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## TOPIC A: DEFENSE

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### Guest Opinion: Female Military Personnel Aren't Whores

By Taegan Goddard | September 19, 2013 at 12:05 pm

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Guest opinion by *K. Denise Rucker Krepp*

Do you feel like a ho is not something a woman should be asked. Sadly, a female midshipman was asked that very question last week during a military hearing. The young woman, like many others in the military had been sexually assaulted by her peers. In order to prove that the rape occurred, she was required to tell defense attorneys whether or not she felt like a whore, how she performed oral sex, and whether or not she wore underwear to a party.

The military has a skyrocketing sexual assault problem. According to a recent Pentagon sexual assault survey, 6.1 percent of active duty women were victims of unwanted sexual conduct in 2012 and the numbers aren't decreasing. The Administration must examine why so many women in the military are being sexually assaulted, why they aren't reporting it, and why the military is tolerating a climate of abuse. Congress should support the efforts of Senator Gillibrand and Representative Speier to reform the current reporting system.

During my time on active duty, I mentored several female junior officers and enlisted personnel. They were a rarity and always attracted attention so I taught them how to rebuff unwanted advances by asking men about their mothers, wives, daughters, and sisters. These questions sent subtle signals that the sexual pursuit was not welcomed. Sending subtle signals was extremely important as the unwanted advances could come from superior officers, the same men who evaluated the young women's performance.

The military is a very insular environment. Early mistakes and problems can last an entire career. One day as a young Lieutenant, I was told that a new female employee was joining our office. Through the male Coast Guard grape vine I quickly learned who she had had sexual relations with. The men didn't want to talk about her work ethic, they only focused on her sex life. I wanted the female service members I mentored to avoid that type of attention and stigma.

Years later as Chief Counsel at the Maritime Administration, I worked with young girls at the US Merchant Marine Academy to prevent the type of incident that occurred at the US Naval Academy. I helped teach them to keep their doors open, to not touch their male counterparts, and to refrain from drinking heavily with these same men. I mandated this training because I knew the challenges they would face in the military after they graduated from USMMA and the lack of trust they had in USMMA senior leaders if an incident occurred at school.

In a 2011 report, a significant portion of the female student body stated that the USMMA did not foster a climate that was intolerant of sexual assault. The senior leadership at USMMA at that time was all men. The female faculty members shared the female students' concerns and changes were desperately needed to foster trust in the system.

Trust is very important in the military. If you are going into battle, you want to know that the service member next to you will protect you. A female midshipman won't trust her fellow service members if she has been taught at a military institution that sexual assaults are tolerated. This lack of trust will be further compounded by the additional unwanted sexual advances she is faced to endure while on active duty.

The current senior leadership of the military does not have the proper background to adequately respond to the sexual assault problem at the five federal academies and in the

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military writ large. They didn't go to school with women. General Dempsey, Chairman of the Joint Chief of Staff and Admiral Greenert, Chief of Naval Operations graduated from the US Military Academy and the US Naval Academy before women were allowed to attend. They don't know what it is like to be 20 and attending parties with your fellow female midshipmen and cadets.

They also don't know what is like to be a female in a heavily dominated male environment. The Washington Post published a very stark photo of the recent Senate hearing on sexual assault. Twelve individuals sat at the witness table, only one of them was a woman. Eleven of these witnesses will never be asked if they wore underwear to a party. There is also a strong likelihood that they will never be asked if they felt like a ho. Female service members, as was demonstrated last week, will be asked these questions as long as sexual assault is tolerated. More women are needed in senior military leadership positions to help their male counterparts understand the debilitating problem and devise a successful strategy to fix it.

*K. Denise Rucker Krepp is a homeland security and transportation expert who began her career as an active duty Coast Guard officer in 1998. After September 11, 2001, Krepp was a member of the team that created the Transportation Security Administration and the U.S. Department of Homeland Security. Krepp joined the House of Representatives' Homeland Security Committee in 2005. In 2009, Krepp was appointed chief counsel of U.S. Maritime Administration. She is currently a private consultant and professor at The George Washington University and Pennsylvania State University. Ms. Krepp also serves on the board of directors for The Infrastructure Security Partnership and is a commentator on the weekly radio show Back Room Politics.*

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The Sexual Assault problem is skyrocketing in direct proportion to increased numbers of women serving in the military. Wow. Who could have imagined such a thing?

But wait, women are identically capable as men to "locate, close with and destroy the enemy through fire and close combat" as men. Am I to understand

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