

Power and Gender in UK Defence

It is a universal principle of social justice that men and women should enjoy equal rights on fundamental issues. This is codified in the UN Declaration of Human Rights, Articles 1 and 2, and is supported by the UN Gender Mainstreaming policy. The 1976 EU Council Directive 76/207/EEC demands that member states follow the principle of equality of treatment in the workplace and it prohibits discrimination for reasons of gender. Furthermore, in the UK, the Sex Discrimination Act of 1975 also prohibits discrimination on the grounds of gender.

National defence is a fundamental issue, indeed the UK National Security Strategy (CM7590) states it as the highest duty of government. It necessarily follows then that women should enjoy equal rights regarding national defence. However, when we examine the current policy for employment of women in the UK Armed Forces, significant inequality is evident. So, the research question posed in this paper is: can the current UK Ministry of Defence (MOD) policy be justified?

Research approach and broad findings

The research approach focuses on the officer cadre because of the hierarchical nature of the military. The paper firstly identifies UK Government policy on the employment of women in the Armed Forces. In brief, policy is that women are excluded from close combat roles on the grounds of their inferior physical capability. The paper then presents a literature review on the feminisation of the military and also examines emerging research on women's leadership styles drawing on the 'new leadership' paradigm of transformational and transactional leadership. It then examines the issues of power and authority within organisations, drawing in part from the work of Michel Foucault.

Empirical data on the number of men and women officers employed, and their rank based on the generic NATO rank structure is introduced with an experimental model that uses the typical size of an Army command group at each rank, as a proxy for authority. Using this model, the extent of authority that women exercise is assessed; the results indicate that women exercise significantly less authority than is proportionate to their numbers. This is because although they form a significant percentage of the officer cadre overall (12%), the number of women reduces through the rank structure to almost zero at senior levels, where most authority is concentrated.

The paper reviews the current operational context. It identifies a shift in the nature of UK military operations from a static Cold War posture to a range of counter insurgency operations frequently against the backdrop of a hostile population such as Iraq and Afghanistan. Building on earlier research (Dunn 2008), the paper identifies that the role of women on operations is increasingly participatory, with a consequent level of exposure to death or injury. Current operations also require an empathetic skill set, rather than physical strength, to achieve success.

The paper concludes that women are not equal partners in the UK Armed Forces and the current policy is not defensible. An affirmative research programme is then recommended to take the debate forward.

Women in the UK Military

Current policy on the deployment of women is defined in the MOD report *Women in the Armed Forces* (MOD 2002) but, in brief, the position for each Armed Force is as follows:

Army; women are excluded from close combat roles in the Infantry, Household Cavalry and Royal Armoured Corps. The latter two operate heavy armoured vehicles. My research (Dunn 2007) indicates some acceptance from women officers interviewed that the physical demands of the Infantry limit the capability of women to meet the standards. There was less acceptance of the rationale for excluding women from the Household Cavalry and Royal Armoured Corps where the physical demands are less. Women officers are however employed as pilots in the Army Air Corps (AAC), now designated as part of the combat arms.

Royal Air Force; women cannot be employed in close combat roles in the RAF Regiment. However, female air-crews were introduced in 1989 and women officers now fly fast jets.

Naval Services; women cannot be employed in close combat roles in the Royal Marines General Service. In addition women are not employed in the Royal Navy on submarines or as mine clearance divers. The general exclusion of women from going to sea was reversed in 1990.

The resultant proportion of jobs open to women is:

Army	71%
Naval Service	71%
Royal Air Force	96%

Table 1 – source www.mod.uk (1)

MOD is allowed to derogate from the Sex Discrimination Act 1975 under an ECJ ruling C-273/97 which allowed exclusion on the grounds of operational effectiveness. MOD argued successfully that women lack the physical capability to undertake close combat roles. European Community Law demands a review on any exclusions every eight years and a MOD policy review on close combat roles is due to report to Ministers by the end of 2009.

There have been significant developments on the employment of women in the Armed Forces. Up to 1990, women were forced to leave on pregnancy whether married or not, and were confined mainly to administrative work in, for example the

Women's Royal Army Corp (WRAC). MOD's current approach is detailed in this statement.

Women hold key positions in the Armed Forces and are now reaching senior ranks, such as Brigadier in the Army, Air Commodore in the RAF and Captain in the Royal Navy. The attainment of 2 Star rank (Rear Admiral, Major General or Air Vice-Marshal) and above has tended to depend on operational experience in the Combat Arms and at present there are no women in these ranks. However, as women are increasingly deploying on operations they may attain these higher ranks with time. Continuing difficulties in reconciling family (especially child and elder care), Service commitments to go to sea or deployment overseas remain obstacles to career advancement for many women. Significant efforts are however being made to introduce more "family friendly" policies to aid the retention of female personnel.

www.mod.uk (2)

Thomson (2004:9) identifies that the Return of Service (ROS) for female officers and soldiers was far less than for men – only 58.8% when female length of service was measured as a percentage of male length of service. She identified that difficulty around childcare was a significant factor in making the decision to leave. Carreiras (2006:55-59) discusses in some depth the challenges for women of 'combining work and the family in late modernity'. She also highlights the issue of military men and women who are partners or married and the subsequent issues of postings and arranging childcare which will have the consequence that: 'one of the careers will be damaged'.

Dandeker (2000) suggests that four factors have led to the integration of women in the Armed Forces. The first is driven by societal pressures such as demographic change but also normative and legal pressures, in particular human rights and sex discrimination related legislation. A second factor has been internal with the organisation having to respond to pressures for better career opportunities from women already in service. He states (op cit:41) "It is widely recognised in the services that women have been relatively under utilised given their general high quality". Thirdly, technological changes in the Armed Forces have led to a relative decline in the emphasis on physical prowess and aggressiveness as factors essential to military performance, although he acknowledges that the extent of this trend is contentious. Finally he identifies that policy makers, faced with societal pressures that do not recognise the uniqueness of the military enterprise and require that they come under the same principles of equal opportunity evident in non military employment, are far less sympathetic to making the military a special case.

Feminisation of the Military

There is a deep and broadening body of research and literature on women in the military and this section makes no claim to be comprehensive. What follows is a limited cross section of experience and viewpoints.

North America; the US military's policy is broadly similar to the UK, but there is an underswell of discontent as indicated by the title of Judith Steihm's (1996) edited work *It's our military too! Women and the US military*. The Canadian Armed Forces have opened all posts to women; they lost a combat arms officer, Captain Nichola Goddard, in 2006 in Afghanistan.

The Singapore Armed Forces (SAF) have few women promoted beyond the (army equivalent) rank of Captain. Walsh (2007) argues that this limits SAF's capability to field talent and that current restrictions should be lifted.

In Germany, resulting from European Court of Justice (ECJ) ruling in 2000, the Bundeswehr has opened all roles to women. From January 2001 says Kümmel (2002) the media anticipated integration issues for as he says: 'the change in role images for women also means a change in role images for men and for the entire gender system'. However, he reports that a (non representative) opinion poll taken from serving military personnel on the eve of the integration revealed 70% viewing the change as positive and a small majority (51%) saying that all roles, including combat, should be opened to women. In Sweden, all posts are open to women, whereas in Finland, which operates a conscription system (Tallberg 2009) employment of women is very restricted.

The phenomenon of feminisation of the military can be divided into three distinct but related strands: sociological, emotive and pragmatic. Much of the debate has been conducted in a US context, possibly because it is a larger scale issue there, or there is a greater propensity to debate it, and more channels through which to do so.

Sociological

At a global level, the UN has adopted a policy termed *gender mainstreaming*. Mainstreaming involves "ensuring that gender perspectives and attention to the goal of gender equality are central to all activities – policy development, research, advocacy/dialogue, legislation resource allocation and planning implementation and monitoring of programmes and projects" (www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi). This is promoted by Office of the Special Adviser on Gender Issues and Advancement of Women (OSAGI).

Of particular relevance is Resolution 1325 of October 2000 where the UN Security Council expressed its willingness to incorporate a gender perspective into peacekeeping operations and urged that a gender component be established in peace missions. The rationale for this initiative is an increasing understanding of the disproportionate impact that armed conflict has on women and girls. UN (2004) Report S/2004/8/14 *Women Peace and Security* provided an update on the resolution. It identified (ibid:78) the 'special vulnerability of displaced women, the needs of women heads of household in times of war, the role of women in conflict resolution; it also identified (ibid:73) the "escalation in scope and intensity of sexual and gender-based violence as one of the most visible and insidious impacts of armed conflict on women and girls". Set against this is the fact that women are excluded as actors in early warning, reconciliation peace building or post conflict reconstruction. The report commented that increasing women's representation in decision-making, and

expanding the roles and contributions of women in peace and security issues was a major element of resolution 1325.

Goldstein (2001) reviews the issue of the historical record of women as combatants. He examines the biological evidence to link warrior qualities with gender. He finds no such link. He then examines sociological explanations of gender roles and finds some explanation for the puzzle. War is constructed as a test or signifier of masculinity. Victory is confirmation of male identity and defeat is emasculation. Femininity is constructed to reinforce man as warrior both in support roles as nurse mother or wife and in opposition as peace activist.

Frost (2002:43) states that 'young men have always been attracted by the martial ethos and the opportunity to prove themselves in battle'. He posits that the process of exclusivity or 'male bonding' provides the cohesion on which any fighting unit depends. Kennedy-Pipe and Welch (2002:51) comment that 'war was, and many would argue, still is, associated with masculine values such as physical strength, honour and courage'. However, using the lens of liberal feminism, they argue that the military has been a 'bastion of political patriarchy and that the military retains key significance because of its prolonged resistance to efforts to equalise access. Steans (1998) suggests that, for the male soldier, his heroic role of protecting the nation's womanhood provides a significant motive for participation in military conflict. This carries the implication that the family and its female custodians are vulnerable and require male protection.

Sitting over this is the cultural issue of whether women are truly accepted in the Armed Forces. MOD in the face of extensive evidence of sexual harassment in the Armed Forces agreed with Equality and Human Rights Commission (previously Equal Opportunities Commission) in 2005 to conduct a regular survey and to take positive action to change the culture. Recent surveys (MOD 2006 and 2009a) continue to find extensive evidence of women in the Armed Forces having faced some form of sexual harassment. The 2009 report said that 78% of the servicewomen surveyed had been exposed to comments about their appearance, body or sexual activities. Although there was a high tolerance for these behaviours, 48% of the respondents sometimes found them offensive (MOD 2009a Table 17 Q8). Yeoman (2006) reports on the Industrial Tribunal case of Corporal Leah Mates. She proved 12 allegations of harassment, including one that a picture of her face was pinned to a shooting target, and another that a male officer had said her name while performing a sex act in a tent that they were sharing with seven other soldiers. She said, in the course of her case, that "anti female prejudice permeates the whole Army".

Emotive

The idea of a woman killing in combat raises strong emotions. However, the issue seems to be one of context, not principle. Women fly attack helicopters in the Army Air Corps, fighter jets in the RAF, and direct lethal fire in the Royal Artillery. Women also captain war fighting vessels. Rather, it is the concept of a woman fighting and killing the enemy in close combat which appears to be a cultural taboo by Western moral values.

Van Creveld (2002) is quite clear that during armed conflicts, women should stay at home. The consequence of women participating in warfare is that men become emasculated and that women who make pathetic soldiers anyway lose their femininity. He reviews the performance of women fighters over history in guerrilla campaigns such as Phillipines, Sierra Leone, Chechyna and Stalingrad and concludes: 'In not one of these wars do women participate any more than they have always done; that is to say hardly at all'. He links the current rise in the number of Western women in uniform to the emergence of nuclear weapons; the less a state believes it will have to fight a meaningful conflict the more women it accepts into the Armed Forces. This has the effect of diminishing the attractiveness of the profession to men who find it the perfect vehicle to express their masculinity. He concludes that should a real threat emerge "the expanded role of women in the military will vanish like the chimera it is".

Mitchell (1998), an American commentator, has a similar negative approach stating that women are only in the military because of institutional pressures. He claims that performance standards for recruits and training programmes have had to be lowered to accommodate women, with a subsequent negative impact on morale. Herbert, in a US context, says that '[...] women were also likely to be perceived as weak. It often seems that in the military all women are perceived to be weak until proven otherwise' (1998: 67). The key issue with this strand is whether public opinion is prepared for women soldiers to engage in direct physical combat. There is conflicting evidence for this from contemporary conflicts.

Evidence for the viewpoint that not all women make good soldiers is provided by the case of Lynndie England, court martialled for prisoner abuse at Abu Ghraib. However, by contrast, Private Jessica Lynch, caught up in the front line, was accorded media hero status although accounts differ as to exactly her role and circumstances. Two British women have recently been awarded the Military Cross: Able Seaman Nesbitt, a female medic, saved the life of a soldier when under fire in Afghanistan and Private Michelle Morris saved an injured colleague when under sniper fire in Iraq in 2006. The recent US case of Sgt Kim Munley, a policewomen at Fort Hood who helped to bring down and capture Major Nidal Hasan, after having been shot by him, is an illustrative case. Major Nidal Hasan, an army psychiatrist due to be posted to Afghanistan, shot dead 13 people and had wounded 30 others after opening fire with two handguns at Fort Hood on 5 November 2009.

Another example of where women do engage at close quarters with an enemy is Major Tammy Duckworth of the US Illinois Army National Guard. She was shot down in Iraq by insurgents on 12th November 2004 while piloting a Blackhawk attack helicopter, and having lost both legs, landed the helicopter safely. As Natzio (2003) comments; "That women in uniform may also have a capacity for gallantry, as demonstrated ...more recently by notable American examples, is now becoming increasingly accepted in our own society".

Pragmatic

National government has to maintain manning levels for its Armed Forces as part of its national security strategy. There have been significant recruitment shortfalls over recent years although the current economic climate is changing this short term.

Experience is also accumulating of women actually being involved in operational conflicts simply by virtue of the nature of modern warfare, and conducting themselves in a highly professional manner as evidenced previously. Dixon also makes this important point, even more relevant today:

In days gone by, when physical strength counted for more on the battlefield than mental ability, and senior commanders could exercise their heroic powers by leading their troops into action, the physical aspects of heroic leadership were no doubt important. But in modern war [.....] heroic leadership must count for rather less than managerial and technical ability
(1976:213)

Field and Nagl (2001) comment how ‘much of the current debate surrounding the presence of women in the positions in which they now serve is extremist and destructive’. They state that the specialities that in effect are now closed to women eg infantry and armour are ‘traditionally the most critical routes to high command positions. In addition they are culturally and functionally considered to be positions of greatest significance to the defence mission.’ They also claim that there is little appetite amongst women for these combat roles. However, they conclude that ‘changes in the international environment have moved the balance point between individual liberty and the military’s functional imperative. The time has come to permit female officers to serve in the combat arms if they are able to meet the physical requirements of that branch. Anything less is a betrayal of the very democratic principles which members of the American military have sworn to support and defend’.

Finally, combat role is an ambiguous demarcation line; the combat zone can encompass support activities in a fast moving conflict. Walters (2004) comments that “Even though US military women are not officially allowed into combat, they are finding themselves in the thick of the action with no definable front line – and they are fighting and dying in record numbers”. The recent account by Kayla Williams (2005) who was a sergeant in the military intelligence division of the 101st Airborne Division (Air Assault) highlights the tough role of women in the military working alongside, but not part of, the infantry and the commonality of experience;

When you get deployed your whole life everything is intimately bound up with the people on your team. These are the people with whom you live, sleep, work, eat, fight (pp58)

Leadership research has also focused on the gender debate with particular attention to ‘new paradigm thinking’ on transactional and transformational leadership (Bass 1998). Transactional leadership operates on the basis of exchange theory where the leader does something in exchange for an act of equal value from the follower. Transformational leadership appeals to the moral values of the followers and engages them at a higher level that transcends exchange. This is through factors of idealised influence, personalised consideration, inspirational motivation and intellectual stimulation. Furthermore, Eagly and Carli (2003) using a meta analysis of research on gender and leadership, identified evidence that female leaders were typically more transformational in their leadership style. The issue of which leadership approach is more appropriate in contemporary combat operations is dealt with later.

Authority and Power

The Armed Forces of course are an important means by which the state exercises authority and power. Foucault (1980:122) describes the Army as possessing 'the power of death' However, it is the academic construction of these concepts and their role within the Armed Forces which I discuss here.

The constructs of authority and power and the linked issue of influence, have been the subject of extensive academic interest and research. A full examination is therefore beyond the scope of this paper. Much of the work (Pfeffer 1981, 1982) and (Mintzberg 1983) has been conducted within the context of the organisation with a focus on how agents and organisational sub units acquire and manage power.

Terms associated with authority include: assigned, legitimate and hierarchical, but all derive from an agent's formal position within an organisation (Astley and Sachdeva 1984). Flowing from authority are the concepts of sanctions and legitimacy. The availability of sanctions means that the agent can enforce either a punishment or withhold rewards. Legitimacy is a full agreement by the subordinate that the leader can exercise power so little supervision is required by the leader to enforce compliance.

Power, within an organisation, has been conceptualised as a more emergent, non hierarchical, and agent centric construct (French and Raven 1959). Foucault's work (op cit) has added the post modernist dimensions of power - knowledge and discourse. He also developed the concept of surveillance, using Jeremy Bentham's invention of the panopticon as an analog for power. This was an architectural feature that enabled a single prison guard to conduct surveillance of an entire prison population, without the targets' knowledge. Bentham described the panopticon as 'a new mode of obtaining power of mind over mind, in a quantity hitherto without example' (Bentham 1995). Foucault identifies contemporary concepts of surveillance such as annual performance reports as examples of the panopticon principle in organisations.

The concept of power within the military is interesting because it combines certain aspects of both authority and power. The military structure is demonstrably hierarchical. All military personnel know, simply from an individual's military dress, the identity of: their service, location within the service and rank. This is a precise and overt triangulation absent from non uniformed organisations. There are, in addition, complex arrangements for appropriate dress, rituals of conduct eg formal dinners, and personal conduct and appearance. The military also has a system of authority, termed command (Watters 2004), under which higher ranks can give orders to lower ranks which, if legitimate, must be obeyed under pain of court martial. For officers this power derives from the Queen's Commission, a vestige of the feudal system when all power derived from the Monarch.

Authority then is clearly delineated and predominates. Power in the military however has interesting resonance with Foucault's concept of surveillance. A successful military career rests on a number of bases. Firstly the most senior appointments are reserved for 'warrior' roles. In the Army this would primarily be positions in the Infantry, Household Cavalry and the Royal Armoured Corps ie close combat roles.

For the Navy it would be command of large fighting vessels eg destroyers and battleships and, in the RAF, piloting fast jets. Secondly, a successful career depends on the correct sequence of postings to gain exposure to the right areas of the operation, plus attendance at Staff Courses at particular career junctures. Finally, all officers are subject to an annual report. A single critical report can compromise an individual's career.

The concern is that this system, whilst it delivers compliance, suppresses innovation. Little (2009) commenting about the British Army senior officer performance says that there are serious systemic shortcomings in the system, a 'stay in your lane' mentality and 'It is not unusual to hear UK contemporaries [of his] express the view that there are no heretics left, few non conformists and not enough original thinkers'.

Employment of female and male officers in the UK Armed Forces

The MOD's Defence Agency for Statistical Analysis (DASA) publishes regular information on areas such as manpower and finance

Table 2 below, based on DASA (2009) statistics shows the position of women in the whole of the Armed Forces terms of NATO rank structure.

OF Grade Group	Equivalent Army Rank	Female	% of total	Male	% of total	Total
6-9	1* and above	4	0.8	507	99.2	511
5	Col	41	3.3	1179	96.7	1220
4	Lt Col	216	5.3	3844	94.7	4060
3	Major	990	10.4	8550	89.6	9540
2	Captain	1790	15.2	9980	84.8	11770
1-D	Below Captain	790	17.2	3810	82.8	4600
Totals		3831	12.1	27870	87.9	31701

Table 2 - Source DASA TSP 09 Table 1 01.04.09

Comment on Table 2

The headline figure that women account for 12% of the total and men for 88% is not surprising. An equally important issue is that women constitute a decreasing proportion of the officer population until, at the top level, they represent less than 1%. This is less than industry where one in seven Directors (14.4%) is female (EOC 2006); this in itself is far from satisfactory.

For complex reasons, women in the Armed Forces have not been promoted beyond 1*, and then not into a command position. A consequence is that no contemporary role models of women military leaders exist in the same way as for men. Military leaders such as Field Marshals Slim, Wavell and Montgomery still figure on Staff Course programmes, alongside heroic figures such as Shackleton. Terry (1996) in discussing the lack of role models for women says: 'For the woman it can be extremely difficult to follow a male role model because the attributes he exhibits may be inappropriate or ineffective for the woman leader. This lack of senior women

leader role models makes leader development for women more complex than for men’.

Women are therefore set a double challenge in career progression. The first is to cope with being such a small minority in a traditionally masculine environment. The second is the complex issue of how women can be authentic in such a masculine environment. Herbert (op cit) talks about the stress that women suffer in trying to arrive at a middle position between appearing too feminine or too masculine. If a woman is too feminine, this may lead to accusations of not being soldier-like and using her sexuality to secure favours. On the other hand an overtly masculine approach eg swearing or drinking heavily may lack authenticity. Interestingly, she comments that the range of sanctions applied when women were perceived to be too ‘feminine’ included being ostracised or disapproved of by other women (ibid: 65). Sheppard, in an earlier study of Canadian women managers, identified a similar issue. She describes how women had responded by developing a ‘blending’ strategy:

The blending depends on a very careful management of being ‘feminine’ enough (ie in terms of appearance, self presentation etc) so that conventional rules and expectations of gender behaviour can be maintained by the men in the situation while simultaneously being ‘business like enough’ (ie rational, competent, instrumental’ impersonal – in other words stereo typically masculine) so that the issues of gender and sexuality are apparently minimised in the workplace

(Sheppard 1989:146)

Authority Distribution Model – an experiment

The headline figure in Table 2 is that only 12% of the officer cadre is female, itself a low figure. However I will analyse the figures to identify the impact on authority of the distribution of female officers using an experimental model. We have identified that the military is a hierarchical organisation with authority flowing from the top. It would also follow that officers at the base of the organisation exercise less authority than those at the apex. But by how much?

My hypothesis is that the typical head count in the Army commanded by each rank is a possible proxy for authority exercised. It is not a precise measure because organisational models differ across the services and, within each service as we have seen, some career paths are privileged over others.

OF 1 – D (2nd Lt) would command a platoon or troop of 30 soldiers. OF 2 (captain) is 2 i/c to an OF 3 (Major) so I have bracketed them together. A Major commands a company or battery of 100 men. An OF 4 (Lt Col) commands a battalion or regiment of 500 soldiers. An OF 5 (Colonel) is a Staff position, so I have bracketed them with OF 4s. An OF 6 (Brigadier) commands a brigade of 2000 – 3000 troops whilst an OF 7 (Major General) commands a division of 10,000 soldiers. I have bracketed OF 6-9 together and taken a mean of 4500 soldiers commanded. Having established a base line using the OF 1 – D command, the impact factors can be calculated as shown in Table 3. The result provides for most authority to be vested in the OF6-9 group, which would be expected.

Col 1 Rank	Col 2 Soldiers	Col 3 Impact Factor (rounded)	% of impact Col 3/total col 3	Comment
OF 1 - D	30	1	.5	Base Factor
OF 2	100	3	1.5	Soldiers commanded/Soldiers commanded by OF 1 - D
OF 3	100	3	1.5	As above
OF4	500	17	9	As above
OF 5	500	17	9	As above
OF 6-9	4500	150	78.5	As above
Total		191	100	

Table 3 – calculation of Impact factors

The impact factors can then be applied to the female/male distribution amongst the officer as shown in Table 4.

OF Grade Group	Impact Factor	Total officers	Total Authority	% of females	Total Female Authority	% of males	Total Male Authority
6-9	150	511	76650	0.8	613	99.2	76037
5	17	1220	20740	3.3	684	96.7	20056
4	17	4060	69020	5.3	3658	94.7	65362
3	3	9540	28620	10.4	2976	89.6	25644
2	3	11770	35310	15.2	5367	84.8	29943
1-D	1	4600	4600	17.2	791	82.8	3809
Totals		31701	234940	12.1	14090	87.9	220850

$$\begin{aligned} \% \text{ authority held by females} &= 14090 \text{ divided by } 234940 = 6.0 \\ \% \text{ authority held by males} &= 220850 \text{ divided by } 234940 = 94.0 \end{aligned}$$

Table 4 dispersion of authority

It can be seen from this model that although women account for 12% of the headcount, their impact in terms of the authority they exercise, is reduced to 6%. Kanter (1993) examines the issue of a small number of a particular group eg women, in a (male dominated) environment. Where very small numbers are present, she argues this lead to the concept of tokenism where tokens are members of a sub group that is less than 15%. Tokens encounter a number of problems eg their high visibility leads to performance pressures, or their physical appearance takes on a higher importance than their work performance. She defines a balanced group ie where such issues do not present themselves, as a ratio of between 60:40 to 50:50.

Current operational context

The Strategic Defence Review carried out by the new Labour Government (MOD 1998) and updated in 2003 (MOD 2003) identified that the threat of war between Europe and the USSR had receded and replaced by a future security environment comprising the threats of international terrorism, proliferation of weapons of mass destruction and the wider security risks arising from failed or failing states. Smith (2005) drawing on his distinguished British Army military career opens the work with the sentence ‘War no longer exists’. His thesis is that the nature of conflict has changed and that conventional military force has no use unless this is understood. The old paradigm of nation states waging war in which one loses and the other wins is the old way. Modern conflict, he says, takes place ‘amongst the people’.

The two major UK Armed Forces operations of recent times are: Operation Telic - the invasion of Iraq in 2003-2009, and Operation Herrick - the British contribution from 2003, as part of the NATO-led ISAF force, in Afghanistan. Both were conducted as part of a coalition with the USA. Seven British women have died in the two operations, five from enemy action (Evans 2009).

Current policy rules out women from close combat roles on the basis of their physical capability. This then limits them from advancement to the most senior military posts. It would follow from this that physical strength is an essential attribute to deal with modern military leadership challenges. Dixon, as we saw earlier, questions this.

Aylwin-Foster (2005) has also identified the need to move away from brute force and deploy a more empathetic approach. His controversial critique of the US’s initial and highly aggressive performance in Operation *Iraqi Freedom* states:

Above all a [counter insurgency] COIN approach must have two skills that are not required in conventional war fighting: first it must be able to see issues and actions from the perspective of the domestic population; second it must understand the relative value of force and how easily excessive force even when apparently justified can undermine popular support

(Aylwin-Foster 2005)

Donnelley (2009) argues that the US military then embarked on a fundamental and reflexive review of their doctrine, led by Generals Petraeus and Odierno. Furthermore their new, more engaged, approach has led to perceived operational success, whilst British performances in Basra and Helmand have been criticised. Little (op cit) uses as examples of this new approach, the roles played by special advisers to General Petraeus and Odierno. He describes the work of Emma Sky, an ex British Council employee, and Sadi Othman, a Palestinian Jordanian and ex taxi driver. Emma Sky is of particular interest. Thomas Ricks (2009) in *The Gamble* describes how General Petraeus transformed the US military approach to counter-insurgency operations in Iraq. Petraeus’s style embodies many of the features of transformational leadership described earlier. Ricks gives this cameo of Emma Sky:

In the spring of 2007 she was in a “battle update assessment” as an officer showed gun camera footage of an attack helicopter surprising insurgents

emplacing a bomb and blowing them to bits. This was red meat for officers who had spent years being attacked by anonymous roadside bombers.

“They all loved it,” she recalled, so much so that the officers at the briefing began talking about taking the declassification steps necessary to release the imagery to the media. “We should get this out, get it on TV,” they commented.

Sky was shocked. “These are American versions of jihadi videos,” she interrupted angrily, knowing they would be taken aback by the comparison to decapitation photographs and videos posted on the internet.

“Is this the image you want to present to the world? This is America killing people. Yes, it has to happen. But let's not glorify it.”

Furious, she stood up and strode out of the conference room.

After she left, Odierno discussed her comments with his corps sergeant-major, the highest-ranking enlisted man for tens of thousands of troops.

Half an hour later, the sergeant-major walked into her office. “Ma'am, you're right,” he said, and then hugged her.

(Ricks 2009)

This intervention can be seen as support evidence for the UN Gender Mainstreaming policy referred to earlier. Women do see conflict and violence differently. Women do see the negative consequences of an irresponsible use of force or display of images and, if present, can change male attitudes on these issues.

Discussion

The relationship of the UK Armed Forces with its female officer cadre is complex. The organisation is experiencing significant change in the nature of its task which now constitutes a broad spectrum of activity and an environment where conflict, and the nature of its resolution, is less predictable than in the Cold War era. The traditional physical attributes required for successful operations, although still very important, have now been blended with a requirement for be more empathetic and to have more context sensitive appreciation of operations, as demonstrated by US counter-insurgency doctrine. This chimes well with the ‘new paradigm’ leadership models.

At the same time however, it has a blanket policy that excludes women from close combat arms, primarily on physical capability grounds. There are critical consequences to this policy in that the input of women is potentially denied on other important military tasks involving the combat arms eg peacekeeping and humanitarian scenarios. These are areas of higher activity where the presence of women soldiers would provide a means of dialogue and positive role models for the women victims of such events.

The exclusion of women from close combat roles also relegates them career wise to a lower caste than male officers, thus creating an 'armoured glass' ceiling (Dunn 2007). As Kennedy-Pipe and Welch (ibid:51) comment: 'women's partial exclusion from the military and in particular from combat roles is held to exclude them from an important sphere of value and thus to derogate them'. The irony is that there is emerging evidence that women are more pre-disposed to a transformational leadership style, and their input has helped inform the new, and allegedly successful, US counter insurgency doctrine. This supports the UN Gender Mainstreaming policy.

The headline figure that women represent 12% of the officer cadre needs to be interpreted in the context of their distribution through the rank structure. So we are left with a paradox that the task of defence now conducted by the UK Armed Forces is almost completely a male operation. Women exercise little authority, and are reduced to 'tokens' in Kanter's (ibid) terms, even though they should be equal partners in the project and there is some evidence that they enjoy better skills than men to deal with contemporary conflicts.

The situation is brought about by two systemic inhibitors. The first is their career paths in mainly support functions, which has the effect of limiting their career paths under current policy. The second is the absence of effective childcare support systems; this is a major contributory factor to a shorter ROS and a resultant plateaued career path.

The current UK MOD policy review should address these systemic issues. Further, affirmative based research is required to:

- establish the view points of key stakeholders in this debate, principally serving women possibly through use of an ethnographic approach.
- to examine objectively the practicality of opening all posts to women, drawing on the experiences of other forces such as Canada and Sweden
- to identify the barriers to a more extended Return of Service by women and the actions needed to overcome them

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