indicates that from 1982-2012, the U.S. Army: developed and incorporated advanced offensive and defensive military technologies; evolved tactics and doctrine to leverage those technologies; and, finally, expanded its understanding of how and by whom such assets would be used on the battlefield. These efforts dramatically improved the lethality and survivability of all U.S. Army soldiers in combat. More importantly, these findings demonstrate that the U.S. Army possesses both the willingness and ability to mitigate the hazards and demands posed by the modern battlefield. As a result, the operational risk posed by the revocation of the U.S. Army's combat exclusion policy is low.

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