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The gender dimension

Elizabeth Boulton

An historically significant aspect to Australia's involvement in the Afghanistan and Iraq wars from 2001 to 2014 was the emergence of the so-called gender dimension. There are two broad components to consider: *internal* issues—the changing nature of the ADF's own troops; and *external* issues—the character of these wars, such as the 'war among the people' and counter-insurgency dimensions, in which gender issues became more prominent. This chapter draws on contributions from a range of ADF members and is divided into two parts corresponding to the two types of issue.[1]

Internal issues—own troops

The Afghanistan and Iraq wars were notable for seeing the first mass deployment of women in warlike operations in combat-related roles in Australian history. Although it might seem obvious to state, the most significant story to emerge is that women were well integrated into teams and well trained, and that they performed under pressure. This story is less well known, and is the focus of this chapter.

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1   Contributions by Kellie Brett, Deb Butterworth, Fiona Grasby, Leanne Iseppi, Paula Ivanovic, Amanda Johnston, Marija Jovanovich, Bevan McDonald, Stacey Porter, Grant Prendergast, Janelle Sheridan, Donna Sill, Kelley Stewart and Jasmine Young.

However, a second, parallel and more negative story of gender and the ADF during this period must also be recorded. External inquiries into ADF culture around 2012–14 identified and sought to remedy a range of discrimination and abuse problems that had occurred from the 1960s onwards.[2] It was found that for both genders, the severity of abuse was much decreased between 2001 and 2011 compared to earlier periods; however, proportionally, rates were still higher for females.[3] These cultural difficulties likely affected female retention during the 1990s, something that was already challenging to maintain owing to general societal attitudes about gender and vocational choices. Operationally, this meant that there were low numbers of women in the ADF, just as the 'war among the people'[4] and counter-insurgency aspects of modern warfare came to the fore, and thereby, militarily, gender issues also became more important. Although these abuse issues internal to the ADF are deeply troubling, they need to be placed in context; similar problems occurred in wider Australian society at the same time, reflecting the influence of broader sociocultural factors.[5]

A finding that immediately emerged from my initial inquiry into 'own troops' is that data capture and analysis of this area is limited. Accordingly, this account relies on select voices from the field to illustrate the types of lesson that arose and does not claim to be a definitive, all-encompassing account.

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2   Defence Committee, *Pathway to Change: Evolving Defence Culture—A Strategy for Cultural Change and Reinforcement*, Department of Defence, Canberra, 2012, and Defence Abuse Response Taskforce, *Report on Abuse in Defence*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2014.
3   Defence Committee, *Pathway to Change*, pp. 288–9.
4   'War among the people' refers to conflict scenarios in which there are no clear delineations of combat zones or safe rear echelons. Armed violent individuals or groups and/or military forces undertake operations in urban or rural areas, where civilians live and work. An example is bombing of a busy marketplace. The widely used term is attributed to British General Rupert Smith, who introduces it in his book, *The Utility of Force: The Art of War in the Modern World*, Penguin, London, 2012.
5   R. Knowles, H. Szoke, G. Campbell, C. Ferguson, J. Flynn, J. Lay and J. Potter, 'Expert Advisory Group on discrimination, bullying and sexual harassment: Report to Royal Australasian College of Surgeons', Royal Australasian College of Surgeons, Melbourne, 2015, www.surgeons.org/-/media/Project/RACS/surgeons-org/files/operating-with-respectcomplaints/expert-advisory-group/background-briefing-16-june-15-final.pdf?rev=7b721c1d5a264a5983f715783a3ab18f&hash=DE07ACB50DC25A6D5C8400405C164B43 (retrieved 20 October 2020), and Australian Human Rights Commission, *Change the Course: National Report on Sexual Assault and Sexual Harassment at Australian Universities*, Australian Human Rights Commission, Canberra, 2017.

Women in ADF operations in the Middle East: Business as usual

Interviews that I conducted with senior female regimental sergeant major (RSM) equivalents of each service found that women characterised the Middle East deployment as 'business as usual'. Areas like logistics, intelligence, communications and medicine had long been gender-integrated. Operational expertise had been steadily built from the late 1980s, for example, from Fiji in 1987, to the First Gulf War in 1990, and various deployments during the 1990s such as in Rwanda, Somalia and Timor Leste. It was the actions undertaken in the 1990s—the long investment in mainstreaming women into units, training regimes, posting cycles and selection for deployments—that allowed women to develop the requisite experience to perform in the Middle East.

In the RAN, ships had already long examined and resolved a range of pragmatic gender-related issues, such as sleeping quarters arrangements, and whether women should wear head scarves when ashore in some locations. RAN women were exposed to more hostile action, collectively, than seen before. For example, HMAS *Stuart* was part of a multinational naval security force in the Persian Gulf when, on 24 April 2004, hostilities erupted. There were two concurrent attacks: a dhow acted as a suicide bomb against a USS *Firebolt* boarding party, killing three crew members, while shortly after, an insurgent speedboat, laden with explosives, attacked an offshore oil rig. Commander (now Commodore) Michele Miller was the Executive Officer (XO) at the time and played a key role in leading the HMAS *Stuart* response.[6]

In the Army, the Centre for Army Lessons database reflects that army women's employment in standard non–arms corps environments has been uneventful. Nonetheless, soldiers indicated that they required additional focus and strategies to fit in when attached to combat arms corps units. Cognitive bias might have influenced the inclusion of women in some operational activities (such as tactical reconnaissance activities), typically required for the conduct of their roles. Generally, like their male peers,

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6   D. Ellery, 'Captain Miller has a firm grasp of the Navy's tiller', *Sydney Morning Herald*, 14 October 2011, www.smh.com.au/politics/federal/captain-miller-has-a-firm-grasp-of-the-navys-tiller-20111014-1v6i8.html (retrieved 1 April 2020).

women filled new functions needed to suit operational needs. For example, Lieutenant Colonel Amanda Johnston worked on Taliban reintegration programs throughout the provinces.

The 'no women in combat' rule for the Army was not lifted until 1 January 2013; hence women were not employed in direct land combat roles in Iraq and Afghanistan. Nevertheless, the blurring lines of where the battlefield began and finished saw many women working in locations where they were under mortar fire, such as the Force Level Logistic Asset – Baghdad. Others experienced incidents involving improvised explosive devices during convoys and the like. One radio operator in Iraq provides an interesting anecdote:

> Her contingent received sporadic indirect fire, and they did not have an indirect fire warning system. To cope with the pressure, the corporal would listen to music … As section commander, she would talk to her team and check on matters like if they were getting enough sleep and they were communicating with people at home.[7]

Female soldiers kept their sense of humour, as shown through feedback on the resupply system for basic items: 'The full briefs that are only worn by grandmas need to be replaced with standard black underwear otherwise they will only be used for rifle pull-throughs.'[8]

This was regarded as a routine part of army deployment for many. Some individuals sought to apply the 'no women in combat rule' to prevent women from visiting units like the Security Detachment in Baghdad and other 'red zone' areas. However, generally, operational imperatives required this rule to be broken. It became obvious that with modern war, where there is no front line, such rules lacked relevance and often ended up being ignored.

By the time of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, women had become so integrated into the Australian Army's approach to land operations that Australian policies on women in combat lagged behind reality. Although this issue had been long realised on preceding operations, it had not precipitated any consequent review of policy or force structure before Middle East operations. This suggests a gender blind spot in national security strategic planning forums and post-operational analysis activities.

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7   Anonymous comment found in 'Centre of Army Lessons' database for Middle East deployments.
8   Anonymous comment found in 'Centre of Army Lessons' database for Middle East deployments.

Despite this lag, Army women gained substantial senior leadership experience during operations in Afghanistan and Iraq, which bodes well for the development of the future force. It is also historically significant. The first female RSM appointment in the Middle East, Warrant Office Class 1 Lynne Foster, occurred in 2006. By 2014, the Army had 12 female RSMs in total, and six of these had also served in an RSM capacity on operations in the Middle East. At the officer level, women also filled more senior operational leadership roles than seen before. For example, Major General Simone Wilkie served as both Assistant Chief of Staff on the Headquarters Multi-National Force – Iraq (MNF-I) in 2007 and as Assistant Commander, Joint Task Force (JTF) 633 in Afghanistan in 2011–12. Major General (then Colonel) Sue Coyle also served as a deputy commander of the JTF 636 Afghanistan in 2014.

When it comes to the Air Force, aside from long-standing roles in such areas as communications and logistics, Air Force women played critical operational roles. This was particularly so in the Air Traffic Control element at Baghdad airport in the early phase of the Iraq War. Others also worked in military policing roles among the population.

What was new about the Middle East deployment was the more extensive role women played as aircrew. For example, Warrant Officer (then Flight Sergeant) Paula Ivanovic was a loadmaster on C-17 Globemaster aircraft for 21 missions in Afghanistan, from 2007 to 2010. Before the Middle East conflict, this was a role almost exclusively performed by men. AP-3C Orion aircraft pilot Squadron Leader Marija Jovanovich completed three tours, in total, flying more than 100 missions. Her crew provided overland intelligence, surveillance and reconnaissance support to coalition troops in Iraq and Afghanistan and maritime surveillance in the Persian Gulf and the northern Persian Sea, and conducted counter-piracy operations off the coast of Somalia and in the Gulf of Aden.

Flight Lieutenant Jasmine Young, a weapon systems officer on the F/A-18F Super Hornet fighter aircraft, was the first female Australian deployed to air combat operations. She executed pre-planned and dynamic strike missions against Daesh in Iraq from 2014 to 2015. Aircrew also includes those working with the IAI Heron remotely piloted aircraft, such as sensor operator Flight Lieutenant Janelle Sheridan. While the Air Force had some female air combat officers qualified for fast jets, these aircraft did not deploy to the Middle East during the 2001–14 period.

An RAAF C-17 Globemaster prepares to land at Tarin Kowt, 2012.
Source: Courtesy of the Department of Defence.

On being interviewed about her experiences as aircrew, Squadron Leader Marija Jovanovich agreed with the 'business as usual' concept:

> Although there are not many of us, female aircrew are fully integrated into 92 Wing. Both as a co-pilot and as a captain, I always felt like I belonged and my gender was never an issue. I also had a highly competent female navigator on my crew for the 2010 tour, and the same applied to her.[9]

One minor problem was that sometimes separate sleeping locations were created for female aircrew. This arrangement was not ideal as it meant that the women's sleep was disrupted by other women working different shifts. When mixed-gendered aircrew were accommodated together, no problems were experienced.

Beyond the service-specific experience of women outlined so far, some other interesting leadership and teamwork dimensions are worth reflecting upon. The above descriptions indicate that there are many positive aspects about the way in which women had been mainstreamed into the ADF's various units by the time of and during Middle East operations. Part of this success might also relate to the idea that, regardless of service, the

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9   Conversations with author.

mentality of 'a soldier is a soldier' (a sailor is a sailor and so on) was pre-eminent. Primarily, ADF members regarded themselves as members of a team, in which gender was not a conspicuous issue. However, the preference for the 'soldier is a soldier' approach meant that sometimes gender aspects were not considered when they needed to have been. For example, initially combat body armour did not fit women well, while pre-embarkation training did not address the risk of rape, for both men and women, on some deployed bases. As highlighted elsewhere, research insights from the new field of 'men's studies' might have helped the ADF to better support deploying men.[10]

One insight to emerge was that, when it came to resolving gender-related issues on deployment, the critical point was the person's chain of command. This has implications for the focus of gender policies; specifically, investment in leaders' knowledge, skills and behavioural repertoires to manage diverse teams might be the key to success.

Despite external review findings that some men made women's service life difficult, history must also record that there were many other ADF men who played a positive role in this story. From the 1990s onwards, it was a numerical reality that many ADF men were responsible for training, mentoring and developing these pioneering women. It should be noted that some of these men showed more acceptance towards military women undertaking a non-traditional work role than was seen in wider Australian society. In many units, strong teams and collegial connections developed over a sense of shared purpose. The success of this varied by unit and type of function; however, it suggests those areas of the ADF that achieved cohesion might have excellent lessons to offer other units still embarking upon this task.

In addition to issues of leadership and teamwork, the issues of parenthood had to be managed as well. Although the ADF has long had measures and systems in place to support deploying fathers, it is likely that some of the thinking around this had become dated. For example, societal shifts involve more dual-income families. Additionally, the 'longest war' nature of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars might have had particularly harsh consequences for fathering duties, which might not be properly understood and might require further analysis.

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10   E.G. Boulton, *Teaming: An Introduction to Gender Studies, Unshackling Human Talent and Optimising Military Capability for the Coming Era of Equality: 2020 to 2050*, Australian Army, Canberra, 2017.

The report 'Mothers in the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO)'[11] found that women greatly valued their deployments from a professional perspective, and were creative and resourceful in finding ways to constructively manage separation from children. Nonetheless, although ADF women achieved this, they sometimes also faced harsher criticism over their decisions than fathers might have experienced. Wing Commander (then Squadron Leader) Kelley Stewart, OIC Medical, Task Group 633.2, in 2006 summed up the sentiment here, when she wrote:

> The main issue for me … is Mother Guilt with a capital 'G'. There can be a lot of pressure applied or inferred … You often feel the urge to justify why you want to leave them all to deploy operationally. Why? Because this is our job and it's what we joined up to do … Another mother at school had said, 'There is no mother' about my family. Luckily, the Family Day Care mum set them straight.[12]

Generally, mothers required additional time before deployment to make various family support arrangements while for others it was the post-deployment phase that was most difficult. As Wing Commander Stewart observed, '[O]n returning from deployment to Afghanistan, she was informed that she would be involved in three major training exercises after returning from operational duty. She was heartbroken over how she was going to tell her family …'.[13]

Women's partners and husbands (whether civilian or also serving in the military) were a new demographic that, initially, might not have been well understood by ADF units and the Defence Community Organisation.

A related issue was that the Australian population, in general, was largely oblivious to the changing role of women in the ADF. This particularly affected female veterans. A study in this area found that female veterans perceived that they were not regarded as (and were not treated as) 'real' veterans.[14] However, male veterans also reported this experience, especially

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11   E. Lawrence-Wood, L. Jones, S. Hodson, S. Crompvoets, A. McFarlane and S. Neuhaus, 'Mothers in the Middle East Area of Operations (MEAO): The health impacts of maternal deployment to an area of operations', Applied Research Program, Department of Veterans' Affairs, Canberra, 2014.
12   K. Stewart, 'International Women's Day 2006—inspiring potential', *Newsletter*, Defence Community Organisation—South Australia, 8 March 2006.
13   Ibid.
14   S. Crompvoets, *Health and Wellbeing of Female Vietnam and Contemporary Veterans*, Department of Veterans' Affairs, Canberra, 2012.

the younger ones. Arguably, though, the challenges faced internal to the ADF have not been nearly as challenging as those external to the ADF, as the rest of this chapter sets out to illustrate.

External issues—a gendered area of operations

Although women within the ADF were ready—that is, well trained and integrated into teams—arguably neither the coalition nor the ADF were ready for a gendered battlefield. Gender became significant in Iraq and Afghanistan for three reasons.

First, 'rescuing Middle Eastern women' was a conspicuous part of the narrative that accompanied the rationale for both wars. For instance, at a press conference two weeks before the US-led invasion of Iraq, Paula Dobriansky, then Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs, flanked by four members of a group called Women for a Free Iraq, declared: 'We are at a critical point in dealing with Saddam Hussein. However, this turns out, it is clear that the women of Iraq have a critical role to play in the future revival of their society.'[15]

In their book *What Kind of Liberation?*, Nadje Al-Ali and Nicole Pratt argued that 'women's causes' became part of an empire-building approach that backfired on Iraqi women and undermined their own sense of agency. They insisted that the most damaging impact to women in Iraq came from the degradation of the security environment. Women's rights and how this was progressed was a significant part of these conflicts. At times this became at least an ideological battleground, and at worst it influenced targeting choices made by al-Qaeda, the Taliban and later Daesh.

The second reason gender became important in Afghanistan and Iraq is because, although this varied by geography and time, one of the features that did emerge was that of 'war among the people', at other times described as the 'three-block war' phenomenon. This concept, articulated by US Marine Corps General Charles Krulak in the late 1990s, envisaged the close relationship between combat operations, peacekeeping and humanitarian assistance undertaken simultaneously within the space

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15   N. Al-Ali and N. Pratt, *What Kind of Liberation? Women and the Occupation of Iraq*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2009, p. 56.

of three neighbouring city blocks. In this context, women, children and communities were integrated into battlefield and conflict zones to an extent not seen by the ADF or modern Western militaries in living memory.

Third, there was a new international legal framework influencing security and military operations. In 2000, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) was adopted by the UN Security Council, followed by a wave of other WPS-related Security Council resolutions . UNSCR 1325 'reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts … and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security'.[16]

To explore lesson learned, five aspects will be considered: female engagement teams (FETs); gender advisers (GAs); Australian commanders' perspectives; the strategic approach to WPS; and general lessons.[17]

Female engagement teams

In response to the 'war among the people' dimension, the United States raised FETs in Iraq, most notably though its Lioness program.[18] An early lesson was that the women were not adequately trained in crew-served weapons systems and patrolling techniques used by the Marines, which differed from those taught by the US Army in basic Infantry Minor Tactics training.[19]

ADF members became involved in FETs as part of a larger approach managed by the NATO International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) in Afghanistan. Australian Major Grant Prendergast was the FET Commander for ISAF from March to October 2012. He introduced new initiatives, such as requiring completed FET patrols to produce a 'quad-slide' summarising key insights and learnings from each patrol within 24 hours, synchronising efforts of FET patrols, and facilitating

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16   Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues, 'Landmark resolution on Women, Peace and Security', United Nations, New York, www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/wps (retrieved 25 March 2020).
17   The analytical time-period has been extended from 2014 to 2017 to capture WPS lessons, which were pertinent to the Middle East yet did not begin to be progressed by the ADF until around 2012.
18   M. McLagan and D. Sommers, *Lioness* (documentary), Roco Films/Public Broadcasting Service, USA, 2008
19   M. Mackenzie, *Beyond the Band of Brothers: The US Military and the Myth that Women Can't Fight*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge, 2015.

a process whereby they could all collectively learn from each other. FETs were given formal orders, end-states and detailed information messaging guidance.

Through these more structured and regular FET activities, nascent standard operating procedures emerged. Major Prendergast concluded that FETs were effective in aiding in situational awareness, for example on Taliban presence; however, great care was required when planning how and when to employ FETs owing to risks to local women and FET members. Sometimes the risks were so high that it was not worth employing FETs directly. FETs were created in theatre, and women were drawn from existing units undertaking a 55-hour certification course while deployed. RAAF Warrant Officer Fiona Grasby was the second in command of the Force Protection and Security Section Multi-National Command, Tarin Kowt, from July 2012 to January 2013. She observed:

> We searched the women and children in a partitioned area at the Main Entry Control Point, away from the men, and would then monitor them until … we were required to escort them to the flight line. We were cognisant not to be too familiar with women who visited regularly (in the view of others), as they may have then been used to target us. Behind the safety of the screens, though, there were hugs and food swapping and gift giving. Being aware of the atmospherics was paramount.[20]

Australian special forces also experimented with FET patrols in Afghanistan, using medics and local contractors. However, it was assessed that these were not well integrated into what was called 'human terrain analysis' or intelligence collection plans. There were various attempts to recruit Afghanistan nationals for indigenous FETs; however, these attempts failed.

The Australian Civil-Military Centre conducted some analysis on FETs, but noted a key problem was that there was not enough data or knowledge about FET activities to draw definitive conclusions. Nonetheless, they assessed that, on the basis of limited knowledge, FETs appeared to be a 'useful operational tool that ought to be integrated into future operational planning'.[21]

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20 Conversation with author.
21 H. Studdert and S. Shteir, *Women, Peace and Security Reflections: From Australian Male Leaders*, Australian Civil-Military Centre, Canberra, 2015, p. 58.

Gender advisers

Apart from FET, another category of engagement for women was as gender advisers (GAs). The ADF deployed a number of GAs into Iraq and Afghanistan. The role of the GA varied greatly, reflecting that some were deployed when such initiatives were in start-up phases—whereby obtaining funding and agreements was a large part of their tasking—while later GAs could focus upon pragmatic operationalisation of WPS objectives.

Over several rotations some WPS objectives were progressed, despite the extreme difficulties involved. For example, a girls' school was established in Tarin Kowt, and Afghan women were trained as police officers and army officers. A 'soldiers' card' on WPS was developed, and briefings were incorporated as part of the mainstream component of the Force Preparation and Reception, Staging, Onward Movement and Integration (RSO&I) processes.

GAs were well prepared for their roles through being sent on a variety of specialised training courses, such as those conducted at the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations in Sweden, and other NATO-sponsored courses. Additionally, GAs were considered to be highly collegial, allowing informal learning to occur in addition to the formal programs.

What emerged is that the GA role is complex and required understanding a wide range of legislation and policies from the United Nations, NATO, coalition forces, the ADF and the relevant countries within the area of operations. Given the significant challenges in unravelling various levels of rulings, GAs did not have formal authority, but relied upon their ability to persuade and influence to make a difference. An example of this circumstance is the experience of Captain Stacey Porter, RAN.

Captain Porter was assigned as the senior GA to the Commander, Resolute Support Mission, Afghanistan, from April 2016 to February 2017. She observed that while the gender training was largely tactical in nature and about instilling a gender perspective in all aspects of operations, this was not strictly what she did; instead, she was working at a high level in collaboration with ministerial, political, civil society, international community and vice-regal actors.

Afghanistan launched its National Action Plan (NAP) on 13 June 2015, but during Porter's time she observed that, on the ground, very little work was being done to implement many of its actions. She attributed this slow progress to three factors. First, the immediate problem that Afghanistan was still largely a country at war; the Afghans continued to fight the Taliban and the 14 other terrorist groups that existed in their country, so it was not surprising that other issues took precedence at the ministerial level.

The second reason for the slow traction on the NAP was the backlog of legal and legislative issues to be resolved. For example, much work was being conducted on trying to get approval for the draft penal code, which sought to address challenges like the incompatibility of Afghan law with Afghanistan's obligations under international treaties (including that of human and women's rights, which was not ratified). Other work was concentrated on the High Peace Council, a body appointed by President Karzai to negotiate reconciliation with the Taliban.

Finally, there were cultural issues. Women's political marginalisation and other forms of gender discrimination were the norm. Explaining this, Porter remarked: 'While I was deployed, a six-year-old was married off to a 60-year-old in exchange for a goat, a bag of flour, and a jar of ghee … When these norms exist, you can appreciate the uphill battle we had.'

Porter reflected that, at the end of the day, NATO was institution-building in Afghanistan. To do so, NATO concentrated on advising the Afghans how to become independent and self-reliant. The view was that any solutions had to be Afghan-led and process-based. However, by the time Captain Porter left some nine and a half months later, she observed, 'NATO was starting to realise that this approach was going to take a lot longer than they realised'.

Porter commented that the biggest challenge was encouraging the move from merely increasing recruiting figures to advising the Afghans on the development of a human resource strategy for women in the security forces. Crucial to this was having females assigned to positions on the manning document, or *Tashkil*, so that adequate specialised training and career management could be achieved.[22]

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22   Written account by Captain Porter and subsequent conversations with author.

Australian commanders' perspectives

Australian commanders, from tactical to strategic levels, provided further useful insights on WPS. For instance, at the tactical level, an Air Force ground defence officer made this observation:

> Women still were not allowed to join as [Air Defence Guards/ Ground Defence] when we were in Iraq, and for most of our time in Afghanistan. I remember it was an issue when I was attached to [the Royal Air Force] and we were patrolling [the area] around Kandahar because we couldn't enter any compounds with women in them and I remember wishing we had some girls so that they could access certain areas that otherwise we could not. About this time [the US Marine Corps] started using female platoons for that exact purpose. Beyond that, small numbers of female dog handlers and security police performed security (as opposed to 'combat') roles, at bases such as [Al-Minhad Air Base].[23]

At the operational level, Bernard Philip, from DFAT, headed the Provincial Reconstruction Team (PRT) in Uruzgan from 2010 to 2011. Considering WPS, Philip's reflections capture the immense difficulty of engaging women in Uruzgan—Taliban heartland. He decided to avoid direct action on gender issues, explaining that this decision was 'the product of an intuitive judgement that a direct approach to gender equality would be counter-productive and constitute a red line for the male leaders of Uruzgan'.[24]

He therefore pursued indirect methods such as aid programs to support children. Of these indirect methods, Philip assessed that perhaps the most enduring was the example of gender inclusion the PRT provided, especially in allowing Afghan men to experience it. Male Uruzghani leaders were enthusiastic about meeting Prime Minister Julia Gillard and Major General (then Brigadier) Simone Wilkie on her visits, and they worked well with female leaders within the PRT. Philip noted that, somewhat ironically, PRT civilian female diplomats and advisers

> enjoyed some of the closest and most productive relationships with key tribal and government leaders. I remember one of our female diplomats being especially effective in strengthening the resolve of a key tribal leader to remain engaged with the government and to discourage his tribe from supporting the Taliban.[25]

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23 Conversations between an anonymous male RAAF ground defence officer and author.
24 Studdert and Shteir, *Women, Peace and Security Reflections*, p. 50.
25 Ibid.

At the strategic level, Major General Fergus McLachlan was a senior military planner with the International Security Assistance Force in Afghanistan from November 2012 to November 2013. He assessed that the overall mission would have been better positioned to address WPS issues if they had been integrated into earlier ISAF planning activities.[26] Another lesson is the deeper insights into Taliban strategy. McLachlan notes that the Taliban sought to attack the social cohesion of the Afghan community and that one way to do so was through targeting women and girls. Their cold-bloodedness in pursuing this strategy was evident in such incidents as the bombing of a busload of women and girls. This led McLachlan to observe: 'We have an increasingly sophisticated understanding that we must also defeat the enemy across their range of objectives, including their deliberate targeting of women and girls.'[27]

To counter this, the ISAF sought to shift responsibility for town security to police forces, so that military forces could be freed up to pursue the Taliban outside the township. McLachlan, again, commented:

> We made gains for the security of women and girls in Afghanistan by moving the violent clashes between the Taliban and the security forces away from the population centres … In Kabul and Kandahar, Afghan police chiefs gained control of their cities—the two largest cities in the country became increasingly safe places for women and girls—but only as a subset of broader security gains.[28]

The strategic approach to Women, Peace and Security

Reflecting on the issue of WPS and whether there was a strategic approach and analysis, various GAs and commanders agreed that the ability to progress WPS objectives was extremely difficult, mostly owing to the cultural contexts of Iraq and Afghanistan, but also owing to the existence of a war. However, it is also possible that progress was hindered by the way WPS was conceptualised and managed. As Captain Porter observed, 'Effectively, NATO forces are conducting what we term non-combat operations in a combat environment.'[29]

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26 Ibid., pp. 55–61.
27 Ibid., p. 61.
28 Ibid., p. 60.
29 Conversations with author.

Initiatives seemed burdened by bureaucratic paperwork, legislative tasks, transferring WPS objectives into policy, and then funding cycles. Part of this was because WPS was not treated as an operational matter but rather an administrative one. For example, if the key present hurdle in Afghanistan is the legislative backlog, the logical solution would be to bolster legal and policy support. It is not clear, however, that such a reorientation of effort was considered, let alone implemented. In general, one wonders where the role of creative or transformative thought exists in the WPS space—for example, the application of design thinking to the problem, or the conduct of large multidisciplinary problem-solving workshops and conferences, as have occurred for other intractable security dilemmas. It was not apparent that any agency had either the mandate or the resources to undertake this task. Government progress reports during this period focused on compliance rather than effectiveness, and seemed to paint a universally 'good story', which did not identify problems or opportunities to improve a new initiative in its critical start-up, growth phase.[30]

Perhaps related to the lack of strategic analysis has been the issue of lukewarm attitudes towards WPS activities by some within the security sector. GAs had quite different perspectives on this, several noting excellent support, especially from command levels. Others thought it was personality dependent, while another noted that what she called the 'middle management level' of the ADF could be sceptical. This often related to people not understanding what WPS was about, or getting it confused with general internal institutional equity initiatives. One GA speculated as to whether the impact of external investigations into the ADF on gender issues during 2012–14,[31] which involved some painful revelations and sudden changes, have indirectly undermined some people's enthusiasm for WPS initiatives. Porter, for instance, in her role as senior GA to the Commander, Resolute Support Mission, in Afghanistan in 2016, observed:

> I was quite unprepared for the comments that came from within RSM [Resolute Support Mission] such as 'what about the men?' and 'why are we putting gender before the fight?' … I had to remain diplomatically stoic in the face of not only Afghan cultural and organisational resistance but that of coalition complaints.[32]

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30   Commonwealth of Australia, *2016 Progress Report on the Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security: 2012–2018*, Commonwealth of Australia, Canberra, 2016.

31   Defence Abuse Response Taskforce, *Report on Abuse in Defence*, and Defence Committee, *Pathway to Change*.

32   Conversations with author.

Similarly, Lieutenant Commander Donna Sill, GA to Commander JTF 633 in 2017, observed: 'The most regular question has been "but how is this relevant to my job?" The gender adviser role is primarily about developing awareness of gender-related issues and developing tools that allow others to answer this question themselves.'[33]

The impact of some of this disinterest or doubt subtly slowed the ability of GAs to progress WPS initiatives, while others would argue that dealing with such attitudes was and remains part of the GA role. Some people's ambivalence towards WPS initiatives could reflect deeper general Australian cultural attitudes to traditional gender roles and activities of the military. Addressing such attitudes will require broader approaches before further progress can be achieved.[34]

General lessons

Overall, in relation to the gender dimension of the Afghanistan and Iraq wars, and how the coalition and ADF responded to it, four key lessons have been identified. The first and most important lesson is that there were opportunity costs of 'gender ignorance' or inadequate analysis before the outbreak of the Iraq and Afghanistan wars and during the conflicts. Coalition operations could have benefited from a greater understanding of gender-related issues in the early framing, conceptualisation and planning phases of operations. In addition to those already discussed, there are a number of additional aspects, which I will just touch on here.

The first is masculinity studies, which could have aided analysis of the human dimension. See, for example, work on Afghan men by Echavez, Mosawi and Pilongo, who analysed views of masculinity by different groups in Afghanistan, finding that the prevailing view was that men were *nafaqah* providers, responsible for family security, safety and all 'living support' and financial needs.[35] Second is pedophilia and especially *bacha bāzī* (or 'boy rape', as it is commonly referred to in Afghanistan). The high-profile case of US Sergeant First Class Charles Martland, who in 2011 assaulted an Afghan police officer who had raped a 12-year-old boy, brought to

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33   Conversations with author.
34   Boulton, *Teaming*.
35   C.R. Echavez, S. Mosawi and L.W.R. Pilongo, *The Other Side of Gender Inequality: Men and Masculinities in Afghanistan*, Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit, Kabul, 2016, p. 19.

global attention the lack of adequate coalition policies to deal with such incidents.[36] Third is counter-insurgency and gender; other analysis suggests that counter-insurgency efforts would have been improved had greater efforts been made to incorporate women.[37] Fourth is the issue of women in special forces and arms corps functions. If women had been employed more strategically, it is possible they might have helped with situational awareness, thereby improving planning and benefiting the entire force. There are many unknowns about Iraqi and Afghan women's perspectives and experiences at critical moments of the campaigns. Although these details might have been included in post-mission reports, they have been less visible in mainstream military accounts in the public arena. This leaves a knowledge vacuum, potentially limiting strategic discourse. Fifth is the issue of people who identify as LGBTI. Greater attention to lesbian, gay, bisexual, transgender and intersex (LGBTI) issues might have allowed early warning on the extreme vulnerability of LGBTI locals to violent attack and executions by groups like Daesh,[38] and to have enacted warnings proactively or to have initiated other protective strategies.

The second lesson is that the ADF conducted WPS-type activities before Australia adopted UNSCR 1325 but used different language to describe them. For example, in 2003–04, the Security Detachment in Baghdad was heavily involved with the kindergarten in their area of operations, and they connected to the entire community in layered ways. This approach was often considered standard practice, sometimes managed through civil–military cooperation constructs.

Colonel Studdert's quite amazing account of how he used an understanding of gender dynamics to achieve operational outcomes, as part of the United Nations Transitional Authority in Cambodia in 1992–93, is another example.[39] These instances demonstrate that the stereotype of military males being ignorant about such issues might not be fair. It is possible that this type of existing expertise, which relates to the WPS task within conflict zones, has not been properly acknowledged nor harnessed.

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36   K. Jahner, 'Green Beret who beat up accused child rapist can stay in Army', *Army Times*, 28 April 2016.

37   M. Anderson, 'Where are the women? The unfortunate omission in the Army's COIN doctrine', Modern War Institute, United States Military Academy, West Point, 2017.

38   J. Stern, 'The UN Security Council's Arria-formula meeting on vulnerable groups in conflict: ISIL's targeting of LGBTI individuals', *NYU Journal of International Law and Politics*, vol. 48, pp. 1191–8, 2015, nyujilp.org/wp-content/uploads/2010/06/NYU_JILP_48_4_Stern.pdf (retrieved 30 April 2020).

39   Studdert and Shteir, *Women, Peace and Security Reflections*, p. 7.

The third lesson is that gender lessons from Iraq and Afghanistan should not drive conceptual development. Although the Iraq and Afghanistan experience provides valuable WPS lessons, it might be unwise to use this experience as a template for future planning. In other regions, such as the Asia Pacific or Africa, women have far different, often considerably more influential roles in their societies. Such environments might demand greater resources and a more comprehensive approach than was possible in Afghanistan and Iraq.

The fourth lesson is that Australian national policy setting on WPS is slow. For instance, the UN Security Council adopted UNSCR 1325 on WPS in 2000; however, Australia did not commit to implementing it until 2015. This 15-year delay meant that the ADF did not have WPS policy and a developed WPS capability in place in time for the wars in Afghanistan and Iraq.

Conclusion

This chapter has outlined a range of gender-related issues as they concern ADF operations, both internal to the ADF and external. The activity that occurred from the late 1980s to expand women's military roles and mainstream women into standard military units was at times difficult and flawed, with recurrent scandals prompting external reviews. These received immense media attention and dominated the Australian public's perception of women and the military. However, a 'good story' quietly paralleled this period as well.

By the time the Afghanistan and Iraq wars commenced, in many areas of the ADF women were well integrated into teams, were well trained, and had the requisite experience to perform well under pressure. Although both wars had tragic outcomes, ADF women gained invaluable operational experience and a depth of expertise that increased as the wars progressed. It is unfortunate that the Australian community, during the conduct of the wars, were largely kept ignorant of the brave, resourceful and historically significant feats of various ADF women, instead receiving an almost ceaseless and unbalanced story of ADF women as victims. Another untold story is that, owing to numerical realities, in the main, it was ADF men who effectively trained and developed these pioneering women, from the late 1980s onwards.

To be sure, there was a distinction between the vast bulk of ADF units and specialities that were long used to working in mixed-gender teams and those units for which mixed-gender teams was still a novel experience. Not surprisingly, leaders from generally mixed units had solid repertoires of skills for managing minor gender issues that might arise and were able to set command climates that supported cohesion. For mothers, some flexibility was often needed, and the chain of command was the critical point that determined how possible and successful their deployment was. The impact of the 'longest war' on fathering duties requires analysis.

Like most Western military forces, the ADF was not ready for a gendered battlespace at the start of the century. New capabilities were often developed in theatre and then, perhaps owing to culturally related trepidation or a lack of expertise, were not properly analysed or developed. The setting up of capability to address WPS was unfathomably slow compared to responses to other new dimensions, like IED, cyber or drone warfare. Indeed, the promise of WPS has not yet been realised.

There were six inquiries into aspects of ADF culture during the period 2011–14 (with gender issues being prominent). It is possible therefore that gender issues became associated with pain and shame. This might have subtly influenced some individual, and possibly institutional, support for WPS activities. In essence, the effect of this is that WPS issues remain underanalysed and could suffer from being segregated from mainstream capability development and operational planning processes. In general, limited data capture or inclusion of the gender dimension in multiple routine post-operational review and analysis activities hinders the ability of the ADF to understand the gender dimension in a sophisticated way. This, in turn, limits the ADF's collective ability to refine methods and exploit emerging opportunities.

Without women in arms corps or special forces, it is likely that the ADF lacked certain unique capabilities that could have been advantageous. Although three Victoria Crosses were awarded to men, no Nancy Wake equivalent emerged, nor had the opportunity to emerge, in these conflicts. Other opportunities were also likely to have been lost through ignorance of other issues such as masculinity studies.

As a final point, a key lesson is that national strategic security planning needs to be forward-looking regarding demographic and societal changes, which affect not only our own troops but also the external operating environment.