

The Month In Women, Peace And Security: February 2018

[ASPI](#)

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Women, 'standards' and the military

Analysis by *The Economist* shows that there's a link between gender, prevailing norms and barriers to women's participation in male-dominated fields. This is relevant in the military, where [this month](#) the US Marine Corps removed the 'pass/fail' requirement for its gruelling Combat Endurance Test. Objectors argue that the high failure rate for women indicates that they're unsuitable for combat, and that removing the test lowers military standards and respect for military women. These objections speak to military traditions where ideological adherence to imagined military requirements reinforce conclusions that are skewed to favour men.

Former US Army Colonel Ellen Haring [notes](#) that the test is more initiation rite than accurate assessment of suitability. Marine Corps officials agreed, saying that the change didn't lower standards and that quality would remain the same. While military personnel need to meet certain standards, the debate shows that in an era where women face [persistent legal barriers](#) to work, it's worth questioning the biases that inform the 'standard'.

Women in post-conflict constitutional reform

In the past 25 years, 75 countries have undertaken post-conflict constitutional reform. Including women in political and legal decision-making is important to creating lasting peace and stability. Inclusive Security's recently released report, '[How women influence constitution making after conflict and unrest](#)', highlights that women's participation has increased, yet they remain significantly underrepresented. Between 2010 and 2015, the average participation level for women was 24%, compared with 19% previously. This increase is due to growing demands for female democratic participation, allowing women to form coalitions and partnerships with civil society groups, the use quotas in some instances and international commitments. The report shows that including women in constitutional reform can bridge communal divides, broaden societal participation and advance more equitable and inclusive societies.

Learning from Bougainville

A report from [Conciliation Resources](#) analyses the difficulty in translating women's participation in peace processes into lasting influence in both decision-making and political structures in countries with strong patriarchal institutions and norms. The report analyses the Bougainville peace process and concludes that there were difficulties reconciling local norms with internationally accepted understandings of gender equality.

Opportunity for Syria

Will the [constitutional committee](#) charged with writing a new constitution for Syria comprise 30% women as promised? There remains some [doubt](#). Post-conflict peace processes provide an opportunity to advance gender equality, so it will be interesting to watch what happens in Syria.

Explaining the links between women and security

A [podcast](#) from the Asia & the Pacific Policy Society fleshes out how patriarchal societal norms hinder progress towards gender equality. The podcast features the managing director of the [Women, Peace and Security Index](#), which provides data on women's inclusion, justice and security, and ranks countries based on these indicators.

Gender and justice

Morocco made a significant step in the right direction in introducing new [legislation](#) to prevent violence against women. The new law criminalises some forms of domestic violence. However, it still requires survivors of abuse to file for criminal protection in order to obtain prosecution. The legislation obligates public authorities to take preventative measures, and it establishes special units to serve the needs of women. However, the law fails to include mechanisms to monitor those units' actions and conduct, or to hold them accountable. [Human Rights Watch](#) has identified some concerns, including that police and prosecutors are reluctant to act in what they consider 'private family matters'.

Justice and poverty

Poverty severely affects the ability of many women to seek justice. Survivors of domestic abuse must often return to abusive households because they can't support

themselves. [Brookings](#) has explored the degree to which justice is a dimension of poverty, and assesses women's access to justice in Jordan. Additional background can be found [here](#).

Women, furor and armed forces

There has been great debate about the role of women in the armed forces this month. Saudi Arabia [allowed women to apply](#) for military service for the first time. In Israel, women have been conscripted into the IDF since 2000 under the equality amendment to the [Defense Service Law](#). Controversy abounds after IDF Chief Rabbi Eyal Karim said that [men will have the right to choose](#) whether they serve alongside women in the army. Karim's comments came after several male Orthodox soldiers from the IDF Armoured Corps [boycotted a training exercise](#) because, for the first time, women were participating. While much attention has been paid to the rights of Orthodox men in the IDF, [silence prevails](#) on the rights of Orthodox women in the IDF despite a third of women in the Orthodox community enlisting.

Other stories this month explored the gendered identity of armed forces and a woman's place in them. Human Rights Watch [reported](#) that women who surrender alongside IS fighters in Iraq are punished disproportionately. Philippines President Rodrigo Duterte [defended his orders](#) to shoot female guerrilla fighters 'in the vagina'. Closer to home, remarks [criticising](#) women serving in frontline positions in the Australian Defence Force sparked a national discussion. Minister for Defense Marise Payne [weighed in](#): 'The ADF is strengthened through engagement of great serving women and men. You can't ignore the abilities of half the population in the 21st century.'

Yemen's call to arms

Based on these reports, women's participation in war is often relegated. But many stories emerged out of Yemen this month noting that women are [recovering abducted men](#) by leveraging their relations with Houthi clerics—something men can't do. Others try to [mitigate the effects](#) of the Yemen conflict by providing humanitarian relief and trauma support. Still, [doubts remain](#) as to whether operational success and greater responsibility translates into empowerment for women in war.

Launch of Fifth Report of the Annual Civil Society Dialogue

On Tuesday, 6 March, the Fifth Report of the Annual Civil Society Dialogue on Women, Peace and Security will be launched. The report highlights the need to focus on achieving peace and conflict prevention through meaningful engagement with civil society, especially women's organisations. RSVP for the event [here](#). The report informs the development of Australia's second [National Action Plan \(NAP\) on Women, Peace and Security](#). The first NAP [was criticised](#) for being too broad, and for prioritising grand issues of national security and terrorism over increasing civil society's understanding of peace and security in everyday lives.