

# **An Exploration of Gender and National Security Through the Integration of Women into Military Roles**

By Alexine D. Carr

## **Abstract**

This paper stems from curiosity as to whether there are differences in the outcomes or abilities of militaries to function effectively when females are included. Notions of high-stakes warfare, the physiology of both genders, tradition, and a culture built upon hypermasculine ideals deserve consideration within the context of both 21<sup>st</sup>-century feminist thought and overall fighting aptitude. In the pages that follow, the militaries of the United States, Israel, and Sweden are examined to 1) determine what women specifically contribute within a military setting, and 2) argue that integration aligns with priorities of both feminism and national security. Specifically, I assert that optimized incorporation of women into American military roles will produce more cohesive, robust, and capable forces that ultimately better promote national security. Further, I argue that this progressive integration is essential to dissolving the outdated, gendered assumption that to include women is to shift the primary focus of a military from a necessary protective institution into a social experiment doomed to collapse. If women are successfully integrated and able to improve the overall outcomes of military operations, then there is reason to believe such inclusion is both necessary for security purposes and aligning nations with modern demands for gender equality.

*Keywords:* military, gender, army, integration, equality, United States, Israel, Sweden, national security, feminism

## **Introduction**

With a growing multinational sentiment for the inclusivity of women within notoriously male dominated spaces, the integration of women into military roles within the United States lags starkly behind contemporary gender-based expectations. While many studies have looked to differences in physique between men and women coupled with deeply entrenched institutional structure to rationalize this divide, the extent to which the research extends beyond physical capability is limited. In recent years, strides have been made to afford women greater opportunity within domestic and international military frameworks. From mandatory conscription requirements introduced by both the Israel Defense Forces and Swedish Armed Forces to the revocation of the United States' Combat Exclusion Policy in 2013, opportunities for women are expanding from a legal perspective, albeit with much resistance and slow implementation.

This paper stems from curiosity as to whether there are differences in the outcomes or abilities of militaries to function effectively when females are included. Notions of high-stakes warfare, the physiology of both genders, tradition, and a culture built upon hypermasculine ideals deserve consideration within the context of both 21<sup>st</sup>-century feminist thought and overall fighting aptitude. In the pages that follow, the militaries of the United States, Israel, and Sweden will be examined to 1) determine what women specifically contribute within a military setting, and 2) argue that integration aligns with priorities of both feminism and national security. Specifically, I assert that optimized incorporation of women into American military roles will

produce more cohesive, robust, and capable forces that ultimately better promote national security. Further, I argue that this progressive integration is essential to dissolving the outdated, gendered assumption that to include women is to shift the primary focus of a military from a necessary protective institution into a social experiment doomed to collapse. If women are successfully integrated and able to improve the overall outcomes of military operations, then there is reason to believe such inclusion is both necessary for security purposes and aligning nations with modern demands for gender equality.

First, I discuss what criteria are necessary to constitute a successful military member from a theoretical and practical perspective. Second, I define national security in a way that intersects with feminist priorities to establish why integration is important for the rhetoric of both. Next, I segue into an analysis of American, Israeli, and Swedish militaries to explain ways in which, through integration, each nation contributes to improving perceptions of gender within the military. Such contributions are further analyzed in a subsequent section focused exclusively on combat, cohesion, and the changing battlefields of which they are a part.

### **What Makes an Ideal Military Member?**

In order to analyze what makes a collective force strong, it is necessary to look to what is required of the individuals of which it is comprised. This section seeks to identify what an “Ideal Military Member” entails such that there will be an established baseline with which to compare performance and aptitude by gender. By creating criteria for successful performance in a military setting, the focus shifts from a male vs. female debate to a fundamental question of qualification. I argue that because women can meet all requirements for what is needed to be in a military position, there is no reason for exclusion. After establishing that exclusion based on failure to meet basic requirements is unfounded, I will look to specific case studies to show how women not only meet requirements but add greater value to their overall environments. It must be noted that this standard is to be understood simply as a starting point; particular roles as discussed in the Combat and Cohesion section of this paper will have additional stipulations.

#### *Theory*

The placement of women in military positions, while a newer concept in American society, is not a new historical phenomenon. Rooted in ancient philosophy, a notable case of advocating for women warriors is found in Plato’s *Republic*. In Book V, Socrates creates a city founded on the principle of justice in which women, being the guardians of the city,<sup>1</sup> are given military responsibility (Titunik, 2000). Because Socrates’ city is premised upon ideal circumstance, it creates an interesting debate over what modern, ideal military practice *should* look like. When considering an Ideal Military Member, there may be strong temptation to evoke stereotypes classifying men as more independent, self-confident, and competitive, while perceiving women as being more helpful, kind, and emotionally expressive (Boldry et al., 2001). On the surface, the qualities attributed to men are typically preferred in a military setting, which perpetuates the assumption that men are indeed the most qualified gender.

While traits such as confidence, independence, and a competitive nature are important, they are not sufficient for developing an effective military leader. Confidence without

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<sup>1</sup> Later specified as auxiliaries—a key distinction in philosophy, but insignificant for the purpose of this paper. While there are many interpretations of Socrates’ use of women as guardians in the Republic, a commonly held view amongst philosophers places women in a positive light.

competence and independence without awareness of one's team can not only be dangerous to the individual but can have disastrous effects on a military element at large. In his philosophy, Socrates realized the consequence in selecting only male warriors on the grounds of bravado and brute strength. To prevent his city from falling victim to counterattacks as the result of a militia inclined only to wage war on others as a means of conflict resolution, he strategically took a different approach. While he recognized that women generally have less physical strength than men, he looked instead to the "soul" of the person in determining whether one was qualified for military service. Those with determined fighting characters were deemed fit for military roles, and women were recognized as having a more methodical approach in protecting the city without resorting immediately to violence. When violence was necessary, they were assigned to weapons tasks, thereby resourcefully compensating for any perceived lack of bodily strength (Plato, trans. 1997).

In applying Socrates' theory to modern military practice, it is important to note two things: first, the determining factor for a position should be rooted in more than gender, and second, physical strength does not equate to capability to accomplish an end goal. While strength and confidence are important, it is crucial that these traits be balanced out with proper thought, consideration of all means of conflict resolution including non-violent tactics, and the use of fighting resources beyond one's physical body. It is easy to categorize lesser physical strength as a detriment, but in reality, a balanced force of physical strength, methodical thinking, and varied approaches to conflict is more effective in achieving the end goal of security. Therefore, to include women in a military is to add balance and a dynamic of reason beyond traditional male vigor, thereby strengthening the force as a collective.

### *Stereotypes and Misconceptions*

Underlying most arguments against integration are stereotypes concerning the nature of femininity and misinformed assumptions regarding requirements of the average military member. Beyond the obvious differences in physiology, women are often labeled as the emotionally weaker gender. Notably, military environments are quick to deem any sense of emotion detrimental. It is common sense that emotions in a military environment, when extreme or incapacitating, are dangerous for anyone. However, prudent analysis of gender must not rely on the maxim that any display of emotion crosses this threshold. This section seeks to show that the majority of stereotypes held against women are not inherent qualities of the female gender, but rather the byproduct of years of a male-dominated tradition.

The effects that stereotypes have on women, and the extent to which they exist, are interpreted differently across both military and feminist literature. A study on the Texas A&M Corps of Cadets found that not only do both women and men affirm gender stereotypes, but women are less likely to be graded as highly on necessary evaluations as their male counterparts, even when all other factors are equal (Boldry et al., 2001). However another study focused on Continuing Professional Education of women found that in a classroom setting, women in the Nigerian Navy did not suffer any negative effects of stereotypes on their performance, and tended to excel in both self-motivation and proper planning (Akpomuje 2017). Stereotypes of women also appear to play a role in public opinion; one out of every four individuals in a study saw women as inferior personnel whose inclusion in combat roles would result in more casualties (Collins-Dogrul & Ulrich, 2017).

When considering the value of public opinion surveys, it is helpful to pause and clarify some common misconceptions regarding military roles. The breadth of opportunity within active duty, reserve, and national guard positions extends far beyond what many typically associate with military roles. In the United States, for example, professional careers within the military include Judge Advocates (licensed attorneys), certified cooks, medical doctors, and PhD-holding scientists. To exclude women from positions which closely parallel the civilian world directly contradicts the progress society has made in affording women the opportunity to succeed in once male-dominated professions. This is certainly not to say that women should be limited to professional roles rather than “grunt” positions, but simply to make a connection which strengthens my claim that integration aligns with gender-progressive priorities already present in society. Just as it would be absurd today to claim that women fail to meet the qualifications for positions as doctors or lawyers, so too would it be absurd to not support the integration of these roles within a military setting.

One of the most common arguments against women in the military expresses concern over the physical ability of women to meet the fitness qualifications necessary for success. While being physically fit is an important part of a military environment, it must be noted that the degree of intensity many associate with such roles is overexaggerated. Mainstream media often focuses on the grueling and most dangerous elements of combat warfare. Consequently, this does not assist in painting an accurate portrayal of what most individuals in the military do, nor might need to do in order to perform well. Put simply, the military is not exclusively fighting—in fact, over eighty percent of military specialties are non-combat positions. Within the twenty percent of combat/infantry roles, even fewer individuals will actually experience combat during their time in service (*5 Military Myths*, 2019). Most of the men currently in the military are not performing the tasks commonly associated with “military jobs,” thus posing questions of the credibility surrounding public opinion surveys.

Other research suggests that stereotypes are not rooted in empirical truths, but rather in constructs. Specifically, fighting is not a naturally male aptitude nor an innate quality of masculinity; rather, it is something that is artificially constructed through rigorous military training. In a book titled *Stoic Warriors*, Nancy Sherman traces this phenomenon back to ancient times to showcase the impact a stoic mindset has had on militaries for hundreds of years (2005). Beginning with the Roman Stoics and continuing through the present day, Sherman writes: “More fundamentally, boot camp attempts to change the core values of a self, so that one is ready to sacrifice in a way uncommon in civilian life, and prepared as well to overcome the fear and aversion to killing that is bred in the bone as a civilian” (2005). From this, it must be recognized that the expectation of extreme sacrifice is not something arising naturally for either gender. For anyone, retraining the mind to be willing to take the life of another human being in the context of war requires a fundamental change in individual *identity*. Because the military mindset is a product of identity-altering conditioning, and because this training has been disproportionately afforded to men, it is tempting to assume a false correlation between masculinity and willingness to fight. On the contrary, socially constructed impulses to channel violence should have no bearing on the effectiveness of female soldiers (DeGroot, 2001).

In this regard, attention may be turned to successful nations such as Norway, which have focused the mental aspect of training on instilling a national identity above gendered rhetoric (Woodward et al., 2017). Within this framework, soldiers are conditioned to associate necessary acts of war as preserving a national identity rather than acting on one’s sense of masculinity.

While shifting the mentality of a training process involves time and a gradual cultural overhaul, this example shows it is possible to develop comradery, motivation, and an overall purpose in the absence of a traditionally single-gendered approach. Thus, integration may be successfully achieved without losing any of the essential elements of rigorous training nor cultivation of the “warrior spirit.”

### *Traits Needed for Success*

Synthesizing the research discussed above, it seems what is ultimately desirable is an individual who has a) a vested interest in the overall mission, b) tactical competency, and c) a personal connection to those with whom they are fighting. This connection may manifest in the form of “brotherhood,” but it need not be gender-specified. If one properly places the mission first, it follows that any refusal to fight stemming from gender predispositions is overridden (should such factors legitimately exist), thus nullifying arguments that women are unable to execute in the same regard as men. Now that it has been suggested that the ability to perform in a military role is not an inherent product of gender, but rather of something else, it is essential to establish what exactly is needed of a person to be successful in a military position. Below, I propose a list of factors which I argue are essential for an ideal serviceman or woman. These criteria are informed by personal experience, study of military history, and discussions with experts in the service regarding what makes a successful military leader.

1. An Ideal Military Member will, regardless of gender, place the mission before personal interest.
2. An Ideal Military Member will, regardless of gender, be competent in their respective field.
3. An Ideal Military Member will, regardless of gender, respect both superiors and subordinates.
4. An Ideal Military Member will, regardless of gender, be physically and mentally fit.
5. An Ideal Military Member will, regardless of gender, understand the balance between authoritative rank structure and the duty to speak out against that which is inherently wrong, overly risky, or in direct contrast with the values of the organization.
6. An Ideal Military Member will, regardless of gender, maintain comradery and a fierce fighting spirit.

If an individual meets these criteria, they will likely be successful on a personal level and thus contribute to the overall success of an element. This list serves to take the focus away from male versus female rhetoric rooted in many overgeneralizations and determine what is necessary for anyone in a military role.

### **Security and Feminism**

A military is an institution of national security, while feminism is an institution of security and equality for women. In this section, I address how the priorities of both national security and feminism intersect, as well as why each is essential to the topic of gender integration within the military.

What exactly is “national security?” In one sense, it is the physical protection of the homeland from external threats. In another, national security extends to the preservation of societal and cultural ideals, the ability of individuals to live autonomous lives, facilitation of

economic stability, and the upholding of governmental systems. As societies have become increasingly global, and as human rights have come to be valued and prioritized from an international perspective, some militaries have shifted their focus from an attitude of “state security” to one of “human security” (Woodward et al., 2017). Human security as outlined by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) redirects the focus of security from the state to individual persons within the state. In some instances, the state either fails to uphold security for the people within it, or directly contributes to the problem of insecurity within its boundaries.

Approaching integration from a feminist perspective premised in human security is beneficial in that it provides an alternate view from a longstanding anti-militarism position. Historically, it has been held that: “because traditional military roles have required the wielding of state-sanctioned violence, they are fundamentally aggressive and oppressive institutions” (Woodward et al., 2017). Instead, when militaries are viewed from a feminist lens as instruments of security rather than violence, the opportunity of considering how women may make meaningful contributions is legitimized:

Thinking of militaries as having the goal of security enables us to be open to the idea that militaries could be ‘forces for good.’ It is not that we are wholly convinced that militaries *are* forces for good, but defining them primarily as instruments of war solely focused on the wielding of violence does not allow for that debate. It is a debate we think is crucially important, especially for feminists. It is important intellectually, because it prompts us to ask that militaries *are*, what they are for, what security might mean for women. It is also important practically, because militaries focused on the facilitation of human security can play a positive role in the lives of many people living in insecurity throughout the world, a disproportionate number of whom are women (Woodward et al., 2017).

For the rest of this paper, I will assume the alternate feminist view as discussed above, focusing on military institutions from a positive position of security whereby women add value. These additions are rooted heavily in the ideologically diverse perspectives women provide, as well as contributions to peacekeeping operations which have directly contributed to cultivating a spirit of human security.

### **The US, Israel, and Sweden—Key Players in the Discussion for Gender Integration**

In this section, the specific militaries of the United States, Israel, and Sweden are outlined in the context of their relevancy to mechanisms of integration. This paper does not assert that any of these militaries exemplify the ideal distribution nor structural formation of men and women. Rather, it seeks to show ways in which various nations have pursued integration, and to what extent these methods have been successful in building capable forces and progressive conceptions of gender. First, I outline the history of integration within each military, noting both successes and failures each has encountered as development has occurred. Second, I use case studies to recognize successes of integration an optimal military might aspire to mimic, and how such a military would positively contribute to national security and further equality across gender.

*The United States*

As one of the largest modern militaries, looking to the United States provides a reference for understanding how a well-developed and progressive nation has handled the integration of women. Gender inclusivity began largely in response to globalized military conflict and the need for more soldiers, with the first major wave of females introduced during the last two years of World War I. During this time, upwards of 33,000 women served as nurses and support staff (*Women in the United States Army*, n.d.). This need-based trend grew throughout the second World War, with the passage of the 1948 Women's Armed Services Integration Act becoming the formal congressional approval for women to serve in non-combat positions at the discretion of military officials (*Timeline: Women in the U.S. Military*, 2008). Nearly thirty years after the Integration Act's passage, the U.S. military academies afforded women the opportunity to pursue elite military training and ultimately leadership positions as officers (*Timeline: Women in the U.S. Military*, 2008).

The question remains: how did women perform during this shift, and what were they able to add beyond the filling of vacant spaces? Dr. Williamson Murray, a Yale professor and veteran, notes that servicewomen have lived up to the standards of the politicians and officials who took a gamble on their placement. He recalls a commander of an A-10 squadron during Operation Iraqi Freedom stating: "the presence of women pilots considerably improved the attitude and atmosphere of the squadron" (Murray, 2015). While improvement of atmosphere and attitude is not a definite designator of success, these observations coupled with Murray's statement point to two things: female pilots were successful in the execution of their respective tasks, and their participation contributed to the comradery and cohesion within their squad. Thus, it may be inferred that the Ideal Military Member requirements 2, 4, and 6 are satisfied, and there is reason to believe that integration in this regard served a positive purpose.

A difficult line must be drawn, however, between forced integration in response to political agendas and necessary integration during times of global instability. Pulling from a voluntary female population during a time of need as was the case during the World Wars and accepting the most qualified females into the service academies has resulted in great success. Contrarily, attempting to inflate the military population by setting gender quotas has historically resulted in great failure. While I seek to advocate for the inclusion of women, I also wish to be transparent in recognizing that integration is not a simple process; care must be taken to ensure troops are integrated in a way that does not compromise training nor overall troop readiness. Just as unqualified males are a danger to troops and security, so are females placed into positions they are unqualified for. Individuals seeking to serve should be held to a standard that looks to their personal aptitude, and not one that blindly pushes for open eligibility without careful attention to individual potential. To integrate a female who is ill-prepared in effort to satisfy feminist demands is detrimental for feminist rhetoric, as those who perform poorly serve to perpetuate negative stereotypes. Instead, integration must be balanced by placing national security and the mission first.

A notable example of an unsuccessful integration policy based on political correctness is the initial decision of the US Army to establish coeducational basic training for enlisted personnel. Confoundingly, the policy led to a staggering number of female dropouts compared to male dropouts, creating an ideologically undesirable representation of integration. In order to decrease drop-out rates and maintain a female population, the standards for basic training were lowered, making it significantly easier for recruits to pass. The effects of lowered standards were brutally evident in a 2003 disaster at Nasiriyah when an Army supply convoy manned by ill-prepared soldiers drove into the city with dirty rifles, many of which were unloaded or issued

to those who did not know how to operate them (Murray, 2015). The entire unit was killed, wounded, or captured as the result of basic mistakes that anyone who goes through the most rudimentary levels of military training would actively know to avoid. Soldiers who could not properly maintain nor operate a weapon should not have been passed through basic training.

This disaster is worth mentioning as it is frequently cited in arguments against gender integration. It is asserted that women have no place in the military, as it results in accidents like the loss of this unit and overall depreciated military quality. While Nasiriyah was a massive failure, it was not a failure because of women nor integration, but rather failure on behalf of Army leadership and policymakers to integrate in an effective way. Had the Army approached the situation with a long-term vision as opposed to the short-term goals of saving money and passing females through training, the results would have likely been different. The question as to why females were less successful upon entering basic training is not particularly difficult to answer; in general, it takes a female body more time to develop the necessary physical strength to perform successfully in a demanding environment. This does not mean that women are incapable of excelling, nor that a generalized initial shortcoming is a permanent condition of femininity. While some may counter this idea with concerns regarding time and monetary investments involved with implementing single-sex training processes, this paper advocates that these small costs are far outweighed by the benefits of gender integration.

Those in opposition to integration express concerns regarding lowered standards, and there is legitimacy to these concerns as they have historically produced negative consequences. However, the goal of including previous failures in this paper has been to show that integrating in ineffective ways produces results that are not truly representative of the potential of women. It has also sought to highlight that arguments based on failures are often extrapolated in ways that disadvantage those women who are both capable and qualified. Current standards, particularly in the US Army, have done a better job of recognizing physical difference while still maintaining a threshold for jobs which inherently involve a greater level of risk. All soldiers must be able to pass the Army Physical Fitness Test (APFT), which is comprised of push-ups, sit-ups, and a two-mile run. While the APFT maintains a different scoring system for women, it must be noted that scoring is also affected by age. Such variations are in place not to disadvantage any group, but rather to ensure that individuals are fairly assessed on the composition of their bodies. Those wishing to pursue additional qualifications or attend specialty training schools are required to pass more advanced assessments, assuring they are physically able to handle the demands of the job.<sup>2</sup>

The United States Marine Corps, which also maintains a different threshold for women than for men, utilizes both a Physical Fitness Test (PFT) and a Combat Fitness Test (CFT) to test aptitude for both basic military service and combat readiness. As of 2019, the pull-up standards for women increased, with a leading military news source stating: “The Corps decided to make the pull-up portion of the PFT tougher for female Marines following recent data that showed they were crushing the event” (Snow, 2019). From this, it may be gathered that integration is a learning curve. It will take time to establish criteria which fairly assess the strength of the female body. Further, it is reassuring to see that the branch with the highest physical fitness standards is recognizing success on behalf of women, while continuing to push for improvement.

*Israel*

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<sup>2</sup> In late 2020, a new AFPT comprised of six events will be implemented. It is expected to have gender neutral scoring and serve as a better indicator of overall fitness.



The Israel Defense Forces (IDF), which encapsulate the Israeli Army, Air Force, and Navy, are arguably the most gender-progressive military powers in existence. In 1948 when the state was founded, twenty percent of the IDF was comprised of women, with percentages of female soldiers and availability of occupations increasing steadily over time (Shavit, 2010). Today, the IDF utilizes a mandatory service requirement for both men and women, with exemptions granted only in particular scenarios. IDF conscription requirements are gender dependent, with time in service influenced by the age of the individual, marital status, and whether the individual has children at the time of enlistment. For married women and women with children, service requirements are voided entirely, thus rendering only single women part of the conscription process.<sup>3</sup> Time in service is also dependent on gender, with eligible females required to serve half the equivalent of their male counterparts (“Israeli Army Service Requirements for Olim,” 2015).<sup>4</sup>

With the number of exceptions to mandatory service, one may be inclined to think that the matriculation rate of the IDF is low. On the contrary, over eighty percent of the Israeli population fulfils the duty of military service in some capacity. What is even more surprising is that fifty-one percent of the IDF is comprised of women—so, despite greater ways to obtain exemption from service, women fill a higher number of positions than men (Cromwell, 2017). Thus, over half of a modernized, capable, and highly effective military is powered by young women.

What makes the high conscription and nearly equal gender distribution rates in Israel so effective? Arguably, the cultural perceptions of service in Israel are a major factor in how military obligations are both viewed and acted upon. Whereas the population of enlisted members in the United States pulls largely from lower income areas and those who have elected service in lieu of attending a college or university, in Israel, service is societally valued just as much as higher education (Cromwell, 2017). Participation in the IDF is viewed as a “rite of passage” for citizens, and a necessary experience that offers skill, exposure to individuals from all backgrounds, and the opportunity to travel to locations one may otherwise never have the chance to visit (Lomsky-Feder & Ben-Ari, 1999).

The value in Israeli military participation is not something that ends with the satisfaction of a mandatory requirement. For many women, service is viewed as a preparatory experience for life beyond the military. Yehudit Grisaro, a former female member of the IDF, states: “Personally, I am a strong believer that women who had a significant army experience approach the rest of their lives in a dramatically more positive way than those who didn’t. It’s the feeling of being capable, of belief in oneself—the belief that one can cope with difficult situations” (Stern & Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2009). Not only are women directly contributing to the national security of Israel through their service, but they are afforded the opportunity to grow on a personal level, giving rise to individual empowerment: a goal at the heart of feminism.

Israel is doing something right in the long-term approach to service and how it compensates participants for their time. Research groups within the army have made an effort to contact women who have been out of the service for several years to investigate the connection between their army experience and how they transitioned into life outside of the military. This is

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<sup>3</sup> Married men with children are also excluded from mandatory service, provided they are married and have a child by the age of enlistment (typically between 17 and 18 years of age). Married women do not have to serve at all, while married men without children still encounter a requirement.

<sup>4</sup> Note: this is not the case with combat positions, which require at least 24 months of service for both men and women.

done with the intent of identifying key factors to the creation of a military environment preparing women for success after the fact. The sense of duty goes both ways, with a researcher stating: “A western society that takes its young people, boys and girls, at the age of 18, and asks them to give the finest years of their lives, has to consider what it is giving them in return. It can hardly be the pocket money we give them. The only thing you can really give in return is a positive experience” (Stern & Fogiel-Bijaoui, 2009).

With cultural value placed on service and the balance between men and women, it becomes evident that the unifying factor of the IDF is not rooted in false conceptions of masculinity and brotherhood, but rather in a sense of national identity. Earlier in this paper, the argument that women interfere with the overarching need for a masculine spirit of a fighting force was addressed. Specifically, some individuals against gender integration assert that women distort a necessary component of mental conditioning, namely the harsh male attitude intended to “toughen up” soldiers. The case of Israel goes to show that this perception of genuine commitment and duty to the country does not require purely masculine conditioning. Conversely, it may arise through establishing military service as something that is both societally respectable and expected of individuals. The IDF does not need extreme, hypermasculine training tactics because it is able to train and promote its mission on the grounds of deeply rooted values in a national identity.

Within the IDF, women serve in aviation, field intelligence, artillery, and co-ed border patrol battalions. They may also deploy as part of support positions within the Special Forces, leading within the Oketz K-9 Unit which works to detect explosives and neutralize threats (Scarborough, 2015). While the IDF classifies positions within these categories as combat operative roles, the extent to which women actually experience combat is debated; this discussion will continue in the Combat, Cohesion, and Changing Battlefield portion of this paper.

#### *Sweden*

The Swedish Armed Forces are particularly relevant to today’s discussion of gender integration, as 2018 marked the first year in the nation’s history that men and women were both subject to compulsory military enlistment. While Sweden had an exclusively male conscription policy in the past, this program was brought to an end between 2010 and 2017 (Persson & Sundevall, 2019). After determining that the voluntary numbers within the armed forces were too low and recognizing increased threats to national security, the conscription process was reintroduced with an entirely gender-neutral approach. Approximately 4000 individuals were selected out of a population of roughly 100,000 18-year-olds with a highly selective process seeking to produce a thoroughly qualified conscription pool (Noack, 2018).

Swedish peacekeeping, which will be addressed in the next section of this paper, is a likely reason for the increased value of women in military positions. It has also contributed to the adoption of combat-neutral selection processes, whereby the Swedish military has elected to not differentiate between combat and non-combat positions as any role may become combat operative in times of ‘total wars’ (Persson & Sundevall, 2019). Arriving at the point of open positions, even in a country as socially progressive as Sweden, was not without backlash. Male resistance to female integration led to a three-stage reform as opposed to an immediate overhaul of previously existing policy; such a reform was intentionally structured to begin integration slowly by only placing the most qualified, capable women into positions of leadership a few at a time. The goal was to avoid the possibility that errors on behalf of a single woman would be extrapolated by resistant men to infer that all women were incapable of military leadership

(Persson & Sundevall, 2019). While male attitudes were initially reported as a problem by women, over time, this attitude has substantially waned with a change in how the Swedish military promotes national identity. Gender is not something that is dwelled upon in training nor in active operations, but rather is something that has become normalized and essential to execution of various tasks (Egnell et al., 2014).

The Swedish model provides valuable lessons in how to initiate a cultural shift from a highly gendered military into one that is gender-progressive, effective, and strong in a sense of national identity. The United States may look to both Sweden and Israel as examples of how to mediate institutional resistance to the integration of women, as well as how to create an identity rooted in nationalism as opposed to masculinity.

## **Combat, Cohesion, and a Changing Battlefield**

As the most controversial issue concerning women in the military, integration into combat roles has experienced the most backlash and slowest integration timeline. In the United States, ground combat positions were effectively prohibited until the Combat Exclusion Policy was revoked in 2013, though individual branches did not begin accepting women into their programs until much later (Schaefer et al., 2016). In this section, I recognize the validity of some concerns posed by critics while standing firm in my assertion that if a person is fit for a job—if they meet the criteria outlined in the Ideal Military Member section of this paper—it is inherently wrong to prevent them from the opportunity on the basis of gender alone. Integration of qualified women into combat roles is an important component of progress from an ideological and feminist perspective. Ultimately, it will contribute to national security by pulling qualified candidates with diverse thought processes and abilities together into a cohesive force.

Because combat arms positions are said to be the most grueling occupational specialties, arguments against female inclusion are premised upon physical differences that render women unfit for such demanding tasks. These arguments reiterate that to include women for a social purpose is to potentially put other servicemen in danger (Schaefer et al., 2016). If in extreme survival scenarios a female cannot be relied upon to carry an injured comrade out of a danger zone, run at the same speed so as not to compromise a mission, or fail in any other test of physical capacity that puts the military member next to her at risk, such inclusion is inherently wrong (Rice, 2015). For arguments such as this, it is important to point out that the generalization of all women compared to all men is troublesome. Instead of focusing the dialogue on all men versus all women, it is beneficial to rely on the criteria I have outlined in the Ideal Military Member section. By asking questions such as, “Is this person fit for the job?” instead of “Is this person male or female?” the objective becomes focused on producing the most capable individuals who will in turn comprise a capable force.

Critics have posed a challenge to those who properly focus on general qualifications as opposed to gender. After former U.S. Secretary of Defense Leon Panetta argued for rescinding the ban of women into combat arms positions using rationale that: “the mission is met with the best-qualified and most-capable people,” those in opposition pointed to logical inconsistencies behind this statement and current policy (Rice, 2015). Charles Rice states:

If “best-qualified and most capable” is the true test, then Panetta would have lifted the age restrictions as well. Indeed, men over and under the current enlistment age parameters have proven themselves capable in all types of combat, to include underage personnel being awarded the Medal of Honor. Arguably, there are more 40-year-old men

and 15-year-old boys physically capable of performing the tasks of an infantryman than 20-year-old women (2015).

In response, I argue that to not include age in this line of reasoning has no bearing on the validity of gender integration. I grant that from a theoretical perspective, Rice is correct that to truly approach the issue of creating the most capable force is to remove all external limitations and examine the person from an objective perspective focused exclusively on capability. However, such theory does not discount that women have something to add, nor that they are able to contribute to a stronger force than currently exists. If anything, Rice's statement is grounds for investigating the relationship between qualifications and limitations further and reevaluating how and why boundaries between demographics are drawn.

To base a decision on who is placed into combat positions based on demands of the past is counterproductive. In previous times of war such physical demands were of greater concern, but the changing battlefield confronting today's military world is becoming rapidly mechanized. With the increased use of drones, artillery, and continuously evolving technology, the traditional boots on the ground and hand-to-hand combat approach is losing its relevance, resulting in asymmetric warfare as opposed to the "anticipated linear clash of large mechanized forces" (Brown, 2012). During this shift toward asymmetric warfare, women have served successfully in combat positions when gender lines were blurred in practice out of necessity. Sergeant Leigh Ann Hester serves as an excellent example of a woman who rose to the challenge of a combat deployment as part of Operation Iraqi Freedom after she was pulled from a Military Police position within the Kentucky Army National Guard:

Sergeant Hester was serving as member of a squad providing convoy security when approximately 50 insurgent fighters ambushed the convoy with small arms, machine gun fire and rocket propelled grenades. After maneuvering her team through the kill zone and into a flanking position, Sergeant Hester and her squad leader assaulted and cleared two trench lines with hand grenades 11 and M203 grenade launcher rounds. During the 25-minute firefight, she killed at least three enemy combatants. Sergeant Hester received the Silver Star for her exceptional valor and marked her place in history as the first female soldier awarded this decoration since World War II and the first ever to be cited for valor in close quarters combat (Brown, 2012).

If a woman can go from serving within the National Guard, one of the more gender-inclusive branches of the military, to a combat position she was not originally slotted for, there seems to be no reason for excluding qualified women from combat roles at the onset of their military careers. Sergeant Hester's performance goes to show that a woman can be capable of executing given combat tasks such as the use of hand grenades and M203 launchers. Most significantly, she accomplished this without going through the traditional training a combat or infantry soldier would receive (Martin, 2011). If capable and properly trained, it is arguable that other women may follow in her footsteps, paving the way for positive integration and contributions to the security of troops and the larger forces they represent.

A Captain of the U.S. Marine Corps, Lauren Serrano, makes the argument that because the existing system works, and there is no need to change a functioning system, women should be included only if it is discovered that there is something which they can add that males cannot (Surrano, 2014). She cites their desire to be infantrywomen as selfish in nature, and one that does nothing for the overarching mission. Sadly, her view is not uncommon; the Marine Corps

has been the slowest branch to integrate, with only seven percent of the force comprised of women (Patten & Parker, 2011). While it is true that the existing system works, it is simply absurd to imply that a desire for equal opportunity premised upon selfless service is selfish. Attitudes such as Captain Serrano's serve to slow down the process of integration, perpetuate negative conceptions of gender within military spaces, and contribute to the false narrative that only men may add value to combat positions. In fact, women do have much to add to a military space, particularly in roles involving diversified decision-making, technical competence, and the need for a multitude of strategies.

There are practical reasons to integrate women into combat positions beyond social concerns. The U.S. Department of the Navy's 2010 decision to integrate women into Guided-Missile Attack Submarines and Fleet Ballistic Missile Submarines was initiated not by pushes for equality, though equality was later recognized as a success of integration. Instead, the decision was made based on statistics that found women are now earning about half of all bachelor's degrees in science and engineering, which are prerequisites for many submarine leadership positions. In order to uphold what is notoriously identified as the best submarine force in the world, it makes sense to open the applicant pool to all of those with qualifications, instead of cutting eligibility in half with gender requirements (Brown, 2012). As noted by a former submariner:

The right females could actually enhance our warfighting capability. Let's not forget that at a molecular level, women are fundamentally different than men in every aspect, and it is this difference that could be vitally valuable in battle. By leaving women on the pier, we leave behind all their different thought patterns, intuition and talent, all of which could mean winning a battle that would otherwise be lost (Iskra, 2011).

Whether or not women and men are fundamentally different in *every* aspect is debatable, but the notion of different thought processes, intuition, and talent that women bring to a male-dominated environment is not something to be overlooked. Just as qualified women have contributed to social progress and workplace development in civilian positions, so too will qualified women contribute to security and progress within the military.

One argument for the physical inability of women to perform in military settings looks to Ranger School, an elite instructional course for infantry-based training and the toughest of all U.S. Army schools to pass. Since the Combat Exclusion Policy has been revoked and the Army has opened its doors to women for specialty schools, women have been permitted to attend Ranger School; twelve total women have currently passed the school to earn the coveted Ranger tab (Cox, 2018). Because few women may actually be able to meet the conditions for combat assignments, there is concern over whether the push for inclusion may lead to lowered standards that in turn threaten the safety of the very democracy we are trying to improve (Snyder, 2003).

The concern, however, lies with those who have not successfully completed the school, or those who have been forced to "recycle," meaning repeating the entire course or a specific portion of it after an initial failure. Taken out of context, claims against women sound staggering: of the first nineteen women who entered the school, only eight passed the initial Ranger Assessment Phase (RAP), with all eight of those women failing at some point after RAP and having to recycle completely. This means that critics may claim, with zero context, that the entire first class of female soldiers in Ranger school effectively "failed." However, when examined within the context of the school, these results become less alarming: nearly forty percent of Ranger Graduates recycle at least once during the RAP, and as many as sixty percent

of Ranger School failures occur within the first four days of RAP week. Overall, the school has about a sixty percent passage rate (Ronin, 2018). For the top-notch school of the Army, which already does not pass many individuals who are viewed as the most physically fit and tactically competent, concerns regarding lowering standards for anyone seem irrational. Ranger School has already effectively removed any gender-based differences as seen in other parts of the Army, requiring females to do everything from shave their heads to pass the exact same obstacle courses as men during their time in the school. With the women who have passed the school, there is evidence that qualified females are capable of meeting the most rigorous physical challenges, and thus reason to promote integration.

Looking to other nations and their programs for combat inclusion provides for comparison and analysis of success in ways that cannot yet be as effectively tested in the US due to the recent nature of legal inclusion. While proponents of women in combat positions have historically referred to female combatants within the Israel Defense Force as the face of success, critics note that their participation is limited to two light armored battalions, with tasks fundamentally distinct from assignments that fit within the structure of the US Military (Woodward et al., 2017). Their involvement includes guarding the borders of the only two Arab countries that have peace treaties with Israel—Egypt and Jordan—far from any direct combat or front-line brigades (Scarborough, 2015). Elaine Donnelly, head of the Center for Military readiness, notes: “Uniformed Israeli women patrol the borders or help to train men for combat positions, but these important missions do not involve direct ground combat, meaning deliberate offensive action against the enemy. None of America’s allies, much less potential adversaries, are treating women like men in combat arms” (Scarborough, 2015). Because this is not a direct parallel to elite force positions in the United States such as the Army Green Berets, Navy SEALs, or Marine Special Operations Command, those in opposition to the inclusion of women may be quick to discredit the value in Israeli integration when such a reference is made. Critics may contend that Israel, while once considering incorporating women into M1A1 battle tank elements, has halted such pursuits after findings that claimed the intimately close quarters of women and men required by tank operations distracted from the overall mission. If it is an issue of distraction, this is not something to ban women from completely. Rather, it is a reason to instill discipline within those involved and establish an understanding that nothing is to detract from the primary objective. As outlined in the Ideal Military Member section of this paper, it is essential that good soldiers understand the importance of placing the mission before themselves. These findings show that perhaps the wrong people or people with the wrong priorities were assigned to the job. Distraction is not a fair reason to exclude women from positions they may otherwise be fit for.

The Swedish military challenges the assumption that women do not have a place in the “hypermasculine world of the battlefield” through successful integration of women into combat units tasked with peacekeeping operations. A study tracking the success of all male units and mixed-units (both male and female) found that mixed units were met with not only less hostility from aggressors, but also offered a gender perspective that contributed to the overall value of the mission. Whereas men were quick to react, and often with violence, women tended to be more methodical in their thinking and effective in their communication with both members of their unit and aggressors. Because of this, “the benefit of the Swedish structure is that it considers gender perspective to be an issue of operational effectiveness rather than just a politically-laden human resource issue of women’s rights and participation” (Egnell et al., 2014). Peacekeeping operations, which typically fall under the category of combat roles due to likelihood of engaging

with oppositional forces, are more common in today's military world than in traditional combat warfare. This should not be viewed as a discount to the discussion of gender in combat roles, but rather as another reason which exemplifies why women *should* be included.

The realization that women serve as an asset in peacekeeping is not exclusive to Sweden—in 2000, the United Nations Security Council made a monumental leap with UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, which explicitly recognized a linkage between peace and security to women's agency. Following the adoption of UNSCR 1325, a former US Ambassador for Global Women's Issues stated: "We know that military forces are better equipped to fulfill their mission when they can engage with all members of the societies in which they operate. A gender perspective should influence the training of our troops... the goals are to ensure the protection of civilians, and address lawlessness and sexual and gender-based violence" (Egnell et al., 2014). With successful integration of women comes the promotion of human security, as well as international recognition that co-ed peacekeeping forces are more effective at truly promoting peace.

## Conclusion

The purpose of this paper has been to show how effective integration of women into military positions is beneficial for both national security and social progress. To successfully provide women a space within military positions is to diversify the thought processes and approaches within a traditionally single-gendered space, promote the prioritization of proper qualifications over gendered assumptions, and improve overall operational outcomes. As integration mechanisms are operationalized, military leadership and defense policymakers must collaborate to ensure qualifications are prioritized over gendered rhetoric.

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