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## Deploying Women as a Unique Capability in the Canadian Army

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**JCSP 49**

**Service Paper**

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**PCEMI n° 49**

**Étude militaire**

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CANADIAN FORCES COLLEGE - COLLÈGE DES FORCES CANADIENNES

JCSP 49 - PCEMI n° 49  
2022 - 2023

Service Paper – Étude militaire

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# DEPLOYING WOMEN AS A UNIQUE CAPABILITY IN THE CANADIAN ARMY

## AIM

1. The aim of this Service Paper is to discuss the merits of if the Canadian Army (CA) should consider women as a specific capability when Force Generating (FG) positions for operations. The intent is to provide background information on the topic and argue specific literary evidence supports the posit that women bring a unique capability to areas of conflict. As a result, the CA should start taking gender into account when FG based on the specific tasks it will be asked to complete on operations. The CA must move past concepts of gender equality or gender balancing and start to explore the facets of gender mainstreaming. Although this paper will focus solely on the CA, similar review could be completed by both the Royal Canadian Air Force (RCAF) and the Royal Canadian Navy (RCN). Additionally, this paper will focus on the benefits of women related to interaction with the local population, but further analysis should occur on the impact of women on operational culture.

## INTRODUCTION

2. It is proposed that the CA will continue to operate in complex environments into the future across the spectrum of operations. “Those threats and challenges will be diverse, ranging from armed conflict and wars involving increasingly capable state and non-state adversaries in possession of ever more sophisticated and lethal technologies, to state instability and collapse, to humanitarian crises and disaster.”<sup>1</sup> It then follows that the CA needs to continue to evolve innovative concepts for how to thrive in all of these environments. Regardless of the type of operation, there will always be a human factor and the CA has acknowledged the requirement to understand, assist and influence them to set conditions for stability.<sup>2</sup> By understanding this fact, analyzing the specific requirements of an operation and identifying positions to be filled by women, the CA can bring new effects to not only the operation, but more importantly to those civilians who are affected by conflict. It is critical to note that this paper is not about women as a force multiple to help the CA or Canadian Armed Forces (CAF) achieve its’ goals, it is about those specific tasks that should be completed by women to assist women or those other populations most vulnerable during times of conflict.

3. Since 1990 there has been discussion within the United Nations (UN) that women bring a unique capability to conflict. This was culminated in 2000 with the release of United Nations Security Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 – Women Peace and Security. One pillar of this strategy included emphasis on participation of women in the peace process, including women in uniform. Part of the follow on to this resolution, the UN Uniformed Gender Parity Strategy has now set targeted percentage goals for the participation of uniformed women on UN missions. Important to note, that criticism of this approach has been labelled tokenism by pushing emphasis on target goals rather than ensuring gender mainstreaming across the UN. An example of this concept includes the perceived success of UN deployment of fully female police units on operation. Although successful in supporting the WPS agenda and increasing the percentage of women

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<sup>1</sup> Canadian Army, *Close Engagement: Land Power in the Age of Uncertainty* Canadian Army Land Warfare Centre, (2019), 11.

<sup>2</sup> Canadian Army, *Close Engagement: Land Power in the Age of Uncertainty*, 18.

deployed, arguably they did little to actually advance integration of women within the masculine command structure and culture on UN operations. In cases of any international operation, it is the policies of troop contributing nations that will determine how many women will be deployed into each specific position and the CA cannot lose sight of this important fact. This paper will review the evolution of policy related to women, current doctrine on this subject, arguments for the unique skills women can utilize across the spectrum of operations, limit to this concept and provide a recommendation for future action.

## **DISCUSSION**

### **Background**

4. Historically over the past several decades, the CA and overall CAF have had a very specific focus of gender equality within the forces. This policy has allowed men and women equal opportunities to work in any trade, receive equal pay and benefits and equal approach to career advancement based on merit and performance. Along with gender equality, in 2016 focus shifted to the concept of gender balancing when the CAF published specific recruitment targets of women within the military to be 25% by 2026. Yet there is still a strong preference in the occupations and services with women less drawn to combat arm trades within the CA. Both RCN and RCAF are over 20% women, while the CA is only 13.8%.<sup>3</sup> Over the past five years, the CAF along with the UN, and NATO have continued to focus on a gender balanced approach applying it to operations by tracking percentages of deployed women. Within the CAF that information has been sparse and often not published, nor is there evidence that it can be found published by service. To counter the concept of tokenism, the CA should refrain from setting goals focused on percentages of women deployed and instead use metrics that would measure the effect they brought to the operation. For example, ensuring women are in positions where they can complete some of the essential tasks that will be discussed in the next section of this paper, instead of filling traditional support trades that often do not interact with the local population. This will also decrease an added pressure on those women in the CA to deploy too often in support of reaching percentage goals. The concept is that women in key positions supported by a strong leadership focused on gender mainstreaming can have more of an impact than a certain percentage of women in any positions. To achieve this the CA needs to be less focused on a gender balanced force and more focused on gender mainstreaming. Table 1 outlines the clear delineation of terminology and allows the focal of this paper to be where gender mainstreaming intersects operational.

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<sup>3</sup> "Statistics of Women in the Canadian Armed Forces," , accessed Feb, 23, <https://www.canada.ca/en/department-national-defence/services/women-in-the-forces/statistics.html>.

Table 1.1 – Framework

	Institutional	Operational
Gender Balancing	Recruitment campaign aimed to increase the proportion of female service members	Percentage of Women deployed on military operation
Gender Mainstreaming	Integration of Gender Based Analysis as part of personnel training	Integration of gender perspectives on operation

Source: Women and Gender Perspectives in the Military: An International Comparison, 76.

5. Interestingly, the CAF has officially stated in its 2009 annual report to NATO that gender is not a consideration for deployment selection. Additionally, “DND has insisted that it has not collected information specifically about women’s combat experience in Afghanistan, and has no definite plans to do so.”<sup>4</sup> This lack of focus on gender mainstreaming within the CAF was further amplified by the 2022 Barrier Assessment Report that found one of the main barriers to CAF women deploying on UN missions was lack of senior leadership with oversight taking gender into account when selecting for deployment.<sup>5</sup> To date there is no information to support that the CA has analyzed experience or effects of women in ground operations.

## Current Doctrine

6. In 2016 the CAF released direction on UNSCR 1325 and formally directed Gender Based Analysis Plus (GBA+) as a tool to take gender and other intersectional considerations into account across the institution including operations.<sup>6</sup> Specific to the Line of Effort (LoE) on operation, the Chief of Defense Staff (CDS) directed increased education and training including specific legal and policy guidance related to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). Doctrinally in the CAF, the concept of gender mainstreaming is not specifically named. It is mentioned once within Canada’s Defence Policy as “the routine consideration of gender in public policy development”<sup>7</sup> Arguably within this document, more prominence remains on gender balance by noting that the CAF remains a leader in this field with their goal of 25% women by 2026. The policy has an entire annex dedicated to the use of GBA+ as the tool that was integral in the creation of the document and for future use in all defence policy. The annex then goes on to discuss how the tool will help with gender balancing policy, eliminate harmful behavior, and ensure diversity in the CAF. It does not link GBA+ to gender mainstreaming or to operations within the CAF.

<sup>4</sup> Robert Egnell and Mayesha Alam, *Women and Gender Perspectives in the Military: An International Comparison*, ed. Robert Egnell and others (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, [2019].), 79.

<sup>5</sup> Department of National Defence, *Elsie Initiative Barrier Assessment* (Canada: [2022]). D2-626-1-2022-eng.pdf (publications.gc.ca), 22.

<sup>6</sup> J. H. General Vance, *CDS Directive for Integrating UNSCR 1325 and Related Resolutions into CAF Planning and Operations*, Department of National Defence, (2016), 13.

<sup>7</sup> Department of National Defence, *Strong Secure Engaged Canada's Defence Policy*, Government of Canada, (2017), 105.

7. The main publication that presents the gender mainstreaming concept is Gender Perspectives on Operations. Although the term is not specifically used in the document, it focuses on how to integrate gender into the Operational Planning Process including the role of Gender Focal Points and Gender Advisors. It outlines the critical factor that gender and intersectional considerations are not a women's problem but a responsibility of all members of the institution. This is an important facet for the CA to consider when understanding the role of women in operations and not putting an onerous amount of pressure on them to be the members carrying the extra burden of gender mainstreaming. For example, it should not be assumed the best person to be a gender advisor or gender focal point is a woman. There does exist a visible gap within this doctrine that is important for the CA to recognize. Although it identifies the interaction between military and civilians at the tactical level and how gender perspectives can play a role in enhancing and shaping those interactions, it does not give context for how this can be achieved. Consequently, it would be outside of current doctrine for the CA to adopt this new approach of force generating women as a capability and to identify the important role of women in operations at the tactical level.

### **Leveraging Unique Skills of Women within Limits**

8. There are a multitude of arguments to support the unique skills that uniformed women bring to a conflict specifically related to Peace Support Operations (PSO), but can be useful in many other types of operations. The UN Security General outlined that women in uniform are better able to interact with women in the local population, assist with the prevention and reporting of gender-based violence and can be less confrontational.<sup>8</sup> Community engagement between women allows the military to gain an understanding of gender perspectives and issues in the local area.<sup>9</sup> Some sensitive tasks including assisting and talking to victims of sexual violence, body searches, and house searches should arguably be completed by women.<sup>10</sup> Additionally, the visibility of women to the local population is also proposed to increase visibility, credibility and image of the operational force. Women resolve disputes with more de-escalation which builds trust and stability within communities. Finally, argument is also made that just having women peacekeepers, regardless of their role, can give hope and serve as inspiration to young women within the location population.<sup>11</sup>

9. The key to any of these arguments is that there must be a leadership structure and chain of command willing to accept the information and know how to utilize it. Argued in the book Deploying Feminism, using the Women Peace and Security norms in operation is not enough. The most famous example of this misrepresentation of the WPS agenda is the building of a water well in Afghanistan. After an information gathering session with local women, coalition forces become aware that the women of the village must travel far distances each day to collect water. As a result, the forces build the village a well which the women keep trying to destroy because

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<sup>8</sup> "Deployment of Female Personnel Boosts Effectiveness, Says Secretary-General, as Security Council Holds Open Debate on Women in Peacekeeping ." *UN Press*, Apr 11, 2019. <https://press.un.org/en/2019/sc13773.doc.htm>.

<sup>9</sup> Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace and Security*, eds. Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, 1st ed. (New York, NY: Oxford University Press, 2019), 114.

<sup>10</sup> Davies, *The Oxford Handbook of Women, Peace and Security*, 214.

<sup>11</sup> Sara Martin, *This is More than Just a Numbers Game: Cultural Barriers for Women's Contributions to UN Peacekeeping Operations*, Canadian Forces College, Department of National Defence (2022), 11.

they liked the time spent together each day walking to gather water. In this instance the use of a women soldier to gather information was a success, but lack of overall cultural understanding to utilize this information in a positive way failed. This example von Hlatky argues has made WPS norms in the military about operational effectiveness and that NATO has “made war safe for women rather than challenging military entrenchment in the way the international community approaches conflict resolution.”<sup>12</sup> However she concludes that even with militarizing the norms of the WPS agenda, there is benefit in their purpose. This is evident in the fact that they have been institutionalized across policy, training and organization structure with the addition of gender advisors. Yet, she believes that these norms have been institutionalized to gain traction and funding by arguing the operational effectiveness angle instead of the focus which should be on advancing overall WPS gender equality policy.<sup>13</sup>

## CONCLUSION

10. Women deployed as a capability in key roles on operations is not about the CA’s ability to FG so the CAF can achieve operational goals. Separate from this concept of a force multiplier to increase operational effectiveness, women bring unique skills across the CA spectrum of operations that can benefit those local affected populations, especially those that are most vulnerable. Given the future operating environment of the CA, it would be valuable to analyze how women can most be utilized in these environments. This service paper has reviewed the background for the WPS agenda and how it has been integrated into the CAF including operational planning using the GBA+ tool over the last decade. Next, it outlined the need to shift focus away from a gender balanced mindset and approach to tracking operational statistics, and instead focus on gender mainstreaming. It further has identified gaps and shortfalls within current doctrine to identify how the CA can adopt a gender mainstreaming mentality when FG positions to ensure women are used in roles specific to that operation.

## RECOMMENDATION

11. After review of the relevant information, the following are recommended:
- a. Although required for statistical purposes, CA should refrain from tracking success of women involvement on operations based on percentages deployed;
  - b. Implement an approach to identify key positions on operations where the local population would benefit from interaction with women;
  - c. Start to analyze the experiences and effects of deployed women on operation; and
  - d. Ensure sufficient training is given to operational leadership to understand gender mainstreaming concepts and how to analyze information collected from the local population that affects those gender and other intersectional diverse populations.

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<sup>12</sup> Stefanie von Hlatky, *Deploying Feminism: The Role of Gender in Nato Military Operations*, Oxford University Press, (2022),18.

<sup>13</sup> von Hlatky, *Deploying Feminism: The Role of Gender in Nato Military Operations*, 179.

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