



Helpdesk Research Report

Lessons from Female Engagement Teams

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Question

What are the lessons on what worked well with the use of military Female Engagement Teams (both U.K. and U.S.) and what were the main challenges?

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1. Overview

Female Engagement Teams (FETs), made up of female soldiers¹, have been used by International Security Assistance Forces (ISAF) to engage with women in Afghanistan. This rapid review looks at the open source evidence on the lessons for what worked well with the use of FETs and what were the main challenges. This includes: lessons on impact and effectiveness; selection and assessment; training; and integration and employment.

Most of the available literature is concerned with lessons drawn from U.S. experiences rather than U.K. experiences. The literature is mainly grey literature, including some theses written by U.S. soldiers, rather than published academic literature. Very few independent evaluations of FETs and their impact and effectiveness have been carried out.

¹ FET soldiers are trained to conduct engagement activities in a culturally respectful manner in order to build confidence and support for the host nation government and the ISAF security objectives.

Evaluations of FETs that are available indicate that:

- Female soldiers have had a deescalating effect as Afghan males generally accepted females being searched as long as it was done by other females.
- FETs have had positive engagement with both women and men and were viewed as a kind of 'third gender'. This gave them the advantages, rather than the disadvantages, of both genders: they are extended the respect shown to men, but are granted the access to home and family normally reserved to women.
- The right training, support, and working conditions helped FET effectiveness.

However, very little independent analysis has been carried out. Unclear functions and a desire to be useful meant FETs engaged in a wide variety of disparate activities and there was a great pressure to report the activities of FETs as successful. This resulted in a tendency to cite everything FETs carried out as an achievement, without really understanding cultural dynamics.

The U.S. Army Research Institute found that there is a lack of standardisation of **FET assessment, selection, training, integration, and employment procedures**. FET soldiers and their officers identified a number of lessons from their experiences of deploying FETs. These include:

- **Assessment and selection:** Physical fitness and good interpersonal skills are important qualities to look for in a FET member. Rigorous assessment and selection procedures result in higher morale and greater mission success. FET members should be volunteers to enhance motivation.
- **Training:** Training prior to deployment means FETs are better prepared. Training in rapport building and influence, and language and cultural skills is useful. Physical fitness training helps FETs carry out their missions and integrate with other units. Adopting best practices for more rigorous FET assessment, selection, and training helped integrate FETs better.
- **Integration and employment:** Emphasising the value and skills of FETs can help their integration. Units which recognised the value of FETs were more likely to include them in every mission. FETs who were used according to their training and had a clear purpose were motivated to deploy again. FETs should not be used for tactical and operational missions simultaneously.

The **main challenges** for FETs include: lack of female interpreters; lack of access to women; lack of leadership support, training, and coordination; lack of respect from male colleagues; lack of real influence; lack of understanding of gender and institutional memory on women and gender programming; overly ambitious programming and no clear goals; potentially damaging FET activities; lack of good assessments; not rooted in the military; and loss of FET skills.

Recommendations for future use include:

- Female engagement should be institutionalised and incorporated into future military operations.
- A standardised and targeted assessment and selection process should be put in place.
- Best practices should be incorporated into standardised future training for soldiers and commanders.
- There should be a clear mission and standard procedures to enhance FET integration and employment.
- Use FETs for better quality interactions with men and women and de-escalation of tensions.

- Improve engagements with women by removing body armour, wearing headscarves, providing gifts and communicating well.

2. Impact and effectiveness of Female Engagement Teams

Gender segregated societies pose challenges for engaging with host communities and for force protection as it makes it hard to approach and search women (Brooks Babin, 2014a, p. 1; Beljan, 2013, p. 17). In Afghanistan, the International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) initially failed to engage much of Afghan society, remained blind to its gendered nature, and did not realise the potential of female engagement for almost a decade into its presence in the country (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 1; Beljan, 2013, p. 17). In 2009, ISAF began a radically new approach with Female Engagement Teams (FETs) which were created to help overcome these challenges and help with the counter-insurgency strategy on the basis of lessons from female engagement in Iraq (Pottinger et al, 2010, p. 1; Beljan, 2013, p. 17; Katt, 2014, p. 107; Long, 2012). FETs consist of female soldiers trained to conduct engagement activities in a culturally respectful manner in order to build confidence and support for the host nation government and the ISAF security objectives (Brooks Babin, 2014a, p. 1). In some cases, FETs developed into Cultural Support Teams (CSTs), which were designed to provide persistent presence and engagement (Katt, 2014, p. 107, 109; Wilson, 2014).

It was believed that it was important to engage with local women in Afghanistan as a result of the influence they wield over their husbands and sons and because of their local knowledge (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 4; Pottinger et al, 2010, p. 2). This influence could help create a critical mass of support to give momentum to the counter-insurgency (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 4). However, a deeper understanding of Afghan culture indicated that Afghan women do not have the influence originally suggested (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 37-38).

Female soldiers have a deescalating effect

The deescalating effect of FETs was the most obvious and useful impact they had (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 11; Centre for Army Lessons Learned, 2011, p. 29). Afghan males generally accepted females being searched as long as it was done by other females, so female soldiers were a welcome presence for searches (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 11).

One paper by an Afghanistan and gender expert suggests that used strategically, in less conservative areas of Afghanistan, the search function could have been used to very gradually encourage Afghan forces to accept the utility and presence of Afghan female searchers (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 11). This could have increased the recruitment of women into the Afghan security forces; however the opportunity was lost as FETs were used for more than a deescalating effect (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 11).

FETs have had positive engagement with women and men

FETs were assessed as helping ISAF military units gain greater acceptance from the local population (Beljan, 2013, p. 18). FETs are reported to have earned goodwill amongst women who previously viewed international troops with fear through their engagement with women and provision of humanitarian supplies and health care (Pottinger, 2010, p. 1; Wilson, 2014, p. 4). Women are reported to have given FETs important information about local personalities, economics, and grievances, as well as about the enemy; although FETs were never meant to be an intelligence collection asset and the information provided was not really of military value (Pottinger et al, 2010, p. 2; Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 42, 45; Centre for Army Lessons Learned, 2011, p. 21).

As well as engaging with local women, FET soldiers frequently engaged with local men (Brooks Babin, 2014a, p. 1). U.S. FET soldiers reported that they engaged very frequently with local males during missions (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2). During their deployment, 93 per cent of U.S. FET soldiers engaged with local males, whereas only 81 per cent of FET soldiers engaged with local females (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2).

Many Pashtun men show a preference for interacting with female soldiers over male soldiers (Pottinger, 2010, p. 2). Pashtun men tend to view foreign women troops as a kind of 'third gender' (Pottinger et al, 2010, p. 2; Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 22; Beljan, 2013, p. 18). As a result, female servicewomen have the advantages, rather than the disadvantages, of both genders: they are extended the respect shown to men, but are granted the access to home and family normally reserved to women (Pottinger, 2010, p 2; McBride and Wibben, 2012, p. 210; Holliday, 2012, p. 91).

The right training, support, and working conditions helped FET effectiveness

The efficacy and effectiveness of FET engagements rest on the assumptions that the teams are properly recruited, trained, and professionally incentivised (Jones, 2013, p. 68). In addition, their actions should support a well-articulated and well-understood strategy about how and why engaging female populations are good for the U.S. military, the women themselves, and the partner nation (Jones, 2013, p. 68).

The right conditions are also important factors in FETs effectiveness (Pottinger et al, 2010, p. 3-6). A paper written by trainers of FETs suggests that FETs are more effective if they are devoted to a district and authorised to make recurring visits to households to deliver lasting benefits, than if they are used in an area once (Porringer et al, 2010, p. 2, 3-4). Passing through an area only once in areas that troops had no intention of holding generated more friction than rapport (Pottinger et al 2010, p. 5).

Measuring impact and effectiveness

Little analysis has been conducted regarding the efficacy and operational capabilities of FETs (Erwin, 2012, p. 65). A report into FETs in Afghanistan, based on primary sources found there was a lack of substantive outcomes between 2010 and 2012 (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 1). Promoters of the programme have often cited FET achievements, without any indicators to evaluate or measure progress or success (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 1, 8). The report found no evidence or objective external evaluations to support claims that FETs achieved any of the outcomes their creators and supporters claimed on their behalf (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 15; Coll, 2012, p. 3). None of the FET reports attempted a 'before and after' scenario and many extrapolated results from the opinions of a small number of women (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 20-21).

As a result of their unclear functions and a desire to appear useful, FETs engaged in **a wide variety of disparate activities**, ranging from providing handouts, trying to solve individual problems, and providing loans for small businesses (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 14-16). Requests for assistance, blessings, niceties, gossip, chit chat, random encounters, minor achievements and every meeting attended were reported as major activities of FETs (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 16). FET reports seem to take sincerely everything Afghans said, without an understanding of the usual dynamics and that it is common for local leaders to grandstand in front of the community (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 18). One paper cautions that concluding that FETs are a success requires significant assumptions, both about the impact of those engagements and their relevance in terms of the larger goal of defeating the insurgency in Afghanistan (Coll, 2012, p. 57).

There was a great pressure to report the activities of FETs as successful (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 17). Gender relations in the military meant that women had to work hard to prove themselves. Faced with

a badly designed programme, which had to be shown as a success because it was specifically by women and for women, female personnel were determined to make it work (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 17). ‘Success reporting’ by FETs led to: i) lack of realistic assessments; ii) failures to recognise standard evasive measures or misrepresent them; iii) mistaking grandstanding and performance as sincere statement of intent; iv) lack of knowledge of basic cultural and social practices in relation to women; v) inaccurate reporting without consulting locals or experts; and vi) expectation raising, creating a hand-out mentality and developing an artificial sense of entitlement (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 18).

3. Deployment of Female Engagement Teams

The US Army Research Institute interviewed US FET soldiers, their non-commissioned officers in charge (NCOIC), and officers in charge (OIC) post-deployment to determine how they were being assessed, selected, trained, integrated, and employed. They found that there is a ‘lack of standardization of FET assessment, selection, training, integration, and employment procedures’ (Brooks Babin, 2014a, p. 1; see also Katt, 2014, p. 110).

Assessment and selection

Physical fitness and good interpersonal skills are important qualities for a FET member

There were no standardised procedures for the assessment and selection of U.S. FETs (Brooks Babin, 2014b, p. 1). Critical qualities for FET members were identified by U.S. FET leaders as maturity, adaptability, physical fitness, good oral and written communication skills, teamwork, and deployability (Brooks Babin, 2014b, p. 1). FETs are made up of female soldiers with different specialities (Brooks Babin, 2014a, p. 1).

Rigorous assessment and selection procedures result in higher morale and greater mission success

Qualitative and quantitative data indicated that soldiers from posts that used best practices for more rigorous FET assessment and selection procedures reported significantly higher morale in their FETs (Brooks Babin, 2014b, p. 1). They also rated their FETs’ readiness for deployment significantly higher than did soldiers from posts that did not adopt existing best practices (Brooks Babin, 2014b, p. 2). FET units with a more physically and mentally demanding selection standard also reported greater mission success than units that did not (Brooks Babin, 2014b, p. 2). They were able to deal with long mountainous treks to reach local populations and reported better success at integrating with male soldiers as a result of their increased level of fitness (Brooks Babin, 2014, p. 2).

Best practice assessment and selection procedures developed by the U.S. army include three elements; female soldiers were assessed for aptitude, physical fitness, and their reaction to scenarios (Brooks Babin, 2014b, p. 2). Following this assessment and selection, FET members in benchmark units were given extensive training to develop mission skills, build team cohesion, and facilitate integration with their deployment battalions and companies (Brooks Babin, 2014b, p. 2).

FET members should be volunteers to enhance motivation

The importance of FET members being volunteers rather than conscripts was stressed (Brooks Babin, 2014b, p. 1; Pottinger et al, 2010, p. 5; Centre for Army Lessons Learned, 2011, p. 29). FET members who were told to fulfil FET duty, sometimes upon arrival in the area of operations, lacked motivation and training, which can have serious consequences for mission success and personnel security (Brooks Babin, 2014b, p. 1).

Training

The Commander's Guide to Female Engagement Teams provides information for commanders and their staffs and interested female soldiers to help include FETs in operations and standardise training (Centre for Army Lessons Learned, 2011). The FET Training Support Package (TSP) is required training for all U.S. FET members (Brooks Babin, 2014c, p. 1). They provided limited training, which on its own was insufficient to prepare female soldiers to effectively engage with the local population (Brooks Babin, 2014a, p. 1; Holliday, 2012, p. 93). While some units augmented this training by turning to Army and Marine Corps best practices to develop their unit's training, others did not and there was a large disparity in reported knowledge, skills, and ability levels of FET soldiers (Brooks Babin, 2014a, p. 1; Brooks Babin, 2014c, p. 1).

Training prior to deployment means FETs are better prepared

FET recruits that received training prior to deployment were better prepared to conduct their FET missions upon arrival in Afghanistan (Centre for Army Lessons Learned, 2011, p. 28).

Training in rapport building and influence, and language and cultural skills is useful

Some U.S. FET teams reported that training in rapport building and influence would have helped them engage with tribal elders for permission to talk with the women (Brooks Babin, 2014c, p. 2). Others reported that they needed training for working with interpreters and developing language capabilities (Brooks Babin, 2014c, p. 2). Even U.S. FET Soldiers with 10-16 weeks of Pashto language training prior to deploying felt that greater language proficiency would have contributed to greater mission success (Brooks Babin, 2014c, p. 2). Language proficiency is especially important given the scarcity or lack of female interpreters in many locations (Brooks Babin, 2014c, p. 2). Cultural training was identified by U.S. FET soldiers as helpful in equipping soldiers to more successfully engage with individuals from other cultures and improve mission success (Brooks Babin, 2014c, p. 2).

Physical fitness training helps FETs carry out their missions and integrate with other units

High physical fitness was identified as helpful in enhancing U.S. FET soldier's confidence when integrating with infantry units; identifying those soldiers who were highly motivated and persistent; and giving the soldiers credibility that they could be a help and not a hindrance during physically demanding missions (Brooks Babin, 2014c, p. 2).

Best practice training programmes developed by the U.S. army included a seven month pre-deployment FET training programme which was designed to build teamwork and resiliency, and to develop rapport-building skills and tactical abilities (Brooks Babin, 2014c, p. 1). It included team-building workshops; physical fitness conditioning; language training; a cultural awareness program; Combat Lifesaver Training; midwifery instruction; training on working with interpreters; and practice in engagement strategies in simulated interactions and mock *shuras* (Brooks Babin, 2014c, p. 1).

During 2010-2012, UK FETs had a short pre-deployment training, under the responsibility of the Military Stabilisation Support Group (MSSG) (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 10). Once on the ground, they received a week long course focused on female engagement and influence methods, and later on interaction with the Helmand Provincial Reconstruction Team, female Provincial Councillors and staff of the Department of Women's Affairs (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 10).

Integration and employment

Adopting best practices for more rigorous FET assessment, selection, and training helped integrate FETs better

An important factor which influenced the integration of U.S. FET units was the effort spent on the development of the FET asset (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 1). Soldiers from units which used best practices for more rigorous FET assessment, selection, and training procedures rated their FET's integration into the rest of the unit's staff elements significantly higher than soldiers from units that did not adopt existing best practices (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 1). Good integration into line units was also important for effective employment during deployment (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 1).

Integration of U.S. FETs into line units was negatively affective by i) confusion regarding the FET mission; ii) superstitions related to having females in a combat environment; iii) concerns about fraternisation among soldiers; iv) misunderstandings about female soldier health and welfare needs; and vi) lack of experience working with FETs before deployment (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 1; see also Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 12; Katt, 2014, p. 112; McBride and Wibben, 2012, p. 210).

Emphasising the value and skills of FETs can help their integration

According to the officers in charge, the best way to combat these challenges was to provide opportunities for the FET members to demonstrate their abilities as soldiers (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 1). This could be done via integrated training, physical training competitions, and/or team building exercises (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 1). In addition, it is helpful to emphasise the extensive training that FETs go through to become a well-trained, motivated, and professional asset that will help the units achieve their objectives during deployment, especially in relation to engaging with the local community in gender-segregated societies (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 1).

Units which recognised the value of FETs were more likely to include them in every mission

There was a wide discrepancy in the use of FETs in the US army (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2). Some units recognised the value of the FETs and included them in every mission, while other units did not (Brooks Babin, 2014a, p. 2; Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2). Frequently they were not used in their intended capacity as FETs but for their primary skills (Brooks Babin, 2014a, p. 2; Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2). Factors affecting the use of FETs related to local or regional acceptance of female engagements, unit acceptance and integration of FETs, degree of commander and staff support for FETs, unit mission, and phase of conflict (Brooks Babin, 2014a, p. 2; Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2). In addition, there were some presumptions among commanders that engaging local women would pay no dividends; while other people worried that female engagement would offend Pashtun men (Pottinger et al, 2010, p. 1).

FETs who were used according to their training and had a clear purpose were motivated to deploy again

Female soldiers who did not enjoy their deployment in FET units cited lack of respect/ lack of cooperation from male soldiers, lack of command support, lack of mission clarity, and lack of employment as primary reasons they would not want to deploy again as FET members (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2; Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 12). Female soldiers who would maybe deploy again as FET members said they were only willing to do so if they were properly trained and utilised (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2). Soldiers who perceived that they had been utilised in accordance with their training, and had been deployed to locations that had an urgent mission need for FETs were highly motivated to deploy again in a FET capacity (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2).

FETs should not be used for tactical and operational missions simultaneously

FETs were used for both tactical and operational missions but it is important not to try to do both at the same time as this may destroy the possibility of building relationships with the local women (Centre for Army Lessons Learned, 2011, p. 28).

4. Main challenges for Female Engagement Teams

Lack of female interpreters

One of the greatest challenges reported by U.S. FET soldiers in relation to engaging with local women related to the lack of female interpreters (Brooks Babin, 2014a, p. 2; Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2; Katt, 2014, p. 111; expert comment). Nearly half (48 per cent) of FET soldiers reported that they had 'never' or only 'sometimes' had a female interpreter with them (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2).

Lack of access to women

FET soldiers were often unable to access women as a result of lack of rapport or established relationships, as they often visited a specific village only once (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2). In some villages, especially those with few foreign or Afghan security forces, local men have been reluctant to allow female soldiers to enter the community to meet women (Pottinger et al, 2010, p. 3; Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 29).

One expert also points out that anecdotal evidence suggests that for many Afghans, female soldiers are still members of the military, which can have a negative impact on attempts at meaningful engagement (expert comment).

Lack of leadership support, training, and coordination

Lack of adequate training and support from the top leadership was a major challenge for FETs (McBride and Wibben, 2012, p. 199, 210; Jones, 2013, p. 70). There was an unwillingness to establish full-time FETs made up of volunteers and give them the resources and time to train as professionals should (Pottinger et al, 2010, p. 1). This posed a danger as poorly trained FETs are likely to come to more harm than well-prepared units (Pottinger et al, 2010, p. 3). A failure to involve FETs in the planning stages of operations lead to poorly conceived missions (Pottinger et al, 2010, p. 1). The efforts of FETs can be redundant and repetitive if not properly coordinated, especially when coupled with the current non-standardised training (Holliday, 2012, p. 90). The ad hoc nature of the programme and its limited application in Afghanistan mean that FETs are unlikely to have had a lasting impact on the women of Afghanistan or the outcome of the mission (Long, 2012, p. 45).

Lack of respect from male colleagues

FETs struggled to be perceived as useful by male colleagues (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 1, 12; Katt, 2014, p. 111-112). One expert mentions that by corraling female military personnel into a 'dealing with women' role, it may diminish the value of their other competencies in the eyes of male peers (expert comment).

Lack of real influence

FETs struggled in their efforts to influence Afghans (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 1). While 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 (Katt, 2014, p. 109). This meant that they repeatedly failed to deliver on promises made to the local population (McBride and Wibben, 2012, P. 199). The episodic and temporary nature of their engagement also meant that were unable to create long-lasting effects (Katt, 2014, p. 109).

One report into FETs indicates that Afghans used FETs for their own ends, including getting hand-outs, and were skilled at diverting conversations in the direction they wanted (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 34).

Lack of understanding of gender and institutional memory on women and gender programming

When conceiving and operationalising FETs, the military largely ignored decades of accumulated knowledge and institutional memory on women and gender programming available in the aid community (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 1, 20). This meant the FETs were easily manipulated by Afghans with experience of three decades of relief and development interventions and there was little understanding within the military of the role of women within and in support of the insurgency in Afghanistan (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 1).

There was very little understanding of gender within ISAF, especially in relation to what their female personnel could and couldn't do (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 22). They underestimated the ease with which foreign women could navigate between the worlds of Afghan men and women as a so-called 'third gender' and side-lined their own female personnel for fear of offending locals (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 22). They overestimated how easy it would be for women to address gender in Afghanistan with little or no support and training (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 22).

Overly ambitious programming and no clear goals

The type of changes which FETs were expected to achieve was beyond the scope of generally inexperienced young women working in unstable, conflict areas, quite often with no translators (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 46). FET goals were not clear and sometimes clashed (expert comment).

Potentially damaging FET activities

One paper highlights that there is a lack of reporting on the potential negative impact of some FET activities (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 21). Cultural *faux pas* have occurred but there is no in-depth enquires into the impact on women of FET activities which were controversial in conservative communities, such as videos showing the impact of drug addiction or natural family planning (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 21; Erwin, 2012, p. 68).

Lack of good assessments

Lack of good assessments of the effectiveness of the FET programme may weaken proponents of future FET use (Coll, 2012, p. 60).

Not rooted in the military

There was a worry amongst some FET members that the programme is not sufficiently rooted in the military for it to last (Coll, 2012, p. 60).

Loss of FET skills

In the US army there is a risk that the FET skills of the FET soldiers will be lost as very few have had their skills recognised (Brooks Babin, 2014a, p. 2).

5. Recommendations for future use

Female engagement should be institutionalised and incorporated into future military operations

The study into U.S. FETs indicates that female engagement is a critical capability that should be preserved and incorporated into future military operations (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2).

If the programme is disbanded now and the capability is needed again in the future, it will cost a lot of resources, both money and manpower, to start again (Katt, 2014, p. 113).

However, if FETs are to be used in the future there needs to be a clarification and institutionalisation of their roles (Brooks Babin, 2014a, p. 2; Katt, 2014, p. 113; Holliday, 2012, p. 94; Long, 2012, p. 45). This would involve incorporating female engagement in doctrine, policy, education, and training, so that soldiers will understand the contribution of female engagers and how to effectively employ them (Brooks Babin, 2014a, p. 2). In addition, a standardised curriculum and procedures for FET assessment, selection, training, integration, and employment should be established (Brooks Babin, 2014a, p. 2).

FETs can be a 'force multiplier' if the FET mission is clearly outlined; the best candidates are recruited and selected; and the unit leadership has buy-in supporting the training, integration, and employment of the FET asset (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2).

There are some suggestions that institutionalising FETs would help achieve U.S. security objectives in Africa (Jones, 2013). Cultural Support Teams are being used in the Horn of Africa and Mali to work with local Muslim women as part of an overall U.S. mission to create stability in tribal areas and to undermine the terror organisations, al-Shabaab and other al-Qaeda affiliated terror organizations (Wilson, 2014, p. 5).

If the armed forces choose to open all positions to women, FETs may not be necessary as more trained women will potentially be available on the battlefield to regularly engage with female counterparts during patrols and meetings or after raids (Katt, 2014, p. 113).

FET assessment and selection recommendations:

A standardised and targeted assessment and selection process should be put in place

Prerequisites for FETs should be established to help meet mission demands (Brooks Babin, 2014b, p. 2). These prerequisites should help to inform the assessment and selection process (Brooks Babin, 2014b, p. 2). Standardised guidance should be created for the process of FET member assessment and selection (Brooks Babin, 2014b, p. 2). Given the demands and security risks involved with female engagement, FET members should be screened for experience, maturity, motivation, physical fitness, people skills and creative thinking (Brooks Babin, 2014b, p. 2; Centre for Army Lessons Learned, 2011, p. 28; expert comment). FET applicants should be volunteers to ensure motivation, and should demonstrate the mental and physical ability to conduct missions in stressful and rigorous conditions (Brooks Babin, 2014b, p. 2).

FET training recommendations

Best practices should be incorporated into standardised future training for soldiers and commanders

FET training best practices should be used to inform future FET training and add to the foundational knowledge provided by the U.S. army's FET Training Support Package (Brooks Babin, 2014c, p. 2). Best practices include extensive culture, physical, and engagement training (Brooks Babin, 2014c, p. 2). The effectiveness of FET training can also be increased by incorporating frequent rehearsals in which soldiers or marines and their translators, working with role players, practice 'breaking the ice' and engaging with local men and women under a variety of circumstances (Pottinger et al, 2010, p. 8). Training should be standardised for all deploying units and appropriate training given to support the skills needed at the tactical level and skills needed for the operational level (Holliday, 2012, p. 94).

Training should also be given to commanders so they understand how to use FETs (Centre for Army Lessons Learned, 2011, p. 29).

FET integration and employment recommendations

There should be a clear mission and standard procedures to enhance FET integration and employment

Inclusion of female engagement in U.S. army doctrine, policy, education, and training will help soldiers at all levels to understand the benefits of FETs and how to effectively employ them (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2). A clear mission and standard procedures would enhance FET integration and employment (Brooks Babin, 2014d, p. 2; expert comment). Engagements should be tailored to the context in different parts of the country (Centre for Army Lessons Learned, 2011, p. 28). Female interpreters should be well looked after in order to retain their important services (Centre for Army Lessons Learned, 2011, p. 28).

Use FETs for better quality interactions with men and women and de-escalation of tensions

One report suggests that it is likely that FETs could have had a measurable positive impact if their real advantages had been recognised and used (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 46). Their ability to search women has led to better quality interactions with men and women and a de-escalation of tensions during searches of family compounds and vehicles bearing passengers (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 46).

Improve engagements with women by removing body armour, wearing headscarves, providing gifts and communicating well

A number of recommendations from trainers of FETs to help improve engagements include: i) use FETs to distribute humanitarian supplies directly to the women of each household; ii) take off body armour and helmets in compounds and put on headscarves; iii) do not turn first engagements into interviews; and iv) screen female Pashto linguists for attitude and fitness (Pottinger et al, 2010, p. 7-8; Katt, 2014, p. 112; Centre for Army Lessons Learned, 2011, p. 35).

However, in relation to the delivery of aid and services by FETs, others have pointed out that it is not the responsibility of FETs to undertake piecemeal service delivery (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 10). FETs should strengthen women's relations with the national government (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 10). For instance, in Afghanistan there was a national bureaucracy in place to serve Afghan women which needed strengthening (Azarbaijani-Moghaddam, 2014, p. 10).

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