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| 14. ABSTRACT In 2017, the U.S. was the first nation to pass an independent Women Peace and Security Act mandating implementation across several government organizations, including the DoD. Although structural impediments, laws, and policy have largely been addressed, cultural roadblocks remain strong, particularly in the Marine Corps, and must be addressed before effectively implementing the WPS agenda. The Marine Corps could better embrace inclusive diversity and gendered perspectives dictated by the WPS framework by revising women's recruiting and retention efforts. Studies evidence that women's perspectives do not become effectively voiced or heard until a "tipping point" of demographic representation is reached at 25-30%, numbers currently a deficit in the Corps and impossible to achieve soon. Therefore, in the absence of depending on a select few women senior enough to "risk" speaking without fear of retribution, consideration of alternatively assigning senior women leaders to crucial decision-making tables is necessary. Finally, the Marine Corps' culture, still grounded in a male-dominated view, may profit from policy changes surrounding physical standards and family support to validate the importance of women and the female viewpoint to the organization. If the Corps values its women members, desires security and peace, and wants to remain relevant on the international stage, it has no choice but to change. If the Marine Corps can forge a path to embrace WPS, despite all the obstacles, then so too can all of DoD. | | | | | |
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The Fewer, the Prouder: Impediments to Embracing Women, Peace, and Security

The Marine Corps, the nation's naval expeditionary force in readiness, is undertaking modernization and force restructure to meet the demands of the future fight. According to the Interim National Security Strategy 2021, this fight will likely be complex and conducted across the continuum of conflict. Further, the U.S. military faces the possibility of a peer or near-peer threat in the future, differing significantly from the asymmetric conflicts of the last 75 years. To better meet these diverse future challenges, the Department of Defense (DoD) at large and the Marine Corps specifically need a broad spectrum of experience and perspectives to examine and meet these challenges.

The female point of view, empirically demonstrated as critical to achieving security goals, is missing from the Corps' decision-making and force structure changes.¹ With males comprising 91% of the total force and occupying an overwhelming 97% of senior leadership positions,² the male perspective dominates Marine Corps policy and decision-making. In addition to the sparse number of women, the Corps' failure to address recruiting and retention issues, seek out senior female advisors, or create a culture of gender inclusivity suggests the institution does not value the female point of view. Research shows that supportive rhetoric offered with little follow-through, often referred to as performative allyship, is as damaging as doing nothing, as it signals to subordinates that the issue is not really important.³ By neglecting to use both male and female viewpoints, the Marine Corps is not making decisions with

¹Valerie M. Hudson, Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen, *The First Political Order: How Sex Shapes Governance and National Security Worldwide* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2020).

²“DoD Personnel, Workforce Reports & Publications,” DMDC web, accessed November 28, 2021, <https://dwp.dmdc.osd.mil/dwp/app/dod-data-reports/workforce-reports>.

³ Carmen Morris, “Performative Allyship: What Are the Signs and Why Leaders Get Exposed,” *Forbes* (Forbes Magazine, November 26, 2020), <https://www.forbes.com/sites/carmenmorris/2020/11/26/performative-allyship-what-are-the-signs-and-why-leaders-get-exposed/>.

“strategic bifocals,” as Joan Johnson-Freese, professor of international security at the United States Naval War College, suggests.⁴ Instead, the Marine Corps sees the world through a singular masculine vantage point, leaving a gaping blind spot to half of the society it represents and half of the globe it defends. Additionally, the Marine Corps misses the demonstrated benefits of communication skills and problem-solving approaches women bring to the table that differs from their male counterparts.

The absence of the female perspective is not unique to the Marine Corps but appears throughout the international community. Recognizing that many nations fail to advocate for or fully understand women’s impacts and roles in shaping and maintaining security, the United Nations Security Council unanimously passed Resolution 1325 in 2000 to adopt a Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda. Rooted in three pillars of increased participation, attention to protection needs, and gender perspectives in conflict resolution, the evidence-based WPS premise recognizes women’s crucial role in global security.⁵ In 2017, the U.S. was the first nation to pass an independent WPS Act mandating implementation across several government organizations, including the DoD.⁶

Translating WPS frameworks into action by the U.S. military has been slow and lacking across all organizational levels. In 2021, the DoD published a WPS *Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan* and allocated \$7 million to place and train WPS experts in critical positions, but these actions are insufficient.⁷ DoD’s goals are too broad, not metric-driven, and have received minimal Congressional oversight to hold leaders accountable for execution. To

⁴ Joan Johnson-Freese, “A Place at the Table,” in *Women, Peace and Security: An Introduction* (Abingdon, Oxon: Routledge/Taylor & Francis Group, 2019), p. 11.

⁵ UN Security Council, *Security Council Resolution on Women and Peace and Security*, S/RES/1325, October 2000, SC_ResolutionWomenPeaceSecurity_SRES1325(2000)(english).pdf.

⁶ Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017, Pub. L. No. 115-68, 131 Stat. 1203 (2017).

⁷ United States Government Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) Congressional Report June 2021

date, many of the DoD's efforts focus on international outreach and training programs but fail to address domestic issues.⁸ Having neglected WPS training within its own ranks, as evidenced by the Naval War College, the only military school including the topic in its core curriculum and only since 2022, and replete with its own gender norm concerns, the DoD is poorly positioned to embrace WPS fully.

Although structural impediments, laws, and policy have largely been addressed, cultural roadblocks remain strong, particularly in the Marine Corps, and must be addressed before effectively implementing the WPS agenda. By revising women's recruiting and retention efforts, the Marine Corps could better embrace inclusive diversity, creating a collaborative environment built on respect and fairness, and gendered perspectives, acknowledging the power disparity between genders, as dictated by the WPS framework. Studies evidence that women's perspectives do not become effectively voiced or heard until a "tipping point" of demographic representation is reached at 25-30%, numbers currently a deficit in the Corps and impossible to achieve in the near future. Therefore, in the absence of depending on a select few women senior enough to "risk" speaking without fear of retribution, consideration of alternatively assigning senior women leaders to crucial decision-making tables is necessary. Finally, the Marine Corps' culture, still grounded in a male-dominated view, may profit from policy changes surrounding physical standards and family support to validate the importance of women and the female viewpoint to the organization. Only by addressing these institutional barriers can the Marine Corps begin to implement the WPS agenda and make sound operational decisions today and in the future.

⁸ "Toward a Gender-Inclusive National Security Strategy," United States Institute of Peace, March 30, 2021, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2021/03/toward-gender-inclusive-national-security-strategy>.

Revising Women’s Recruitment and Retention Efforts

A guiding principle of WPS is inclusivity to improve gender balance across the force.⁹ To change the existing balance, the number of women in uniform needs to grow, making recruiting essential. A 2020 U.S. Government Accountability Office (GAO) report entitled *Female Active Duty Personnel: Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention* acknowledged that the DoD is aware that female recruitment is wanting but has no comprehensive plan or ways to measure effectiveness.¹⁰ Instead, the military has shied away from establishing gender goals and placed false hope that opening new military occupational specialties to women, such as combat arms, would intrinsically grow the force.

As the service with the fewest number of women, the Marine Corps has unique challenges with female recruitment owing to its culture and views on women’s roles. The Marine Corps, a historically masculine organization, used the slogan “We’re Looking for a Few Good Men” as recently as 1985 and reinforced it in the 1992 movie *A Few Good Men*.¹¹ The male-exclusive Marine ethos appeared nationally in the 2017 Marines United scandal, where investigative journalism uncovered a Facebook group of over 30,000 prior and active-duty Marines who shared nude photos, made threats, and voiced sexually explicit comments about women Marines. Through social media, the press, and Congressional testimony, the American people forced the Corps to acknowledge that several Marines used the social media platform to voice hostility toward females and participated, condoned, or ignored degrading and exploitive

⁹ NATO, “Women, Peace and Security,” NATO, November 19, 2021, https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/topics_91091.htm#:~:text=Three%20principles%20guide%20NATO's%20work,%3A%20integration%2C%20inclusive

¹⁰ United States Government Accountability Office, “GAO-20-61, Female Active-Duty Personnel: Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts,” May 2020, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-61.pdf>, page 18.

¹¹ USMC Recruiting Command, “Core Values,” date viewed 20 November 2021, Golino personal story about joining the Marine Corps, 3:42, <https://www.marines.com/about-the-marine-corps/who-are-the-marines/purpose.html>.

behaviors toward their sisters in service.¹² Finally, sexual assault, which plagues each service, is even more pervasive in the Corps, with the Marines having the highest number of assaults in three of the last five years and the highest ever rate of reported cases of 5.9% in 2020.¹³ It is reasonable to assume that the Marine Corps' ability to increase its number of servicewomen is and will continue to be adversely affected by its proudly displayed masculine bravado, the higher potential for assault, and its historic and still pervasive unwillingness to embrace its sisters in arms.

To address concerns and increase female active-duty numbers, the Marine Corps shifted its recruiting campaigns to appeal to women but with lackluster results. In 2017, on the heels of the Marines United disgrace, the Corps released its first commercial to feature a woman.¹⁴ The commercial attempted to embrace the "fighting spirit" in every Marine by using sports as analogous to combat, with a scene of the female Marine playing rugby in the rain.¹⁵ Brigadier General Austin Renforth, then Commanding General Eastern Recruiting Region, echoed the desire to recruit athletic females in a 2017 interview stating, "I think we're trying to find, recruiting-wise, those women who were handed lacrosse sticks and hockey sticks growing up and not Barbie dolls."¹⁶ Renforth's beliefs in a warrior ethos beginning in sports are conveyed

¹² Andrea Januta, "How the Marines United Investigation and Scandal Unfolded," *The War Horse* (Andrea Januta <https://thewarhorse.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/NEW-War-Horse-logo-no-tagline-405x160-1.png>, July 11, 2017), <https://thewarhorse.org/how-the-marines-united-investigation-and-scandal-unfolded/>.

¹³ "Fiscal Year 2020 Annual Report on Sexual Assault in the Military, Appendix B: Statistical Data on Sexual Assault," May 6, 2021, https://www.sapr.mil/sites/default/files/3_Appendix_B_Statistical_Data_on_Sexual_Assault.pdf.

¹⁴ Camila Domonoske, "Marines Release First-Ever Ad Spotlighting Woman in Combat Position," *NPR* (NPR, May 12, 2017), <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/05/12/528129573/marines-release-first-ever-ad-spotlighting-woman-in-combat-position>.

¹⁵ Douglas Quenqua, "US Marines Run Their First Commercial Starring a Woman in Combat," *Campaign US* (Campaign, May 12, 2017), <https://www.campaignlive.com/article/us-marines-run-first-commercial-starring-woman-combat/1433436>.

¹⁶ Camila Domonoske, "Marines Release First-Ever Ad Spotlighting Woman in Combat Position," *NPR* (NPR, May 12, 2017), <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2017/05/12/528129573/marines-release-first-ever-ad-spotlighting-woman-in-combat-position>.

again in a 2021 recruiting video featuring Captain Reinalyn Golino. In this video, Golino complains that throughout her childhood, she was not allowed to participate in “guy activities,” which she disliked, compelling her to make a statement by playing high school football.¹⁷

Although finding a “fighting spirit” in sports is logical, an underlying message remains that the Corps is looking for women who are not typical of their gender. The subtext is that the Marine Corps is not seeking women who have grown up in the traditional gender world but is looking for women who want to compete against men. These recruiting efforts and opening all occupational fields to women have only increased female recruitment by 1.8% over the last ten years, nearing 9% of the total force but falling short of Secretary of the Navy Ray Mabus’ 2015 goal of 25%¹⁸ and the Corps’ more realistic 2019 goal of 10%.¹⁹ Although looking for tough women to serve in the Corps is sensible, the current campaigns, focusing on traditionally masculine pursuits, can also have the unintended effect of alienating rather than attracting qualified female applicants whose perspectives are needed.

Not only does the WPS agenda require females to participate in decision-making, but it also recognizes the need for senior women. Unlike corporate America, which can hire female executives from outside their organization, retention and promotion are the only way to increase senior female leadership in the military. Since men are 72% more likely to remain in the service than their female counterparts,²⁰ retaining women becomes yet another hurdle to WPS

¹⁷ “Marine Corps Purpose,” Marines, accessed January 5, 2022, <https://www.marines.com/about-the-marine-corps/who-are-the-marines/purpose.html>.

¹⁸ Derrick Perkins, “Mabus: 1 in 4 Marine Recruits Should Be Women,” Marine Corps Times (Marine Corps Times, May 26, 2015), <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2015/05/26/mabus-1-in-4-marine-recruits-should-be-women/>.

¹⁹ Shawn Snow, “Where Are the Female Marines?,” Marine Corps Times (Marine Corps Times, March 5, 2018), <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/2018/03/05/where-are-the-female-marines/>.

²⁰ United States Government Accountability Office, “GAO-20-61, Female Active-Duty Personnel: Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts,” May 2020, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-61.pdf>, page 18.

implementation. In the 2020 GAO report, five of the six primary factors leading to women departing the service centered around family concerns and the challenges inherent to motherhood,²¹ yet little has been done institutionally to address or mitigate these concerns.

If female retention issues go unresolved, the Marine Corps risks decreasing rather than increasing its female population. Historically, around 75% of Marines serve one enlistment, with new recruitments replacing the outgoing. General David Berger, 38th Commandant of the Marine Corps, in his *Talent Management Plan 2030*, outlines a potential change to this formula. Rather than relying on recruitment for the bulk of the force, the Marine Corps must retain and mature more of its current end strength.²² If women attrit at their current rate and new recruits decrease per General Berger's proposal, the number of women serving in the Corps will further decline. Therefore, with the initiation of *Talent Management Plan 2030*, solving the problems inherent to female retention is even more critical to both increasing the percentage of women in the Corps and developing senior female leaders.

Deficient Female Perspectives Across the Corps

Another tenant of WPS is to “promote the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of overseas conflict prevention, management, and resolution, and post-conflict relief and recovery efforts.”²³ Female Marines must have standing within the organization to obtain a seat at the table, and in a profession of arms, this often equates to participating in traditional combat fields. Currently, the Marine Corps lacks female perspectives across all military occupational

²¹ United States Government Accountability Office, “GAO-20-61, Female Active-Duty Personnel: Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts,” May 2020, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-61.pdf>, page 18.

²² “Talent Management 2030,” November 2021, https://www.hqmc.marines.mil/Portals/142/Users/183/35/4535/Talent%20Management%202030_November%2021.pdf?ver=E88HXGUdUQoiB-edNPKOaA%3d%3d.

²³ Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017, Pub. L. No. 115-68, 131 Stat. 1203 (2017).

specialties and a cogent integration plan to remedy this imbalance. Further, a lack of senior female voices across the Corps impairs effective WPS implementation.

The most significant female absence in the Marine Corps exists in traditional combat arms roles. Historically, the Corps has attempted to bar women from infantry, artillery, and reconnaissance fields and was the only service that requested a Congressional exception to fully integrating females in all occupations. In 2016, a year after the Congressional mandate to open all occupational specialties to women, the Marine Corps launched a study to determine if women serving in combat arms was feasible or of value. After pressure from Congress and a direct order from Secretary Mabus, the Marine Corps reluctantly opened combat arms to women.²⁴

Before the Congressional mandate, senior Marines were vocal in their opposition to a change in policy, helping set a nonreceptive climate and reinforcing a masculine, non-inclusive culture. In 2012, then Colonel William Mullen, Commander Marine Corps Tactics and Operations Group, the center of excellence for ground combat arms, circulated an email requesting wide dissemination to challenge political pressure to open combat roles to women.²⁵ On 8 January 2015, a 45-year Marine veteran and commander of Southern Command, General John Kelly, when asked about opening combat arms to females, stated, “I believe every decision has to go through only one filter, and that is, does it make us more lethal on the battlefield?” If the answer to the question is “it shouldn’t hurt, [then] I would suggest that we shouldn’t do it because it may hurt.”²⁶

²⁴ Tom Bowman and Laura Wagner, “Controversial Marine Corps Study on Gender Integration Published in Full,” NPR (NPR, November 5, 2015), <https://www.npr.org/sections/thetwo-way/2015/11/04/454672813/controversial-marine-corps-study-on-gender-integration-published-in-full>.

²⁵ Mark Faram, “What’s Next for Enlisted Female Submariners,” Navy Times (Navy Times, July 17, 2019), <https://www.navytimes.com/news/your-navy/2019/07/18/whats-next-for-enlisted-female-submariners/#:~:text=Enlisted%20women%20now%20serve%20in,according%20to%20NavAdmin%20159%2F19>.

²⁶ Hope Hodge Seck, “Opening Combat Jobs to Women Will Mean Lower Standards: Marine General,” Military.com, October 31, 2017, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2016/01/08/opening-combat-jobs-women-mean-lower-standards-marine-general.html>.

The culture these men and others helped foster enabled junior officers and enlisted Marines to object to women in combat units. A poll in 2016 found that 76.5% of active-duty infantry Marines opposed women operating alongside them, and only 22.4% of men who served in occupations that worked alongside women supported the change.²⁷ Even after women began serving in combat arms units, leaders still questioned the decision to integrate. In 2018, while addressing students at the Virginia Military Institute, Secretary of Defense James Mattis, a 44-year Marine veteran and idolized “warrior monk” of the Marine Corps, stated that “the jury is out on whether women can succeed in combat.” Aside from further fueling dissenting views within the service, the statement is false. Women have succeeded in combat, perhaps not yet in traditional “combat arms” while wearing a Marine uniform but in combat non the less. Further, Mattis, who professes to be a prolific reader of history, need only look to Russia during World War II to find women excelling in traditional combat roles.

As of 2020, 52 officers and 179 female enlisted Marines serve in combat arms billets across the Corps.²⁸ Aside from their representative insignificance compared to the 33,225 men serving in combat arms, there is no published plan to assign these females across the fleet. The only “integration” plan, published in 2016, focused solely on recruitment goals to assign approximately 200 women annually, or 2% of the female population, to combat arms specialties.²⁹ The distribution of the few women in combat arms is also not proportional, leaving fields such as infantry, which as of 2020 only had one female officer, woefully deficient.

²⁷ Dan Lomothe, “How Big is Opposition to Women in Combat Units Among Marines? This Report Explains,” The Washington Post (WP Company, March 10, 2016).

²⁸ Emma Moore, “Women in Combat: Five-Year Status Update,” Center for a New American Security (en-US), March 31, 2020, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/women-in-combat-five-year-status-update>.

²⁹ Fragmentary Order 4, Marine Corps Force Integration Campaign Plan, 16 December 2015, <https://www.fitness.marines.mil/Portals/211/Docs/MARINE%20CORPS%20FORCE%20INTEGRATION%20CAMPAIGN%20PLAN.pdf>

The Marine Corps' approach to culture change differed significantly from that of the U.S. Navy when integrating its all-male submarine force in 2010. Realizing that leadership was critical to success, the Navy focused on officer integration five years before enlisted sailors. Further, the Navy selected 19 boats for female assignments to ensure that a female officer was present and that a lone female sailor was not serving with an all-male crew.³⁰ Although not without issues, the Marine Corps could learn from the Navy's deliberate process. The Corps' lack of a distribution plan makes cultural change reliant on a few, or perhaps one woman, many times junior in rank without the aid of female mentors.

Through the non-intentional distribution of women across units, the Marine Corps also has gaps in both midgrade and senior officers and enlisted ranks. When female junior officers and enlisted have no senior women readily available, the access to mentors who can share perspectives, offer experience-based advice, and create a roadmap for others to follow is absent. Further, advocacy for issues, either female-specific or gender-nuanced, can better be served by senior women leaders. One such example is traversing through the challenges inherent to motherhood. With the demographic scarcity of women exacerbated by an absence of female mentorship, the Corps is ill-prepared to appreciate concerns beyond maternity leave. Yet, female Marines needed to know how to navigate childcare, obtain motherhood advice, and safely and effectively return to the Marine Corps' height and weight standards post-partum. To address the need, Brigadier General Roberta Shea, Commanding General First Marine Logistics Group, established the Artemis Program that addresses a myriad of concerns involving motherhood and

³⁰ Gina Harkins, "Female Enlisted Sailors Can Now Apply for Submarine Duty Year-Round," Military.com, July 17, 2019, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2019/07/17/female-enlisted-sailors-can-now-apply-submarine-duty-year-round.html>.

the perceived binary choice of being a good mom or being a good Marine.³¹ Although currently limited to Camp Pendleton, the Artemis Program is but one example of the power of a female advocate and the creation of a path where female Marines can continue to serve.

A short supply of senior female Marines, even in fields with no historical gender restrictions, creates deficiencies in advocacy and female perspectives for decisions. With the ongoing shortage of senior women, the Marine Corps would benefit by reexamining female distribution and highlighting commands and/or billets requiring a female perspective. Although perhaps reminiscent of past behaviors where assignments were based on gender, using the personnel management process to code specific billets as female may be the short-term solution. Without making senior female perspectives a requirement, gaps may readily continue. Making a personnel structural change, if nothing else, would signal to the Corps that the female perspective is valued and necessary to the future fight.

Policy Changes to Support the Importance of Women

To fully adopt WPS requires the Marine Corps to embrace WPS's agenda of integration, inclusiveness, and integrity.³² These actions require a change to the Corp's organizational culture, and in the Marine Corps, policy can most readily advance cultural transformation. Examining and redefining women's standards and updating policy on traditionally female issues may fundamentally change how the Corps views and values its women.

³¹ Philip Athey, "This New Program Aims to Make It Easier for Marines to Be Moms and Warriors," Marine Corps Times (Marine Corps Times, February 23, 2021), <https://www.marinecorpstimes.com/news/your-marine-corps/2021/02/23/this-new-program-aims-to-make-it-easier-for-marines-to-be-moms-and-warriors/>.

³² "Women, Peace and Security at NATO: Integration, Inclusiveness, Integrity," October 20, 2020, https://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/2020/10/pdf/2010-factsheet-WPS-en.pdf.

The first standard requiring examination is the antiquated female height and weight requirements that differ across DoD and are ill-suited for women assuming physically-demanding combat roles. Depending on age, the female Marine body mass index ranges from 26% to 29%, while the Navy sets a standard of 34%, the Air Force ranges from 28%-32%, and the Army ranges from 30%-36%.³³ Attempting to maintain the Corps' more stringent standard has already led to self-destructive behaviors, with the Marine Corps reporting twice the number of eating disorders than the other services.³⁴ As women take on combat roles, increasing muscle mass is required, yet if this weight gain exceeds the standard, there is potential for dismissal.

A second standard creating gender issue is the Marine Corps' physical fitness standards. In 2018, the Corps adopted a physical fitness test where events were the same, regardless of sex; however, the minimum standard and scoring scales differ significantly based on gender. Although biological differences between men and women exist, a different standard is divisive. The U.S. Army is in the process of launching gender-neutral passing standards for its physical fitness test. After achieving the standard, soldiers are awarded points based on a gendered derived bell curve.³⁵ Although not perfect, by changing its test, the Army communicates to its soldiers that the standard is the standard, regardless of gender. So while the Army is moving towards inclusivity by removing gender standards from defining a soldier, the Marine Corps remains stalwart in maintaining a gender divide, reinforcing that there are two kinds of Marines,

³³ Stewart Smith, "Here Is a Look at US Military Enlistment Height and Weights Standards," The Balance Careers (The Balance Careers, June 6, 2019), <https://www.thebalancecareers.com/us-military-enlistment-standards-3354017>.

³⁴ Patricia Kime, "Congress Wants the Pentagon to Expand Coverage for Troops' Eating Disorder Treatments," Military.com, August 12, 2020, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/08/12/congress-wants-pentagon-expand-coverage-troops-eating-disorder-treatments.html>.

³⁵ Matthew Cox, "Army Leaders Say ACFT 3.0 Remains Gender-Neutral, despite Gender-Specific Evaluation Categories," Military.com, March 22, 2021, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2021/03/22/army-leaders-say-acft-30-remains-gender-neutral-despite-gender-specific-evaluation-categories.html>.

male and female, and perpetuating animosity toward women by male members who feel resentful that they must meet a higher standard.

In addition to addressing female standards and moving beyond performative allyship, the Marine Corps must examine family care plans, childcare, and parental leave, making these “female issues” Marine issues. With women disproportionately leaving the service for family-related discharges, ranging from 65%-83%,³⁶ few policy changes have occurred to rectify conditions that make it difficult or impossible for women to continue serving. Childcare availability is lacking due to an inadequate number of providers and insufficient operating hours.³⁷ The COVID-19 pandemic exacerbated the demand for consistent, cost-effective, and safe childcare, with many government-run childcare centers refusing new applicants³⁸ and, in turn, revealing that childcare is not a “female issue” but a family issue. Family care plans are mandatory for service members who have dependents, but the resources to build, develop, and uphold the plans are absent. Many Marines, serving far from home, struggle with having no family or close friends that are willing to take a child on little to no notice in the case of illness or for long durations in the case of deployments.³⁹ Finally, although the Marine Corps has generously increased maternity leave from 6 to 18 weeks to improve the welfare of both mother and child, such an absence could have negative career impacts. Leaders often move pregnant

³⁶ United States Government Accountability Office, “GAO-20-61, Female Active-Duty Personnel: Guidance and Plans Needed for Recruitment and Retention Efforts,” May 2020, <https://www.gao.gov/assets/gao-20-61.pdf>, page 18.

³⁷ Karen Jowers, “Citing 'Crisis' in Military Child Care Facilities and Barracks, Lawmakers Want Extra \$15 Billion,” *Military Times* (*Military Times*, July 16, 2021), <https://www.militarytimes.com/pay-benefits/2021/07/16/citing-crisis-in-military-child-care-facilities-and-barracks-lawmakers-want-extra-15-billion/>.

³⁸ Karen Jowers, “Citing 'Crisis' in Military Child Care Facilities and Barracks, Lawmakers Want Extra \$15 Billion,” *Military Times* (*Military Times*, July 16, 2021), <https://www.militarytimes.com/pay-benefits/2021/07/16/citing-crisis-in-military-child-care-facilities-and-barracks-lawmakers-want-extra-15-billion/>.

³⁹ “Into the Unknown: Military Families Struggle with Family Care Plans,” Center for a New American Security (en-US), accessed January 15, 2022, <https://www.cnas.org/publications/commentary/into-the-unknown-military-families-struggle-with-family-care-plans>.

women to less competitive billets because the unit is unwilling or unable to gap a mission-critical position for a prolonged duration. Further, pregnancy restricts many women from fulfilling their jobs, placing them at a disadvantage compared to peers. With an up-or-out construct, being non-competitive for promotion results in many women exiting the Corps with the advent of motherhood.

Changing culture is never easy, but it is foolhardy to assume a change will occur without a policy-supported plan. If the Corps is unwilling to make necessary policy changes, it is signaling that it does not value its female members. Given readiness challenges, failing to recruit and retain women lowers the Corps' mission success potential and, in turn, national security.

Change is Hard. Why Pursue?

To properly implement WPS, the Marine Corps needs to expend energy, resources, and time to realize gains in creating a gender-balanced organization that values women. But nowhere in *Advantage at Sea: Prevailing with Integrated All-Domain Naval Power*, the 2019 *Commandant's Planning Guidance*, or *Force Design 2030*, documents which outline priorities and provide focus to future Marine efforts is gender inclusivity or adoption of the WPS agenda mentioned. These documents fully acknowledge the complexity of strategic power competition and a potential fight with China or Russia but do not suggest that a more diverse force, with its inherent problem-solving abilities, is part of that approach. Although not reflective of society or in keeping with Congressional mandates, the Corps' formula for success, an organization dominated by males with women serving in limited roles, is battle-tested, making a reason to

change unappealing. As General John Kelly suggested changing the equation now may harm the nation's 9-11 force.⁴⁰

However, to remain relevant in today's U.S. military and to the nation it represents, the Marine Corps cannot stay stagnant and view the world in a singular light. General Berger asserts a need to increase female presence, stating at the 2020 Women's Defense Conference that "women do not merely add to the Corps, but that Marines cannot complete their mission without women." Additionally, he declares that the Corps is vulnerable if it fails to diversify. "We're much more powerful when we have different people looking at the same issue from different perspectives...I also firmly believe that war is going to get only more complex, so we're going to need a diverse force to solve the problems that are in front of us."⁴¹ Rather than making changes solely on the political mandates of WPS, General Berger rightly understands that it is an organizational imperative to employ and value women. It will now be interesting to see if his actions match his words and move the organization towards adopting the WPS agenda.

Research has unequivocally proven that women play a vital role in building peace and creating a stable world. Women and female leadership are essential in diplomatic and military fields. Passing a WPS Act alone is not enough. Penning goals for WPS implementation with no accountability is not enough. Giving lip service to WPS is not enough. If the U.S. and, by extension, the U.S. military genuinely support conditions enabling stability, upholding human rights, and seeking peace, then WPS is key. If DoD effectively puts the WPS agenda into practice, the U.S. military could lead the world through example and not just through rhetoric.

⁴⁰ Hope Hodge Seck, "Opening Combat Jobs to Women Will Mean Lower Standards: Marine General," Military.com, October 31, 2017, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2016/01/08/opening-combat-jobs-women-mean-lower-standards-marine-general.html>.

⁴¹ Gina Harkins, "Marine Commandant Wants Answers on Why Women, Minorities Decline to Seek Command," Military.com, September 11, 2020, <https://www.military.com/daily-news/2020/09/11/marine-commandant-wants-answers-why-women-minorities-decline-seek-command.html>.

To remain relevant and safe in a complex world, the U.S. military must understand women's role in every facet of national power. In the Marine Corps, roadblocks prevent the full implementation of the WPS agenda. The number of females serving, their roles, the value of their contributions, and the culture in which they operate must improve. These challenges are not insurmountable. If the Corps values its women members, desires security and peace, and wants to remain relevant on the international stage, it has no choice but to change. If the Marine Corps can forge a path to embrace WPS, despite all the obstacles, then so too can all of DoD.