

One team, one fight



Lt. Gen. Claudia Kennedy (USA, Ret.)

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In Brief

“We’re not debating anymore whether women in combat are as effective as men. Instead, our focus is on the entire Army team. Is the *Army* effective? That is the appropriate question.”

- Lt. Gen. Claudia Kennedy

The debate about the role of women in combat has been settled – permanently. The myopic view which sought to anchor the role of women in an operational no-man’s-land has been rightly ignored in order to build the most effective Army possible. The dysfunctional policies which reduced Army readiness and imposed unwise and unwarranted restrictions on the full use of *every* soldier’s talents have been thoroughly discredited.

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It turns out that the role of women in combat is far more than a domestic issue – it is of consequence in matters of our national security and also in international security. Because the security of our nation is deeply affected by international influences, we cannot judge the effectiveness of our security without reference to the security of others. So it is with judging the effectiveness of women as soldiers – it cannot be assessed in isolation. The effectiveness and readiness of the entire team is what ultimately matters.

The old, tired discussions about upper body strength, foxhole hygiene and hormones, and pejorative arguments, such as “Who-will-have-the-babies?” have simply been forgotten in the face of perfectly ordinary military performance by women in uniform and by the men with whom they serve. To call women’s performance as soldiers “ordinary” is no slight. Rather, it avoids the tendency to attribute special qualities to women’s service or require that they

exhibit extraordinary skills to be considered acceptable. Women did not have to perform better than men for this argument to be settled, so superlatives are not needed.

The point of the Army's personnel and operational policies is to maximize Army readiness and to create the most effective Army possible. The truth is, the way women have been assigned and are performing in Iraq and Afghanistan represents a sea change in Army personnel policy. Admittedly, this is the product of necessity more than intention, but the results cannot be denied.

What we have learned in Iraq, among numerous other lessons, is that the role of women in combat is now resolved. It is years after the debate was settled operationally that we have now resolved the debate politically. Women in uniform, men in uniform – all part of the same fabric. It is, after all, one team, one fight.

Lieutenant General Claudia Kennedy was the first woman to achieve the rank of three-star general in the United States Army. She served as the senior intelligence officer for U.S. Forces Command, Deputy Commanding General for the Army Intelligence Center and School and completed her Army career as the Deputy Chief of Staff for Intelligence. She is Chair of the First Star non-profit corporation, working on behalf of children, and serves on the Board of Directors of the American Security Project.

What is IRAQ: Lessons Learned?

Five years into the Iraq war, Americans are left groping for answers. Are we safer? Can America's image be repaired? What are the lasting implications for our Constitution? Historians will spend decades examining this conflict, its causes, its conduct, and its consequences, but those left to grapple with the immediate policy implications must do so without the benefit of the perspective that time can often provide. What lessons should we draw from Iraq today so that we, as a nation, learn from this painful experience? Iraq: Lessons Learned is an initiative to begin answering those questions. The American Security Project asked some of the nation's best minds—military, policy, academic, political, business, religious, media and community—to ponder this question and provide insights from which we can all benefit.

