

Former British Army commander says having women in the army 'will cost lives on the battlefield'

[Harriet Agerholm](#), The Independent, 10 July 16

'No one pretends allowing women onto the front line enhances the army's capabilities,' says Tim Collins

In wars, such as those fought in Iraq, women have not been allowed on the frontline.

Lifting the ban on women in combat roles will "drag our infantry to far below the required standard" and put people at greater risk of dying, according to a former [SAS](#) commander.

"The infantry is no place for a woman, and to permit them to serve in close combat roles is a pure politically correct extravagance," Colonel Tim Collins has said, following David Cameron's announcement on Friday that [women will be allowed to perform combat roles in the army](#).

He added: "No one pretends that allowing women onto the front line enhances the army's capabilities."

Citing a report by the US Marine Corps from 2015, he added that having women in the armed forces would be more likely "cost lives on the battlefield".

But Hannah Bryce, from the Royal Institute of International Affairs, has said having women in the roles would make the army "more operationally effective", as well as more reflective of society.

"Wars are not just fought by men, and do not just affect men," she told the [BBC](#), "the battleground has already moved from the remote frontlines of 20th Century warfare to a more urban environment and as a result is influenced by all society and not just military personnel.

"The armed forces need women in all military roles if they are to understand and influence events on the battlefield and beyond. She continued: "This is not just about fairness, but about winning."

Women are currently able to fill 80 per cent of jobs in the armed forces and make up more than 10 per cent of the work force.

One test involved in joining the infantry is completing an eight-mile march in less than two hours, while carrying 25kg. The army's research suggests less than 5 per cent of 7,000 female recruits would currently pass the physical tests.

Writing in [the Telegraph](#), Colonel Collins' comments come after the findings of the [Chilcot inquiry](#), which condemned both the government and the British Army for their failures in Iraq.

The former soldier said: "The physical bar for joining [close combat] units may need to be raised, never lowered." He added: "We cannot tolerate... any attempt to play politics or mount social experiments with the armed forces."

However, Mr Cameron said the change "will ensure the armed forces can make the most of all their talent."