



## Women in Combat: a bibliography

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Women may soon be able to serve in combat roles in the Armed Forces. The Defence Secretary has launched a review of the current policy that excludes women from ground close combat roles. It will report back by the end of 2014, a shift from the Government's previously stated position to not review the policy before the end of operations in Afghanistan. Previous reviews were conducted in 2002 and 2010.

This note provides a short overview and a bibliography of sources of further reading.

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**1 Overview**

The vast majority of trades in the Armed Forces are open to women except ground close combat roles where the primary role is to close with and kill the enemy over short range on the ground. These are: Royal Marines; the Household Cavalry; Royal Armoured Corps; Infantry and the Royal Air Force Regiment.

Two reviews, carried out by the Government in 2002 and 2010, concluded women should continue to be excluded from close combat roles because of concerns about how mixed gender teams would function in ground close-combat environments, and lack of evidence of how such teams might function from either field exercises or from the experience in other countries. The reason was not because of physicality. The then Parliamentary Under-Secretary of State for Defence, Andrew Robathan, said at the time of publication of the 2010 review:

In the light of the inconclusive results of the research and the views of the service chiefs, I have concluded that a precautionary approach is necessary. Accordingly, the current policy of excluding women from ground close-combat roles while ensuring that the maximum numbers of trades are available to provide opportunity to those women who wish to serve their country will continue.<sup>1</sup>

The Sex Discrimination Act 1975 and the Equality Act 2010 allows the armed forces to exclude women from those posts where the military judgement is that the employment of women would undermine and degrade combat effectiveness. The EC Equal Treatment Directive also allows such exclusions but requires periodic reassessments in order to decide, in light of social developments, whether there is justification for maintaining the exclusion. Reassessments are required at least every eight years.<sup>2</sup>

The next review was not therefore required until 2018 and the Government said in January 2013 it had no intention of reviewing the decision before the end of combat operations in Afghanistan in December 2014.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> [HC Deb 29 November 2010 c61WS](#)

<sup>2</sup> [Council Directive 76/207/EEC](#), 9 February 1976, articles 2.2 and 9; see also Report on the Review of the Exclusion of women from Ground close-combat roles, November 2010, para 4

<sup>3</sup> [“Defence in the media”](#), *Ministry of Defence*, 25 January 2013

However the Secretary of State for Defence, Philip Hammond, told reporters on 8 May 2014 he had brought the review forward because he was concerned of the message it sends to women that the Army is not fully open to them. This comes at a time when the Army is undergoing a significant restructure. Shadow defence secretary Vernon Coaker welcomed the review.<sup>4</sup>

The Terms of Reference for the Review were published on 3 July 2014 and are available in full on the [Ministry of Defence](#) website.<sup>5</sup> The aims of the review are to:

- assess the current exclusion of women from ground close combat roles
- identify the benefits and risks of changing this policy
- make recommendations

The review will be led by the Chief of the General Staff, General Sir Peter Wall. While the Army is the lead service, the review will cover all three services.

The number of roles open to women has gradually increased over the years. Women have been allowed to serve as fighter pilots since the early 1990s. In October 1997 the Secretary of State announced the Army was to extend employment opportunities for women from 47% to 70% of posts. Figures compiled in 2006 show that 71% of posts in the Navy, 67% of posts in the Army and 96% of posts in the RAF are open to women.<sup>6</sup> More recently, women have been able to apply to become mine clearance divers and submariners since 2010 and 2011 respectively. Women currently make up 9.7% of the regular armed forces. The RAF has the largest percentage of women in total while the Army has the fewest.<sup>7</sup>

Many hundreds of women have served in Iraq and Afghanistan in a number of roles that have taken them into a combat situation.<sup>8</sup> The key difference is the primary purpose of these roles is not one that meets the definition of Ground Close Combat Roles, unlike infantry units.

The MOD has acknowledged that there are a small number of support roles in the infantry in the Territorial Army that are filled by women. However the MOD says these are based in the UK and are non-deployable roles: “No female reserve personnel would be mobilised and deployed in a ground close-combat role on operations overseas.”<sup>9</sup>

A number of other countries have lifted restrictions on women participating in combat units in recent years, including Australia, Canada, Germany, Israel, New Zealand and Norway.<sup>10</sup> The United States lifted its restrictions on women serving in combat units in January 2013. The MOD commissioned a review into the experiences of other nations for its 2010 Review. The report, *Women in Ground Close Combat Roles: The Experiences of other Nations and a Review of the Academic Literature*, profiled 18 countries. It found that of the countries that do

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<sup>4</sup> “Ban on women in army combat units set to end: Hammond orders review and strikes positive note: Physical fitness the only concern, says minister”, *The Guardian*, 9 May 2014

<sup>5</sup> “[Review into the exclusion of women from ground close combat roles: terms of reference](#)”, *Ministry of Defence*, 3 July 2014

<sup>6</sup> “[UK Armed Forces Annual Personnel Report](#)”, *Ministry of Defence*, 1 April 2013

<sup>7</sup> “[UK Armed Forces Annual Personnel Report](#)”, *Ministry of Defence*, 1 April 2013

<sup>8</sup> See for example “[Sergeant Beth Wilson on serving in Afghanistan](#)”, *MOD News*, 7 March 2013; : “[Meet Juliette, the RAF bombshell who terrified the Taliban in her fighter jet](#)”, *The Daily Mail*, 27 January 2010

<sup>9</sup> “[Defence in the media](#)”, *Ministry of Defence*, 25 January 2013

<sup>10</sup> “[8 Other Nations That Send Women to Combat](#)”, *National Geographic News*, 25 January 2013

employ women in such units, uptake has been slow. Reasons given include the rigorous physical demands of the role, perceived lack of resilience or aggressiveness and enduring negative gender stereotyping from male colleagues.

House of Commons Library Standard Note [Women in public life, the professions and the boardroom](#), SN05170, takes a broader look at how women are represented in public life and sets out key trends in a variety of sectors.

## **2 Government and Parliamentary Publications**

Ministry of Defence, "[Women in combat roles](#)", 8 May 2014

["Armed Forces Front-line Combat Roles: Women"](#), HL Deb 6 May 2014 c1393-5

["Submarine Service"](#), HC Deb 8 December 2011 c42WS

[Ground close combat roles \(Women\)](#), HC Deb 29 November 2010 c61WS

Secretary of State for Defence, [Armed Forces \(Women\)](#), HC Deb 22 May 2002 c363W

### ***The 2002 and 2010 reviews***

Ministry of Defence, [Report on the Review of the Exclusion of women from Ground close-combat roles](#), November 2010.

Defence Science and Technology Laboratory, [Women in Ground Close Combat Roles: The Experiences of other Nations and a Review of the Academic Literature](#), 29 September 2009 (published to accompany the November 2010 Report)

Ministry of Defence, [Women in the Armed Forces](#), 22 May 2002, DEP 02/1055.

## **3 Journal and newspaper articles**

The JSCSC library of the Defence Academy has published a bibliography on this topic entitled: [women in combat](#) which contains additional material to that listed below.

["Women set to get green light for combat roles in the British army"](#), *The Guardian*, 8 May 2014

Joanne Mackowski, ["Women in Combat: British Band of Brothers May Soon Be History"](#), *RUSI analysis*, 9 May 2014

["Women could be rushed on to the frontline in combat roles to 'maintain operational competitiveness'"](#), *Mail Online*, 8 May 2014

["German army losing luster for female members"](#), *Deutsche Welle*, 26 January 2014

["Women in Combat: issues for Congress"](#), *Congressional Research Service*, 9 May 2013 R42075

Ben Barry, "Women in Combat", *Survival*, April – May 2013, vol 55:2, p19-30

["Ban lifted, but few women apply for combat roles"](#), *ABC News*, 25 April 2013

Anthony King, "Women in Combat", *The RUSI Journal*, February/March 2013, vol 158:1, 4-11

Vix Anderton, "On the frontline of equality", *RUSI Newsbrief*, 8 March 2013

"Argentine army to allow women to fill combat roles for first time", *Jane's Intelligence Weekly*, 24 February 2013

"The US decision to allow women to serve as front-line combat troops has stirred passions in Britain." *The Daily Telegraph*, 25 January 2013.

"US DoD lifts ban on female combat troops", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 25 January 2013

["8 Other Nations That Send Women to Combat"](#), *National Geographic News*, 25 January 2013.

Olivera Simic, "Does the presence of women really matter? Towards combating male sexual violence in peacekeeping operations", *International Peacekeeping*, 2010, vol 17, issue 2, p188-199

Irene Eulriet, "Towards More Coherence? Policy and Legal Aspects of Gender Equality in the Armed Forces of Europe", *Journal of European Integration*, 2009, Vol. 31:6 p741-756

"Women and War", *RUSI Journal*, December 2003

"A Woman's Role...in Close Combat", *RUSI Newsbrief*, March 2001

"Women can never belong in combat", *British Army Review*, 2000-2001

"On the Military Significance of Being Female", *British Army Review*, 2000-2001

"Women warriors", *Jane's Defence Weekly*, 23 June 1999

## **4 Books**

Robert L Maginnis, *Deadly consequences: how cowards are pushing women into combat*, Regnery Publishing, 2013

Kate Adie, *Corsets to Camouflage*, Hodder & Stoughton 2003

Helena Carreiras, *Gender and the Military*, Routledge 2006

Rachel Woodward and Trish Winter, *Sexing the Soldier: the politics of gender and the contemporary British army*, Routledge 2007

Rachel Woodward and Claire Duncanson are currently conducting research into women in the Armed Forces: lessons from Afghanistan, at Newcastle University. It is projected to end in August 2015 and more information is available on the website: [Gender and the Armed Forces](#)