



In addition to their daily duties within Combat Logistics Battalion 6, Marine Expeditionary Brigade–Afghanistan, Marines also serve as FET members to establish rapport with locals (U.S. Marine Corps/Justin Shemanski)

Blurred Lines

Cultural Support Teams in Afghanistan

By Megan Katt

Megan Katt is a Research Analyst in the Center for Stability and Development at the Center for Naval Analyses. She is a co-author (with Jerry Meyerle and Jim Gavrillis) of the book *On the Ground in Afghanistan: Counterinsurgency in Practice* (Marine Corps University Press, 2012).

Allowing women in combat is a highly controversial subject. Yet regardless of their official military occupational specialty (MOS), female Servicemembers have often found themselves in combat situations—most recently in Iraq and Afghanistan. In both combat zones, male and female Servicemembers alike

have conducted counterinsurgency and stability operations—so-called irregular warfare activities that lack clearly defined “frontlines” against enemies who do not wear uniforms. These types of operating environments forcefully negate any biological sex combat restrictions as the lives of both men and women are at risk.

Along with the highly trained and capable special operations forces (SOF) operating in remote locations throughout Afghanistan, lesser known teams of female Soldiers, Marines, and Sailors have worked to develop enduring relationships with Afghan women. These enabling units, which evolved from earlier female engagement efforts and ultimately became known as Cultural Support Teams (CSTs), have supported SOF units conducting village stability operations (VSO). While skirting Department of Defense (DOD)-imposed restrictions on women in combat that had been in place since 1994, the women on CSTs faced substantial personal and physical risk. By stepping “outside the wire” to converse with locals, they placed themselves in harm’s way,¹ engaged in firefights, and, in some cases, were specifically targeted by insurgents. At a time when the U.S. military is pulling back from a large-scale irregular warfare mission in Afghanistan and trying to rebalance the Armed Forces for more traditional operations, it is worth examining whether these types of all-female teams will be relevant to future operating environments.

Based primarily on author interviews with CST and SOF personnel,² this article describes the CST program; why it was created and how it evolved from previous efforts; how some CST members were selected and trained; the types of activities that members of these teams conducted; the challenges that arose; and the lessons that can be drawn from their experiences. While this article does provide some background on gender policy restrictions, it does not argue either for or against making combat positions available to women. The nature of conflict in these types of environments belies the idea that women can simply be kept out of combat. Therefore, this article focuses on what some female Servicemembers were able to accomplish executing population-focused operations under the combat restrictions in place at the time. It concludes by discussing potential implications of the sexual policy restrictions debate on the future of a CST-like capability.

Moving across “Frontlines”

Women’s roles in the military have necessarily evolved over the past several decades, while still limited by DOD restrictions on the types of positions they could fill. In 1988, DOD created the so-called Risk Rule, which excluded women from units that had a high probability of engaging in ground combat, hostile fire, or capture.³ In 1994, DOD replaced that regulation with the Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule, otherwise known as the DOD Combat Exclusion Policy, which restricted the assignment of women to units below the brigade level whose primary mission was to engage in direct ground combat.⁴ According to the policy, female Servicemembers were restricted from jobs in a primary MOS of ground combat, such as in the infantry. Yet with these rules in place, women have increasingly been allowed to serve in a wider range of combat support roles, including as explosive ordnance disposal technicians, military police, interpreters, drivers, and working dog handlers. In irregular warfare, where frontlines are nonexistent, many of these supporting jobs can take women into the line of fire, often with little ground combat training.

Counterinsurgency and stability operations in Iraq and Afghanistan challenged U.S. forces to identify friend from foe as they operated among civilians, including many women and children. Perceived indiscriminate use of force and culturally prohibited contact between male Servicemembers and local women (for instance, during night raids) angered local populations and proved counterproductive to the overall mission. In an effort to avoid these confrontations and show more respect for the local culture, U.S. forces largely ignored the female population. Insurgents, in turn, took advantage of these cultural sensitivities by disguising themselves in women’s clothing to avoid detection during searches. Men wearing traditional burkas—full body cloaks worn by some Muslim women—could escape the military’s grasp by blending in with women.

To counter this insurgent tactic in Iraq, the U.S. military developed what became known as the Lioness Program. As part of this initiative, the military posted female Soldiers and Marines at control points to interdict and search women for weapons, explosives, and other contraband. However, these teams were staffed in ad hoc fashion by female Servicemembers who were pulled from their regular duties and who received minimal training for these new responsibilities. In addition, the narrowly focused program did not provide opportunities for persistent engagement with the female population.

In an attempt to develop better relationships with Iraqi women and identify sources of instability, the Marines developed the Iraqi Women’s Engagement Program. Unfortunately, not much is written about the program—in part possibly due to potential controversy over women being placed in combat situations. What little is known is that a group of female Civil Affairs (CA) Marines reportedly began the program in Al Anbar Province in 2006. The uniformed women aimed to build trust with local women by discussing their concerns over cups of tea. Later, these efforts also included talking to women during sewing clinics and medical engagements. The indirect effect of these engagements was a nascent dialogue on the factors of instability in the area.

Providing Opportunities for Engagement

The Iraq experience, although limited, highlighted the positive effects of female engagement in that type of environment and the need for a similar tool in Afghanistan. In a society with limited women’s rights and restrictions on contact between the sexes, Afghan women were culturally off-limits to outside men. Male Servicemembers ran the risk of showing disrespect to locals if they engaged with women during patrols, raids, or other operations. As in Iraq, Soldiers and Marines realized there was a need to fill that gap, as well as to build rapport with the female portion of the population. This requirement



FET Team 11 members in Helmand Province listen to other Marines talk about their deployment experiences (U.S. Marine Corps/Katherine Keleher)

resulted in the Female Engagement Team (FET) initiative, which combined the Lioness Program's efforts to search women with the Iraqi Women's Engagement Program's efforts to address underlying causes of instability, merging them into even broader operational roles.

The Army and Marine Corps assembled FETs on an ad hoc basis upon the request of maneuver units. As a result, female Servicemembers already on the ground were pulled from their regular jobs and had little or no time to train for their additional FET responsibilities. Moreover, because these women did not have a ground combat MOS or any of the training that would accompany it, some have argued that this staffing put them and the men serving alongside them at greater risk.⁵

The first reported FET was assembled on an ad hoc basis to support a specific cordon and search operation in western Afghanistan in February 2009. The team, which consisted of female Marines and

a female interpreter, provided the same search function that the Lioness Program had in Iraq. Yet the team also visited with Afghan women in their homes and distributed humanitarian supplies in an effort to develop goodwill. Later that year, a similar FET was established after insurgents were able to escape a military cordon by dressing like Afghan women. These early FETs largely conducted short-term search and engagement missions.

In late 2009, the commander of the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) institutionalized the FET concept by directing all deploying military units to create all-female teams to develop and improve relationships with Afghan women. To quickly fill the requirement, initial FET training was limited and ranged from just a few days to months. Generally speaking, training focused on combat activities but also included some instruction on Afghan culture, language (Dari or Pashto), use of interpreters, and other softer skill sets relevant to operating among the population.

By 2010, the Army and Marine Corps began to send dedicated FETs, which ranged from two to five women per FET, to support battalion and company commanders across an area of operation. The first trained, dedicated, and full-time Marine FETs arrived in Southwest Afghanistan in the spring of 2010. Depending on the need, FETs, sometimes augmented by a female interpreter or medic, accompanied all-male infantry patrols in Helmand Province. Similar to the Afghan women who needed to be escorted by a male relative in public, female Servicemembers needed to be escorted by their male colleagues outside the wire due to force protection restrictions.⁶ This created resource constraints for units every time they took FETs outside the wire. While FETs were generally sent to areas that had largely been cleared of insurgents, they still took a combat-training refresher course and carried M-4 carbine rifles with the full expectation that they would be exposed to combat situations.

Marine FETs conducted a range of engagements during their 7-month tours. Generally, after a team arrived in a village, female Marines went door to door to engage women and learn about the area and villagers' concerns. Once inside an Afghan compound, they removed their weapons and body armor as a sign of respect. They also replaced their helmets with headscarves to be culturally sensitive. In many areas, the FETs found that Afghan men were also willing to engage with them. Yet while the FET members could listen to the concerns and issues raised by villagers, in many cases they did not have the authority or capability to address them. In addition, some criticized the FET program because the teams were unable to create lasting effects due to the episodic and temporary nature of their engagement as coalition forces moved through an area, never to return.

In addition to engagement, each FET was tasked with a variety of responsibilities—perhaps more than the name of the program implies. In addition to engaging with and gathering information from Afghan families, they distributed information, facilitated CA programs (for example, distributed school supplies and opened schools or clinics), supported female-focused governance and development projects (developing women's centers, providing micro-grants), held key leader engagements and women only-shuras, conducted medical outreach, assisted with cordon and knock operations, and searched women.

Developing a SOF-Specific Female Engagement Capability

Meanwhile, similar female engagement capabilities were quietly being developed within the special operations community to fit mission requirements. The ISAF commander began to pressure U.S. Special Operations Command (USSOCOM) to develop its own FET-like capabilities to embed with SOF units to assist with engaging Afghan women in support of direct operations. Marine Corps Forces Special Operations Command (MARSOC) was one of the first to experiment with using an FET in 2010 by pulling one

Marine officer, two enlisted personnel, and a Navy corpsman from their day jobs to support a Special Operations Task Force (SOTF) in this new role.⁷ Because these women lacked specific training and were pulled from their regular duties, the effort was less than seamless; however, this did not dissuade MARSOC from the concept. Instead, MARSOC deployed a female unit with the sole purpose of conducting the FET mission in an organic capability to support a SOF unit in June 2010.

The SOF female engagement program was formally created in 2010 under the direction of the USSOCOM commander. The United States Army Special Operations Command, Naval Special Warfare Command, and MARSOC expanded on the FET concept by developing what became known as Cultural Support Teams (CSTs). The term itself took sex out of the equation; however, the teams still solely comprised female Servicemembers. The primary difference between the two was that FETs were used to soften coalition forces' footprint as they moved through an area, whereas CSTs were designed to provide persistent presence and engagement—a key tenet of population-focused operations conducted by SOF.

These two-person CSTs were given a wider mission set to support SOF conducting “non-direct ground combat missions,” specifically village stability operations. As part of VSO, small SOF teams aimed to disrupt the insurgency and foster stability in relatively remote villages where the Afghan government was not represented by its own security forces. Special operators engaged influential local leaders in an effort to recruit community defense forces, empower local governance, and bolster economic development—all in an effort to expand the reach of the Afghan government and disrupt insurgent influence. The CSTs provided an opportunity for SOF to communicate with Afghan women, something they had been limited from doing previously due to cultural sensitivities. In short, VSO became a loophole for female Servicemembers to operate alongside the most highly trained—and exclusively male—forces on the battlefield.

Identifying Suitable Candidates

Per USSOCOM's directive, each of the Services began to recruit female Servicemembers to work alongside the military's most elite units. Some Services solely recruited volunteers, whereas others, which had larger operating requirements, reportedly assigned personnel to these teams. Because these CSTs are designed to support SOF teams at the lowest levels, the qualification requirements and selection process of these women has been demanding. Each Service conducts a thorough assessment to locate candidates who are both physically and mentally fit. Like special operators, the Services look for specific selection criteria in identifying suitable candidates. Many women have reportedly been turned down during the assessment process.

MARSOC evaluators held female candidates to the standards similar to MARSOC male special operators, known as Critical Skills Operators (CSOs), since they would be working alongside each other. MARSOC candidates needed top physical fitness test and general technical scores. Prior deployment experience was also a factor. If women met these criteria, MARSOC psychologists then administered the same four psychology exams that potential CSOs receive to ensure that their personalities and psychological profiles were compatible with the individuals with whom they would deploy and that they could make the necessary adjustments to keep up with the distributed, fast-paced nature of the Afghanistan mission. Finally, MARSOC evaluators conducted an oral interview with eligible candidates to gauge interest and determine whether they could “think on their feet” to make quick decisions on the ground.

The qualified Marines ultimately selected for MARSOC CSTs came from a variety of occupational specialties, ranging from judge advocate to military police officer to automotive maintenance technician. The most common occupational fields included logistics, communications, and military police, investigations, and corrections. Most were enlisted personnel ranging from sergeant to gunnery sergeant. In addition, Marine

teams were also often supplemented by medically trained Sailors, such as Independent Duty Corpsmen.

Preparing Women to Be SOF Enablers

Subtle differences also existed in how each Service trained its female candidates for the mission. According to many accounts, individual augmentees received varying amounts of training to fill the emerging requirement. As the program expanded, the Services slowly developed their own formalized training packages for CSTs. For example, MARSOC developed a series of training organized into blocks. For a total of 109 days, its female volunteers were trained to the same standards as other MARSOC enablers:

- The first block of instruction began by focusing on engagements and rapport-building with an Afghan focus. MARSOC hired female subject matter experts in negotiations and Afghan culture (tailored to the region in which the women would deploy) for both discussion and practical application. CST members learned about Afghanistan, Afghan values, and the nuanced roles of women in that society.
- The second block of instruction taught female Servicemembers the basics of how CSTs would fit into the MARSOC intelligence process, as well as additional instruction on combative training, riot control, and increased observation and situational awareness. In addition, CST candidates participated in the MARSOC intelligence course's culminating exercise, which not only gave them a chance to practice what they had learned but also allowed the MARSOC students the opportunity to leverage every asset available to them to complete their mission.
- The third block of instruction focused on civil-military operations (CMO). MARSOC sent its candidates to the Marine Corps Civil Military Operations School to receive CMO training, at the end of which

students received an additional MOS in CA. CMO skills are particularly useful in an irregular environment and provided CSTs with an additional capability they could bring to their assigned SOF team if CA personnel were unavailable.

- The fourth block of instruction consisted of the basic MARSOC special operations training course, which all MARSOC enablers attend in order to prepare for the rigors of a combat deployment with a MARSOC SOTF, company, or team. There, CST candidates received an introduction to SOF operations and learned how CSOs operate. In addition, the course provides a basic combat skills refresher course (that is, "shoot, move, and communicate") to dust off those skills and add a special operations approach. CST candidates were also trained to master the weapon (an M-4 rifle and/or a pistol) that they were assigned and would carry with them during their deployments. Even though CSTs have supported nondirect combat missions, they have still operated in a combat environment. As an integrated member of a special operations team, each CST member had to be prepared to engage in direct combat in case a situation took a kinetic turn.
- The fifth block of instruction included MARSOC's full-spectrum survival, evasion, resistance, and escape course, which incorporates field survival basics, including hostage and detainee operations. In addition to preparing them for survival, it helped prepare them mentally and physically by gaining a better understanding of the other women they would deploy with and their limitations.

Additionally, CST candidates received training in tactical questioning, basic medical skills, and tactical driving—all of which made them more useful to the special operations team to which they would be attached and created additional opportunities to get outside the wire to engage with the local population.

Finally, MARSOC provided them with interactive software and books so that they could learn Dari. By August 2013, a total of 18 Marines and 5 Sailors had completed MARSOC's CST training program, which then deployed with even higher numbers from the other Services.

Deploying with SOF

The first formalized CSTs from the Army and Marines began to deploy in two-woman teams in early 2011. Due to DOD restrictions below the battalion level, CSTs were formally attached to larger special operations units—generally SOTFs—and then distributed throughout the battlespace as needed. Not every VSO site and SOF unit received a CST. Instead, attachments were based on demand. After a special operations team secured a VSO site and identified a need for a CST, the SOTF attached one based on the team's capabilities. In addition to initially attaching them to units, the SOTF could rear-range CSTs based on mission requirements and CST members' individual skill sets. In many cases, teams have been split—sometimes over different districts—to divide responsibilities and leverage particular skill sets based on local needs (such as medical care).

CSTs have supported a broad spectrum of activities across all three lines of operations: security, governance, and development. Special operations teams have incorporated CSTs differently into their missions depending on the local situation. As designed, many have accompanied special operators into villages on patrols to engage and help build rapport with local women, much like FETs. There have also been cases in which CSTs have effectively engaged women and children after alleged civilian casualty incidents. By developing relationships with the local population and sharing the information (sometimes time-sensitive information) that they gather with their teams, special operators can develop a more complete picture of the operating environment than was previously attainable. Like FETs, CST activities include providing medical support and humanitarian assistance, conducting key leader



Afghan children gather around FET member during shura to discuss current local issues (U.S. Marine Corps/Andrea M. Olguin)

engagements, exploring girls' education issues, and performing searches on the female population. In many cases, CST members have established rapport with locals, exchanged cell phone numbers, and been invited to visit women's homes. Their capabilities are also broader than those of FETs. CSTs can follow special operators into areas after they have been secured, including after raids. In those situations, CSTs then use search and seizure techniques to find hidden items on females (for example, weapons or contraband)—and, like FETs, occasionally uncover a militant dressed as a woman.

CST activities can be largely dependent on location and the permissibility of the environment. In northern Afghanistan, for example, governance and development were primary goals in 2012. At one site, a CST member with medical training focused on conducting medical engagements. At another site, her CST partner worked with the Ministry of Education to reform education syllabi. Around the same time in

western Afghanistan, CST accomplishments included opening a clinic and a girls' school, in addition to organizing a women-only shura. CST members also worked with government ministries, such as the Department of Women's Affairs and the Labor Union, in an advising role.

Finally, a CST member could also provide value to the team by conducting tasks related to her MOS, such as communications, CA, or driving.

Recurring Challenges

CSTs, like their predecessors, have received mixed reviews. While their operational impact is difficult to measure, many special operations teams have spoken highly of the enabling capabilities they have provided in the execution of VSO in persistent situations, particularly in gathering information. In other cases, special operations teams either have not known how to best use their capabilities or have not been able to due to limitations based on the security situation. Like other

enabling capabilities, there has also been the risk that abilities did not measure up to expectations or that personalities would clash.

In my discussions with both CST and SOF members, a number of recurring challenges emerged. CST members discussed challenges with integrating into teams, misperceptions of their capabilities, and a lack of capable female interpreters. Special operators identified additional challenges such as site selection, security limitations and considerations, and sexual tension between CST and SOF members.

Some CST members indicated that it could be difficult to integrate with a special operations team as an outsider to a "band of brothers"—a concern similarly raised by members of other enabler units (for instance, CA) as well. In northern Afghanistan, one CST Soldier described her team's integration with an Army Operational Detachment–Alpha (ODA) as a train wreck. The SOF unit had misperceptions about the capabilities



Marines practice speed and tactical reloads while training to become augments for FETs (U.S. Marine Corps/Ryan Rhoads)

of her team. In situations such as those, CSTs can run the risk of turning into a hindrance for the special operations team and can therefore be underutilized. In that case, it took time for the women to gain the operators' trust and understanding. That same CST was later moved to a different site where the resident ODA made the team an extension of its own team. She believed that the primary difference between the two experiences was that the second ODA was already familiar with the capabilities they could provide and how best to use them.

Finding qualified female interpreters was another issue identified by several interviewed CST members. In some areas, such as western Afghanistan, it may be culturally acceptable to use a male interpreter. However, that is generally not the case in ethnically Pashto areas. And while it can be relatively easy to find male interpreters, there are generally far fewer mentally and physically fit female interpreters. One CST started its deployment with a young female interpreter who spoke a different dialect from the one spoken in their assigned area. That same CST later received a different interpreter with impressive language capabilities; however, she was older and her physical ability was limited, which in turn limited team mobility. At another location, a CST member

indicated that her team's interpreters could not keep up on long patrols, in effect slowing the special operators down. Therefore, without a good interpreter, the CST could not effectively do its job.

According to some special operators, security has been a limiting factor in assigning CSTs to different sites. Some operators suggested that CSTs could potentially be more useful to gain buy-in by engaging with female villagers during the initial stages of VSO when the area is less permissive. However, due to DOD-imposed restrictions, CSTs were instead introduced to the village later when the area was relatively secure and male Servicemembers had already developed local relationships. Similarly, some areas were more receptive to CSTs. At some of the locations where CSTs were assigned, Afghan women were either uninformed or unwilling to share information, which hindered a CST's ability to complete its mission.

Ultimately, in some situations, special operators determined that the costs of using CSTs outweighed the benefits—that is, in some cases, CSTs were not worth the risk for the team due to protocols and security considerations. One special operator explained that it could be manpower-intensive to bring CST members out to a shura or on a mission.

If a CST member took up a seat, it meant that she had taken the place of another operator (with his own supplementary capabilities). In addition, taking a CST member anywhere usually required bringing along an interpreter and a security patrol. As a result, even though two women were on each CST, often only one would go out on each mission. That made it easier for the team to patrol and meant that they did not need to take additional operators with them for security purposes, possibly requiring an additional vehicle.

Finally, operators expressed concerns about sexual tension and activity impacting unit effectiveness, an argument frequently cited in studies on women in combat. Working long hours in close quarters and in sometimes austere conditions has the potential to bring people together in any job. Some have suggested that sexual relationships have had the potential to impact daily operations and unit cohesion. In addition, there have been some complaints about a lack of maturity of both men and women. Yet this issue may have been mitigated at VSO sites that had strong leadership.

Implications for the Future

The FET and CST programs were emergent mission-specific requirements, which the Services met by initially recruiting female Servicemembers out of hide from other units as individual augmentees. In particular, CSTs in Afghanistan opened the door for female troops to operate alongside special operations units in the battlefield. They were specifically selected and trained to work with SOF as part of VSO. The Marine Corps ended its use of CSTs in Afghanistan in 2013 because of the drastic change in mission when SOF moved out of villages into overwatch positions. However, as the U.S. military continues to withdraw from Afghanistan and looks to prepare and posture itself for the future, it should consider whether CSTs are truly an enduring requirement for SOF, which will continue to conduct irregular warfare activities around the globe and could benefit from this enabling capability.

The conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan reflect the likely future of combat—non-linear and population-focused—and will increasingly place female Servicemembers in combat situations. Both men and women have fought and died in these combat environments. Partly as a result, DOD has recently relaxed its restrictions on women in combat. In February 2012, DOD modified the 1994 Combat Exclusion Policy to increase the overall number of positions available to women.⁸ Then, in February 2013, DOD eliminated the exclusion policy and began to allow each Service to determine any restrictions specific to its members.⁹ Each Service is now examining potential roles for women in future operating environments.

The results of these studies may help the Services determine whether FETs and CSTs are necessary in future operating environments. For example, if the Services do choose to open all positions to women, these all-female teams may not be necessary once units are fully integrated; more trained women will potentially be available on the battlefield to regularly engage with female counterparts during patrols and meetings or after raids. If they do choose to leave restrictions in place for women in combat, the Army and Marine Corps may want to consider institutionalizing an FET-like capability within each infantry battalion, with special attention to the CA skill sets found necessary in Afghanistan. The resource commitment would be relatively small and would maximize a unit's effects in population-focused operations. Similarly, USSOCOM may ultimately decide that female Servicemembers should not be allowed to serve in a special operations-specific MOS. If that is the case, the potential still exists for SOF to benefit from CSTs in other theaters.

Regardless of the policy restrictions debate and the Services' findings, the need for a CST-like capability will endure as SOF continue to operate in irregular battlefields all over the world. While the VSO mission was designed expressly for Afghanistan, its roots are in traditional SOF missions, such as counterinsurgency, stability operations, and foreign

internal defense. In these population-centric missions, CSTs can help provide access to roughly half of the population through engagement activities. In addition, CSTs could be enormously beneficial during SOF training missions with partner nations. In countries that have female soldiers or police, the addition of women to an otherwise all-male team could give them greater access and placement during a Joint Combined Exchange Training event.

Looking ahead, the question ultimately becomes whether the military believes that this enabling capability is worth keeping at a time when every program is increasingly scrutinized due to ongoing budget cuts. However, if the program is dissolved now and the capability is needed again in the future, it will cost a lot of resources—in both money and manpower—to begin anew. Therefore, by evolving the program to provide SOF with this type of enduring enabling capability, it may ultimately save resources in the long run.

As part of this evolution, the SOF community should ensure that the lessons learned in Afghanistan are institutionalized. Ultimately, the bulk of the challenges identified herein have little to do with gender policy restrictions. Some of the issues, such as capability misperceptions and clashing personalities, are similarly faced by other types of (all-male) enablers and can possibly be resolved as the CST program matures. For example, challenges of CSTs integrating into special operations teams may be overcome with additional combined training opportunities. In addition, CST assignments would need to be monitored by leadership and adjusted as needed. While the issue of deploying CSTs in heavy fighting areas may possibly be a result of policy restrictions, it may also be a command decision. With limited numbers of CSTs, it is practical for a commander to ensure that they face less risk.

SOF may need to examine the need for CSTs on a mission-by-mission basis. Some have argued that the culture in parts of the Middle East and South Asia may be somewhat unique in terms of sex segregation. In many parts of the world,

male Servicemembers may be able to converse freely with female locals without the same traditional cultural implications. Yet in any culture, women may generally feel more comfortable being engaged with—and, when necessary, searched by—other women. Even in the United States, women prefer and often insist on female Transportation Security Administration staff patting them down at airports, if necessary. It is not unreasonable to expect similar preferences in other countries. Therefore, the special operations community should more closely examine how it could use or retool this enabling capability for different types of environments. JFQ

Notes

¹ In October 2011, First Lieutenant Ashley White, USA, became the first Cultural Support Team member killed in the line of duty when an improvised explosive device (IED) detonated in southern Kandahar Province. See David Zucchini, "A Counterinsurgency Behind the Burka," *Los Angeles Times*, December 11, 2011. More recently, First Lieutenant Jennifer Moreno, USA, was killed in an IED attack in October 2013. See Gretel C. Kovach, "Female Soldier Killed on SpecOps Mission," *San Diego Union Tribune*, October 8, 2013.

² The author also researched open source material and the Marine Corps Lessons Learned System for additional information.

³ David F. Burrelli, *Women in Combat: Issues for Congress*, R42075 (Washington, DC: Congressional Research Service, May 9, 2013), available at <<http://fas.org/sgp/crs/natsec/R42075.pdf>>.

⁴ Department of Defense (DOD) Memorandum, "Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule," January 13, 1994.

⁵ See, for example, Lia B. Heeter, "Women in Combat: Policy Barriers are Being Removed," *Marine Corps Gazette*, July 2013.

⁶ Ann Jones makes this observation in "Woman to Woman in Afghanistan," *The Nation*, October 27, 2010.

⁷ Trisha Talton, "MARSOC Looks to Women for New Mission," *Marine Corps Times*, November 14, 2009.

⁸ DOD, *Report to Congress on the Review of Laws, Policies and Regulations Restricting the Service of Female Members in the U.S. Armed Forces*, February 2012.

⁹ DOD Memorandum, "Elimination of the 1994 Direct Ground Combat Definition and Assignment Rule," January 24, 2013.