Women in Combat: Thoughts on a Cultural Shift
By Jennifer Clark

Recent discussions in Congress have spurred a variety of debates and arguments regarding the ban on women in combat military occupational specialties (MOSs), and the viability of lifting that ban.[1] The debates focus mostly on physicality, unit cohesion, and logistics.[2] After a recent review of the literature, I found that the surveyed texts overall support the claim that women can and do serve well in combat roles. However, the sample of combatants documented was likely selected for individual augments; there were no mixed battalions that could be evaluated, and there were no mixed combat units that officially allowed women in combat roles. In this regard, there appears to be a significant lack of rigorous long term or large scale studies that investigate the roles and performance of women in combat units, even as individual augments. My own experience, while embedded with the Army and Marines in Iraq throughout 2008-2009,[3] found no instances of women serving in direct line of fire roles. However, I heard plenty of stories from female soldiers who either had experienced or had returned combat fire and who felt that the ban was outdated and did not take into account the lack of a front-line in today's warzones. I saw no logistical issues of the sort noted in the literature while on Marine Corps bases (the Marines were quite adept at making do with the supplies they had), but did see a variety of Marines with various body types of both sexes who performed well in all physical activities either with or without the use of a buddy. To me, it seemed that should the ban be lifted, individual

Divided We Stand: Reflections on Civilians, Warfighters and War
By Wendy Chambers, PhD

The Civ-Mil Divide

The gap in experience and knowledge between U.S. civilians and our military hinders effective civilian decisions about war. Despite a majority of Americans expressing confidence in the U.S. military in recent years,[1] civilians outside of military families are largely disengaged about why we go to war, what warfighters do during war, and the warfighter's experience of returning home.[2]

performance-based selection for combat-related MOSs might be a potential solution to the sensitive topic of integrating women into traditionally all male MOSs and units. In thinking further about the topic, I decided to approach the debate in cultural terms, specifically what it means to be a warrior, how that is defined literally and symbolically by the Marine Corps, and what conflicts and shifts should be considered if the ban were to be lifted.

What is a warrior? The images we see in Marine Corps commercials, on recruiting posters, and on the Marine Corps website[4] are generally rugged, male, tough, idealized hyper-masculine infantry Marines who are physically and mentally strong, and resilient. Does this singular archetypal warrior identity represent the totality of the Marine Corps? Of course it does not. There are many different types of warriors. However, it is this imagery that challenges the evolution of policy on such topics as having women serve in combat positions. An exploration into how the Corps defines its best traits may show the diversity of what constitutes a warrior and how women may be integrated into the visual imagery and symbolism of a Marine warrior.

Marine Corps doctrine defines the core values of Marines as Honor, Courage, and Commitment. Honor is defined as respect for others, to act responsibly, and to be held to the highest ethical and moral standards. In doctrine, courage is defined as "what allows you to remain calm while recognizing fear, having the inner strength to stand up for what is right and to accept blame when something is your fault, and to continue to function effectively when there is a physical danger present."[5] Commitment is the "spirit of determination and dedication found in every Marine."[6] The Marine Corps does not define a warrior in words to exclude females. Indeed their definition can include any person, gender, and/or physical type; but in imagery, females are largely absent. On blogs,[7] infantry Marines appear to embrace their version of the warrior's ideal regardless of whether or not this ideal is actually codified in doctrine, and may express their interpretation of warrior ethos in a variety of forms (e.g. squad-bay talk, bragging, hyper-competitiveness, hazing, etc.). These manifestations may be useful in terms of building unit cohesion, urging colleagues to perform better, and overcoming fear and internal barriers to combat in an all-male unit. However, these ways of talking through and with value-based images can easily deteriorate into misogynistic rhetoric which may be damaging to unit cohesion during gender integration.

Historically and across cultures, the most notable fighting forces and warriors did not unilaterally embrace a warrior ethos with gender ties. Instead, strong historical images of warriors (e.g. Alexander's Sacred Band, Queen Vishpala, Phung Thi Chinh, Boudicca, Hadrian, Vikings, etc.) exemplified great variety in physicality, gender, and their means of successfully accomplishing their mission. These diverse examples illustrate the variety of options for how Marine Corps values might be expressed in ways that more easily could include females. Should the ban be lifted and women integrated into the infantry, exploring a cultural shift to include language, imagery, and symbols of a variety of warriors, to include women, may aid the transition.

Notes:

[1] U.S. Congress, House Armed Services Committee, Military Personnel Subcommittee, Military Personnel Legislative Priorities, Hearing, 111th Cong., 2nd Sess., Report No. 111-139, March 17, 2010: 19; Burrelli, David F. "Women in Combat: Issues for Congress." Congressional Research Service, November 8, 2011.

[2] Keenan, Jimmie O. "The DOD Combat Exclusion Policy: Time for a Change?" in Putko, Michele M. and Douglas V. Johnson II, ed. Women in Combat Compendium. Strategic Studies Institute. January 2008. 21-26; Simons, Anna. "Women in Combat: Civic Duty or Military Liability." Paramaters. Winter (2002-03): 152-54.

[3] I was deployed as a social scientist on a Human Terrain Analysis Team.

[4] U.S. Marine Corps Website. http://www.marines.com/#default, accessed January 10, 2011.

[5] U.S. Marine Corps Leadership Traits. http://www.6mcd.usmc.mil/ftl_site/Handbook/marine_corps_leadership__traits.htm, accessed June 10, 2011.

[6] "Core Values: The Values that Define a Marine." http://www.marines.com/main/index/making_marines/culture/traditions/core_values, accessed January 10, 2011.

[7] Lamothe, Dan. "Behind the Cover: The Push to Add Female Grunts." Marine Corps Times. April 2011. http://militarytimes.com/blogs/battle-rattle/2011/04/04/behind-the-cover-the-push-to-add-, accessed June 14, 2011. Snedon, Sgt. "Women in Combat- Will it Happen?" Features on target, MarinesBlog http://marines.dodlive.mil/2011/03/21/women-in-combat-will-it-happen/, accessed January 10, 2012.

A minority of politicians have military experience, which may challenge political leadership's ability to decide what requires military defense of our national interests.[3] Likewise, warfighters express their own disengagement from civilians and civilian life.[4] This civ-mil gap has only widened since the end of conscription and the increasing cultural isolation of the U.S. military.[5]

In order to decrease the civ-mil gap to improve war-related decisions and increase civilian understanding of war and warfighters, this piece will primarily focus on changing civilian culture, though some warfighters have proposed that the services should also improve their civilian outreach efforts.[6]

An Engaged Civil Society

Multiple options exist for getting citizens engaged in decisions of war and the experiences of warfighters. Warfighters would not necessarily support a draft.[7] A draft would also recreate the post-WWII problem of having a less effective force if deferments were allowed. Without something as dramatic as the draft, however, the citizenry must have multiple incentives to be informed about war and warfighters. Unless the U.S. suffers a direct attack, options facilitated by the government could include:

Prior to war:
- Weekly updates from Congress to multiple public media platforms on war justification
- Monthly town-hall meetings on war justification, broadcast on multiple media platforms, open to the public and chaired by local representatives of legislators
- Social media outreach by all services on warfighters' preparations for war with links to approved warfighter blogs

During war:
- Cost of war identified on salary statements based on costs of military operations only, with a note directly beside the cost stating that veterans' benefits, interest paid for borrowing money to finance wars, or assistance to allies are NOT included in this estimate[8]
- War bonds
- Ads and social media campaigns created by non-governmental organizations (NGOs) and private agencies through federal stipends to:
    Educate the public about why we are at war and provide sources of war-related information
    Inform the public of current warfighter experiences at war
    Provide counts of not only U.S. warfighter and civilian deaths, but also the deaths of local foreign civilians, foreign security forces, and third country nationals using transparent methods (e.g. see the methodology of the Iraq Body Count Project[9]), updated weekly, and compared to any parallel U.S. government estimates[10]

Post war:
- Pairing of exiting service members with veteran mentors to help them transition to the civilian world and find employment. The Marine Corps' improvements to their Transition Assistance Program that involve following Marines six months post-separation offer an example[11]
- Federal stipends for qualified therapists outside the government who treat veterans
- Federal stipends for businesses to provide cultural transition support services to veterans, ideally run by veterans who have successfully integrated back into the civilian workforce
- Ads and social media campaigns created by NGOs and private agencies through federal stipends to:
    Educate the public about what warfighters offer the civilian workforce
    Identify ways for volunteers to help wounded warriors (like the Wounded Warrior Project) and their families,[12] which could also be linked with relevant university departments and other agencies to facilitate support and awareness

Observations of WWII propaganda have led to the argument that government officials believe that the public cannot understand foreign policy.[13] This is both an assumption and insufficient justification to not fully engage the public on the risks to its resources and warfighters when it comes to war. If the majority of citizens understand war and the risks, which the above propositions would hopefully achieve, the expectation is that these citizens would demand justification before pursuing any war unless the U.S. is directly attacked. However, even with a direct attack, the public is likely to want explanations for long, protracted wars, as in the case of Afghanistan. On the negative side, with a more engaged public, it is

possible that the United States would engage in fewer wars, even those that clearly relate to our national interest, if the American people thought the cost might be too great. On the positive side, any time warfighters went to war, it would be with the support of the majority of the public before, during, and after the war ends.

Conclusion

A society that is engaged in all phases of war is more informed and engaged with foreign policy and the warfighters that protect them. Even without relevant military experience, a politician that better understands war and warfighters will make more effective war-related decisions. By staying the course, the only ones held accountable for the wars are those who fight them.

Notes:

[1]Frank Newport, "Americans See U.S. Military as Number 1 Now, but Not in 20 Yrs," Gallup (February 26, 2010), http://www.gallup.com/poll/126218/americans-military-no-not-yrs.aspx, accessed January 5, 2012.

[2]E.g., Karen S. Wilhelm, The American People at War in the 21st Century: Mobilized, Engaged, or Indifferent? (A Paper submitted to the Inter-University Seminar on the Armed Forces & Society Biennial International Conference, October 2011).

[3]Mark Thompson, "The Other 1%," TIME (November 21, 2001): 38-39 and William F. Mullen III, Major, U.S. Marine Corps, The Civil-Military Gap: Why It Exists And What Should Be Done About It (Future war paper submitted to the faculty of the School of Advanced Warfighting, 2001-2002), 3-4.

[4]See http://artsbeat.blogs.nytimes.com/2010/02/18/five-questions-about-reentry/; Thomas Ricks, "The Widening Gap Between the Military and Society," The Atlantic (July, 1997): 3.

[5]Bernard D. Rostker, I Want You! The Evolution of the All-Volunteer Army RAND Monograph-265 (Chapter 1, sections 2-4, 2006), http://www.rand.org/pubs/monographs/MG265.html, accessed January 11, 2012.

[6]Mullen, 13.

[7]Thompson cites a 2011 Pew poll, 39.

[8]See for example, Stephen Daggett, "Cost of Major U.S. Wars," Congressional Research Service (June 29, 2010), http://www.fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/RS22926.pdf, accessed January 20, 2012.

[9]See http://www.iraqbodycount.org/about/ and methodology http://www.iraqbodycount.org/about/methods/3

[10]See Military Personnel Statistics at http://siadapp.dmdc.osd.mil/personnel/MILITARY/miltop.htm, accessed January 23, 2012.

[11]Chelsea Flowers, Lance Cpl., U.S. Marine Corps, "Once a Marine, Always a Marine: Commandant Improves Transition Assistance Program," Headquarters Marine Corps Website, http://www.marines.mil/unit/hqmc/Pages/OnceaMarine,AlwaysaMarineCommandantimprovesTransitionAssistanceProgram.aspx, accessed January 11, 2012.

[12]Wilhelm, 25.

[13]Ibid, 5.