

# The Great Illusion: Women in the Military

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In the hands of feminists, the thirty-year long influx of women into the militaries of advanced countries is usually presented as a 'gain' or 'victory' for the members of the female sex, one part of womankind's unstoppable march from the dark recesses of subjection to the glories of freedom.<sup>1</sup> In this paper I do not intend to address the question as to whether women's joining in what Lord Byron called 'the brain splattering, windpipe-slashing, art' does in fact constitute 'progress', rather, I shall argue that the process is part symptom, part cause, of the decline of the 'advanced' military.<sup>2</sup>

With this objective in mind, the paper is constructed as follows. Part I demonstrates that the 'advanced' militaries are, in fact, in decline and have been so for the last fifty years. Part II shows how, in one country after another since 1970 or so, this decline correlates rather precisely with the influx of women. Part III argues that, whereas the regular armed forces of most developed states are ceasing to be warfighting machines, in those places where there are still wars women take little or no part in the fighting. Finally, Part IV presents my conclusions.

## I

From North America through Europe to Australia, the military of developed countries are in retreat. The single most important factor behind the retreat is the proliferation of nuclear weapons which, over the last half century or so, has rendered a serious conflict between states that possess them impossible. Additionally, in the absence of a threat, financial considerations are permitted a much greater role than previously; whereas it took only three years to develop the first atom bomb, present-day planners want to persuade us that a new fighter-bomber cannot be developed in less than fifteen. Be the reasons what they may, scarcely a day goes by in any developed country without some military program being cancelled, a procurement decision postponed, or personnel being made redundant. According to the *Economist*, between 1991 and 1997 alone the global

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1. See above all Jeanne Holm, *Women in the Military: An Unfinished Revolution* (Novato, CA: Presidio, 1992); also Leisa D. Meyer, *Creating G.I. Jane: Sexuality and Power in the Woman's Army Corps during World War II* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996), chaps. 1-2 and 5.

2. Some women think otherwise: see in particular Cynthia H. Enloe, 'Women in NATO Militaries: A Conference Report', *Women's Studies International Forum* 5, no. 3/4 (1982): 329-34.

arms trade shrunk by over 40 percent, and this was before an economic crisis hit South East Asia and dramatically reduced one of the largest remaining markets.<sup>3</sup>

As might be expected, most of the decline was concentrated at the upper end of the trade. However, the manufacture of small arms up to, and including, machine guns and mortars and light anti-tank weapons is spreading into new regions. Sales of these weapons are booming, as is shown *inter alia* by the fact that, in the US alone, there are now some 200 million handguns, shotguns, rifles, and assault rifles in the public's hands. In contrast, the major weapon systems—submarines, large surface vessels, high performance combat aircraft, tanks, and artillery barrels—appear to represent a dying breed. Those arms are clearly going the way of the dinosaurs; to the point that, in most countries, they are no longer being built at all.

Even in retrospect, to pin-point the exact time when the process got under way and became irreversible is anything but easy. Perhaps it was in 1945-46, when the vast majority of the 35 million or so troops of the principal belligerents went home, never to return. Since then both the world's population and the number of states have tripled, yet armed forces have only become smaller. Perhaps it was in the late 1960s and early 1970s when, under the name of *détente*, first the Nuclear Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and then Strategic Arms Limitation Talks (SALT I) began to put a cap on the previously unrestricted nuclear arms race between the superpowers. Not by accident, this was also the time when the US armed forces, as the most powerful ones of all, abandoned conscription. By switching to a professional, all volunteer, force structure they set a new kind of limit on their own size. Even more important, they ensured that the bulk of the country's manpower, whether male or female, will almost certainly never again be available for warlike purposes.

Another critical turning point came in 1989-90 when the end of the Cold War momentarily seemed to render a more peaceful world within reach. As a result, one of the two mightiest alliances in history was dismantled, and the other all but lost its *raison d'être*. On both sides of the former Iron Curtain troops were discharged by the hundreds of thousands. In the transition from the Red Army to the Russian one approximately two thirds of the troops went home, and the situation in most East European countries was roughly similar. As more and more European countries follow the American (and British) example and abandon conscription in favour of voluntary service, this process still continues. From the former East Berlin to Camberley, England, and from New Zealand to Canada, the result is empty casernes, abandoned bases, sharply falling defence budgets, and a sudden predilection for 'jointness' as a means for reducing overheads to say nothing of a surplus of old weapons that the military would dearly like to sell to some Third World country but, in most cases, cannot.

Naturally the decline did not proceed at an equal pace in all places, some of which were affected much more, and much earlier, than others. Generally it was greatest and fastest in Western Europe where, after 1945, the armed forces of the

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3. 'Only the Bangs are Genuine', *The Economist*, 28 June 1997, 76.

largest countries never even started to recover their pre-1939 size. The former communist states kept their World War II style armed forces longer than did the capitalist ones, thereby burdening their economies to such an extent that the largest and most important of them, i.e. the Soviet Union, finally collapsed. Elsewhere the situation varied. India and Pakistan, whose armed forces might perhaps be described as semi-developed, continued to clobber each other long after developed countries had ceased doing so and still exchange an occasional round of artillery fire. As late as a quarter century ago, Israel and its Arab neighbours were still fighting something very close to an all-out war; in places where nuclear weapons have not yet been introduced, notably the Persian Gulf area, large-scale conventional wars have taken place even more recently.

Even in the West the process of decline was not smooth by any means, but was accompanied by many ups and downs. Take the case of the US as the most powerful state of all. Hard on the wake of World War II came demobilisation, the intent being to return to the professional force-structure that had prevailed until 1940. With the start of the Cold War, though, conscription was re-instated by Congress exactly one day after it was abolished, and as a result, on the eve of the Korean War the American armed forces still numbered approximately 1.5 million troops. The Korean War itself led to an expansion of the defence budget and rearmament, only to be followed by the Eisenhower Administration's 'New Look' and retrenchment. Beginning in 1961, the new Kennedy Administration began a new expansion that was carried into, and sustained by, the Vietnam War. This in turn was followed by the era of 'more with less' during the 1990s, the Reagan Administration's build-up during the 1980s, and finally the downsizing of the 1990s. Surprising as it may sound, by the mid-1990s the only remaining superpower left on earth was maintaining a number of divisions not much larger than that of Israel, a Middle Eastern country with fewer than 6 million people and perhaps 40 percent of the American per capita GDP. By that time, too, the number of military aircraft which the US Air Force was purchasing each year had declined to little more than one tenth of one percent of what it had been in the peak year of 1944: from 100,000 to 127, to be precise.<sup>4</sup>

Thus, when considered in quantitative terms, each successive peak was smaller than its predecessor. Even as the US military waxed and waned in accordance with the exigencies of the Cold War and the ideas of individual presidents, the strategic horizon kept shrinking. From the time of Harry Truman to that of Lyndon Johnson planners, taking their cue from World War II, proceeded on the assumption of '2.5 wars'. This was reduced to '1.5 wars' under Richard Nixon, and to '2x0.5 wars' under George Bush. At the time of writing there is some debate whether, assuming no more than one Saddam Hussein appears on the world stage at any given moment, the forces can afford to demolish themselves still further and go down to

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4. World War II production figures from Richard Overy, *The Air War 1939-1945* (London: Europa, 1980), 150; 1995 figure from Don M. Snider, 'The Coming Defense Train Wreck', *Washington Quarterly* 19, no. 1 (1996): 92.

'0.5 wars'; the more so because one so-called 'rogue state', i.e. North Korea, has just announced its intention to live in peace with its southern neighbour. The shrinking of the strategic horizon of other countries, notably Britain, has been even more dramatic. Force-structures followed suit, falling continuously from 1945 on. For example, in 1979 Margaret Thatcher entered office as the Prime Minister most committed to rearmament since the end of World War II; eight years later, the number of squadrons in the Royal Air Force had declined by twenty per cent.<sup>5</sup>

Critics will point out that each successive peak brought with it a corresponding increase in the quality of weapons and weapon systems as well as their destructiveness and their ability to 'service' targets.<sup>6</sup> That is true, but it misses the point. Real-life wars, as opposed to those waged by armchair generals, are never fought on the basis of quality alone; the longer and the larger the conflict, the greater the importance not only of quantity but of the ability to maintain it over time. One might even argue that, historically speaking, the combination of high quality and falling numbers is itself a symptom of decline. A good example is provided by the galleys which were built by Hellenistic monarchs between about 300 and 160 BC. In comparison with their classical predecessors, they were so large and so powerful they could no longer be used, and consequently several ended up as booty in Roman hands. Other examples are the late medieval knights whose armour, developed in an attempt to resist crossbows and firearms, ended up by becoming so heavy and expensive that it was no longer either useful or affordable, as well as the fate suffered by the battleship during the first half of the twentieth century.<sup>7</sup>

Nor is the long-term trend towards smaller and smaller military establishments be wondered at. The introduction of nuclear weapons in 1945 cut the link between victory and survival; from now on, provided only one's opponent possessed a 'second strike' capability of some sort, it became possible for a belligerent to conquer *and* be annihilated off the face of the earth<sup>8</sup>. As a result the scale of war, which had been growing for many centuries past, suddenly started declining. It is now several decades since any developed country has fought a serious war against an opponent who was even *nearly* as strong as itself, let alone near enough to pose a serious threat to its integrity. In the words of French President Jacques Chirac, for the first time in a thousand years a situation has arisen where there is not an enemy

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5. Keith Hartley, 'The Affordability of Air Systems', in *The Future of United Kingdom Airpower*, ed. Philip Sabine (London: Brassey's, 1988), 109.

6. For some calculations pertaining to airpower, see Neville Brown, *The Future of Air Power* (New York: Holmes & Meier, 1986), 88; John A. Warden, 'Air Theory for the Twenty-First Century', in *Challenge and Response: Anticipating US Military Security Concerns*, ed. Karl P. Magyar (Maxwell, AL: Air Force University Press, 1994), 313 and 328; and Daniel T. Kuehl, 'Airpower vs. Electricity: Electric Power as a Target for Strategic Air Operations', *Journal of Strategic Studies* 18, no. 1 (1995): 250-60.

7. See Martin van Creveld, *Technology and War* (New York: Free Press, 1989), 69, 207.

8. See above all Thomas C. Schelling, *Arms and Influence* (New Haven, CT: Yale University Press, 1966).

in sight in a thousand kilometres.<sup>9</sup> Justifying the recent cut in the size of the Bundeswehr, German Chancellor Gerhard Schroeder said that today was the first time in history when Germany was surrounded by allies on all sides.<sup>10</sup> Currently, even the more sanguine proponents of the so-called 'revolution in military affairs' find it hard to imagine when and where a war that will answer their expectations might take place.

## II

As the overall size of the armed forces decreased, paradoxically the number of women in them increased. Before 1914, and with very few exceptions hardly worth mentioning, very few women had taken an active part in war and no armed force had ever included women as a regular part of its establishment. If anything, the professionalisation of armed forces during the nineteenth century caused the number of females who went on campaign to decline. Throughout the eighteenth century, (in the US, as late as the Civil War) women were occasionally able to avoid the recruiter's attention, put on uniform, and pass themselves as males.<sup>11</sup> After 1865 this too came to an end owing to the institution of regular pre-enlistment medical examinations which were conducted by qualified physicians.<sup>12</sup> Whether because the growing militarisation of rear services rendered their presence redundant or because the introduction of railways for strategic movement made it impossible for units to transport them free of charge, the hordes of female camp followers who had traditionally provided the troops with various services also disappeared.<sup>13</sup> As a result, perhaps at no time were armed forces so exclusively male as during the decades just before 1914.<sup>14</sup>

The wars of 1914-1945 were, of course, the largest in history by far. The demands they made in terms of manpower were unprecedented, causing several belligerents to take a fresh look at what women could and could not do in war. The outcome, as is well known, was the establishment of women's auxiliary corps in two countries: Britain and the US. Even so, hardly any women in hardly any

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9. See Pierre Beylaur, 'L'Europe s'impose', *Le Point*, 8 June 1996, 26.

10. ZDF3's *Afternoon News Bulletin*, 10 June 2000.

11. For female soldiers in male uniform, see Rudolf M. Dekker and Lotte C. van de Pol, *The Tradition of Female Transvestism in Early Modern Europe* (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989). For a roughly contemporary account of American cross-dressers during the American Civil War, see Linus P. Brockett and Mary C. Vaughn *Women at War: A Record of their Patriotic Contributions, Heroism, Toils and Sacrifice during the Civil War*, (1867; reprint, Stanford, CT: Longmeadow Press, 1993).

12. In Russia, where military administration was notoriously lax, some women succeeded in disguising themselves even later. See most recently David E. Jones, *Women Warriors: A History* (London: Brassey's, 1997), chap. 10.

13. Myna Trustram, *Women of the Regiment: Marriage and the Victorian Army* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1984), 43, 91.

14. On the way World War I linked war and masculinity, see George L. Trustram, *Fallen Soldiers: Reshaping the Memory of the World Wars*, Oxford, (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 59-62. See also Barbara Spackman, *Fascist Virilities: Rhetoric, Ideology, and Social Fantasy in Italy* (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 1996), chap. 1.

country were *obliged* to wear uniform, as men were; what is more, the vast majority of adult women—those who were married and/or had children—were always exempt. During World War I the total number of the women who served probably stood at around 150,000.<sup>15</sup> In World War II there were about 1.5 million women, 800,000 of them Soviet.<sup>16</sup>

Partly owing to its communist ideology, which put great emphasis on equality for women, partly because of the dire straits in which it found itself in 1941-42, the Soviet Union was more prepared to use women than any other country. Still, even in this case, necessity clearly did have its bounds. Though the figure of 800,000 is impressive at first sight, women only formed a very small fraction of all Soviet military personnel, perhaps no more than two to three percent.<sup>17</sup> Like their sisters elsewhere, the vast majority served either in administrative positions or as doctors, and above all, nurses. As was also the case in Britain and the US, tens of thousands worked in anti-aircraft defence. However, only a relative handful—probably no more than a few thousand—actually fought weapon in hand, e.g. as snipers or as tank crews; among combat engineers, a female officer was considered sufficiently rare for her to be introduced to a visiting general.<sup>18</sup> Though some woman did fly in combat, they only formed less than one percent of all pilots,<sup>19</sup> and their units were commanded entirely by males.<sup>20</sup>

From Russia through Yugoslavia to Italy and France, many other women participated in the various resistance movements (even though, once again, every one of those movements was led almost exclusively by men).<sup>21</sup> Doing so they were hunted like the men, suffered with the men, and often died with the men; without question, fighting the Nazis took immense courage, determination, and endurance from everybody involved. However, and much like their sisters in the various regular forces, women in the resistance tended to be assigned almost automatically to act either as nurses or as communicators. In the latter capacity they operated the

15. The largest contingents by far were the British (80,000) and the American (30,000). See detailed figures in Nancy Loring Goldman and Richard Stites, 'Great Britain and the World Wars', in *Female Soldiers—Combatants or Noncombatants?*, ed. Nancy Loring Goldman (Westport, CT: Greenwood Press, 1982), 29; and Holm, *Women in the Military*, 10-11.

16. These figures include 800,000 Soviet, 350,000 American, and 300,000 British (the Axis countries did not put significant numbers into uniform). Figures from D'Ann Campbell, 'Servicewomen in World War II', *Armed Forces and Society* 16, no. 2 (1990): 252-70.

17. The total number of those who passed through the Soviet armed forces was 34,700,000; Viktor Suvorov, *M Day* (Moscow: ACT, 1994), 476.

18. Svetlana Aleksijewitsch, *Der Krieg hat kein Weibliches Gesicht* (Hamburg: Galgenberg, 1989), 178-79.

19. On the assumption that there was a pilot for each aircraft produced, see Horst Boog, 'German Air Intelligence in the Second World War', in *Intelligence and Military Operations in World War II*, ed. Michael I. Handel (London: Cass, 1990), 354.

20. For the story of these women see above all Anne Noggle, *A Dance with Death: Soviet Airwomen in World War II* (College Station, TX: Texas University Press, 1994).

21. For Yugoslavia see Boris Yancar, 'Yugoslavia: War of Resistance', in *Female Soldiers*, 85-105; for Italy, Anna Bravo, 'Donne e Armi. La Resistenza come Punto di Svolta?', in *Donne e Forze Armate*, ed. Fabrizio Battistelli (Milano: Angeli, 1997), 116-28; and for France, Shelly Saywell, *Women in War* (New York: Viking, 1985), 42.

wireless when it was available and passed messages (on the assumption that women gave rise to less suspicion, and if caught, might be treated a little less harshly than men) when it was not. One way or another, rarely did they take part in the actual killing if only because weapons were always short and were issued to the men first. When it came to shooting members of the occupation forces, or blowing them up, the women would be left behind.<sup>22</sup> Towards the end of the war, whenever partisans emerged from the underground and started participating in open warfare women were invariably taken out of the combat units.<sup>23</sup>

It was not until after the end of World War II had signalled the incipient decline of the world's most important armed forces that women in several developed countries first gained a permanent niche in the military. As General Eisenhower, testifying to Congress in 1948 explained, the idea was to have a core of professionals ready who could help draft, train, and assign women if another large-scale war broke out.<sup>24</sup> However, even in the Soviet Union the tasks envisaged for the women in question were strictly limited. They did not include either combat or combat support, let alone serving aboard aircraft or naval ships.<sup>25</sup> Israel alone excepted, no country conscripted women, much less made them serve in the reserves; contrary to legend, too, no Israeli women has seen combat since June 1948.<sup>26</sup> There were usually caps on the number of women in the forces, which in the case of the US stood at two percent. In practice, so low was the number of those who stepped forward that even that target could not always be met. Women's place in the organisation was also marginal, as is evidenced by the fact that no female was allowed to carry a higher rank than that of colonel or to command a unit consisting of men.

With the US in the lead, this picture began to change from the late 1960s on. The Vietnam War was not going at all well, making men reluctant to serve and facing planners with the possibility of having to call up the reserves. Taking that step might have led to large scale civil unrest; consequently Congress, acting on the request of the Department of Defence, took the easy way out and turned to women instead. More women entered the American military in 1971-72 because not enough men could be recruited to serve in the All-Volunteer Force then being established.<sup>27</sup> By the late 1970s women formed around seven per cent of the

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22. The same was also true in Israel under the British Mandate. See Martin van Creveld, *The Sword and the Olive: A Critical History of the Israel Defense Force* (New York: Public Affairs, 1998), chap. 4.

23. For the French case, see Saywell, *Women in War*, 42.

24. For Eisenhower's own experience with female soldiers during World War II, see Dwight D. Eisenhower, *Crusade in Europe* (New York: Doubleday, 1948), 132-33.

25. A.E. Griesse and Richard Stites, 'Russia Revolution and War', in *Female Soldiers*, 78.

26. On the history of women in the Israel Defense Force see most recently Martin van Creveld, 'Armed but not Dangerous: Women in the Israeli Military', *War in History* 7, no. 1 (2000): 82-98.

27. On the link between the influx of women and the reluctance of men to serve see Holm, *Women in the Military*, chap. 15; William H. Breuer, *War and American Women* (Westport, CT: Praeger, 1997), 79; Helen Rogan, *Mixed Company, Women in the Modern Army* (Boston, MA: Beacon Press, 1981), 16; Jean Ebbert and Marie-Beth Hall, *Crossed Currents: Navy Women from WWI to Tailhook* (Washington, DC: Brassey's 1993), 160-61, 168 and 222-23; Jane J. Mansbridge, *Why We Lost the Era* (Chicago:

Armed Forces which, at that time, were undergoing perhaps the worst crisis in their entire history; with the Federal budget in the red and the dollar at a previously unknown low, US troops in Germany had to beg their neighbours for handouts. So bad was the recruitment situation that, in the words of Lawrence Korb, Under Secretary of Defence for manpower during the first Reagan Administration, 'no way [would we] ever leave a spot vacant rather than take a woman'.<sup>28</sup>

During the 1970s, a similar shortage of men willing to serve helped trigger the expansion of women's role in the military of several other countries including Australia, Sweden, Greece, Britain, and Belgium, and, as far as medical personnel were concerned, the Federal German Republic.<sup>29</sup> Much more than the US, most of these countries were affected by a stagnating population, on the one hand, and growing pacifist sentiment on the other. Like the US, they responded by taking a new look at the possibility of using women as at least a partial solution to their difficulties.

Once women had got a foot in the door, their presence became self-reinforcing. Many female members of the forces, particularly officers, saw their prospects for advancement limited by the fact that they were excluded from many so-called 'nontraditional' slots, including combat. Working through the political process as well as the courts, they demanded equal rights for themselves.<sup>30</sup> The military tried to resist but, obeying their political masters, invariably ended up by swallowing their rage and yielding. This in turn helped bring in more women, and created a vicious cycle that in most countries does not show any sign of stopping. Particularly in the US, the military has now been turned into a safe-haven for very young mothers (average age 22-23, at a time when the average female has her first child at 29 or so), many of them single. The military provides these women with housing, medical care, and child-minding facilities of a kind, and at a price unavailable anywhere else. Needless to say, should they be called upon to deploy in an emergency this can only give rise to problems, as already shown, to some extent, during the 1991 Gulf Crisis.<sup>31</sup>

As long as the Cold War lasted the influx of women in the military remained under control. The closer any NATO military was to the East-West border, the

University of Chicago Press, 1986), 72; Brian Mitchell, *Women in the Military: Flirting with Disaster* (Washington, DC: Regnery, 1998), 24-25.

28. Quoted in Judith Hicks Stiehm, *Arms and the Enlisted Woman*, (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1989), 55.

29. For Japan, see K. M. Wiegand, 'Japan: Cautious Utilization', in *Female Soldiers*, 184 and 187; for Australia, V.H. Billington, *Broadening the Recruiting Base for ARA Soldiers*, Fort Queenscliff Papers, (Fort Queenscliff: Australian Army Staff College, 1991), 56-57; for Sweden, Kurt Tornqvist, 'Sweden, the Neutral Nation', in *Female Soldiers*, 208; for Greece, J. Brown and Costantina Safilios-Rothschild, 'Greece: Reluctant Presence', in *Female Soldiers*, 168; for Britain, Christopher Dandeker, 'New Times for the Military', *British Journal of Sociology* 45, no. 4 (1994): 649; for Belgium Franz Seidler, *Frauen zu der Waffen?* (Bonn: Bernhard & Graefe, 1998), 243; and for the Federal German Republic, see *ibid*, 223.

30. For the process as it unfolded in the US see above all Stiehm, *Arms and the Enlisted Woman*, 123.

31. Linda B. Francke, *Ground Zero: The Gender Wars in the Military* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 1997), 134, 136.

fewer women it contained. Thus, in the 1980s, women constituted 8.4 percent of the US armed forces, 7.7 percent of the Canadian, 4.9 percent of the British, two to three percent of the French, one percent of the Dutch and Norwegian, and zero percent of the West German Bundeswehr, except for fifty physicians.<sup>32</sup> It was only after the Berlin Wall, and with it the prospect of large-scale war, disappeared that the barriers were abolished and women began entering a large number of additional Military Occupation Specialities which had previously been closed to them. Thus, it is not by accident that, in all the years since women went aboard US Navy ships in 1972, hardly a single US Navy ship has come under attack, let alone suffered damage at the hands of an enemy. In the US as well as Britain, Norway, and Canada *inter alia* women started flying combat aircraft precisely at a time when the enemy, in the form of the Warsaw Pact, disappeared. Early in 2000 two more NATO countries, Italy and Germany, decided to open themselves to women; as if by magic, both announcement were followed almost immediately by drastic cuts in the total number of troops.<sup>33</sup>

Nor was this process limited to NATO. In Israel the expansion of women's role in the military started during the mid to late 1970s, i.e. shortly after the country had fought its last full-scale war.<sup>34</sup> In the mid-1980s, however, Defence Minister Yitschak Rabin recognised that another 1973-style war was unlikely. Since then, the Israel Defence Force has been steadily shrinking. By January 2000, things had progressed to the point where the Knesset formally opened all units to women. This decision, though, did not cause women to join men in the bunkers of southern Lebanon; if anything, it was a prelude to Israel's withdrawal from that country. Possibly because they want to impress foreigners with an apparent 'modern' image, the logic of no war, more women even applies to some Moslem countries. Thus, in Jordan, the decision to set up a woman's corps—with one of King Hussein's daughters at its head—was made just after peace had been concluded with the only neighbour against whom Jordan has ever fought a full scale war, i.e. Israel.

To return to the armed forces of the developed countries, the Cold War having ended they were left largely without a mission: pundits spoke of 'the postmodern military', 'armed forces in a warless society', 'operations other than war', and 'the boredom factor'.<sup>35</sup> Throughout recorded history, the function of the military had been to fight wars; now, with even nuclear deterrence barely relevant any longer in the great majority of cases, all of a sudden it was to keep the peace. Two scholars has even claimed that the place of the combat leader as the dominant military type

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32. US, Canadian, British, Norwegian, and Dutch figures (1980) from Enloe, 'Women in NATO Militaries', 330-31. French figure (1988) calculated by me on the basis of Jean Boulègue, "'Feminization" and the French Military: Anthropological Approach', *Armed Forces and Society* 17, no. 3 (1991): 343-62.

33. ZDF3's *Evening News Bulletin*, 21 March 2000.

34. See Creveld, *The Sword and the Olive*, chap. 15.

35. All these articles are collected in Giuseppe Caforio, ed., *The Sociology of the Military* (Cheltenham: Elgar, 1998).

is being taken by an apparition known as 'the soldier-scholar', as if the purpose of maintaining armed forces is to flood the world with the kind of papers written by staff-college students.<sup>36</sup> Whether the influx of women into the military was cause or symptom of their decline is not at issue here; the evidence is compatible with both interpretations. It could even be argued that many women, and enlisted ones in particular, are entering the military precisely *because* they hope they will not be obliged to fight.<sup>37</sup>

### III

If the feminisation of the state-owned, regular military is one symptom of its decline, the growth of irregular, non-state, armed forces of every sort is another. To quote a few figures only, in Britain between 1950 and 1976 the number of people active in the field of private security increased from 10,000 to 250,000.<sup>38</sup> By now, there probably are far more private guards than there are military personnel in all three Services combined; as the former wax, the latter wane. The same is true in other countries. According to *Der Spiegel*, in Germany between 1984 and 1996 the number of firms offering security services of every kind more than doubled, whereas the number of personnel active in the field increased by three hundred percent.<sup>39</sup> In the Russian Federation there are said to be no less than 1,000 companies which provide protection services; not seldom they are barely distinguishable from the kind of ruffian that the state itself employs in order to intimidate its enemies. Finally, in the US too there are now more people involved with private security than there are uniformed troops: 1.6 to 1.4 million, to be precise. A quarter century ago in the US, the defence budget stood seven to one to the turnover of the security industry.<sup>40</sup> It has since gone down to between four and five to one, and if present trends persist the crossover point is in sight.

While certainly not without its unique characteristics, in many ways the security industry is like so many others: it is heavily centralised at the top, so that a handful of firms account for the majority of money, equipment, and personnel. Some firms are led by retired generals and admirals, employ the equivalents of entire divisions and could, if they husbanded their resources, take on the armies of a Third World country. Others run sophisticated organisations and possess every weapon up to, and including, machine guns, light armoured personnel carriers, attack helicopters complete with rockets, anti-tank missiles, and the most up to date night-vision equipment.

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36. Charles C. Moskos and James Burk, 'The Postmodern Military', in *The Military in New Times: Adapting Armed Forces to a Turbulent World*, ed. James Burk (Boulder, CO: Westview, 1994), 147.

37. Laura L. Miller, 'Il Caso Americano', in *Donne e Forze Armate*, 301.

38. Nigel South, *Policing for Profit: The Private Security Sector* (London: Sage, 1989).

39. 'Aktion Auge Auf', *Der Spiegel*, no. 46 (1996): 37; also Bernard Jean d'Heur, 'Von der Gefahrenabwehr als Staatlicher Angelegenheit zum Einsatz Privater Sicherheitskraefte', *Archiv des Oeffentlichen Rechts* 119, no. 1 (1994): 107-36.

40. All American figures based on Brian Jenkins, 'Thoroughly Modern Sabotage', *World Link*, March-April 1995, 16.

To the uninitiated, the range of activities in which they engage is astonishing. It starts with the recruitment and training of individual guards to station in your local supermarket, and progresses through research and development, both of equipment and of scenarios of war games that may be used in order to test those scenarios. It goes all the way to securing vast complexes such as international airports and providing 'red' teams to test the defences in question. In developed countries their clients are rich individuals, gated communities, municipalities, and corporations. Surprising as it may sound, sometimes, the government itself is included in the list. Rather than employ their own forces, governments may find it cheaper to use private security that does not require the kind of fringe benefits to which state employees are entitled; in Israel, for instance, the rule of the thumb is that the cost of one policeman will buy three private guards. Even in developed countries, those guards not seldom engage—and, increasingly, are permitted to engage—in so-called 'cowboy activities'; for example, in New Zealand in 1997 there was a serious debate as to whether they should be allowed to join the police at roadblocks so as to collect debts.<sup>41</sup> Other activities include detective work, bounty hunting, breaking up strikes, evicting squatters, and the like.

Private security also hires women, if only because, their average wage being only about 60 percent of men's, they are cheap.<sup>42</sup> For reasons which even the most determined feminist can understand, though, on the average women are less suitable than men either for guard duty or for the kind of work that involves extensive travel. Hence most are concentrated in support positions as secretaries, communicators, and so on; the more violent the kind of activities with which the organisation is expected to deal, the fewer the women who are engaged on it. The aviation-security business, for instance, which in the US alone is worth approximately 2 billion dollars a year, concentrates women heavily at the bottom of the ladder: mostly checking bags in airports that proves so boring a task that the crews must be relieved every twenty minutes.<sup>43</sup> Higher up, where the work can be extremely interesting but often demands irregular hours, the ability to respond to emergencies of every sort, and sometimes round-the-clock presence there are few if any women, nor are there any women in the commando units that specialise in hostage-rescue operations.<sup>44</sup> To adduce another example, police forces that specialise in crowd-control now often include a handful of helmeted, baton-carrying, women not because they are really needed—when hard comes to hard they are nowhere to be seen—but because they may be used against other women.

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41. Editorial, 'Alarm at Police Power for Civilians', *Auckland Herald*, 27 June 1997, 1.

42. For some relevant figures (US) see Barbara F. Reskin and Patricia A. Roos, *Job Queues, Gender Queues: Explaining Women's Inroads into Male Occupations* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 1990), 61. Remarkably enough, the figure for a traditional society such as India is exactly the same. See Hilary Standing, *Dependence and Autonomy: Women's Employment and the Family in Calcutta* (London: Routledge, 1991), 53.

43. For a general explanation of the working of the industry see Donald Phipps, *The Management of Aviation Security* (London: Pitman, 1991).

44. For example, in one group of about forty medium-level aviation security specialists that this author once addressed there was only one woman.

In a world where any man who so much as touches a woman is likely to be accused of 'sexual harassment', it is helpful to have a few of them around.

The personnel in question—many of them ex-military who find themselves on the streets as a result of downsizing—are being exported.<sup>45</sup> Though seldom noted, the return of the mercenaries is one of the more significant developments of the last three decades.<sup>46</sup> Even in Europe, several ex-Soviet republics rely on them to train their forces and make the transition to Western methods. The war in Bosnia-Herzegovina alone saw the use of mercenaries from Afghanistan, Britain, Denmark, Finland, Italy, Sweden, Russia, and the United States.<sup>47</sup> Chechnya, too, is said to give employment to mercenaries from various nearby Muslim countries. 'Mercs', as they are called, are equally conspicuous in Latin American, central Asian, and African countries. For instance, during Zaire's recent civil war both sides made use of mercenaries, and as it happened, those fighting against President Mobutu, who were provided by the South African firm Executive Outcomes, proved stronger than those hired to fight for him, mostly Croats and Serbs.<sup>48</sup> In Angola and Sierra Leone it is they who protect the extraction of vital minerals such as oil and diamonds, and thus make possible the continuation of the wars in those countries. From Papua to West Africa, mercenaries have often been involved in *coups d'états*, either trying to topple governments or helping them reassert their authority. Indeed, there exists an entire industry that will provide the requisite cannon-fodder. Relying on sophisticated, computerised data bases, it will first advertise to find the necessary personnel. Next it will take orders, locate any type of military specialist, put them under contract, equip them (if that is desired), and dispatch them to wherever they are needed to meet interesting people and kill them.

What makes these developments possible is the fact that, outside North America, Western Europe, Japan, and Australasia, much of the world is anything but peaceful. From Kosovo to Sierra Leone, and from Sri Lanka to Sudan, at any one time there may be found approximately thirty armed conflicts that involve open, if so-called 'low intensity', warfare. As the examples of Angola, Somalia, Rwanda, and others show, many of these conflicts are extremely bloody, involving as they do hundreds of thousands if not millions of casualties. Yet one only has to look at the TV pictures coming out of them to realise that, a few viragoes apart, in *none* of them do women fight in the open; for instance, though one in seven Russian officers is now a woman, when the war in Chechnya got under way they simply

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45. For instance, in Bosnia ex-British soldiers trained both Bosnians and Croats. See Mary Kaldor, *New and Old Wars: Organized Violence in a Global Era* (Oxford: Polity Press, 1998), 49.

46. See the short discussion in A. Roberts, 'The United Nations: A System for Collective of International Security?' in *British Security 2010*, ed. G.A.S.C. Wilson (Camberley: Strategic and Combat Studies Institute, 1996), 59-60; also David Shearer, *Private Armies and Military Intervention*, Adelphi Paper, no. 316 (London: International Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998).

47. Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, 49.

48. Al J. Venter, 'Today's Dogs of War', *Soldier of Fortune*, August 1998, 55-56.

refused to go.<sup>49</sup> As to peacekeeping forces, the few women who deploy with them are used almost exclusively in support operation. A good example was the Australian intervention in East Timor where women served, to the extent that they did so at all, only to help bring in transport aircraft and as medics.

Young or old, in or out of uniform, women's involvement in these conflicts is overwhelmingly as eggheads-on, camp followers, and victims.<sup>50</sup> Partly this is because the organisations which wage these wars take them far too seriously to bow to the kind of political and juridical constraints that have compelled the armed forces of developed world to take in women, treat them as if they were as fit for war as men, and pamper them in every imaginable way. Partly it is because recruiters have better ways to spend their money; as is by now well known, in Sierra Leone as in other places, they prefer even 13-15 year old males to women. Last not least, it is because the women in those countries are under no illusions as to their own suitability to the work at hand, which explains why, whenever such a war breaks out, they are found mainly among the refugees.

Of all the activities which humanity engages in, war is by far the most nasty and the most dangerous. Feminist claims to the contrary,<sup>51</sup> it is also physically the most demanding, which means that in no other activity are women as much at a disadvantage in relation to men.<sup>52</sup> To expose, women, therefore, to combat is criminal even if, since combat very often demands close co-operation between the personnel who are engaged in it, it were not counterproductive. Unlike their sisters in the developed countries who have enjoyed peace for half a century on end and consequently do not have the slightest idea of what war is really like, women in war-torn developing ones understand the score well enough. As best they can, they are staying away.

#### IV

This paper argues that the entire debate around the feminisation of the modern military is based on a misunderstanding. It is not that women are making 'gains', but rather it is the military who are in full decline and have been so for over half a century. Naturally there exists some variation from one country to another. With 200 years of peace behind it, Sweden can afford to go further than France which, to

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49. Sergei Rogov, head of the US-Canada Institute and adviser to the Duma's Committee on Defense and Foreign Affairs, communication to the author, 22-23 September 1999.

50. The percentage of victims who are civilians—and thus often female—has increased dramatically since 1945. See Amnesty International, *Donne in Prima Linea: Contro le Violazioni dei Diritti Umani* (Fiesole: Cultura della Pace, 1995), 58; also Kaldor, *New and Old Wars*, 8.

51. As quoted in Laura L. Miller, 'Feminism and the Exclusion of Army Women from Combat' (unpublished paper, Harvard University, John M. Olin Institute for Strategic Studies, 1998), 1-2.

52. For a summary of the extensive data collected by the US armed forces on this subject Mitchell, *Women in the Military*, 141-42; for the consequences of ignoring those data, see L.B. de Fleur, D. Gilman, and W. Marshal, 'Sex Integration at the US Air Force Academy: Changing Roles for Women', *Armed Forces and Society* 4, no. 4 (1978): 615; also US Army Research Institute for Environmental Medicine, *Incidence of Risk Factors for Injury and Illness among Male and Female Army Basic Trainees*, (Silver Spring, MD: US Army Research Institute for Environmental Medicine, 1988).

meet its commitments in the Third World, still retains an all-male Foreign Legion. The Netherlands, that do not have an enemy anywhere, can afford to go further than Pakistan which has an aspiring superpower right next door. Israel, as the only country in history that has ever conscripted women, represents a particularly interesting case, but even here the same rule of the thumb—feminisation equals decline—obtains.

By and large the less important the role of the military, or individual units, as a warfighting machine the more they are penetrated by women. If only because research shows that going into combat is the last thing most military women want, the more of them there are around the less capable those military are of acting as effective combative units.<sup>53</sup> And indeed the one military which has gone furthest down the road—i.e., the American one—is now paying a heavy penalty for the folly of the responsible politicians and voters as cohesion suffers, training becomes almost impossible, and some of its best personnel are forced out by ‘sexual-harassment’ claims which may or may not be well founded.<sup>54</sup> No wonder that, as of late 1999, all except the US Marines, which only have about half as many women as the rest and who are the only ones to insist on separate basic training, were unable to meet their recruitment targets.<sup>55</sup>

With each passing day, the regular military of the developed countries are being turned into constabularies whose job, if any, is to act as UN peacekeepers. In those countries, given the absence of severe war, the task of looking after day to day law and order is gradually being taken over by the security industry. On the other hand, virtually all serious warfare left on this planet now unfolds in the developing world where 80 percent or so of humanity live. Whether they consist of mercenaries or of other kinds of troops, without exception the forces that wage those wars are as near-exclusively male as ever. Thus any progress that women seem to be making in the military—and, I suspect, not only in the military—is a great illusion. Considering what the alternative may be, perhaps it is better this way.

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53. The evidence that American military women do not want to be in combat is overwhelming. See Stiehm, *Arms and the Enlisted Woman*, 100; Mitchell, *Women in the Military*, 77-78; and Miller, ‘Feminism and the Exclusion’, 19.

54. On how the US military, as the most sexually-integrated of all, is being torn apart by the presence of women, see Mitchell, *Women in the Military*; also, most recently, Stephanie Gutman, *The Kinder, Gentler Military: Can the US Armed Forces Still Fight?* (New York: Scribner, 2000).

55. See Andrea Stone, ‘Paying a High Cost for Preparedness’, *USA Today*, 22 October 1999, 18.