

Why GAO Did This Study

Since September 2001 more than 300,000 women have been deployed in Iraq and Afghanistan, where more than 800 women have been wounded and more than 130 have died. A 1994 rule prohibited women from being assigned to many direct ground-combat units, but on January 24, 2013, the Secretary of Defense and the Chairman of the Joint Chiefs of Staff rescinded the rule and directed the military services to open closed positions and occupations to women by January 1, 2016.

Senate Report 113-176 had a provision for GAO to review the services' progress in opening closed positions and occupations to women. This report assesses the (1) status of service efforts to open positions and occupations to women, including steps to identify and mitigate potential challenges; (2) extent the services' efforts to validate gender-neutral occupational standards are consistent with statutory and Joint Staff requirements; and (3) extent DOD is tracking, monitoring, and providing oversight of the services' integration plans. GAO analyzed statutes, DOD guidance, and service reports and plans, and interviewed DOD officials.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that DOD develop plans to monitor integration progress after January 2016. DOD concurred with GAO's recommendation. GAO previously recommended that DOD establish a process of periodically reevaluating DOD's requirements for the Selective Service System. DOD has not taken action but GAO continues to believe the recommendation is valid.

View [GAO-15-589](#). For more information, contact Brenda S. Farrell at (202) 512-3604 or farrellb@gao.gov.

MILITARY PERSONNEL

DOD Is Expanding Combat Service Opportunities for Women, but Should Monitor Long-Term Integration Progress

What GAO Found

The military services and U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) have opened selected positions and occupations to women since January 2013, as shown in the table below, and are determining whether to open the remaining closed positions and occupations. The services and SOCOM also are conducting studies to identify and mitigate potential integration challenges in areas such as unit cohesion, women's health, and facilities. As of May 2015, the Secretary of the Navy was the only military department Secretary to recommend an exception to policy to keep positions closed to women on three classes of ships that are scheduled to be decommissioned, due in part to high retrofit costs.

Table: Changes in and Status of Military Service Opportunities for Women as of March 2015

	Positions opened since January 2013	Positions closed as of March 2015	Percent of positions closed as of March 2015
Army	68,500	176,800	18%
Air Force	0	4,300	1%
Navy	17,100	9,200	2%
Marine Corps	6,000	54,800	25%
Total	91,600	245,100	—
SOCOM	7,000	25,700	41%

Source: GAO analysis of DOD data. | GAO-15-589

The services and SOCOM are working to address statutory and Joint Staff requirements for validating gender-neutral occupational standards. GAO identified five elements required for standards validation. GAO compared these elements to the services' and SOCOM's planned methodologies and determined that their study plans contained steps that, if carried out as planned, potentially address all five elements. However, the services' and SOCOM's efforts are still underway; therefore, GAO could not assess the extent that the studies will follow the planned methodologies or report how the study results will be implemented.

The Department of Defense (DOD) has been tracking, monitoring, and providing oversight of the services' and SOCOM's integration efforts, but does not have plans to monitor the services' implementation progress after January 2016 in integrating women into newly opened positions and occupations. While DOD requires the services and SOCOM to submit quarterly progress reports, this requirement ends in January 2016. Without ongoing monitoring of integration progress, it will be difficult for DOD to help the services overcome potential obstacles. Further, when opening positions to women, DOD must analyze the implications for how it meets certain resource needs. In 2012, GAO assessed the military necessity of the Selective Service System and examined alternatives to its structure. GAO recommended in 2012 that DOD establish a process of periodically reevaluating its requirements in light of changing threats, operating environments, and strategic guidance. DOD has not taken action to do this, but agreed that a thorough assessment of the issue was merited, and should include a review of the statutes and policies surrounding the registration process and the potential to include the registration of women. GAO continues to believe that DOD should establish a process of periodically reevaluating DOD's requirements for the Selective Service System.