FROM: Phyllis Schlafly
68 FAIRMOUNT, ALTON, ILLINOIS 62002 / (618) 462-5415

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VFW TAKES ON "QUIET REVOLUTION"

The Veterans of Foreign Wars, at their annual convention a few weeks ago in Philadelphia, passed their usual raft of resolutions calling for a strong military defense and veterans' benefits. But Resolution No. 424 was different. In two pages of "whereases," it tackled a subject that few military men or politicians have dared to discuss.

First, the resolution pointed out that "the number of women in the armed forces has more than quadrupled since 1972, from less than 2% of the total force to about 8.9%." It points out that "women comprise 26% of the ROTC force at 291 colleges, while 36,000 women are in Junior ROTC programs."

Making a point for which the English language has not yet developed satisfactory terminology, it says that "in 1972, 90% of the women in the armed forces were in 'women type' jobs. Today, this percentage has shrunk to about 50%." The resolution bluntly states what few Americans know: that "on December 20, 1977, the Secretary of the Army approved the assignment of women to 'hazardous assignments near combat areas.'"

The resolution then points out that "no other country, except New Zealand, has brought so many women into their armed forces. The Soviet Union has only 10,000 women in forces totalling over 4.6 million; Israel about 8,000 out of 278,000. In short, we are the only nation going this route."

Having stated the basic facts, the resolution then draws its conclusions. "The presence of thousands of women in our armed forces, and the prospect of many more thousands in the future, is a 'quiet revolution' with profound implications for our national security." It points out that the dramatic change in both the numbers and the role of women in the armed forces, as well as their admission to the military academies, has marched forward even though the laws exempting women from combat have not changed.

The resolution continues: "As structured today, should our armed forces be committed to action, women would be killed, wounded and captured in numbers that have no precedent

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in the history of the modern world." It then reminds the Congressmen that "the most profoundly political -- not narrowly military -- action representative government can do is to call upon its young citizens to fight and possibly die in defense of the nation or the nation's foreign policy objectives."

In no way is the resolution critical of the women or their performance in the All Volunteer Army. It states gallantly: "The 'turned on' young women in today's armed forces are proficient and admirable by every peacetime measurement. Many would fight bravely and effectively near the air, sea or ground battle zone; a truly heroic few could and would fight well in close combat with the enemy."

Then the VFW resolution lays the decision-making responsibility directly on our civilian representatives. "The Congress should be called upon to face up to the 'no win' position they have placed the armed forces in (i.e., equal rights now, never mind the probable security and human cost), and codify, under the United States Code, the role the people's representatives desire American women to play in future combat."

The VFW gives its own advice: "Now, therefore be it resolved, that the position of the VFW on this question before the Congress and the Executive Branch will be: No women will be assigned to ground, sea or air jobs that call for aggressively seeking out, closing with, and destroying the enemy."

Pick up almost any newspaper and you can find some article about the other problems our armed forces face today: high illiteracy, lagging enlistments, drug and discipline problems, the need for more weapons, or the need for more funds. But somehow there is a great silence about the mammoth social, military, and political consequences of the casually-made decisions to eliminate the WACs and the WAVES, to fully sex-integrate the armed forces, to quadruple the number of servicewomen, and to assign them to traditionally male fighting jobs by redefining "combat" as narrowly as possible.

In all history, there is no record of a women's army winning a war or even a battle. (St. Joan of Arc had no women in her troops.) When the U.S. Army adopted the policy of sending women into "hazardous assignments near combat areas," it embarked upon a life-and-death experiment whose probable costs will only fully be known in the next war.

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