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## Women in Combat—An Important Issue?

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Most Americans would probably be surprised to know that women are now deployed in military units that put them directly in the line of fire. The Pentagon has a policy that bars women from service in direct ground combat, but combat support and service units are often so close to the action that the risk faced is virtually the same as that experienced by the ground combat units. In recent weeks, the House Armed Services Committee considered legislation that would have required the Pentagon to seek Congressional approval for any change in the policy that would put women in ground combat units.

In the face of opposition, the committee eventually passed a measure that simply affirmed the standing policy. Is this much ado about nothing?

Not at all. A nation's character is demonstrated in many ways, and its treatment of women is one of the most significant indicators of cultural and moral health. Feminists have succeeded in framing most issues as matters of equal opportunity. By their logic, a policy barring women from combat units is irreducibly discriminatory and oppressive.

The issue is complex, but just consider this: Equality means equality. In other words, true equality means equal risk and equal responsibility. Accommodations have already been made in order to allow the service of women. Strength requirements and other standards have been adjusted. Furthermore, most of those fighting for a woman's "right" to serve in combat fall short of arguing that women should be required to service in combat units in case of national emergency.

Biology also plays a role that simply cannot be denied. The Pentagon refuses to release comprehensive data on the pregnancy rate of female personnel in uniform, but the issue will not go away. The availability of women for active service fluctuates with issues that do not effect the service of men.

From a Christian worldview perspective, far more is at stake. We understand that our Creator designed men and women for different, but complementary roles and responsibilities. This is highly offensive to the contemporary mindset, but men are designed to be the primary protectors while women are intended as the primary nurturers. No amount of social engineering can overcome these realities. The dignity of women is to be defended by men, not undermined by vulnerability in the extreme conditions of combat.

In the end, most Americans may react to the issue out of moral instinct rather than moral argument, operating out of something like what Leon Kass calls the "yuck factor." Consider the great war movies of the American cultural heritage. As a nation, are we ready to erase selected male faces and replace them with the faces of women? Are we ready to see mangled female bodies scattered on battlefields? Eventually, moral instinct will not be enough to stem the tide. We will need substantial arguments and the courage to stand by them.

BASIC TRAINING ON WOMEN IN COMBAT: Listen to Tuesday's edition of "The Albert Mohler Program" that considered this issue. See my commentary, "Women in Combat—A Time for Truth," published May 14, 2004. See also coverage by MSNBC, the Washington Times, The New York Times and The Washington Post, and editorials in favor of women in combat published in The New York Times and the Louisville Courier-Journal. In addition, see a letter to the House Armed Services Committee from the Vice Chief of Staff of the Army, a statement from Democratic members of the committee, a response from the National Organization for Women, and a resolution presented to President Bill Clinton by the Council on Biblical Manhood and Womanhood.

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