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Book Author(s): Margaret C. Harrell, Laura Werber Castaneda, Peter Schirmer, Bryan W. Hallmark, Jennifer Kavanagh, Daniel Gershwin and Paul Steinberg

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Introduction

U.S. Department of Defense and Army Assignment Policies for Military Women

In January 1994, informed by the report of the Presidential Commission on the Assignment of Women to the Armed Forces, then-Secretary of Defense Les Aspin established the current U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) assignment policy for women in the military with a memorandum specifying rules to replace the prior “risk rule.”¹ The risk rule had precluded women from serving in occupations or units characterized by the risk of exposure to direct combat, hostile fire, or capture. The current DoD assignment policy for military women instead establishes that military women can

be assigned to all positions for which they are qualified, except that women shall be excluded from assignment to units below the brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground. . . .²

The same memorandum also promulgated a definition of direct combat on the ground:

¹ Aspin (1994). This memorandum is included as Appendix A. This action by Secretary Aspin followed the congressional repeal in 1993 of the laws that had precluded women from serving in combat aircraft positions or on combatant ships. Although combat aircraft and combatant ships had been closed to women by law, women’s roles in ground units have always been constrained by policy rather than law.

² Aspin (1994).

Direct ground combat is engaging an enemy on the ground with individual or crew served weapons, while being exposed to hostile fire and to a high probability of direct physical contact with the hostile force's personnel. Direct ground combat takes place well forward on the battlefield while locating and closing with the enemy to defeat them by fire, maneuver, or shock effect.

The Aspin memorandum also indicated that the military services' policies and regulations could include certain restrictions on the assignment of military women:

where units and positions are doctrinally required to physically collocate and remain with direct ground combat units that are closed to women; where units are engaged in long range reconnaissance operations and Special Operations Forces missions; and where job related physical requirements would necessarily exclude the vast majority of women Service members.

The services may include these restrictions at their discretion. Such restrictions are permitted by DoD policy but they are not constraints of that policy.

The Army policy for assigning women, Army Regulation (AR) 600-13,³ predates the Aspin memorandum and is similar to, but not the same as, the DoD policy for assigning military women. AR 600-13 states,

The Army's assignment policy for female soldiers allows women to serve in any officer or enlisted specialty or position except in those specialties, positions, or units (battalion size or smaller) which are assigned a routine mission to engage in direct combat, or which collocate routinely with units assigned a direct combat mission.⁴

³ Headquarters, U.S. Department of the Army (1992).

⁴ Headquarters, U.S. Department of the Army (1992, p. 1).

Important to understanding the Army policy is recognizing that it defines direct combat differently from the DoD policy. The Army policy defines direct combat as follows:

Engaging an enemy with individual or crew served weapons while being exposed to direct enemy fire, a high probability of direct physical contact with the enemy's personnel and a substantial risk of capture. Direct combat takes place while closing with the enemy by fire, maneuver, and shock effect in order to destroy or capture the enemy, *or while repelling the enemy's assault by fire, close combat, or counterattack.*⁵

This definition of direct combat is different from the definition provided in the Aspin memorandum. The Army definition adds the requirement for a substantial risk of capture. Additionally, and very importantly, the Army policy includes “repelling the enemy's assault by fire, close combat, or counterattack” in its definition of direct combat.

There are several important differences between the Army and the DoD policies. First, the DoD policy restricts the assignment of women to units whose *primary* mission is direct ground combat, whereas the Army restricts assignment to units that have a *routine* mission of direct combat. Second, the Army also restricts assignment to units that collocate with direct combat units. Third, the Army and DoD policies define *combat* differently: The Army's definition of *direct combat* includes a requirement that there be a risk of capture, but also includes “repelling the enemy's assault.” These differences are significant, and it is notable that the Army did not update its policy when Congress repealed the legal restrictions against women serving in combat aircraft position and on combatant ships nor when Aspin revised the DoD policy in 1994. The implications of these differences are discussed later in this monograph in the context of operations in Iraq.

⁵ Headquarters, U.S. Department of the Army (1992, p. 5). Emphasis added.

Applying the Assignment Policies

It is important to understand that these policies are assignment policies pertaining to women rather than general employment policies. The policies provide guidance about the specialties, positions, and units to which women can be formally assigned. However, the policies do not constrain what individual women can do in operations. On the contrary, the Army policy explicitly states that, once properly assigned, female soldiers are subject to the same utilization policies as their male counterparts. The Army uses this policy as the basis for assigning women and implements those assignments in both the active Army and the reserve component with the Direct Combat Probability Code (DCPC) system, which uses the following three dimensions to classify each Army position: (1) the duties of the position and the area of concentration or military occupational specialty (MOS), (2) the unit's mission, and (3) routine collocation.

The extent to which a unit's activities in Iraq are relevant to this assessment of the assignment policy differs for the DoD and the Army policies. The DoD direct combat restriction focuses on the primary mission of direct combat units. Thus, the doctrine pertaining to the units, not their activities in theater, will determine the units to which women can be assigned. The Army policy, however, includes restrictions that require an assessment of the units' activities. These restrictions pertain to collocation as well as involvement in direct combat. In the case of the direct combat restriction, the Army policy precludes women from being assigned to a unit whose routine mission includes direct combat. Because the routine activities of a unit might change without a corresponding change in doctrine, it is important to assess unit activities in the theater. The focus on assigning women rather than individually utilizing women is discussed in more detail in Appendix B.

Opportunities Available to Army Women

As a result of changes in the DoD assignment policy for military women, additional Army units and occupations were opened to women.⁶ In their January 12, 1994, memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, the Secretary of the Army and the Army Chief of Staff stated the intent to open the following units and occupations to women:

- maneuver brigade headquarters
- division military police companies
- chemical reconnaissance and smoke platoons
- mechanized smoke companies and smoke platoons
- divisional forward support battalions (FSBs) (forward maintenance support teams)
- engineer companies (medium girder bridge and assault float bridge)
- military intelligence collection and jamming companies
- Washington, D.C.–area ceremonial units.⁷

The Army's implementation of the changed DoD policy also resulted in opening positions within the headquarters of some maneuver and separate brigades, as well as in other types of units, such as the special forces group.⁸

As of the end of fiscal year 2006, the active-component Army includes over 48,000 women, who have the opportunity to serve in

⁶ The Army assignment policy, AR 600-13 (Headquarters, U.S. Department of the Army, 1992), predates the Aspin memorandum. Positions were opened to Army women in 1994 as a result of Secretary Aspin's removal of the risk rule from the DoD assignment policy.

⁷ Gordon R. Sullivan, U.S. Army Chief of Staff, and Togo D. West, Jr., Secretary of the Army, "Direct Combat Definition and Assignment Rule," memorandum to the Secretary of Defense, January 12, 1994.

⁸ The Army assignment policy, AR 600-13 (Headquarters, U.S. Department of the Army, 1992), did not change with the change in DoD policy.

92.3 percent of Army occupations; 70.6 percent of Army positions are open to women.⁹

Basis for the Current Study

The Army has recently changed its organizational structure to a modular one that involves a different command structure and form of interaction between maneuver and support units. Army units, including brigade combat teams (BCTs), form the new modularized structure characteristic of Iraq deployment. Women have been an integral part of this structure, comprising approximately 10 to 20 percent of Army personnel deployed to Iraq and participating in almost every kind of unit or subunit open to women within BCTs.¹⁰

Iraq also presents a different kind of warfare. The assignment policy was drafted at a time when battles were assumed to be linear, characterized both by a front line, where direct contact with the enemy occurred, and relatively safer areas in the rear. In Iraq, U.S. forces confront an asymmetric threat. In other words, rather than fighting an enemy that uses similar weapons and techniques, U.S. forces confront an enemy that attempts to harm U.S. assets without going up against the “teeth” of U.S. defenses. For example, counterinsurgents in Iraq have been more likely to target unarmored convoys or civilian locations than better-armed and -defended systems, such as the Abrams tank or the Bradley fighting vehicle. Additionally, the asymmetric warfare in Iraq is occurring on a nonlinear battlefield.¹¹

Given the Army’s recent modularization, as well as the differences between military missions in Iraq in the context of the global war on terrorism (GWOT) and military missions fought on the linear battle-

⁹ Data provided by Office of the Deputy Chief of Staff for Personnel (Army G-1), Women in the Army office. See Appendix C for additional detail on Army occupations open and closed to women.

¹⁰ Our analysis of the roles in which Army women deployed to Iraq is included in Appendix D.

¹¹ Asymmetric threats and nonlinear battlefields are discussed in more detail in Appendix G.

fields of past military engagements, concerns have arisen among some members of Congress and other interested parties as to whether the Army's use of women in Iraq is consistent with existing policies.

In May 2005, House Armed Services Committee Chairman Duncan Hunter and Military Personnel Subcommittee Chairman John McHugh cosponsored an amendment to the National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2006 that would have made into law the 1994 assignment policy and would have also precluded DoD from opening new positions to women without an act of Congress.¹² Democrats and active and retired military leadership resisted the measure, stating that it would "tie the hands of military commanders in a time of war" and undermine the recruiting, morale, and careers of professional military women.¹³ Subsequently, Chairman Hunter proposed a revised amendment to require the Secretary of Defense to give 60 days' (instead of the prior 30 days') notice to Congress before changing the assignment policies for women or opening or closing new positions to women and to report whether DoD was currently complying with the 1994 policy.¹⁴

While the final law did not change the reporting requirement, Section 541 of Public Law 109-163, January 6, 2006, does require an investigative report:

Not later than March 31, 2006, the Secretary of Defense shall submit to the Committee on Armed Services of the Senate and the Committee on Armed Services of the House of Representatives a report of the Secretary's review of the current and future implementation of the policy regarding the assignment of women

¹² See, for example, Liz Sidoti, "House Committee Votes to Ban Women in Combat," *Capitol Hill Blue*, May 19, 2005a.

¹³ See, for example, Ann Scott Tyson, "More Objections to Women-in-Combat Ban," *Washington Post*, May 18, 2005, p. A5. See also U.S. Senate, S 1134-IS, To Express the Sense of Congress on Women in Combat, 109th Congress, 1st Session, May 26, 2005, which was introduced by Senators Hilary Rodham Clinton, Susan Collins, Mary L. Landrieu, Patty Murray, Jack Reed, and Barbara A. Mikulski.

¹⁴ U.S. House of Representatives, House Armed Services Committee, "Hunter Statement on Department of Defense Direct Ground Combat Policy," press release, Washington, D.C., May 25, 2005c.

as articulated in the Secretary of Defense memorandum, dated January 13, 1994, and entitled, “Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule.” In conducting that review, the Secretary shall closely examine Army unit modularization efforts, and associated personnel assignment policies, to ensure their compliance with the Department of Defense policy articulated in the January 1994 memorandum.

Subsequently, the Under Secretary of Defense for Personnel and Readiness communicated to Congress the need to extend the deadline past March 2006 and informed Congress that the RAND Corporation had been engaged to assist in data collection and analysis.¹⁵ Accordingly, this monograph is intended to provide the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD) with analysis it may consider in its response to Congress.

Objectives and Scope of This Study

This OSD-sponsored study was designed to assess whether there is a common understanding—a shared interpretation—of the assignment policy; to determine whether, given Army operations in Iraq, the Army is currently complying with policy; and to assess whether the policy is appropriate to the new military environment, evidenced by current operations in Iraq. This study focused particularly on the Army BCTs that deployed to Iraq in a modular configuration, with specific attention to the new organic relationships with brigade support battalions (BSBs). The intent of this research is not to prescribe policy, but rather to report research findings about the assignment policy, given Army operations in Iraq, and to identify issues for DoD’s consideration in decisionmaking concerning policy, doctrine, and employment.¹⁶

¹⁵ Personal communication from David S. C. Chu, Under Secretary of Defense, to Senator John W. Warner, chairman, Senate Armed Services Committee, and Representative Duncan Hunter, chairman, House Armed Services Committee.

¹⁶ The scope of our study did not include an assessment of the appropriateness of the assignment policy to past operations nor did it consider operations in Afghanistan. Such investiga-

Although this monograph directly references DoD policy as articulated in the Aspin memorandum, Public Law 109-163 also requires the Secretary of Defense to inform Congress of any changes to the ground combat exclusion policy, in which

the term “ground combat exclusion policy” means the military personnel policies of the Department of Defense *and* the military departments, as in effect on October 1, 1994, by which female members of the armed forces are restricted to units and positions below brigade level whose primary mission is to engage in direct combat on the ground.¹⁷

This passage is important because it suggests that the Army cannot choose not to adhere to its own policy and because the law specifically references the personnel policies of both DoD and the military departments. Thus, this monograph addresses both the DoD and Army assignment policies and identifies the manner in which they differ.

This effort focused on Army BCTs and their support units operating in the Iraqi theater. While our observations may apply to the other military services and to other ongoing or future operations, this study did not specifically address how the other services assign women, nor did it encompass operations by the Army or other services in Afghanistan.

Approach and Methodology

To accomplish the study objectives, this effort included three primary research tasks. The first task involved describing the assignment policy and establishing the perceived objectives of the assignment policy. The second task analyzed the Army’s transformational modular combat and combat support design, function, and doctrine to determine whether the doctrine is consistent with the assignment policy. This study was developed with the recognition that the design, function, and doctrine

tions would be interesting for further research.

¹⁷ Public Law 109-163, Section 541 (2006). Emphasis added.

of modular Army units were likely being adapted to the Iraqi theater. Accordingly, we placed more emphasis on the importance of the third research task: understanding how Army BCTs and BSB support units were employed in Iraq, the roles that were filled by women, and to what extent the assignment policy was both appropriate, given Army operations in the Iraqi theater, and complied within that context.

These tasks employed different research methods. We reviewed the relevant literature and debate and conducted 11 qualitative expert interviews with Army, OSD, and Joint Staff (JS) leadership to assess the objectives of an ideal assignment policy, to assess the extent to which the current policy meets those objectives, and to ascertain the extent to which they agree upon the meaning of the policy. This effort also included five interviews with congressional members and staff to discuss the objectives or intent of the policy.

This research also included qualitative interviews and focus groups with service members returned from Iraq. These interviews and focus groups were conducted at a schoolhouse and a unit installation. The Army selected the unit, based on the scheduled return and availability of units, and identified local officers to recruit the focus group and interview participants. In general, battalion and brigade command personnel were interviewed, and more junior personnel participated in focus groups, though a similar protocol was used in both interviews and focus groups. In total, 80 people from the two locations participated in 16 focus groups and eight individual interviews. The confidential 60-minute sessions were led by experienced RAND researchers.

The interview and focus group data were transcribed, coded, and analyzed using the grounded theory method with qualitative analysis software, which permitted the research team to identify themes in experiences of Army personnel in Iraq.¹⁸ These interactions with recently returned personnel were extremely important to this effort because they informed the research team's understanding of "how things really worked" in Iraq. Many quotes and observations from these partici-

¹⁸ For more information about the types of personnel who were interviewed and participated in the focus groups and the semistructured protocols used for these sessions, see Appendix F.

pants are included in this monograph; these participants are referred to as recent returnees to protect their identities while distinguishing their comments from those of senior Army, OSD, and JS interviewees.

Importantly, while we obtained a range of views from individuals in a variety of occupations and units, our interview and focus group data are not representative. Thus, they cannot be considered indicative of the extent to which observed practices are occurring in Iraq, nor can the absence of an observation be construed as evidence that such practices do not happen in Iraq. These observations are intended, instead, to indicate practices that occur at least among some units in Iraq and to indicate perspectives that are held by at least some returned service members. Further, in some cases, we chose to portray the range of perceptions provided by our participants, which is another reason the perceptions and attitudes reported in this monograph cannot be assumed to be predominant views. Additionally, although we indicate whether the comments were made by returned service members or during the senior interviews, we do not provide the personal characteristics of the returned service member who made each comment to protect their confidentiality.

This research also included a review of lessons learned and other materials provided by the Center for Army Lessons Learned, as well as discussions with other Army experts.

Organization of This Monograph

This monograph is comprised of five chapters, including this one. Chapter Two discusses whether the current assignment policy is understandable and describes the central objectives of an assignment policy. Chapter Three considers whether the Army is complying with its policy, given its operations in Iraq, without questioning the policy itself. Chapter Four discusses whether the language and concepts in the current assignment policy are appropriate for the new military environment and the Army's new structure. Operations in Iraq are considered reflective of the new military environment. The final chapter offers conclusions and recommendations.

This monograph also includes supporting appendixes. Appendix A includes the Aspin memorandum that is DoD policy. Appendix B discusses the difference between an assignment policy and an employment policy. Appendix C includes additional information about the opportunities available to current Army women. Appendix D describes the quantitative analysis of Army women deployed in Iraq. Appendix E includes more information about the interviews with Army, OSD, and JS leadership and congressional members and staff and provides more explanation of the objectives discussed during those interviews. Appendix F presents additional information about the interviews and focus groups conducted with Army personnel recently returned from Iraq. Appendix G discusses the Army's modularity and today's asymmetric warfare on the nonlinear battlefield in Iraq. Appendix H summarizes and describes the characteristics of Army women who have received the Combat Action Badge (CAB).