Women in Combat: Efficiency, Requirements, and Political Decisions

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The topic of the **efficiency of the military instrument** returns to the center of the debate every time recruitment, training, and operational employment are discussed. In Italy, during the celebrations of November 4, 2025, the Minister of Defense **Guido Crosetto** summarized this approach with a phrase destined to spark discussion: the Armed Forces «**must be efficient, not inclusive**», adding the need to "talk about **requirements**" and to reform the system that defines them.

Beyond political interpretations, the substantial point is institutional: **the definition of standards**, the allocation of resources, organizational reforms, and the major choices on how to "calibrate" the Armed Forces **can only pass through political authority**. It is politics, in fact, that sets directions and priorities (what capabilities are needed, with what selection criteria, with what numbers and investments), while the military instrument is responsible for translating those directions into training, procedures, and results in the field.

The USA example: the Pentagon initiates a review on the “operational effectiveness” of women in ground combat roles

In the United States, this dynamic is currently very visible. The Pentagon has confirmed the initiation of a review on the **“effectiveness” of women** in **ground combat roles** (particularly Army and Marines), almost ten years after the complete opening of all positions to female soldiers.

According to reports by NPR and covered by specialized outlets, the initiative stems from a **memorandum** by Undersecretary for Personnel **Anthony Tata** and assigns the **Institute for Defense Analyses (IDA)** the task of evaluating data and metrics. Army and Marine Corps leaders are asked to provide information on:

- **readiness** and deployment capability
- **training** and performance
- **casualties**
- **command climate** (command climate and unit context)

The stated goal, according to the Pentagon spokesperson, is to verify that the **standards** are met and that the units maintain maximum effectiveness.

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The context: the announcement on physical standards and the “sex-neutral” line

The review comes after Secretary of Defense **Pete Hegseth** announced – in a widely followed speech at Quantico and in subsequent directives – the intention to tighten/homogenize physical requirements, arguing that for combat roles, **high and uniform standards** are needed, even if this might reduce the number of women who qualify for certain specialties.

It is a key step: **first, the goal of efficiency and the level of standards are defined (politically)**, then the technical levels are asked for a data-based verification to measure operational effects and consequences.

It should be remembered that the presence of women in all roles is not new: in **December 2015**, then-Secretary of Defense **Ash Carter** announced the opening of all positions “without exceptions”, but clarified a principle: access yes, **“as long as they qualify and meet the standards”** (if qualified and meeting the standards).

Why this case is also relevant in Italy

The “USA case” clearly shows a fundamental rule: **efficiency means standards + measurement + decision-making responsibility**. And when the architecture of standards is touched (who enters, who stays, who accesses the toughest roles), the decision is not only technical: it is also **political**, because it affects the force model, recruitment, sustainability, and overall operational capability.

In this sense, Crosetto's statement on requirements and efficiency fits into a broader debate, not just Italian: **what criteria should really count** when the declared goal is to have a ready and credible military instrument, without ambiguity on standards and without shortcuts.

News link: https://thehill.com/policy/defense/5675474-pentagon-ground-combat-roles-women-review/