

AFTER ACTION REPORT

September 2014

Subject: Marine Corps Force Innovation Office (MCFIO) Visit to the Israeli Defense Force (IDF) Ground Forces International Talks and the United Kingdom (UK) Ground Close Combat Review Team

Summary of Findings:

IDF: Integration of female soldiers into the IDF ground forces is far more limited than popularly believed in the US. With female Marines operating in every element of the MAGTF, the Marine Corps is more integrated today than the IDF. The principal factors shaping IDF integration are (1) culture and religion, (2) conscription of large portions of society, and (3) severe manpower constraints. In response to these constraints, the IDF has developed a system that gender-norms unit missions, tables of organization and equipment, accessions policies, assignment practices, and individual standards.

UK: Integration of female Service Members in the ground combat arms of the British Military is at approximately the same level as in the US Armed Forces. Restrictions on female military service are subject to legal review every eight years. The Secretary of State for Defense has directed an additional, out-of-cycle review which must be completed no later than Dec 2014. The final report will propose four courses of action that the British Government can implement: (1) Review - more study required; (2) Lift Exclusion - extend implementation timeline; (3) Detailed Study - yes with caveats (US COA); (4) Reassess in 2022 - execute on the 8-year review timeline.

Israel (14-18 Sept): The IDF talks included briefings, site visits, and panel discussions. The following major themes summarize the lessons learned from these sessions:

- **Culture and Religion:** As the military of the Jewish Nation, culture and religion exercise a decisive influence on the IDF. These factors include the role of the IDF in educating the Israeli Nation, the IDF as caretaker and caregiver of Israeli youth, military service as a universal rite of passage, IDF performance as a critical first step towards career success, and socio-religious constraints on the role of women. These dynamics create an environment in which women can serve in certain combat arms roles while simultaneously shaping and

limiting the nature of that service. Currently, only 2% of females in the IDF are serving in "combat" roles.

- **Conscription:** As a small nation facing existential external threats, Israel faces a severe manpower shortage. Conscripting women is, therefore, not a choice - it is a requirement to fully man the IDF. As a conscript force, the IDF inducts approximately 70% of the male 18-year-old population each year and 52% of the female 18-year-old population. Religious exemptions and exemptions for married women significantly limit annual conscription cohorts. As a result, the IDF must train average males and females across all of Israeli society. Many of the male trainees fall into mental and physical categories that are unsuitable for combat arms service. This lack of quality drives the necessity of finding ways to employ women in the combat arms. Lastly, IDF efforts are further complicated by a decreasing number of soldiers who want to serve in the ground forces, as compared to those who desire to serve in cyber and intelligence units.
- **Female IDF Soldiers in the Combat Arms:** Currently, female soldiers can volunteer to serve in the following specialties that the IDF defines as combat arms: rocket artillery, cannon artillery (FDC only), combat engineers, combat collection, combat instruction, and light infantry. Of note, light infantry in the IDF is a vehicle mounted border security force. Further, IDF combat instructors are exclusively teachers. They do not join combat arms units and do not have direct combat experience.
- **Service Limitations:** The IDF conscripts women for two years and men for three years. Female soldiers who volunteer to serve in the combat arms must extend their term to three years.
- **Limiting Capabilities:** A combination of religion, law, culture, and physiological analysis limits the manner in which women serve and shapes the units in which they operate:
 - While Orthodox Jews enjoy exclusions from conscription, their conservative views pervade Israeli society. As a result, although female soldiers were allowed to cross the Israeli border in 1982, this summer's conflict in Gaza represents the first time (non-combat arms) female soldiers were involved in combat service support operations on foreign soil. Religious beliefs drive the requirement to create male-only formations for Orthodox Jews who do serve.

Finally, social definitions of female modesty limit most gender-mixed units from spending significant time in the field.

- o The IDF has developed a quantitative measure of physical gender norming that it applies across its total force. This measure - a load carriage index (LCI) which is a ratio of lean body mass (weight - body fat) to dead mass (body fat + load) - is a reasonable assurance predictor of a soldier's ability to engage in physical activity without incurring an injury. LCI effectively limits female soldiers to carrying no more than 33% of their body weight while allowing male soldiers to carry as much as 60% of their body weight. While several female officers stated that they hold themselves to a higher standard to set the example for all of their soldiers, LCI represents a deeply ingrained IDF cultural acceptance of female soldiers as physical inferiors to males.
- o LCI shapes strictly gender-normed combat arms standards. These standards, in turn, drive unit organization which informs mission essential tasks. For example, the Caracal light infantry battalion could only perform the equivalent of a border screening mission because of its 70% female staffing goal. A combat collection battalion in the Negev Desert included an all-female combat collection company whose observation squads included 14 soldiers instead of the usual 10 - the larger organization was required, in the IDF view, to spread-load the necessary equipment.
- o Leadership Makes the Difference: The Caracal Battalion Commander, (male LtCol) demonstrated an open-minded, innovative and positive attitude about his unit. A battalion consisting of 551 IDF soldiers (70% females and 30% males), the commander spoke openly about the challenges of integration, the physical differences in the females in his unit, and the determined and humble attitudes the females demonstrated. The battalion commander also stated that being "professional" included employing the battalion within the capabilities of its soldiers (i.e., applying different load standards to men and women).
- o Conversely, the female commander of the Combat Collection Battalion spoke fervently of the need to protect females (and males) from injuring themselves. Her commander, BGen Bar-Lev, spoke of the need to separate men and women, specifically in 72-96 observation post requirements. Bar-

Lev also stated that missions assigned to female observers are limited by weight. Both leaders talked about the physical differences between men and women, and how important it was to monitor the soldiers closely so they did not hurt themselves.

- Cultural change is required, and takes time. [REDACTED], CO of the Officer Training School and former IDF [REDACTED] C stated that the orthodox influence on integration is significant. For example, the Caracal BN commander faces a challenge recruiting men to the battalion. The table of organization calls for a battalion of 50% women and 50% men. However, men do not want to fight in a unit with women. The commander entices men to join by targeting men with a lower physical profile. A profile of 82-97 is required for men to join the infantry. The Caracal will accept men with a profile as low as 72 to join this Light Infantry (border protection) unit.
- Highly motivated and dedicated women. Women are determined to succeed and to prove themselves alongside their male colleagues. We spoke with two panels of young women, both officer and enlisted. The women very often sounded like young Marines, and the women talked about proving themselves to the men. As they proved they could accomplish the mission and be value-added to the team, the men accepted them in their combat roles.
- BG Slovik, (Director, IDF Human Resources Division) mentioned that some of the spotlight placed on female integration in the IDF and associated stories are due to the IDF's need to recruit even more females.

United Kingdom (18-19 Sept):

- Current Status: In the British military, female Service members can serve in all specialties and all units. Only the infantry, armor, and special operations occupational specialties are closed. Female soldiers in support specialties can serve in 3 Commando Brigade. However, they must pass the All Arms Commando Course. To date, three have passed and two have gone on to serve with the Royal Marines. Currently, cadets in the Royal Military Academy at Sandhurst (RMAS) train in gender-separate platoons. The Commandant RMAS is contemplating transitioning this policy to one in which phase I (similar to USMC OCS) continues to be gender-separate

and subsequent phases (similar to USMC BOC) becomes gender-integrated.

- Law and Policy: British and European law requires reviews of restrictions on female service in the military every eight years. The British Armed Force conducted the necessary reviews in 2002 and 2010. They based the continuation of excluding of women from ground close on military judgment that the employment of women such roles would degrade and undermine combat effectiveness. In June 2014, the Secretary of State for Defense directed a shortened, out of cycle review. The goal of the current review is to assess the impact of assigning women to close combat teams and reaffirm or challenge previous findings.
- Duty of Care Provision: Duty of care is a provision of British and European labor law that prohibits the government from participating in any act which could foreseeably harm an employee. Evidence that female soldiers in the combat arms incurred a disproportionately high instance of serious injuries could invoke this provision, based on differences in the likelihood and severity of injuries. In such a case, allowing women to participate in ground close combat would be an act of negligence. Such a finding would force the British Government to exclude female soldiers from the combat arms..
- Both the British Army and Royal Marines share concerns about the physical capability of women to perform in ground close combat, especially the infantry. For example, the Royal Marines have developed physiological criteria as a predictor of Commando course success (i.e., measuring VO2 max = 51% or higher equates to a 50% chance of successful course completion). Having seen the rigor and institutional effort of the USMC and US Army integration efforts, the UK team is leaning towards recommending COA 1.

Conclusions:

- Based on the visits to Israel and the UK, the MCFIO team can speak authoritatively about the plans, policies, and practices of these two allied nations.

Way Ahead:

- MCFIO plans to conduct visits to Canada and Australia to better understand their approach to integration and to establishing physical standards and assessment. Each visit will provide a comprehensive view of international gender integration efforts.