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Ashton Carter

*Press Briefing on Open Military Roles for Women*

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Good afternoon, or good morning. No, it's good afternoon. Thanks for being here. Appreciate it.

Now, before I turn to my statement on the subject about which I'd like to speak to you, I'd first like to offer my condolences to the families of those who were killed yesterday in San Bernardino, California. President Obama just spoke about this tragedy. We're monitoring the situation closely in coordination with the rest of the president's national security team. Our highest priority, of course, is the protection of our people. The law enforcement community's taking the lead on this, and they'll be able to provide more information as it becomes available. I'm confident they'll have more answers in the days ahead.

Let me now turn to my statement.

When I became secretary of defense, I made a commitment to building America's force of the future: the all-volunteer military that will defend our nation for generations to come. Like our outstanding force of today, our force of the future must continue to benefit from the best people America has to offer. In the 21st century, that requires drawing strength from the broadest possible pool of talent.



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This includes women, because they make over -- up over 50 percent of the American population. To succeed in our mission of national defense, we cannot afford to cut ourselves off from half the country's talents and skills. We have to take full advantage of every individual who can meet our standards.

The Defense Department has increasingly done this in recent decades, in 1975, for example, opening up the military service academies to women, and in 1993, allowing women to fly fighter jets and serve on combat ships at sea. About the same time, though, DOD also issued the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule, which still prohibited women from being assigned to units whose primary mission was engaging in direct ground combat.

That rule was in turn rescinded in January 2013, when then-Secretary Panetta directed that all positions be opened to qualified women by January 1st, 2016 -- that is, less than one month from today -- while also giving the secretary of the Army, the secretary of the Navy, the secretary of the Air Force and the commander of U.S. Special Operations Command three years to request any exceptions, which would have to be reviewed first by the chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff and then approved by the secretary of defense.

As many of you know, I was deputy secretary of defense at the time. That decision reflected, among other things, the fact that by that time the issue of women in combat per se was no longer a question. It was a reality, because women had seen combat throughout the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan, serving, fighting, and in some cases making the ultimate sacrifice alongside their fellow comrades in arms.

We've made important strides over the last three years since then. We've seen women soldiers graduate from the Army's Ranger School. We have women serving on submarines. And we've up -- opened up over 111,000 positions to women across the services.

While that represents real progress, it also means that approximately 10 percent of positions in the military -- that is, nearly 220,000 -- currently remain closed to women, including infantry, armor, reconnaissance, and some special operations units.

Over the last three years, the senior civilian and military leaders across the Army, Navy, Air Force, Marine Corps and Special Operations Command have been studying the integration of women into these positions.

And last month I received their recommendations, as well as the data, studies, and surveys on which they were based, regarding whether any of those remaining positions warrant a continued exemption from being opened to women.

I reviewed these inputs carefully. And today, I'm announcing my decision not to make continued exceptions, that is, to proceed with opening all these remaining occupations and positions to women. There will be no exceptions.



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This means that, as long as they qualify and meet the standards, women will now be able to contribute to our mission in ways they could not before.

They'll be allowed to drive tanks, fire mortars, and lead infantry soldiers into combat. They'll be able to serve as Army rangers and green berets, Navy SEALs, Marine Corps infantry, Air Force parajumpers and everything else that was previously open only to men.

And even more importantly, our military will be better able to harness the skills and perspectives that talented women have to offer. No exceptions was the recommendation of the secretary of the Army, the secretary of the Air Force, and the secretary of the Navy, as well as the chief of staff of the Army, chief of staff of the Air Force, chief of Naval operations, and the commander of U.S. Special Operations Command.

While the Marine Corps asked for a partial exception in some areas such as infantry, machine gunner, fire support reconnaissance and others, we are a joint force, and I have decided to make a decision which applies to the entire force.

Let me explain how I came to this decision. First, I've been mindful of several key principals throughout this process. One is that mission effectiveness is most important. Defending this country is our primary responsibility, and it cannot be compromised. That means everyone who serves in uniform -- men and women alike -- has to be able to meet the high standards for whatever job they're in. To be sure fairness is also important, because everyone who's able and willing to serve their country, who can meet those standards, should have the full and equal opportunity to do so. But the important factor in making my decision was to have access to every American who could add strength to the joint force.

Now, more than ever, we cannot afford to have barriers limiting our access to talent. The past three years of extensive studies and reviews leading up to this decision, all of which we're gonna post online, by the way, have led to genuine insights and real progress. Where we found that some standards previously were either outdated or didn't reflect the tasks actually required in combat, important work has been done to ensure each position now has standards that are grounded in real-world operational requirements -- both physical and otherwise. So we're positioned to be better at finding not only the most qualified women, but also the qualified men for military specialties.

Another principal is that the careful implementation of integrating women into combat positions would be a key to success -- integration. And also that any decision to do so, or not would have to be based on rigorous analysis of factual data. And that's exactly how we've conducted this review.

It's been evidence-based, and iterative. I'm confident the Defense Department can implement this successfully, because throughout our history we've consistently proven ourselves to be a learning organization.



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Just look at the last decade and a half. We've seen this in war where we adapted to counter insurgency and counter terrorism missions in the wake of 9/11 and in the wars in Iraq and Afghanistan. We've seen it technically, as new capabilities like unmanned systems and cyber capabilities have entered our inventory. And we've also seen it institutionally when we repealed Don't Ask Don't Tell. In every case, our people have mastered change excellently, and they've been able to do so because their leaders have taken care to implement change thoughtfully. Always putting the missions and our people first. We will do the same today.

As we integrate women into the remaining combat positions, we must keep in mind the welfare and total readiness of our entire force. And as we focus on the individual contributions that each service member makes, we also have to remember that in military operations, teams matter. That's why it's important that the services chose to study both individual performance and team performance. And they not only made comparisons to other elite units like NASA, long-duration flight crews, and police SWAT teams, they also worked with our international partners to examine how they have integrated women into ground combat roles.

Again, how we implement this is key. As Chairman Dunford has noted, simply declaring all career fields open is not successful integration. We must not only continue to implement change thoughtfully, but also track and monitor our progress to ensure we're doing it right. Leveraging the skills and strengths of our entire population. All of us have a role to play.

As we proceed with full integration of women into combat roles in a deliberate and methodical manner, I'm directing that seven guidelines be used to steer this implementation.

First, implementation must be pursued with the clear objective of improved force effectiveness. Leaders must emphasize that objective to all service members, men and women alike. Second, leaders must assign tasks and jobs throughout the force based on ability, not gender. Advancement must be based on objective and validated standards.

A good example of this is SOCOM's selection processes which combine objective and substantive criteria in, and I quote, "a whole person concept that includes rigorous physical standards and also strong moral character, leadership skills, mental agility, problem-solving skills, selflessness, maturity and humility."

The third guideline is that for a variety of reasons, equal opportunity likely will not mean equal participation by men and women in all specialties. There must be no quotas or perception thereof. So we will work as a joint force to expertly manage the impacts of what studies may -- the studies that have been done suggest may be smaller numbers of women in these fields, the fields that were previously closed.



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Fourth, the studies conducted by the services and SOCOM indicate there are physical and other differences on average between men and women. While this cannot be applied to every man or woman, it is real and must be taken into account in implementation. Thus far, we've only seen small numbers of women qualified to meet our high physical standards in some of our most physically demanding combat occupational specialties, and going forward, we shouldn't be surprised if these small numbers are also reflected in areas like recruitment, voluntary assignment, retention and advancement in some of these specific specialties.

Fifth, we'll have to address the fact that some surveys suggest that some service members, both men and women, have a perception that integration would be pursued at the cost of combat effectiveness. Survey data also suggests that women service members emphatically do not want integration to be based on any considerations other than the ability to perform and combat effectiveness. In both cases, based on these surveys, leaders have to be clear that mission effectiveness comes first, and I'm confident that given the strength of our leaders throughout the ranks, over time, these concerns will no longer be an issue.

Sixth, as I noted, both survey data and the judgment of the services leadership strongly indicate that particularly in the specialties that will be opened, the performance of small teams is important, even as individual performance is important.

The seventh guideline has to do with international realities. While we know the United States is a nation committed to using our entire population to the fullest, as are some of our closest friends and allies, we also know that not all nations share this perspective. Our military has long dealt with this reality, notably, over the last 15 years in Iraq and also Afghanistan. And we'll need to be prepared to do so going forward as it bears on the specialties that will be opened by this decision.

With all these factors in mind, Chairman Dunford recommended that if we were to integrate women into combat positions, then implementation should be done in a combined manner by all the services working together. And I agree, and that will be my direction.

Accordingly, I'm directing all the military services to proceed to open all military occupational specialties to women 30 days from today, that is, after a 30-day waiting period required by law, and to provide their updated implementation plans for integrating women into these positions by that date.

Deputy Secretary of Defense Bob Work and Vice Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff Paul -- General Paul Selva will work with the services to oversee the short term implementation of this decision, ensure there are no unintended consequences on the joint force, and periodically update me and Chairman Dunford.

Before I conclude, it's important to keep all this in perspective. Implementation won't happen overnight. And while at the end of the day this will make us a better and stronger force, there still will be problems to fix and challenges to overcome. We shouldn't diminish that.



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At the same time, we should also remember that the military has long prided itself on being a meritocracy, where those who serve are judged not based on who they are or where they come from, but rather what they have to offer to help defend this country. That's why we have the finest fighting force the world has ever known.

And it's one other way we will strive to ensure that the force of the future remains so long into the future. Today, we take another step toward that continued excellence.

Thank you. Now, I'll take your questions.

**Question:** Mr. Secretary, you mentioned that the Marine Corps had asked for a partial exception. The Marine Corps made a very vigorous and detailed case for keeping some combat positions open to men only. In what ways did you find their argument unpersuasive?

**Secretary Carter:** I did review the Marine Corps data, surveys, studies, and also the recommendation of the commandant of the Marine Corps at the time, of course who was General Dunford, now our chairman, that certain Marine Corps specialties remain closed to women.

I reviewed that information and I looked at it carefully. I also heard from other leaders of other services who had studied similar issues in their own force, the recommendations of the other service secretaries and service chiefs, and I came to a different conclusion in respect of those specialties in the Marine Corps.

Where I strongly agreed with now Chairman Dunford is two very important points. I noted them in here. The first is that the key here is going to be implementation. And I viewed the - - the issues that were raised by all the services, by the way, in varying degrees, and obviously by the Marine Corps, that we needed to take those seriously and address them in implementation. And I believe that the issues raised, including by the Marine Corps, could be addressed successfully in implementation.

And second, that there was great value in having a joint or combined approach to implementation. That's why I have decided to have no exceptions in any service and to have them all working together on implementation.

**Question:** You said -- sorry -- just a quick follow-up. You said you came to a different conclusion, obviously. I was asking what about the argument you found lacking?

**Secretary Carter:** Because I believe that we could in implementation address the issues that were raised.

Barbara?



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**Question:** Two things, sir. Since you opened up referencing San Bernardino, and you said that you're monitoring it closely, can you share with the American people and with troops your concerns? You know, what are you monitoring? What concerns you about this incident? What -- what's your assessment of the potential growing issue of seeing acts of potentially terrorist-inspired violence in this country? What -- what does that raise for you? And on this issue that you're discussing here today, can you tell us why General Dunford is not here with you?

**Secretary Carter:** Sure. Okay. On the question of San Bernardino, Barbara, the law enforcement community is investigating what happened there. Again, I'm not going to speculate on what -- what happened. To your general question, obviously protecting our people is our most important mission. But we don't know what the causes are of the San Bernardino tragedy. And law enforcement, I'm sure, will get to the bottom of that, but I just can't tell you what that is.

**Question:** But the broader issue that we have seen so many times now, that, I mean, you the other day on Capitol Hill I believe referenced Chattanooga. And you have -- you have raised this issue of concern in the past. So I'm just wondering what your latest assessment is of -- of how much it worries you.

**Secretary Carter:** Well, again, we don't know the reasons behind this particular shooting. But the protection of our people, including our service people, and concern about radicalization, including of American citizens living in America in the manner that we saw in Chattanooga, is a huge -- enormous concern. And yet another reason why ISIL needs to be fought and defeated in its heartland of Syria and Iraq, about which I've spoken a great deal. But it's a global campaign, including one that involves law enforcement, homeland security, intelligence and other elements right here at home. That is the world that we are in. And we need to protect our people in that world.

**Question:** And why is General Dunford not here, sir?

**Secretary Carter:** I'm sorry. Why is -- is --

**Question:** [inaudible]?

**Secretary Carter:** -- well, this -- I'm announcing my decision. I was the one who took this decision. I'm announcing my decision. I -- you know, I should say, about General Dunford, you're going to have an opportunity to talk to -- to General Dunford. I've talked to him extensively about this subject. He's very knowledgeable about it. He will be with me as we proceed with implementation. I have taken parts of his -- the conclusions he drew. Others drew different conclusions, including myself. And that's the decision I've taken, and that's the direction we're going to go.

**Question:** Mr. Secretary?





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**Question:** Secretary Carter?

**Secretary Carter:** Phil?

**Question:** Mr. Secretary, does this decision now lead to a -- a greater debate about whether women need to register for selective service?

**Secretary Carter:** It may do that, Phil. That is a matter of legal dispute right now, and in fact litigation. So I can't -- I don't -- I don't know how that will turn out. I -- by the way, the -- the legal -- that legal determination won't affect what I announce today -- that is, our timetable for the implementation of the decisions I've announced today. But it is an issue that's out there. Unfortunately it's subject to -- to -- to litigation.

Jennifer?

**Question:** Secretary Carter, the three women who made it through the Ranger School, will they now be welcomed into the ranger regiment? Will they become a part of the regiment? Because they weren't until now.

**Secretary Carter:** Those -- Those positions will now be available to women. Once again, just to remind you, you have -- people have to qualify for -- for positions, positions have to be open and so forth. So there's a lot that goes into it. But those positions will now be open to them, yes.

**Question:** And secondly, can we assume that you found the Marine Corps study which concluded that mixed gender units aren't as capable as male units to be flawed?

**Secretary Carter:** It -- just not definitive, not determinative. There are other issues other than the -- those -- those studies are reflective of something I spoke of, which is teams do matter and we need to take that into account. And at the same time, the -- the individual's capabilities, and the -- the capabilities of the individual to contribute are extremely important. On average, and I said this very directly, men and women will have different physical capabilities. I'm -- I -- the data show that clearly. Now, that's on average. So there will be women who can meet the physical requirements of these specialties -- even as there are men who cannot meet those requirements. And so averages tell you something about the need to pay attention to numbers, team dynamics and so forth. But they do not determine whether an individual is qualified to participate in a given unit.

**Question:** Mr. Secretary?

**Question:** Mr. Secretary?

**Secretary Carter:** Let me just see. Tom, yeah, please.





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**Question:** The general that led this Marine Corps study said in a memo to then-Commandant Joe Dunford that opening up ground combat jobs would increase the risk, meaning more casualties for Marines. I wonder what you think of that, or is that statement overblown? And also, I understand, one of General Dunford's concerns was, since women -- women in the experimental unit suffered more injuries than men, that -- he was concerned that you would lose some hard-charging women Marines, and what did you think about that?

**Secretary Carter:** Yeah. No. Both of those -- I mean first of all, to the first point, combat effectiveness is the critical criterion in implementation. So the issue that you -- your first quote dealt with is something that must be dealt with, and, I believe, can be dealt with in implementation. So it needs to be taken into account. It's a serious issue. Combat effectiveness is why we're here. With respect to -- I'm sorry, your second point, Tom, was?

**Question:** Well, the concern was that some of the women in the experimental battalion that they put through the training [inaudible] --

**Secretary Carter:** Oh. Yeah, no. No.

**Question:** -- concern is that you would lose some hard-charging women Marines due to injury.

**Secretary Carter:** Yes. There are a number of studies that indicated that. Again, that's something that doesn't -- doesn't suggest to me that women shouldn't be admitted to those specialties, if they're qualified. But it's going to -- something that's -- needs -- that's going to need to be taken into account in implementation. So these are real phenomena that are -- affect gender -- that are, rather, affected by gender and need to be taken into account in implementation.

**Question:** [inaudible]. The Marines -- Marine Corps has concluded that it would harm combat effectiveness, and that's something that Secretary Panetta mentioned when he --

**Secretary Carter:** Combat effectiveness is the critical criterion. And it -- this change will be implemented, and I'm -- I'm confident can be implemented in a way that will enhance combat effectiveness, not detract from combat effectiveness.

Mik.

**Question:** Mr. Secretary, will the women's desire to enter combat roles or missions be entirely voluntary? Or will there be a time to -- where they could, like many of their male counterparts, be required to go into combat missions?



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**Secretary Carter:** Absolutely. If you're a service member, you have some choices, but you don't have absolute -- absolute choice. People are assigned to missions, tasks, and functions according to need as well as their capabilities. And women will be subject to the same standard and rules that men will.

**Question:** So are you concerned, as you alluded to in your opening remarks, that that could actually cause women not to want to enlist in the military, if they thought there was a possibility they would be required to go into a combat role?

**Secretary Carter:** Well, I -- I presume there are people in general, men and women, who don't join the military because they don't want to live by the military's rules and standards. But that's -- they -- they don't join, it's an all volunteer force. But if you do decide to join, you're subject to our rules and standards, period.

Jamie.

**Question:** Mr. Secretary, I want to get back to the absence of General Dunford, because given that he was the only service chief that asked for an exemption of all -- all of them, and given that he's now the senior military adviser, wouldn't it be important for him to be here and to send a message that the U.S. military is ready to salute smartly and carry out your orders? Because his absence may be sending an unintended message that he's not fully on board with your decision.

**Secretary Carter:** General Dunford and I have discussed this many, many times. I just met with him and the other chiefs and service secretaries today. And he will be a full part of implementation. And as I said, I came to a different judgment about a part of the conclusions of the studies that were conducted by the Marine Corps when he was commandant, but agreed with the great bulk of them, and they will be reflected in implementation. The issues that were raised by those studies I believe can be addressed in implementation and will be. That's my judgment. And he understands that's my judgment. And we will -- he will be at my side as we do the implementation. That's the idea.

**Question:** Was he on board with your decision?

**Secretary Carter:** Well, you'll have to speak to him about that. But he understands what my decision is and my decision is my decision, and we will implement it accordingly.

Let me see. Gordon. Where's Gordon? Hi, Gordon.



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**Question:** Hi. I wonder if we can move on to a different subject briefly, is the shooting down of the Russian jet. I wondered if you could give us an assessment a little more of -- of how that complicates the issue, and if Turkey overreached on -- on that shooting down of the jet.

**Secretary Carter:** Well, I mean, first of all, we've said repeatedly, the President said the Turks are entitled to defend their own airspace. We have urged both sides not to allow this to lead to further escalation. It has not had any effect on our prosecution of our own air campaign. We, as you know, have a memorandum of understanding with the Russian military, which is being adhered to and which is -- provides procedures that guarantee the operations of our own air campaign unimpeded.

With respect to the relations between Turkey and -- and Russia, we obviously have our differences of perspective with Russia about what is going on in -- in Syria. That doesn't translate, in our judgment, into any desire to see a conflict of any kind between Russia and -- and Syria. And Turkey, for its part, is a member of our coalition. And they're working with us in some regards. Obviously we would like them, like many other members of the coalition, to do more in Syria and Iraq against ISIL.

**Question::** Quick follow up on that. Is it -- what do you think it would take -- obviously the U.S. is pressing Turkey to do more on different levels, particularly this cordon of forces along a stretch of the border to -- to help eliminate the flow of foreign fighters. What do you think it will take for Turkey to kind of agree to do that and move forward?

**Secretary Carter:** Well, I don't -- I don't know. I mean, my -- in my view, they have ample evidence of ISIL's -- the danger ISIL poses to their own people and their own country. We also understand the other dangers they face, but they need to join in the fight against ISIL. I think there is more that they could do. It involves their military, it involves their intelligence services, it involves their border and homeland security forces. So we would like to see Turkey do more. That's essential.

Tony?

**Question:** I want to tie together the fight against ISIL with your decision today. The fact that SOCOM did not press for any exemptions, does that in theory mean that women over the next year could become part of the specialized counterterrorism commando units that you want to accelerate in the fight against ISIL, like the specialized targeting expeditionary task force you announced the other day?

**Secretary Carter:** That is -- yes, that is reflected in my decision. It was, as you said, also reflected in the recommendation of the commander of the Special Operations Command. And I saw it the same way, and therefore, my decision is the same as the decision of General Votel, or the recommendation of General Votel, in this case.



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And as far as the time scale goes, Tony, I mean, remember that the -- from the time a service member joins to the time they're assigned to a specialty, undergo training and so forth, the -- so people will be going through the pipeline, including women who are admitted pursuant to my decision today.

Kevin?

**Question:** Thank you, Mr. Secretary.

**Staff:** Last question.

**Question:** On some of the same vein, were there any of the MO Ss or jobs particularly that were in need of more women? Meaning so the service secretaries in all their recommendations up to you say this is actually where we actually could use more here or there because the military is at capacity or over 100 percent, you're actually shrinking the size of the force. And second question, to follow up on those targeting expeditionary forces, could you explain to us when that -- when those get started or they're already started. You mentioned one of their jobs specifically was to capture ISIS leaders. When they do that, what happens to them? It's a big question that we haven't heard from your level yet.

**Secretary Carter:** Yeah, okay. Two things. Well, there are, Kevin, specialties, and I don't want to go into this too much, but they're -- that are designed specifically for women. These are women who are part of female engagement teams and so forth in places where it is sensitive for an American male service member to interact with local females. So there -- and I was alluding to that in my statement. So there are situations like that.

I suppose it's also fair to say -- and it is a statistical thing, it doesn't apply to individuals -- but there are specialties in which women have historically excelled. And you have to be careful about that, because it's sometimes a matter of where they felt they could advance rather than anything else.

But so women are represented differently across specialties that have long been open, and that's why I think that we really need to focus on standards as we go into implementation. And we're going to learn a lot, and we already have learned -- and the service studies and surveys suggest this -- about standards and about how to think about standards in the course of considering this matter of gender.

With respect to the expeditionary targeting force and capture, we will deal with that on a case-by-case basis. It's going to depend on the circumstances. And that is, of course, just one of the purposes of the expeditionary targeting force, but it is one, capture. And we will be doing such operations, as you know, both in Syria and also in Iraq.



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And just to repeat what I said the other day, when we do it in Iraq, it will be with the knowledge and approval of the Iraqi government, Prime Minister Abadi, just to make that once again quite clear. And with that --

**Question:** What sort of -- [inaudible] -- do you see it possible that an ISIS fighter could be -  
- the full range, either military --

**Secretary Carter:** There's a full range as -- yeah, all the way.

**[CROSSTALK]**

**Question:** -- U.S. law enforcement and tried --

**Secretary Carter:** And other law enforcement of other -- of other nations. So the full range, and it really has to be considered on a case-by-case basis. Thank you all. Thank you very much. Appreciate you being here.