



Women in the Arab Armed Forces

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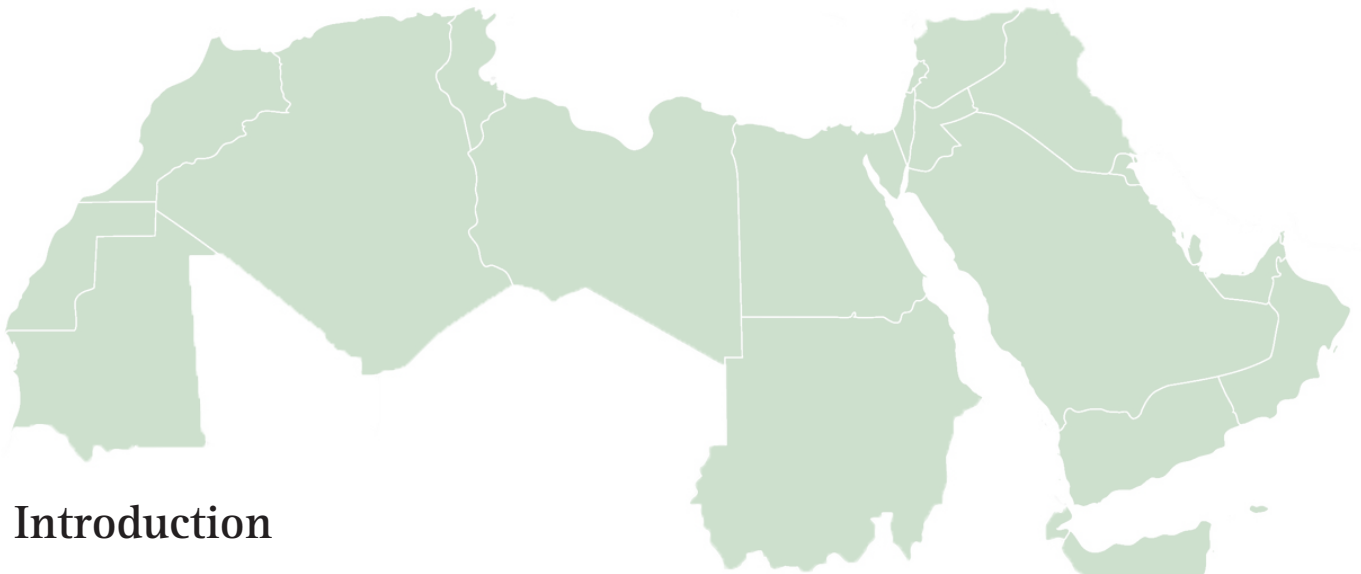
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List of Acronyms

NATO	North Atlantic Treaty Organization
PNA	People's National Army
FLN	National Liberation Front
NLA	National Liberation Army
NCO	Non-Commissioned Officers
EAF	Egyptian Armed Forces
JAF	Jordanian Armed Forces
EAPC	Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council
UNSCR	United Nations Security Council Resolution
JONAP	Jordanian National Action Plan
DMWA	Directorate of Military Women's Affairs
LAF	Lebanese Armed Forces
NAP	National Action Plan
MR	Ministerial Resolutions
GFP	Gender Focal Point
SAF	Syrian Armed Forces
IS	Islamic State Organization
RYU	Revolutionary Youth Union
MSA	Military Service Act
TAF	Tunisian Armed Forces



Introduction

For the last thirty years, women's enrollment in Western armies has been intensely debated. The advocates of women's integration in the military assert the equal right of women to serve alongside men, including in combat roles. Opponents argue that their very presence, as well as their alleged physical inferiority, undermines the *esprit de corps* and combat performance of what has historically been a male institution.¹ In the midst of this debate, the number of women wearing the uniform of North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) countries increased from 30,000 in 1961 to 288,000 in 2001.² In 2018, women constituted 40 percent of NATO's international staff, with 25 percent holding senior positions. As for the International Military Staff, women made up 16.8 percent of personnel.³

By comparison, the integration of women in Arab armies has been inconsistent, slow, and socially and politically problematic. Nevertheless, this situation is gradually changing, and even a country with significant

patriarchal norms and strict gender segregation, such as Saudi Arabia, has allowed for the recruitment of women in the military as border guards.⁴ The debate about how and where women should train and serve and to what extent they should be integrated persists. Nevertheless, efforts toward having more gender-inclusive Middle East and North Africa (MENA) armies have to be acknowledged.

The integration of women in Arab armies has taken place at different levels and in various ways. As a result, it is difficult to draw up a precise and clear mapping among MENA countries. This study will give particular attention to the countries with longer histories of women in service, often dating back to wars of independence in the 1950s and 1960s. Furthermore, the country selection was limited to those for which information is available. Thus, this list is not exhaustive. The long-term goal of our team is to expand the primer to cover all MENA countries.

1. Helena Carreiras, "The military institution and social change", in *Gender and the Military: Women in the Armed Forces of Western Democracies*, (Routledge, 2006), 72-97.

2. Vicki Nielsen, "Women in Uniform", *NATO Review*, 2001, <https://bit.ly/2psNShf>

3. "The Secretary General's Annual Report 2018", NATO, March 15, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2MJCm9w>

4. "Saudi Arabia to recruit first-ever women border guards", *The New Arab*, June 11, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2HLXOWG>

Algeria

Algeria

Women in the Algerian People's National Army (PNA): An Overview

In North Africa, the Algerian PNA is an example of good practice in terms of recruiting women and acknowledging their rights. In 2006, the status of Algerian servicewomen was made legally equal to that of men, and the PNA has since put in place a formal policy framework for equal opportunities irrespective of gender.⁵

From 2009 onwards, women have been able to reach the highest ranks in the military. In 2009, Fatima Zohra Ardjoune, director-general of the Ain Naâdja military hospital, was the first woman to be promoted to the position of general, followed in 2012 by Fatima Boudouani and, in 2015, by three more women.⁶

Algeria has been able to effectively raise the number of women enlisted in the armed forces. Today, the country has 30 times more women enrolled in the PNA than at the beginning of their enlistment in 1978. Women are now accepted in the School of Cadets of the Nation, the National Academy of Military Health, the Regional School of Maintenance of Transmission Material, and lately, the Naval Academy as well as the National Gendarmerie.

A Brief History of Women in the PNA

While it is true that Algerian women participated in the struggle for independence from France (1954-1962), their participation was not the primary goal of either the National Liberation Front (FLN) or the

National Liberation Army (NLA). The latter recruited them for practical reasons, mainly for the optimization of resources. Furthermore, no woman ever reached a leadership position in the FLN/NLA during the war of independence. Back then, the number of women in the ranks barely reached 3 percent of the total force of what was called “the *Mujahideen*”.⁷ The majority of women, around 82 percent, were *mussabilet*,⁸ and only 2 percent were fighters.⁹

At the end of the war in 1962, the NLA converted into a regular force and took the name of the People's National Army (PNA), yet there was no recruitment policy for women at that time. Women could, however, work as civilian employees in administrative and secretarial positions. Under President Houari Boumédiène, women were finally allowed to join the military as officers and non-commissioned officers (NCOs).

Women's enrollment was suspended in 1986, to be resumed in 2001. This step was justified in terms of expenditure reduction. The growth in the number of women joining the PNA after 1978 had a direct effect on the management of personnel. According to retired military personnel interviewed in Algeria, the costs incurred for training and recruiting women were too high. The recruitment of women implied building new facilities and increased expenditures related to their turnover and maternity leave. Since then, the fields that women can join have been expanded from administrative tasks to military manufacturing, research and development, social services, finance, health, and education.¹⁰

5. “Conventions et accords internationaux - lois et decrets arretes, decisions, avis, communications et annonces”, Official Journal of the Algerian Republic, no. 12 (March 1, 2006), <https://bit.ly/2MhQVSS>.

6. Mounir Kechar, “Pr Fatima Zohra Ardjoune, la première femme générale de l'armée algérienne”, AlgerLaBlanche.com, March 31, 2014, <http://bit.ly/2D6x7g3>

7. Djamila Amrane, “Les combattantes de la guerre d'Algérie”, *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, 26 (1992): 59.

8. These women were militants and their main task was to host and nurse the mujahideen.

9. Djamila Amrane, “Les combattantes de la guerre d'Algérie”, *Matériaux pour l'histoire de notre temps*, 26 (1992): 59.

10. “ANP: Histoire et mémoire du cinquantenaire”, special issue, *El Djeich*, no. 3 (April 2013), <https://bit.ly/2qkjZk1>

Recruitment and Employment

The shift to a more gender-equitable policy happened in the PNA in 2006, when former President Bouteflika (1999–2019) decided by decree in February 2006 that the status of women in the military should be equal to that of men. The PNA took serious measures to facilitate and ensure fuller participation by women. The decree granted women equality to men in recruitment, training, promotion, and benefits. Nevertheless, women were still excluded from units that perform combat missions (i.e., infantry, artillery, armored branches, and air force combat units).¹¹

It has been a long journey for Algerian women to join the military, but change has happened, and their status and roles have evolved. However, several challenges remain. Despite the five female generals, who represent a significant first, high-ranking women in the Algerian military are still difficult to find.

The Algerian government took into consideration factors specific to women, such as maternity leave and their length of service. Female officers with the rank of lieutenant colonel or higher may, according to Article 20 of the presidential decree, benefit, on request, from a three-year reduction of the regular retirement age. Extended leave to servicewomen – officers and NCOs – in the case of an accident or severe illness suffered by a direct family member (spouse, child, or the legitimate subject of legal sponsorship, known as *kafala*) is granted in Article 98.¹²

Female personnel who want to follow their spouse for professional reasons, to raise a child under the age of three, or to take care of an incapacitated family member who requires continuous care are allowed extended leave. This is also granted – only for a nonrenewable term of twelve months – to female personnel who want to study, conduct research, or take time off for personal reasons. Finally, the 2006 ordinance exempts female officers from certain obligations such as night duty.¹³

As of 2019, women have been admitted to Algeria's cadet academy, where they accounted for 18 percent of all recruits according to the latest data available in the official PNA's magazine, *El Djeich*.¹⁴ In 2013, the Naval Academy welcomed the first batch of female officer cadets, constituting 29 women out of the 92 total admitted, representing 31.5 percent.¹⁵ Women have also been accepted into the Special Military Academy, the National Gendarmerie Academy, the Academy of Military Administration, the National Academy of Military Health, and the Regional School of Maintenance of Transmission Material.

11. "Conventions et accords internationaux - lois et decrets arretes, decisions, avis, communications et annonces", Official Journal of the Algerian Republic, no. 12 (March 1, 2006), <https://bit.ly/2MhQVSS>

12. Ibid.

13. Ibid.

14. The PNA's Official Magazine, *El Djeich*, no. 601 (August 2013).

15. Ibid.

Challenges

It has been a long journey for Algerian women to join the military, but change has happened, and their status and roles have evolved. However, several challenges remain. Despite the five female generals, who represent a significant first, high-ranking women in the Algerian military are still difficult to find. Women's access to decision-making positions is minimal as they suffer from a traditional, gender-based division of labor. Women in the PNA are concentrated in the health department, where they constitute 17 percent of the total number of military health personnel.¹⁶ The other majority is in the education sector, as military instructors, researchers, or scientists.¹⁷

It is hard to find data on women occupying senior ranks, yet it is revealing to see that on the day that Fatima Zohra Ardjoune became the first woman to be promoted to the rank of general, 51 men also became

generals. This lack of proportion can be explained by the fact that women were first admitted to the military at a time when men already had access, so women have reached the strict time-in-service requirements for promotion later than men have.¹⁸

Another obstacle for women's limited integration in the PNA is their exclusion from the infantry, armored branches, and field-artillery, which are assigned combat roles. This ban is extended to combat air force units, as well. To justify this exclusion, physiological differences between men and women are the most cited.¹⁹

As a result of this exclusion, women cannot command military operations and, therefore, do not have access to the same ranks as men (i.e., ranks above the level of commander). Hence, they are unable to take part in the decision-making process that changes the lives and careers of women in the institution.

16. "ANP: Histoire et mémoire du cinquantenaire", *El Djeich*, no. 3: 25.

17. *Ibid.*

18. Dalia Ghanem, "Women in the Men's House: The Road to Equality in the Algerian Military", Carnegie Middle East Center, November 4, 2015, <https://bit.ly/35GbwaH>

19. Interviews conducted in Algiers with former military personnel in 2015.

Women in the Egyptian Armed Forces (EAF): An Overview

Gender-based roles have continued to be the foundation of gender policies in the EAF. Although the constitution ensures gender equality (Article 11),²⁰ people's attitudes towards women's integration in the military hinder the efforts to improve gender equality in the defense sector. At the end of the 1940s, female military personnel joined the military as nurses and occupied administrative positions. In 2004, the EAF allowed the first female enrolled at the Technical Institute of Nursing Military to become a nurse paratrooper. Yet, minimal progress has been seen since 2011. The government has offered only promises without serious efforts to improve gender integration in the military, in scale and scope.

A Brief History of Women in the EAF

In 1948, during the Arab-Israeli war, women joined the EAF for the first time as specialized military personnel, and their role was limited to nursing and administrative positions.²¹ Over the years, females' progress remained restricted, where they continued performing the same administrative tasks. In 2004, under the former Minister of Defense Field Marshal Hussein Tantawi's rule (1991–

2012), Major Rehab Abdelhalim was the first female to join the paratrooper forces. Yet, Major Abdelhalim joined as a nurse and not a fighter.²² Both Defense Minister Tantawi and his successor, General Sedky Sobhy (2014-2018), supported a minimal expansion of women's role in the EAF.²³

Since 2011, the perception of women in the defense sector has marginally improved. In 2013, Jihad El-Komy created the *Moganada Masriya* (Egyptian Female Conscription) campaign, calling for female conscription and participation in combat roles. The movement was supported by the head of the National Council for Women and Prime Minister Ibrahim Mehleb. Subsequently, the latter promised to consider enrolling women into different branches of the EAF.²⁴ A few years later, in 2017, the National Council for Women set "The National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030", hoping to achieve it by 2030. However, the strategy only included female police officers and disregarded the military.²⁵

Recruitment and Employment

According to Article 11 of Egypt's Constitution, the state is devoted "to achieving equality between women

20. "Constitution 2014- Arab Republic of Egypt", [Dostor 2014, Jumhuriyat Masr Al Arabiya], Article 10 & 11, WIPO, <https://bit.ly/2I3h6Ju>

21. Noura Al Nashar, "First female "lieutenant" in the army: The state did not appreciate the role I played and I feel I am begging for medical treatment from it" [awal sayida «mulazim» fi aljaysh: aldawla lam tuqader aldawr al lazi qumt bihi wa 'ashor «nani «atasawal al ilaj minha], Youm7, October 20, 2012, <https://bit.ly/2W9QINs>

22. Dalia Hassan, "Dalia Hassan and a meeting with the leading / Rehab Abdel Halim Mahmoud - the butterfly of paratroopers in the armed forces - Sayidati" [Dalia Hassan waliqa» ma3 alraed/ Rehab Abdulhalim Mahmoud- farashet almizallat bi alquwwat almusalaha - sayidati], Sayidati, March 30, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2LP18Kv>

23. Shuwi Issam, "Will the "Egyptian Female Soldier" Campaign succeed in bringing girls into the Egyptian army?" [hal tanjah hamlat «moganada masriya» fi «idkhal alfatiat liljaysh almasri?], eremnews, July 27, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2WWFR0K>

24. N.A. Hussein, "Egypt women fight for right to army combat posts", Al-Monitor, March 29, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2WsqcIU>

25. "The National Strategy for the Empowerment of Egyptian Women 2030", National Council for Women, March 2017, <https://bit.ly/2Ht9IMH>

and men in all civil, political, economic, social, and cultural rights” and ensures women’s right to access high managerial and public posts.²⁶ In reality, military conscription is limited to men between the ages of 18 and 30.²⁷ Although the constitution does not mention any obligations related to women, it is customary that women are enrolled as specialized officers in administrative positions, nurses, and assistant civil servants.²⁸

In 1948, during the Arab-Israeli war, women joined the EAF for the first time as specialized military personnel, and their role was limited to nursing and administrative positions.

Conditions and requirements to join the Technical Institute of Nursing Military of the EAF apply to both men and women. In order to be enlisted, both genders have to fulfill the following requirements: be of Egyptian ancestry, be between 17 and 21 years old, hold a high school diploma, be disciplined and well behaved, and obtain parental consent. Those who successfully join, graduate after two years as Sergeant volunteers with a diploma.²⁹

Women with a degree in nursing or psychology can also be admitted to the War College’s Nursing Institute. They undergo six months of training instead of two years and graduate at the rank of officer.³⁰ Similar to the enlisted personnel, admitted male volunteers should be single and never married. Only after graduating and obtaining a license to practice the profession are volunteers allowed to marry.³¹

There are no apparent restrictions on women’s promotion in the EAF. However, based on the available information, the highest-ranking female officer is Major Rehab Abdelhalim.

26. “Constitution 2014- Arab Republic of Egypt”, [Dostor 2014, Jumhuriyat Masr Al Arabiya], WIPO, <https://bit.ly/2I3h6Ju>

27. “Country Policy and Information Note Egypt: Military service”, UK Home Office, March 2017, <https://bit.ly/2kMtPIQ>

28. Wissam Abdul Aalim, “Al Ahram Gate publishes the Commissioners’ report on the imposition of compulsory military service on females” [“Bawabat al Ahram” tanshir taqrir “almufawdin” bisha’n fard alkhidma al aaskaria al ilzamia ala al inath], Al Ahram, October 30, 2013, accessed October 15, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2P2Mb1N>

29. Zaki Al Kadi, “The armed forces announced the acceptance of a new batch of males and females in health institutes” [al quwwat almusalahat tu3lin qabul dufah jadida bi almaahid alsohiya zukur wa iinath], Youm7, June 25, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2Hz5kGf>

30. “Announcement of accepting a new batch of university graduates in the military college” [al e3lan ean qobul dof3a jadida min khariji aljamiaat bi al kulya al harbial], Egyptian Armed Forces- Ministry of Defense, March 29, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2ZjlyLe>

31. Ibid.

Challenges

Women in the EAF saw slight progress in their status in 2011 after their static presence since 1948. However, many challenges remain. Attitudes towards women's position in the military are one of the main challenges for female integration in the EAF. Military officials tend to hold biased beliefs that relegate women to specific roles that suit their gender and push for the idea that women are incapable of performing what are perceived to be male tasks.³²

Legal and constitutional factors are another challenge in Egypt. Although Article 11 of the Egyptian constitution ensures gender equality, Article 10 upholds family values and cohesion based on religion and patriotism.

The latter is used as a tool to oppose women's progress and reinforce traditional norms. For example, in 2016, Al Azhar's Supreme Council issued a *fatwa* [religious edict] stating that female recruitment in the military is against the *shari'a* as it constitutes humiliating hardships on women.³³

Lastly, there is a lack of political buy-in and female presence in the decision-making process in the defense sector. This can hinder women's advancement in roles and ranks. For example, the National Council for Women's gender strategy published in 2017, did not address women in the military,³⁴ although President Abdul Fattah Al Sisi announced 2017 as the "Year of the Egyptian Woman".³⁵

32. Shuwi Issam, "Will the "Egyptian Female Soldier" Campaign succeed in bringing girls into the Egyptian army?" [hal tanjah hamlat «moganada masriya» fi «idkhal alfatiat liljaysh almasri?], eremnews, July 27, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2WWFR0K>

33. N.A. Hussein, "Egypt women fight for right to army combat posts", Al Monitor, March 29, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2WsqcIU>

34. Ibid.

35. Ibid.

Jordan

Jordan

Women in the Jordanian Armed Forces (JAF): An Overview

In general, gender diversification of the armed forces is likely to help a country adapt to new security threats. Jordan is a good case in point. Aligning with the NATO and Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) policy to implement United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security, the JAF developed the Jordanian National Action Plan (JONAP). This plan aimed to increase women's enrollment and training and strengthen their presence. Subsequently, Jordan was able to create broader participation and employment opportunities.

Jordan has increased the number of women enlisted in the military while expanding their roles. In 2006, out of the approximately 100,500 personnel of the JAF, around 4,883 women were serving in uniform in Jordan: 1,203 officers, 2,421 servicewomen, and 1,259 civilians.³⁶ Until March 2019, females in the JAF constituted approximately 1.5 percent of the total military force (excluding medical services).³⁷ Besides, women can enroll as civilian employees or as officers, NCOs, or enlisted personnel. Their pay, promotions, and length of military service are equal to those of men.

Because of these efforts, the JAF has succeeded in attracting more women over the past ten years, which has helped in expanding and diversifying its talent pool. This gives the JAF the opportunity to choose recruits with the best combination of skills, regardless of gender. Women's desire to join the JAF is such that

the applications received exceed the Jordanian military need.³⁸

A Brief History of Women in the JAF

Women were allowed in the JAF as far back as 1950, where they worked in the education sector in military schools. Their low numbers persisted until the establishment of Princess Muna Nursing College in 1962. Three years later, only eight female graduates were enrolled and awarded the rank of second lieutenant at the Royal Medical Services Directorate.³⁹

In 1973, several university students were recruited as officers to serve in the general command's directorates in administrative posts, as secretaries, writers, computer software engineers, accountants, and media personnel. The creation of the Directorate of Military Women's Affairs (DMWA) in 1995 was a turning point for women's career advancement in the JAF. It enhanced their role in training, recruitment, promotion, and participation in the military.⁴⁰

The Directorate was also responsible for carrying out studies and research to develop working methods for the implementation of policies that serve to elevate women's performance as well as their quality of life. After the 2005 Amman bombings – which involved a female jihadist, Sajida Mubarak Atrous al-Rishawi, killing 57 people and injuring 115 – Jordanian authorities became aware of the need to expand women's enrollment in new units, especially those tasked with counterterrorism and intelligence.⁴¹

36. National Report, "Jordan Armed Forces 2006", NATO, Jordan Brief, 2006, <https://bit.ly/2MgxAkC>

37. Presentation of Brigadier General Sana Al Sarhan in a workshop on women in the military, Carnegie Middle East Center, Beirut, March 8, 2017.

38. National Report, "Jordan Armed Forces 2006", NATO, Jordan Brief, 2006, <https://bit.ly/2MgxAkC>

39. Ibid.

40. Ibid.

41. Hassan Fattah, Michael Slackman, "Bomb blasts kill scores at 3 hotels in Jordan / 115 people hurt, Amman locked down - no group claims responsibility, but suspicion falls on leader of al Qaeda in Iraq", New York Times, November 10, 2005, <https://bit.ly/32lkzVL>

Recruitment and Employment

A gender-equal committee in the JAF drafted the JONAP that was endorsed in December 2017 and formally launched in March 2018. The latter aimed at expanding women's recruitment to new sectors and command positions. It also sought to improve the quality and the performance of the military, in general, and women's training and education, in particular.

Women, like their male counterparts, are selected after passing strict examinations (medical and mental health, command tasks, physical fitness, and leadership). Once these examinations and interviews conclude, the selected personnel join the Royal Military Academy for basic training. Afterward, they are assigned to their units and undertake specialized classes according to their focus area and rank.⁴²

Today, women in the JAF have access to various positions, including those that used to be confined to men, such as the air force, the military police, the royal guard protection unit, and military intelligence. The highest rank reached by a woman is Brigadier General in the General Headquarters and Major General in the Royal Medical Services. Women are also involved in various operations overseas, in medical units such as in Congo with the Second Line Hospital, in Liberia with the Third Line Hospital, and in Afghanistan with the force of Afghanistan 222 and 333.⁴³

Women are promoted and paid like their male counterparts. Also, they are allowed three months paid maternity leave, and two years unpaid leave for various

reasons, which are not accounted for when calculating for promotion to the next higher rank.

Challenges

Jordanian women can enroll as civilian employees or as military personnel. Their recruitment, training, pay, promotions, and length of military service are equal to those of their male counterparts. However, several challenges remain. Efforts must be made to increase female enrollment, as their number remains very modest. For instance, only 40 women have been deployed during the last ten years, out of 61,611 Jordanian peacekeepers including both men and women. In addition, despite the efforts towards enhancing women's presence in the military, they remain absent from decision-making positions in the JAF.

The absence of a sufficient infrastructure continues to be one of the main obstacles. There is a crucial need to improve and set up female facilities to increase women's integration. Attempts to appoint a gender focal point (GFP) at the DMWA have been made but remained unsuccessful. The main objective of the JONAP is to increase women in the JAF from 1.5 percent to 3 percent of the total force outside the military medical sphere.

In 2017, the JONAP also aimed to establish training and rehabilitate centers in the JAF dedicated to women. Since then, a new center in the Ghebawi region has been established to cater to the increasing number of women and to conduct national and international trainings.

42. Presentation of Brigadier General Sana Al Sarhan in a workshop on women in the military, Carnegie Middle East Center, Beirut, March 8, 2017.

43. Rana Hussein, "Role of Jordanian women in peacekeeping missions lauded", The Jordan Times, May 23, 2016, <https://bit.ly/25jNlfk>

Lebanon

Lebanon

Women in the Lebanese Armed Forces (LAF): An Overview

The LAF has been a microcosm for Lebanon's inconsistent gender policies. The military first opened up to women at the end of the civil war, in 1990. Throughout the 1990s, the LAF accepted female cohorts in limited specialized fields, starting with administrative positions and branching out to military police and other key units.⁴⁴ By the end of the 2000s, the number of women increased but remained low proportional to the overall force.

The number of female military personnel has fluctuated over the past three decades. Nevertheless, those enrolled in the LAF have progressively risen up in rank throughout the years, without obstacles.

The population and LAF's views towards women in the military have also evolved. In the first two decades, female officers faced resistance inside and outside the LAF when they joined the military. Since then, societal and military perceptions have grown to support the integration of women in the LAF.⁴⁵

A Brief History of Women in the LAF

In January 1990, the government announced its first call for women to join the military. The event coincided with the Taef Agreement, which ended the civil war, and was followed by the decision to rebuild the LAF.⁴⁶

The number of women reached 2,000 in 2009, then decreased to around 1,000 out of approximately 70,000 military personnel right before 2017, and finally increased again to 4,000 in 2019, making up 5 percent of some 80,000 personnel.⁴⁷ The recent surge in female enrollment is linked to the LAF Command's prioritization of gender equality in the military. Until August 2019, the LAF had 8 female general officers, spread across administrative and medical units, and 17 colonels, with a total of 57 women in its officer corps.⁴⁸

Following the appointment of General Joseph Aoun as the Commander of the LAF in March 2017, the LAF Command brought female integration back to the forefront. Since then, their presence has progressively increased in scale and scope. The LAF stated that its goal is to steadily expand female military personnel's positions from administrative to combat units in the long term. The LAF also began updating the legal provisions governing women's recruitment to fit the current trend, but nothing has been published or announced.⁴⁹

In September 2019, Lebanon launched its first national action plan (NAP), for 2019–2022, to implement UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security. The plan sets measures to increase women's participation and representation in the defense and security sector, including the LAF.⁵⁰

44. "Women in the LAF", Lebanese Army, <https://bit.ly/32IEcDU>

45. Sergeant Christina Abbas, "From Administration to Fighting ... Leading Women in the Military" [min al'idara ila alqital... nisa' ra'idat fi aljaysh], *Al Jaysh Magazine*, no. 408, (June, 2019), <https://bit.ly/32zYbhz>

46. Ibid.

47. Dina Arakji, "Females in the Ranks", Carnegie Middle East Center, June 19, 2019, <https://bit.ly/35F16uI>

48. Samar Faddoul, "The woman imposes her exception in the army ... an important precedent to be adopted this year" [almana tafrud istithna'iyatiha fi aljaysh... sabiqa muhima satoutamad hathihi alsana], *Al Joumhouria*, August 1, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2qI5pCJ>

49. Episode 387, "Soldier Program", Lebanese Army, <https://bit.ly/2FZD3J6>

50. "Lebanon Government Adopts National Action Plan on Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security", UNSCOL, September 12, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2p9Q2ms>

Recruitment and Employment

Since the early 1990s, ministerial resolutions (MR) have regulated women's enrollment. In 1989 and 1991, the government issued MR 376 and 839, respectively, acting as a foundation for women's integration. For example, MR 839, passed in 1991, set a 10 percent target for female recruitment into the active force. Article 3 limited non-combat roles for women and Article 4 ensured male and female soldiers received the same training.⁵¹

The number of women reached 2,000 in 2009, then decreased to around 1,000 out of approximately 70,000 military personnel right before 2017, and finally increased again to 4,000 in 2019, making up 5 percent of some 80,000 personnel.

Female volunteers join the LAF as specialized military personnel, and almost all hold bachelor's degrees. In 1990, the first groups of women volunteers held degrees in medicine, information technology, and management. By the end of the decade, the LAF succeeded in enlisting specialized women as soldiers and NCOs, who were then promoted to the rank of lieutenant.⁵²

Women's positions in the military were limited to non-combat roles, occupying only administrative positions. Over time, they ascended to far more critical units, with women now participating in combat units. For example, women joined the military police and were stationed in high-risk areas such as the Wadi Hmeid checkpoint in Arsal, one of the most dangerous deployment points, to search female suspects.⁵³ In 2017, female integration expanded to the Republican Guard Brigade and the Air Force.⁵⁴ In 2019, the military academy opened up to female military personnel for the first time.⁵⁵

Women are exposed to the same enrollment and training conditions as their male counterparts.⁵⁶ Nonetheless, physical requirements to join the LAF differ for women: minimum height being 1.55 meters for women and 1.65 meters for men,⁵⁷ as well as varying requirements for Body Mass Index and muscle mass.⁵⁸

51. "Women in the LAF", Lebanese Army, <https://bit.ly/32lEcDU>

52. Ibid.

53. Dina Arakji, "Females in the Ranks", Carnegie Middle East Center, June 19, 2019, <https://bit.ly/35Fl6ul>

54. Ibid.

55. In 2019, the government decided to freeze enrollment across all security agencies. As a result, the LAF opened up the military academy enrollment from within its ranks for both men and women who fulfill the basic requirement; Faddoul, "The woman imposes".

56. Episode 387, "Soldier Program", Lebanese Army, April 11, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2FZD3J6>

57. Presentation of LAF's Directorate of Orientation in a workshop on women in the military, Carnegie Middle East Center, Beirut, March 8, 2017

58. "Documentary: A day in the Military Academy" [Watha'iki: Yawm fi al Kuliya al Harbiya], OTV, November 25, 2018, <https://bit.ly/31JUvJU>.

Challenges

Since 2017, women's position in Lebanon's armed forces has progressively evolved. However, challenges remain. The LAF needs to improve the legal governance framework and the scale and scope of female enrollment. The ministerial resolutions regulating women in the armed forces are almost three decades old, linked to the Minister of National Defense's decisions, and lack a binding power. The standing decisions can be revoked by any figure presiding over the Ministry without the approval of the Council of Ministers, unlike regular laws and decrees.

Another critical challenge for women in the LAF is the absence of a transparent gender strategy that governs the recruitment of women for its progressive short, medium, and long-term vision.

At the organizational level, the LAF lacks a gender-specific administrative body to accommodate female soldiers' needs in order to reach their full professional potential. The Ministry of National Defense has a GFP appointed by the National Commission for Lebanese Women, yet the entity plays only a limited consultative role and lacks enforcement powers to improve gender mainstreaming within the LAF.⁵⁹

59. In 1997, the United Nations Economic and Social Council (ECOSOC) defined gender mainstreaming as "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels. It is a strategy for making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetrated. The ultimate goal is to achieve gender equality."; "Gender Mainstreaming", UN Women, <https://bit.ly/34nWHZi>

Women in the Syrian Armed Forces (SAF): An Overview

Unlike in most Arab countries, Syrian servicewomen have been serving in combat roles since 2013. In that year, around 450 women joined the national defense forces,⁶⁰ and in 2015, an all-female brigade, an elite commando unit composed of 800 women, was created to fight the Islamic State Organization (IS).⁶¹

Women were dispatched to the front in various positions, including as tank operators and snipers. Between 2013 and 2016, there were approximately 8,500 female volunteers, some of whom were part of the national defense and other militias fighting alongside the SAF.⁶² While this can be seen as a public relations strategy for the Syrian military to portray itself as progressive, it is also a fact that women have been recruited into the force.

A Brief History of Women in the SAF

The enrollment of female volunteers in the SAF started at the end of 1981. Nevertheless, the step was preceded by several incidents that precipitated the decision: the integration of women into the Revolutionary Youth Union (RYU), the adoption of military uniforms in

primary and secondary schools, and the Union's closed training camps held at the end of each academic year for both genders.⁶³ The latter developed into paratroopers' training for women and men who then contributed to riot control during the clashes with the Muslim Brotherhood in the eighties.⁶⁴

As a result of women's progressive movement within the RYU, former President Hafez Al-Assad announced on October 1, 1981, during his speech at the 3rd paratroopers' graduation ceremony, the acceptance of female volunteers into the Military College.⁶⁵ Women's enrollment continued on a yearly basis until 1987, when a female-specific military college was established and provided qualified training which increased female officer graduates. In 1982, women were also accepted to the Al-Assad Military Academy (also known as the Academy of Military Engineering) for a five-year study period, after which they graduate as lieutenant engineers.⁶⁶ In 2005, a secondary level institute was created at the Academy, where female graduates were given a technical assistant rank after two years of study.⁶⁷

After the outbreak of the Syrian civil war in 2011, and due to a lack of human resources, the SAF began training women for combat roles.⁶⁸

60. The National Defense Forces are militias made up of pro-regime armed civilians joined to protect and defend their neighborhoods against incursions.

61. "Assad's female fighters: Progress or propaganda?", France24, April 2, 2015, <https://bit.ly/2MGSLNm>

62. "Pictures: 8500 women fighting alongside the Syrian army against terrorists", Sputnik, September 17, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2Kca0EA>

63. "About the Union", Revolutionary Youth Union, <http://bit.ly/306YNv3>

64. "Mr. President Hafez Al Assad at the paratroopers' 3rd graduation ceremony at the Revolutionary Youth Union", President Assad, October 1, 1981, <http://bit.ly/2JajMI6>

65. Ibid.

66. Interview with former military personnel in the SAF.

67. Ibid.

68. "Pictures: 8500 women fighting alongside the Syrian army against terrorists", Sputnik, September 17, 2016, <https://bit.ly/2Kca0EA>

Recruitment and Employment

Females are recruited and trained in the SAF in the same manner as their male counterparts. Both are admitted to the Military College and the Academy of Military Engineering, where they take the same classes.⁶⁹

There are no restrictions on the promotion of women but their presence in high ranking senior decision-making posts is rare. In 2017, the SAF promoted Nibal Madhat Badr to Brigadier General, the first woman in the military to hold this rank.⁷⁰ Furthermore, salaries are determined by grade without distinction between men and women, according to the Legislative Decree No. 18 of 2003, known as the Military Service Act (MSA).⁷¹

Conditions specific to women such as maternity leave are addressed in Article 124 of the MSA. Female military personnel are granted their ranks and compensation according to the last two months of their pregnancy. Maternity leave is approved based on a medical certificate. Afterward, they are allocated 120 days of leave for the first child, 90 days for the second child, and 75 days for the third child. Females in the SAF are also entitled to a daily one-hour leave until the child turns one year old.⁷²

Challenges

Women face the same training and work conditions as their male counterparts in the SAF, with some even deployed on the front line as snipers or tank operators. However, challenges remain. Although the scale and scope of females in the SAF have surged since 2011, high ranking women are still the exception and not the rule. It is rare to find women in senior positions and taking part in the decision-making process.

Furthermore, several cases of sexual harassment have been reported. In a 2019 video that went viral, female fighters from Brigade 130 complained of sexual harassment, especially from their senior officers.⁷³ Unfortunately, no data is available about the scale of sexual harassment in the SAF or any other Arab military. Furthermore, there is no information on the existence of a prevention strategy or the mechanism of protection (if any) within the SAF. The subject remains taboo, and it is impossible to determine whether the military command has dealt with these claims, or how. Training and communication campaigns explaining sexual harassment to military staff could help raise awareness of the issue.

69. Interview with former military personnel in the SAF.

70. Chris Tomson, "Syrian Army appoints first woman to become high-ranking general", Al Masdar News, July 1, 2017, <https://bit.ly/33dTVG4>

71. "Decree No. 18/2003, Military Service Law, April 21, 2003", <https://bit.ly/2GP7baF>

72. Ibid.

73. Alex MacDonald, "Assad's women soldiers complain of sexual harassment", Middle East Eye, January 29, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2WYgVpI>

Women in the Tunisian Armed Forces (TAF): An Overview

Tunisia is considered one of the most progressive Arab countries in women's rights and gender equality. Its 2014 constitution granted full equality for men and women and prohibited discrimination, which reasserted its gender mainstreaming policies towards an equal society.⁷⁴

The Tunisian constitution also ensures gender equality to defend the country. Since the 1970s, female military personnel have been able to rise through the ranks in different branches of the TAF. In theory, military service is equally open to men and women. In reality, service remains obligatory for men and voluntary for women.⁷⁵

Despite the progress of women in the TAF, gaps remain, hindering their advancement. For instance, the lack of a transparent gender policy in the defense sector and weak civil-military coordination between the TAF and the political establishment hinders the substantial improvement of women's role in the military.

A Brief History of Women in the TAF

Women's integration in the TAF began in 1975. During that year, the first cohort of specialized female officers graduated from the country's Military Academy. They were placed in administrative posts, military hospitals, and within the military's judicial sector. In the 1990s,

women's roles expanded, and they were integrated into the Tunisian Air and Naval Forces.⁷⁶

In 2003, the Tunisian government passed a law opening up military conscription for women. Women had already made up 5 percent of the TAF. The move was discussed in the 1980s, but it lacked national acceptance.⁷⁷ In 2018, Minister of Defense Farhat Horchani attempted to reinstate the discussion for women's military conscription without further action.⁷⁸

Despite these previous attempts and the constitution's gender equality guarantee, women's enrollment has remained voluntary while male enrollment continues to be mandatory. According to a report published by *Aswat Nisaa* in October 2018, women constitute less than 7 percent of those employed in the defense sector.⁷⁹

Recruitment and Employment

Tunisia's Military Academy is open to both men and women. Almost the same conditions and requirements apply to both genders, including marital status, age, academic background, and examination, etc., except for the height – 1.67 meters for men and 1.6 meters for women.⁸⁰

Over the years, women have progressed in the TAF to occupy leading roles in the Land, Air, and Naval Forces. For example, in 2015, 40 women were serving in the Navy,⁸¹ and similarly, another 40 in the Air Force.⁸² They

74. "Tunisia's new Constitution: a breakthrough for women's rights", UN Women, February 11, 2014, <https://bit.ly/1evJ3RF>

75. E.B.A., "Tunisie: Les femmes au ministère de la Défense représentent moins de 7%", Kapitalis, October 4, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2X3k4nv>

76. Duwaja Al Owadni, "Gun and lipstick? Woman in the Arab Armies" [Bunduqiat wa ahmar shifah? Al Mar'a fi al juyush al arabia], Meem Magazine, August 4, 2017, <https://bit.ly/2XfKkeF>

77. Layla al Shayeb, "Women and Military Role in the Arab World" [Almar'a wa al aamal al askari fi al aalam al arabi], Al Jazeera, January 13, 2003, <https://bit.ly/2EwJ0fJ>

78. Dalia Ghanem, "Women at Arms", Carnegie Middle East Center, December 3, 2018, <https://bit.ly/2EAy8xA>

79. E.B.A., "Tunisie: Les femmes".

80. "Conditions of Admission to the Military Academy", Republic of Tunisia Ministry of National Defense Army Training, <https://bit.ly/2MaKYZz>

81. "Women leaders in the army ... pride for Tunisia" [Al kiyadat al nisa'iya fi al jaysh... fakher litunis], Babnet, August 10, 2015, <https://bit.ly/2K6KEZq>

82. Mootaz Khelifi, "Who are these female fighter pilots of the Tunisian armed forces", Pakistan Defence, June 14, 2015, <https://bit.ly/2q8q9mW>

held leading positions that included commanding coast guard warships and flying fighter aircraft. Furthermore, in 2018, the TAF sent the first female UN Peacekeeper to Mali, Captain Olfa Lajnaf, pilot commander of a C-130 Hercules aircraft.⁸³

Attitudes towards women's placement in the TAF have been mainly positive. According to *Aswat Nisaa's* 2018 report, 56 percent of the interviewees value the importance of women's participation in the defense sector, while 14.6 percent think the opposite. Furthermore, the report showed that 60.6 percent believe that women have the same "technical abilities" as men in the security sector as opposed to 39.4 percent who believe the opposite.⁸⁴

In 2016, the Council of Ministers passed a decree to set up the National Council of Peers for Equality and Equal Opportunities between Women and Men. The governmental body is a consultative council tasked with improving gender integration in planning, programming, and budgeting, on the one hand, and eradicating all forms of gender discrimination, on the other hand.⁸⁵ Moreover, the Ministry of National Defense has set a sectoral plan on gender at the level of the ministry. It aims to eradicate gender discrimination, improve the effective integration of women across all branches of the TAF, and incorporate them in the decision-making process.⁸⁶

Challenges

Legally there are no obstacles to women's enrollment into the military. However, many challenges remain. Tunisia lacks a transparent and accessible gender policy for the defense sector. The sectoral strategy mentioned earlier was only presented during a workshop.⁸⁷ It is neither published online nor available to the public. Such a document is vital to set the requirements to elevate women's position in the TAF.

Another challenge lies in the absence of civil-military coordination, which has created a vacuum in the defense sector's gender mainstreaming. For example, the National Council of Peers for Equality and Equal Opportunities between Women and Men presented the "Logical Framework for the National Plan of Action for the Integration and Institutionalization of Gender 2016–2020", which did not mention the defense sector.⁸⁸

Despite the reasonably positive opinions towards female military personnel, an apparent gender gap in the defense sector has persisted. Women continue to constitute less than 7 percent of the defense sector. This reflects the need to work on improving the scale and scope of women in the TAF.⁸⁹

83. Karima Dagrash, "The first Tunisian woman in a UN peacekeeping mission" [Awal tunisiya dimn bu3tha umamiyah lihifiz alsalam], Sayidati, February 1, 2019, <https://bit.ly/2JGIGPP>

84. E.B.A., "Tunisie: Les femmes".

85. "Tunisia's equal futures partnership commitment", Equal Futures Partnership, <https://bit.ly/2W3XOxo>

86. "In the Men's House': How to Integrate Women in Arab Armies?", Workshop Report, Carnegie Middle East Center, March 7-8, 2019.

87. Carnegie Middle East Center organized a workshop on female in the military forces in Beirut on March 7-8, 2019.

88. "National Plan of Action for the Integration and Institutionalization of Gender 2016-2020" [khitit al 3amal al wataniya li idmaj wa ma'sasat al naw3 al ijtimaei 2016-2020], Ministry of Women, Family, Children, and Elderly, August 2018, <https://bit.ly/2HKrY00>

89. "In the Men's House': How to Integrate Women in Arab Armies?", Workshop Report, Carnegie Middle East Center, March 7-8, 2019.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Drawing on the six case studies presented in this primer, efforts to integrate women in armies have been somewhat active, thus challenging societal norms that foster discriminatory gender roles. Even though more women have enrolled in the military over the course of history, Arab endeavors are not yet adequate to shift women's military role from one of total exclusion to one of total inclusion.

The integration of Arab women in the military has been mainly hampered on political, social, and financial grounds. Politically, women do not enjoy frequent access to attain decision-making and senior positions that affect the course of their lives. Instead, they are bound to support and occupy administrative roles that severely limit their active and impactful participation. In addition, Arab governments have not generally prioritized the conceptualization of a clear and transparent gender strategy that advances the notion of gender equality and aims to eliminate gender discrimination. Moreover, the lack of lucid channels of coordination between political institutions and the military prevents the smooth progress of integration.

Socially, perceptions towards servicewomen are generally negative, asserting the dominance of males over the institution and the physical and psychological inferiority of women to cope with the sector's needs. This further impedes women's advancement to combat units that require physical strength, thus aggravating their non-involvement in decision-making and political life.

Financially, women's integration necessitates building infrastructures and therefore incurring additional costs on governments.

Despite these challenges, Arab women from the above countries have moved a long way from the periphery to the center of army life, and the efforts of many Arab armies with regard to their recruitment, training, and

acknowledgment of their rights cannot be ignored. Nonetheless, the integration of women in Arab armies is unfinished.

In order to enhance gender integration in Arab armies and pave the path for a better inclusion of women, specific reforms targeting the aforementioned challenges have to be studied, drafted, and implemented.

1. Arab militaries should devise transparent gender strategies that serve to achieve the effective enrollment and integration of women while upholding their equal standards to male counterparts.

2. Arab armies should work more on the representation of women as soldiers, so as to engrave the idea of equality and fight existing mentalities. Awareness campaigns, workshops, conferences, and public debates could be organized to discuss women's contributions to the army in general and to combat units in particular. Similarly, research should be encouraged to provide an understanding of the perceptions of women in the military.

3. The military should make more efforts to widen women's role in the institution that remains, despite all efforts, a sanctuary of hypermasculinity. By better integrating women, the military will develop a different military culture as women may contribute to help reshape civil-military relations and hence reduce the gap between society and the military.

4. Equality laws and ordinances should be followed by actions, meaning stop blocking women's ascension to positions of prestige and leadership. Women should have access to all posts and units, including combat units. This can allow them to play a crucial role in counterterrorism operations and to fully contribute as full-fledged citizens to the protection of their country.

5. Equality should be asserted and operationalized

through appropriate training and evaluation for women, to prepare them for field operations effectively.

6. Military commands should assess military equipment and adapt it to women's bodies.

Finally, it should be said that integrating women into the military does not only mean including more

female personnel. To quote a United Nations statement on gender mainstreaming, it is more about "making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies and programmes in all political, economic and societal spheres so that women and men benefit equally, and inequality is not perpetuated".⁹⁰

90. United Nations Economic and Social Council, "Coordination of the Policies and Activities of the Specialized Agencies and Other Bodies of the United Nations System," in Report of the Economic and Social Council for 1997 (New York: United Nations, 1997). www.un.org/womenwatch/osagi/pdf/ECOSOCAC1997.2.PDF.

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The Arab Institute for Women (AiW) at the Lebanese American University (LAU) formerly known as the Institute for Women's Studies in the Arab World (IWSAW), established in 1973, is committed to pioneering academic research on women in the Arab world. The AiW also seeks to empower women through development programs and education, and to serve as a catalyst for policy change regarding women's rights in the region.

An active and highly esteemed institute, the AiW facilitates networking and communication, while cultivating ties with national, regional, and international organizations and universities concerned with women and gender issues.