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WOMEN IN THE CANADIAN ARMED FORCES: WHY AN INCREASE IN WOMEN CAN INCREASE OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

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By / Par le Major Dennis Mann

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AIM

1. *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* (SSE) is dedicated to leveraging Canada's diversity and has launched several initiatives relating to the recruitment and retention of underrepresented populations within the Canadian Armed Forces (CAF). SSE has directed that the CAF will increase the representation of women from 15 percent to 25 percent by 2025.¹
2. The purpose of this paper is to provide substantiation that an increase in women in the CAF can result in an increased operational effectiveness. This will support recruitment and retention by providing leaders at every level of the organization with the tools and knowledge to lead a positive culture change from within. This will better position the CAF as a desirable option for the continued or future employment of Canadian women.

INTRODUCTION

3. SSE has directed that the CAF will increase the representation of women from 15 percent to 25 percent by 2025.² A significant impediment to reaching this goal is the general lack of understanding of how women can increase operational effectiveness in the CAF.
4. A substantiated understanding of how women can improve operational effectiveness will facilitate a positive culture change that better understands the military value of employing more women. This will result in a more attractive organization for current and future female members. As this is a viewpoint that has traditionally been met with resistance, a more in-depth understanding is necessary.³ To this end, this paper will address common criticisms of women's inclusion in the military and focus on specific examples of how an increased percentage of women in the CAF can improve operational effectiveness. The examples include identification of new and improved capabilities, an improved gender perspective, and the benefit of women acting as vanguard for a more inclusive culture.

DISCUSSION

Background

5. The Strong, Secure, Engaged: The Canadian Defence Policy has stated the goal of increasing the percentage of women in the forces from 15 percent to 25 percent by 2025. This goal was unfortunately substantiated with only a single statement: "This will not only contribute to positive Canadian Armed Forces culture change but will also increase our operational effectiveness".⁴ The problem with this statement is that it is a conclusion for which the

¹ Minister of National Defence. 2017. *Strong Secure Engaged Canada's Defence Policy*. Defence Policy, National Defence, Government of Canada, Minister of National Defence, 23

² (Minister of National Defence 2017), 23.

³ Egnell, Robert. 2016. "Gender Perspectives and Military Effectiveness Implementing UNSCR 1325 and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security." *PRISM* 73 - 89. 74.

⁴(Minister of National Defence 2017), 23.

substantiation is not readily evident. This presents a challenge for leadership at every level of the organization to address resistance to change as the premises from which this conclusion has been drawn. Even the primary supporting documentation, such as the Prime Minister's Elsie Initiative and the United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, merely acknowledge or *reaffirm* the conclusion without providing clarity or amplification.⁵

Criticisms of Integration

6. It is necessary first to address the counter-arguments directly to better equip our members with the knowledge to dispel the propagation of unfounded criticism. The main criticisms of increased female inclusion in the military tend to focus around two main points: the lack of physical fitness and the risk of decreased unit cohesion.⁶

7. The CAF has quite elegantly addressed the first concern of differing physical standards by adopting the FORCE evaluation, a common physical standard regardless of age or gender. Additionally, commanders may set higher standards for operational or occupational requirements, but they remain common for all participants. At no point in this paper is it recommended to lower professional standards in the pursuit of diversification, as such an accommodation would ultimately work counter to the intention of improving operational effectiveness.

8. The second concern focuses around unit cohesion, and that female involvement will disrupt the morale and effectiveness of individual units. Research on this has demonstrated that there is a higher value placed on training and competence not gender, and that female inclusion has not resulted in a detrimental impact to overall cohesion.⁷ Of note, some studies have observed that high levels of social cohesion, more typical in an all-male environment, can have a detrimental effect due to groupthink and reinforcement of negative behaviours.⁸ Therefore, a more diverse culture focused on task cohesion can increase the unit effectiveness.

9. While there were a plethora of objections and emotions when the United States military decided to integrate women fully, the majority have dissipated after ten years of operations. As a result, there has been little or no evidence to substantiate that women in combat roles (or non-combat roles) have resulted in decreased operational effectiveness.⁹ This is even more distant for the CAF having decided to begin to integrate women fully in the 1980's (with the only exception being the ability to serve on submarines, which was lifted in March 2000).¹⁰ Therefore, any additional capability that women can provide will only improve the CAF capabilities as a whole.

⁵ Prime Minister of Canada. 2017. *The Elsie Initiative for Women in Peace Operations*. November 15. Accessed October 11, 2018. <https://pm.gc.ca/eng/news/2017/11/15/elsie-initiative-women-peace-operations>; United Nations. 2000. *Resolution 1325 Women and peace and security*. October 31. Accessed October 11, 2018. <http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325>.

⁶ (Egnell 2016), 79.

⁷ King, Anthony. 2013. "Women on the Front Line: Women in Combat." *The Rusi Journal* 4-11.

⁸ Haring, Ellen L. 2013. "Women in battle What Women Bring to the Fight." *Parameters* 43(2) Summer 2013 27-32.

⁹ (Haring 2013), 31.

¹⁰ National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces. 2014. *Women in the Canadian Armed Forces*. March 06. Accessed October 11, 2018. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/news/article.page?doc=women-in-the-canadian-armed-forces/hie8w7rm>.

New and Improved Capabilities

10. The inclusion of women in the contemporary operating environment yields additional force capabilities. The current operating environment is very different and much more complex than traditional state-on-state warfare of previous generations. Peace operations, humanitarian crisis' and counter-insurgency for example, require additional capabilities that sometimes only women can execute. The cultural factors present in many of the current operating environments can limit male access to parts of the population, specifically women and children. Without female CAF members, there are capability gaps in information gathering, community outreach and relations, and the understanding of the local culture, to name a few. Each of these can improve perceived legitimacy and force protection through the local population. Additional capabilities can include interviewing victims of gender-based violence, engagement in female-only societies and task forces, and mentorship within the female population. These efforts can have second-order effects such as inspiring women and girls to pursue their rights and inclusion in the peace process.¹¹

11. Women's inclusion in teams has been shown to increase the collective intelligence of a group. Research completed by Carnegie Mellon and the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has indicated that an increase in the percentage of women on a team will increase the collective intelligence of the team. This trend is attributed to the higher levels of emotional intelligence and collaborative behaviour displayed by women.¹² This indicates that an increase in the percentage of women in the CAF will support an improved capacity in environments where higher levels of collaboration are desirable such as operational and strategic level planning, senior advisory and policy development groups, and research and innovation initiatives.

Gender Perspective

12. The inclusion of more competent and qualified women in key senior positions will enhance the quality of the gender perspective to CAF operations and activities. Since the release of UNSCR 1325, consideration of the gendered perspective and the gendered based analysis plus (GBA+) have become increasingly accepted as a legitimate value-adding framework, including for the military. The introduction of GBA+ into the CAF has changed the way in which we approach the planning and execution of military operations. Adding a gender perspective has the potential to transform the traditional military paradigm through an increased understanding of the importance of non-traditional security issues such as social, economic, political, cultural, and religious practices.¹³ It seems only prudent to optimize the inclusion of relevant gender perspectives in the planning and execution of operations. This will be most effectively accomplished by having more female CAF members included in the planning and decision-making process at every level.

13. If the CAF wants to have more competent and qualified female personnel in key senior positions, it is only logical to assume that a more extensive selection pool will yield a larger pool of suitably qualified candidates. Currently, there are only 12 female generals in the CAF (out of

¹¹ (Egnell 2016), 77.

¹² (Haring 2013), 27.

¹³ (Egnell 2016), 77.

131) which amounts to approximately 10 percent, the highest in CAF history, but this still falls well short of proportional representation.¹⁴ If the CAF has more women from which to choose, there is a higher probability of effectively selecting and developing the right women for the right senior positions. The alternatives to this are the possibilities of promoting or appointing a woman to a position for which she is unqualified or unsuited, or just not having appropriately qualified women from which to draw. Neither of these alternatives is congruent with increased operational effectiveness. This perspective is not isolated to women, but can also serve as a justification for a much broader CAF diversification.

14. Given that over half of the Canadian population is female, there should be no shortage of capable women able to meet the organizational challenges.¹⁵ This is especially pertinent in a volunteer military that is struggling to fill the ranks across almost every trade while also professing a desire to grow.¹⁶ There are millions of eligible women in Canada that could provide value to the CAF if they chose to apply.

Vanguards for Diversity

15. Women's rights have often served as a vanguard for minority rights and social change. Women getting the right to vote in the 1920's was followed by large-scale entrance to the workforce in the 1940's. Next came the civil rights movements of the 1960's, legal and social change around homosexuality from the late 1960's to the 1990's, and now the expanded cultural movements around LGBTQ2.¹⁷ Increasing equality and inclusion for women have generally supported the increased equality and inclusion for other minority groups. While these movements are not explicitly linked, and not necessarily in unison, the trends toward equality and inclusion assist each other through cultural change and acceptance. If the CAF desires diversity and has determined that this is a viable way to improve military capability, increasing the numbers of women will support long-term efforts toward a more inclusive and diverse CAF.

16. Without a diverse membership, the CAF is at risk of falling out of relatability with the Canadian public. Without this public support, it is conceivable that the CAF will not be employed optimally. If this were to happen, CAF operational effectiveness, and indeed CAF relevance as a whole, could be compromised merely by not being engaged in the world. If the CAF lacks the public support and trust to be employed by the GOC, then the CAF cannot be operationally effective.

17. A positive and inclusive culture, free from internal threats, is more operationally capable of focussing on external threats. *ÆSOP's* fable is a story about four oxen who stand tail to tail whenever a lion threatens them. This way, no matter which way the lion approaches, he is met with horns. However, due to infighting and disagreements, the oxen each eventually go their

¹⁴ Rehman, Mishall. 2018. "Women in the Canadian Armed Forces Throughout the Years." *Canadian Military Family Magazine* 52-55.

¹⁵ Statistics Canada. n.d. *Population estimates on July 1st, by age and sex*. Accessed October 11, 2018. <https://www150.statcan.gc.ca/t1/tbl1/en/tv.action?pid=1710000501&pickMembers%5B0%5D=1.1&pickMembers%5B1%5D=2.3>.

¹⁶ (National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces 2014), 13.

¹⁷ (Justin Trudeau, Prime Minister of Canada, 2017)

separate way and are subsequently picked off by the loin one by one.¹⁸ This example demonstrates the risks of internal threats and the potential failures resulting from a lack of unity. Even if the CAF maintained the same operational capability but effectively managed a culture change that is more inclusive and cohesive, then the capacity to focus on external threats would increase. This is part of the justification under OPERATION HONOUR to eradicate inappropriate behaviour within the CAF.¹⁹ While it is morally necessary to eradicate such behaviour from within the CAF, it is also prudent to do so from the perspective of operational effectiveness.

Implications to the Military Personnel Command

18. The Military Personnel Command (MILPERSCOM) is the only CAF organization positioned with the mandate and resources to undertake such a task. MILPERSCOM is specifically tasked to recruit, train, educate CAF personnel and to implement strategies to maintain the profession of arms.²⁰ Executing a culture change and education process of this size is a substantial endeavour though this initiative is congruent with, but separate from, the culture change efforts that MILPERSCOM is already executing for OPERATION HONOUR.

19. Given the nature of this deficiency and the potential impact on the recruitment and retention of women in the CAF, this initiative should be considered for the military personnel research and analysis program and the military personnel capability development process, as appropriate. This is likely best addressed on the horizon two timeline, the fight of tomorrow, given the time required to develop, educate and change a culture.²¹

CONCLUSION

20. *Strong, Secure, Engaged: Canada's Defence Policy* is dedicated to leveraging Canada's diversity and has launched several initiatives relating to the recruitment and retention of underrepresented populations within the Canadian Armed Forces. SSE has directed that the CAF will increase the representation of women from 15 percent to 25 percent by 2025 and will result in an increase in operational effectiveness.²² Substantiation for this statement was not provided, and a lack of understanding of the value that women can add to the CAF impedes achieving this goal.

21. There has been no significant substantiation that female inclusion in the military has resulted in a decreased operational capability. Concerns about physical strength and unit cohesion have been addressed through common occupational physical standards and a focus on task cohesion based on individual competence and professionalism, not gender.

¹⁸ Sinek, Simon. 2014. *Why Leaders Eat Last*. New York: Penguin Group, 225.

¹⁹ Chief of Defence Staff. 2015. "CDS Op Order – Op HONOUR." *National Defence and the Canadian Armed Forces*. August. Accessed October 12, 2018. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/caf-community-support-services/cds-operation-order-op-honour.page>. Para 13

²⁰ Military Personnel Command. 2017. *Military Personnel Command*. July 06. Accessed October 12, 2018. <http://www.forces.gc.ca/en/about-org-structure/chief-military-personnel.page>.

²¹ Director General Military Personnel. 2008. "Military Personnel Management Doctrine." *Canadian Forces Joint Publication 1.0*. Canadian Armed Forces, June.

²² (Minister of National Defence 2017), 23.

22. It has been shown that women can provide additional military capabilities in a contemporary operating environment such as improved access and engagement in local populations, improved legitimacy and force protection, and increased collective intelligence. From a GBA+ perspective, having more qualified and competent women in key senior positions will improve the operational and strategic activities of the CAF. It follows that a more extensive selection pool of women will yield a larger cadre of qualified and competent women for employment in critical positions. With over half of the Canadian population, there is a vast pool of eligible women for CAF employment. Finally, a more active involvement of women will support a positive culture change and as a result, increased operational effectiveness. A positive CAF culture free from internal threats will be better focused and capable of fighting external threats.

23. By providing leaders at every level of the organization with tools and knowledge of the value of more women within CAF, then a positive culture change of inclusivity and military effectiveness can be led from within. The most effective method of recruitment and retention is to be an organization that people want to be part of. From this perspective, the increased inclusion of women in the CAF is not just the right thing to do; it's the smart thing to do.²³

RECOMMENDATION

24. Consider institutional education on the increased operational effectiveness from having more women in the CAF as a recruitment and retention strategy.

25. Develop training for all levels of CAF and CAF leadership in support of the desired culture change and determine the optimal delivery method.

26. This initiative is recommended for inclusion in the military personnel research and analysis program and the military personnel capability development process as appropriate. This is likely best addressed on the horizon two timeline, the fight of tomorrow.

²³ (Egnell 2016), 74.

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