



Executive Memorandum

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WHY THE SOCIAL EXPERIMENT OF GENDER-INTEGRATED BASIC TRAINING HAS FAILED

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President George Bush's recent 2002 budget supplemental request for the military rightly concentrates on arresting the decline in U.S. military readiness, but the problem demands more than additional funding. Washington must rethink recent social policies that are affecting the readiness of U.S. armed forces to the detriment of national security. The first step should be to end gender-integrated officer and enlisted basic training, which numerous studies show is resulting in lower standards, increased misconduct, and declining morale.

Problems with Integrated Training. The primary goal of basic training is to instill devotion to duty, a sense of mission, and discipline—the cornerstone of military service. Regrettably, however, the first casualty of gender-integrated basic training has been discipline. In December 1997, the Federal Advisory Committee on Gender-Integrated Training and Related Issues (the Kassebaum-Baker Committee) released its report to then-Secretary of Defense William Cohen. The committee of military and civilian experts was clear. It found:

- A higher rate of disciplinary problems in integrated housing. Some Army drill sergeants, for example, complain about the inordinate amount of time they spend disciplining recruits for male-female misconduct. This increasing problem greatly distracts recruits and trainers from their training objectives.

- More confusion and less cohesion at the operational training unit level. In basic training, units are usually made up of 60 recruits and three instructors. These units are key to developing the unit cohesiveness that is necessary to succeed in battle. The unit is where trainees learn basic team building and discipline. The Marines have found that separating recruits by gender at the operational unit level provides a better environment for instilling military values, discipline, and ethics about professional relations. The Marines have had fewer morale problems and higher retention.

- Lower physical training standards. In certain cases, male trainers have been found to apply different physical standards to female recruits than to males because they fear charges of sexual harassment, are unfamiliar with all the regulations that apply to females, or do not believe that women can meet the same standards as men. As Stephanie Guttman, a journalist who has written extensively on this

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subject, explains in *The Kinder, Gentler Military*, the Army must “slow everything down when they add women.... [Male basic training] is much more intense.”

These attitudes are not surprising. According to the Kassebaum-Baker Committee, recruits are taught that “looking at a female for more than three seconds constitutes sexual harassment” and that they should abide by a “no talk, no touch” policy to avoid any incident that could damage their careers. This affects morale as well, as more and more male recruits complain that their female counterparts are disciplined less harshly.

Mixed-gender basic training creates an environment that is conducive to misconduct. In 1996, for example, Army drill sergeants at Aberdeen Proving Grounds in Maryland were charged with rape, abuse, and harassment of female soldiers under their supervision. This problem can be intensified when troops are deployed for military operations. A study conducted by Northwestern University sociologist Charles Moskos indicates that there was more sexual activity between troops serving in Desert Shield, when men and women were working in closer quarters than usual, than there was in the troops’ home garrison.

According to *The Wall Street Journal*, “Ten years into its vision of a ‘gender-neutral,’ ‘gender-blind’ force, the U.S. military is more preoccupied with sex than ever.” Problems related to gender integration may account in part for the fact that 47 percent of all females, but only 28 percent of men, leave the service before the end of their third year of service.

Learning from the Marines. The only service that maintains gender-separate basic training and that has not had recruiting and retention problems in recent years is the Marine Corps. Even though numerous studies have revealed dissatisfaction among junior officers in the other service branches, especially the Army and Navy, they have found high morale in the Corps. A primary reason is the Corps’ commonsense policy of separating the sexes in basic training, a policy that:

- Eliminates the potential for sexual abuse of female recruits by male drill instructors.
- Reduces the risk of sexual misconduct among trainees. Former Secretary of the Navy John H.

Dalton explains that keeping the sexes apart “gives new and vulnerable recruits the opportunity to focus on Marine standards of behavior without the unwanted stress of gender differences they would face in a gender-integrated boot camp.”

- **Establishes** female drill instructors as the role models for female recruits. “As soon as they get off the bus, we give them someone they want to be like,” says Lt. Col. Angie Salinas, commander of the Marine’s female 4th Recruit Training Battalion.

What Washington Should Do. Given the emotional and political sensitivity surrounding the policy of gender integration of the forces, the executive and legislative branches will need to work together to resolve the problems in the military this policy has created. Specifically:

- **The Secretary of Defense should order that, effective immediately, all basic training be conducted on a gender-separate basis.** To justify and guide his actions, he should adopt the conclusions of the Kassebaum-Baker Committee report.
- **Congress should voice support for gender separation during basic training,** given the substantial evidence that gender-integrated basic training is detrimental to military readiness and thus to national security. Such encouragement would provide senior military officers with some measure of insulation to speak more openly about the problems they experience in gender-integrated basic training and the extent to which combat billets should be open to women.

Conclusion. National security and the readiness of America’s armed forces to fight and win wars must come before political correctness. The first step, and one that will have the greatest immediate effect, is to separate the sexes during basic training.

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