

# Women in Gulf Security Forces

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# Women in Gulf Security Forces

## Introduction

The global community has recently acknowledged that the true path to development cannot be initiated without proper deployment of the other half of the population- women. This has served as an edifice for global initiatives over the last three decades in providing measures for easy access to healthcare and education for improving the equity of women all over the world. Moreover, it has constituted the means for women's active participation in society and has become an indicator of national progress in conjunction with the legitimacy of governance. Contrary to certain beliefs, the great development initiatives in the Gulf during the 1970s have facilitated the exposure of women to good prospects in education, health, and economic opportunity. The significance of these accomplishments in gender equality is seen through women's participation in the police and armed forces of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), which was not encouraged within the socio-cultural frameworks of the past. Arab women's identity and approach is now not only shaped by the discourse of her environment but also by dominant state-directed discourses on national women's duties towards their nation.<sup>1</sup> The responsibility for women to fully and actively work towards the progress of their countries is demonstrated with the increasing amount of rights given to women by rulers that is implemented with principles of state feminism. This Special Report (SR) looks at the role of women in the security forces of the GCC in order to illuminate specific information about this lacuna in security literature but also to show emerging trends. The SR also looks at women in three other Muslim countries—Pakistan, Indonesia, and Jordan for comparison purposes.<sup>2</sup>

## Emergence and Increased Visibility

The indigenous government sponsored 'Islamic Feminism'<sup>3</sup> has come to the forefront with the increased participation of the GCC women in civil services to the country, which also entails serving in the police and armed forces. There is no written history of women in the security spheres of Gulf countries since most of these countries have only been established in the last few decades. Therefore, one of the reasons for women's involvement in national security came with the formation of the Gulf countries, which made them heavily dependent on non-nationals in almost all sectors of society. There was a need to encourage higher enlistment numbers by nationals and women initiated their governments to allow their participation in order to serve

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<sup>1</sup> Krause, W. (2009). *Gender and Participation in the Gulf*. Kuwait: Kuwait Foundation for the Advancement of Science, p. 2

<sup>2</sup> The information contained within this SR is based on several primary sources as well as structured interviews with GCC, Pakistani, Indonesian, and Jordanian interlocutors.

<sup>3</sup> *Islamic Feminism* is a type of feminism that advocates gender equality, social justice and women's rights granted under a Muslim framework.

their country. There was also a demand for females to contribute to different sectors of the police during that time. Allowing for women to contribute to the Gulf domestic security was seen as a legitimate and coherent policy given particular social, cultural and political contexts. As a result, increasing amounts of institutions was to establish sections to enable the training of women embracing the ideologies of nationalism and Islamic culture. Along with the emergence of Gulf policewomen, the first initial public call for women's participation in the armed forces came about as well during the Iraqi invasion of Kuwait in August of 1990, when the UAE and Saudi governments called for women to join the armed forces. The perceived threat of a possible extension of the invasion to other Gulf countries, made governments take inventory of their capabilities, which included women nationals as an underdeveloped national asset. Although the threat was of a temporary nature, it fed into mainstream political thinking of possibly using women to stave off invasion, help in strengthening forces, and complementing to their regular men in the armed forces. The Saudi call was a temporary call for women's role in nursing, healthcare and replenishing of supplies, whereas the UAE trained females as reserves in combat as well.

## **Entry Requirements & Training Programs**

### **Police Forces**

The system of female admittance into any police training program or study is generally similar among Gulf. In most cases, Gulf countries facilitate the building of training institutions within the region and usually allow for exchange of police trainees. Women like their male counterparts are picked based on their adequate skills to become a police officer. Most trainees that enter police academies in the Gulf are picked based on their physical capabilities and their ability to communicate and make decisions. Prior to entering the police academy for training, women must pass certain tests to determine the skills that are required for training and this is usually provided by the ministry of defense in a certain country. Among some of the general requirements is to be a national of their country, to have a clear criminal record and behavioral record, to be at least over 18 or no older than 33 years of age,<sup>4</sup> to have a height of more than 155 cm, and should not be married at the time she joins training. However, for women who seek experience or training in specialized fields such as forensic science or in the handling of investigations, this may not be required.

The police training program in most Gulf states includes both practical and field training. A trainee may undergo a basic training course that lasts for about 22 weeks which includes physical, academic, and military training to get a certificate of completion in order to work for the police. However, the duration of training can range from two to up to four years, in which an officer is awarded a Bachelor's Degree in Policing Sciences and Criminal Justice. The education level along with the amount of training courses allows for a better set of skills

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<sup>4</sup> May slightly differ in each Gulf country. For example in Kuwait (between 19-30 years of age); UAE (between 18-25 years of age)

therefore, a degree allows for acquirement of a higher rank. The first two years of training introduces the training officer to basic academia and physical skills of police life while the next two years new courses are introduced for specialization in a more advanced manner. The practical program includes training in physical fitness trails, security tactics, crisis handling, criminal processing and other courses that are updated on an annual basis. The field training includes logistic courses such as applied administration, monetary management and police operations.

## **Armed Forces**

With similar development frameworks in the countries of the GCC, the promotion of women's participation in the armed forces tend to also have similar frameworks for the recruitment of women in the security forces of their countries. The requirements to entry for the armed forces tend to be the same in the Gulf but may differ in the type of institutions likely to train them. It may be a separate female military school like Khawlah bint Al-Azwar in the UAE or collaborated sections of the military academies that have a specific section to train female cadets. Generally, there are no specific limits for the entry for women in armed forces. In order for women to join the military, most Gulf countries would require for women to pass an extensive assessment program that includes several fitness exercises and literary knowledge for logistics or security tactics. Usually, the involvement of women in the military is mostly based on employment policy rather than a volunteer strategy. Women who join the military need to be at average between the ages of 18 to 28 and must at least have a high school diploma.<sup>5</sup>

Women should be willing to serve in the military for a minimum of five years after they undergo their basic training which usually lasts for about six months.<sup>6</sup> A basic course may be divided into two parts and is the same type of course that is undertaken by men. The first part is basic military training while the other part is subsequent administrative training. In the basic military training, women are introduced to military life in which they undergo physical, infantry and light weapons training. They also learn discipline, field engineering, urban warfare, signals, as well as military field work and survival tactics. In the second part of training, women learn general staff duties such as computer skills, management, language, and organization. Physical training is continued during the course of the training and women are required to take physical training tests every three months to keep skill.

After women graduate from basic training, they are assigned to different sections of the military in the specific country. In most cases, the newly graduated batches of women train new recruits. Usually military rank is given in relation to the education level that is acquired before training or by service dedication. For instance, new students who have an educational level less

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<sup>5</sup> Age range may differ slightly amongst Gulf countries. In some cases, special permission may be given from a higher council for women to participate regardless of their educational background with the condition of taking extra foundational or training courses.

<sup>6</sup> Number of months may differ depending on the kind of concentration skills that a cadet may develop over training period or demand of female cadets in each specific country.

than that of a high school diploma are usually ordinary soldiers or corporals, while those who attain a high school diploma may serve as a sergeant after passing special training. Furthermore, women who have a college degree and have enough experience can serve as majors, lieutenants or generals. However, women can be promoted to higher ranks based on logistics and training at the camp. In some cases, females may undergo a different type of military training than their male colleagues seeing that their duties and missions are different. They may receive training as reserves to potential battlefields but most of the time their concentration skills are based on the performance of other duties such as being special guards to female members of the GCC royal families or as office managers at different military posts. Most women, who have joined the military, have taken pleasure in serving their country and feel that they have taken an important step towards self-determination.

## **United Arab Emirates**

### ***Emirati Policewomen***

The UAE is amongst one of the earliest countries to assimilate women into its police force. The UAE has different type of police force for each emirate. However, all Emirati police forces undergo the same type of training processes and have contributed to the skill mass of the national police force. In 1977, the first batch of 18 women joined the police force in Abu Dhabi, today there is about 1,838 women personnel with 49 female police officers in Dubai itself.<sup>7</sup> Women have participated in various sectors of the police as security personal in airport customs as early as 1960s. They have also taken part as civil officers that support the police departments in engineering, translators, social workers, and specific case attorneys. Today, UAE policewomen are among the most specialized police in the Gulf as the Dubai Police were the first in the Gulf to accept women in the specialized fields within the police force. These women of the Dubai Police Force were the first to become VIP bodyguards, human trafficking investigators, dog handlers and forensic experts. Women officers have also gone through a Special Weapons and Tactics (SWAT) training to qualify to be in the new Female VIP unit of the Dubai police. They have enhanced the skill set of the female police around the country. An increasing amount of UAE policewomen are heads of departments in the police including in DNA and forensics as well as in crime scene investigation departments. Captain Layla Gharib Al Shamsi is considered the UAE's police force highest ranking women and is the head of the women police section in Al Ain.



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<sup>7</sup> As discussed in an interview from representative of Dubai police.

## ***Women in UAE's Union Defense Force***

The UAE was one of the first Gulf countries to establish women's associations to enhance the participation of women in the different spheres of society. The Late Shiekh Zayed bin Sultan Al Nahyan, the former ruler of UAE and his wife Shiekhha Fatma bint Mubarak emphasized the participation of women in every kind of work as she is the role model of the family and holds the future of the society. With the increasing amount of development initiatives, the UAE established the first female military school in the Gulf, Khawlah bint Al-Azwar Military School in 1991. The training regimen for the school was supported by the United States military that sent out a group of 10 women to train and recruit Emirati women. The first batch that graduated was made up of 59 female soldiers, forming a foundation for women in the UAE military. The top two women of the 59 new graduates were sent to the Royal Academy at Sandhurst, Britain to become trainers for future batches.

After a decade, women now make up approximately 5,000 out of the 65,000 personal in UAE's Union Defense Force. An increasing amount of women have acquired major roles in the UAE's Defense Forces, undergoing the same kind of training as Emirati men. The UAE's Khawlah bint Al-Azwar Military School for Women, for example, has an annual enrollment of about 300 students who complete training to become official employees in the military as soldiers and serve as office workers at different military camps.<sup>8</sup> The amount of females who have enrolled in this school is different to the total amount of women who have enrolled in other training sectors affiliated to the UAE military. Women now participate in all different sections of the UAE military being fighter pilots in the UAE Airforce to special soldiers to UAE military intelligence.



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## **Bahrain**

### ***Bahraini Policewomen***

Bahrain along with the UAE is one of the first countries in the Gulf to accept women in their police force. Ever since the early 1970s, women have played a prominent role in the domestic security of the country. Bahrain has a large amount of female police personal for the administration of police which includes Bahrain's Police Women's Directorate. However, it was only recently that Bahraini women have started to train in the active public service roles such as patrolling, which is different to other states of the Gulf. Currently, there are more than 800 female police officers in Bahrain, even though it may be smaller in area compared to other Gulf

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<sup>8</sup> AlOraimi, S. (2008). "Defying the Prohibited Arena: Women in UAE Military". In H. Carreiras, and G. Kummel, *Women in the Military and Armed Conflict* (pp. 129-161). Wiesbaden: VS Verlag fur Sozialwissenschaften.

countries. The concentration of female police in Bahrain has allowed for an increasing amount of females in all sectors of the police. This has also made Bahraini policewomen the top trainers to females of other Gulf states such as Kuwait. Bahraini police women take up jobs in specialized criminal investigations, public security in places such as the airports and ministries as well as running prisons, juvenile centers and monetary security observation.

Bahrain has a large amount of female police corporals that have enhanced the increased participation of women. In 2001, the first female colonial, Awatef Al Jishi, was promoted to commander of the Women Police Directorate. This paved the way for more women's participation in the Bahraini police force.

### ***Women in Bahraini Defense Force***

Bahrain has had a long history of women in the armed forces similar to the UAE military. Women have had a prominent role in the Bahraini Armed Forces for over 30 years but, have been concentrated as well in the medical service section of the military. Today, women have demonstrated the best of skills in the armed forces as they have undergone similar training as their male counterparts. Bahraini women are acquiring leading roles in several sections affiliated to the Bahraini Defense force. In the recent years, there has been evidence of women taking up senior army positions especially in management roles in offices and for the Bahrain Military Hospital, where they have the most experience. In 2004, two Bahraini women, Dr. Aisha Mubarak Jaber and Dr. Moza Rashid Ahmed were promoted to the rank of colonel in Bahrain's Military Hospital to be put in charge of their major departments. The facilitation of increasing numbers of training programs have also allowed women to specialize in other military activities and take major roles in military engineering and planning as well.

## **Oman**

### ***Omani Policewomen***

In Oman, women have been part of the police force since 1972. Women first entered the police forces as personal vital to the security management roles at women prisons and airports. In 1973, the following year, the role of women in the police was recognized as being integral to the role of their male counterparts. As a result, women were allowed to undergo a special type of training sessions and have contributed to police departments in administrative work, criminal investigations, airport customs and managing departments of passports and residency. There have been more than 41 batches of women graduates in the Royal Oman Police force till present day. Women make up more than a quarter of the Oman Police Forces and continue to take major roles in the management of police investigations.

The first female commissioned officer was Hind Sulieiman Al Abry and the first senior Omani civil service official was Mrs. Naashia Soud Al Kharusi who was appointed as technical advisor to the telecommunication minister of the armed forces, seeing that women who have been seen to have good skills in the police directorate are transferred to work for the armed forces as well.<sup>9</sup>

### ***Women in Sultan of Oman's Armed Forces***

Oman and Bahrain also have a history of women in their armed forces. A few women are allowed to enlist in the armed forces and receive training for skills in logistics and in the operation of light arms. In Oman, women have had the longest history of civil service, since 1972, when the Omani defense forces were affiliated with the British armed forces for military exercises. Women have been serving in different departments in support of the military in the support of soldiers and their families, especially in the medical corps of the military. For over 15 years, Omani women attained their training in the Royal Oman Police Force where the decision to collaborate women into the Defense Force came in 2006 when the first batch of females graduated with military skills and training. Women are now commissioned to higher positions in the armed forces. In last few years, there has been evidence of women taking leading major roles in the logistics to the Omani Defense Forces.

## **Kuwait**

### ***Kuwaiti Policewomen***

Only recently have women been part of the police force in Kuwait. The decision for women to join the police force was made in 2001 however, the first batch was only allowed to train in 2008. Cadres from the Bahraini police force assisted the first training of the women of the Kuwaiti police force as requested by the Ministry of Interior of Kuwait. When women were first entered the Kuwaiti police force, they were given titles such as 'security supervisor' and 'security assistant' but, as the number of Kuwaiti women entering the police force, the skill set acquired by the Kuwaiti women allowed them to achieve the same titles as their male counterparts at graduation. In March 2009, the first batch of women police officers graduated. Out of the 27 graduates, there were 16 lieutenants, eight deputy



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<sup>9</sup> According to an interview with an official from the Omani Armed Forces.

police officers and 3 sergeants.<sup>10</sup> Currently, there is double that amount of trainees expected to graduate this year. In Kuwait, women are hired to handle situations that cannot be handled by men. Women have been used in airports security and public security services in public places such as malls. Women are also being training in specialized courses for criminal investigations, community police tasks, and social support.

### ***Women in the Military of Kuwait***

In Kuwait, women have not yet been established as proper soldiers to the Kuwaiti armed forces as women in the security sphere has only come about in the recent years. However, before the Gulf War, women have had experience in working in the support departments to the Kuwaiti armed forces, including in engineering, management of military enterprises, and public relations sectors. In 1991, a large number of women volunteered for service and some were chosen for training periods that lasted for about three to six months. Today, the number of women in the Kuwaiti Armed Forces is limited since the need for women to participate in the armed forces has been delayed and not established. Only recently have Kuwaiti women graduated as commissioned officers in the police as an experiment towards the participation in the security of Kuwaiti Society. To their surprise, a large amount of women participated in police training therefore, indicators of allowing women to go for military training has been adapted and therefore shall be prominent in the coming years.

## **Qatar**

### ***Qatari Policewomen***

Qatar has allowed a large amount of women to work as personal in various sections of the police; however there was only a limited amount of female police officers. Prior to 2003, there were only about 30 female police officers in the Qatar police force. In the recent years, Qatar has opened up more training courses to enable for more female participation in its police force. In 2003, the first batch of 107 female cadets graduated after finishing a six month police program similar to that of male policemen. This has



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<sup>10</sup> Sharaf, N. (2009, March 25). *News*. Retrieved June 22, 2011, from Arab Times Online: <http://www.arabtimesonline.com/NewsDetails/tabid/96/smld/414/ArticleID/150098/t/Kuwaiti-women-make-it-in-police-force/Default.aspx>

well to be increased in recent years new sections of police that specialize in the training female police officers are opening. Qatari policewomen are training to specialize in civil defense, safeguarding installations, communication and public relations. With the increasing amount of women joining the police force women, Qatari police women have collaborated with women of other police forces in the Gulf such as that of the UAE to have joint training courses. Qatari women are also promoted into the educational sector of the police in which they undergo judicial studies for criminal law.

### ***Women in Qatar Armed Forces***

The fast paced development of Qatar has facilitated several women's associations founded by the second wife of the emir of Qatar, Sheikha Moza Bint Nasser Al Misnad during the early 1990s. In the last five years, Qatar has increased the amount of women recruited in the military. Women are now recruited for training sessions to acquire the skills needed for them to be positioned in different sections of the military. Women have been concentrated in the administration and logistics to the Qatar military. They have also undergone training to become female officers to special sections in the armed forces. Like other Gulf countries, Qatari women are more concentrated in the medical corps of the armed forces. Women have undertaken major roles in the management of the medical and social facilities to the military. In August 2007, Sumayya Hassan Al Rashed, was amongst the first Qatari women to be promoted to the rank of colonial to be in charge of the National Internal Disease Section of the Medical Services Department in the Qatari Military.

### **Model Comparisons**

The similar type of frameworks for recruitment within the Gulf countries may be compared to the Islamic type of military frameworks seen in three sample states-- Pakistan, Indonesia and Jordan, respectively. These countries may demonstrate contrasting differences or similarities in the female participation in the armed forces model seen in the Gulf countries.<sup>11</sup> This approach may allow for the understanding of long term trends in the patterns of women's participation in the Gulf in the coming years, seeing that these countries have developed their female contingents over a longer period of time.

### ***Women in Pakistani Armed Forces***

In Pakistan, women in the military tend to be similar to countries in the Gulf, bearing in mind that it has been founded by similar Islamic principles and have acted as support trainers for militaries such as that of the UAE. In Pakistan, there are almost 4,000 women serving in the army. Pakistani women doctors and nurses have been serving in Pakistan army medical corps

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<sup>11</sup> The police forces are not examined in this section.

for a longer period than most Gulf countries and have been most prominent in the medical corps till today, similar to the Gulf. However, it was only recently that women have been granted entrée to serve as soldiers, jet pilots, instructors, and logistics to the armed forces unlike women of most Gulf armed forces. Pakistani women soldiers like countries in the Gulf do not take part in any combat roles. Pakistani women soldiers undergo training that is different to their male counterparts seeing that their roles are assigned to them. Like in the Gulf, women receive training of up to six months at the Pakistan Military Academy and then are posted in different sections of the armed forces. There also is a women's royal guard section of Pakistan's National Guard where women are trained in nursing, welfare and clerical work. In 2003, women who wish to concentrate in other roles in the armed forces were allowed to enroll in other military colleges such as the Pakistan Air Force Academy, The Military College of Engineering, and the Pakistan Navy Academy. The Pakistan Air Force (PAF) for the first time commissioned four women combat flyers just this year. This is a recent development and was promoted in Gulf countries such as the UAE and Bahrain as well. Pakistan also attained the name of being the only country in the Islamic world to have a female major general in the Army, General Shahida Malik, who was appointed in 2008 to be the head of a combination of military hospitals. Pakistan shows signs of very similar female participation patterns to females in the Gulf however, over a longer frame of time.

### ***Women in Indonesian Armed Forces***

In Indonesia, women only make up about 5,000 of the 415,000 members of the military are women, less than a quarter of the military which is a very low number compared to Pakistan and other countries in the Gulf such as the UAE. Only five Indonesian soldiers hold high high-ranking positions — three brigadier generals in the army, a vice marshal in the air force and a navy admiral.<sup>12</sup> These positions are yet to be seen in the female soldiers in the forces of the Gulf countries which makes sense as Indonesia had established a large amount of concentrated female corps in the military since 1992. Some of these included a Women's Army Corps, Navy Women's Corps, and the Air Force Women's Corps for women to undergo training. According to official publications, women members of the armed forces were "set to work at places and in functions conform[ing] to their feminine disposition." More specifically, women were assigned to administrative work, to teaching English, and to working on improving health and social conditions of armed forces members and their families. This is different to that of the Gulf countries as they have undergone similar training to that of their male counterparts however, naturally have concentrated in the social and health departments of the military. This can be

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<sup>12</sup> Osman, N. (2010, April 22). *Female Officers Fights Bias in Indonesian Military to Claim High Rank*. Retrieved June 22, 2011, from The Jakarta Globe: <http://www.thejakartaglobe.com/home/female-officer-fights-bias-in-indonesian-military-to-claim-high-rank/370818>

explained by segregation. In Indonesia, women may volunteer to be part of the armed forces which is not the case in Gulf countries.

### ***Women in Jordanian Armed Forces***

Women have been prominent in the Jordanian armed forces since the early 1950s, when females were recruited as teachers for their military schools, which is far more experience than women in most Gulf armed forces. In the 1960s, Jordan had established the first female Nursing College for women to undergo training for the medical corps for the armed forces. Like other areas of the Gulf, women were first mostly concentrated in the medical corps of the army and then with the increasing number of women willing to serve their country, training courses have opened up to facilitate their participation. The first female graduates of the nursing school were commissioned as 2nd lieutenants. The top women of graduating batches were recruited for training for new female cadets in the military. Women were promoted in other sectors of the military in 1993 when the Directorate of Military Women's Affairs in Jordan's armed forces was established. Women in this directorate of military were training and educating themselves to help recruit future batches and open up new positions. This is the kind of patterns seen in Gulf countries such as Bahrain and UAE as well. Furthermore, other Gulf countries like Kuwait are most likely to undergo this type of starting process, according to interlocutors. In training, Jordanian women are assigned jobs in different sections pertaining to the Jordanian Armed Forces such as being in logistics, administrators, engineers and architects. This is different to the Gulf model as women had undergone training only as military personal and then further inducted into concentrated skill set. However, this pattern may be inevitable in the coming years for reasons of efficiency. Women now make up almost 5000 out of the 100,000 personal of Jordanian armed forces.

### **Conclusion**

The call for women's participation and presence in the development of the Gulf countries was in sync with same experiences of other countries globally. The emergence of women in the security spheres of the Gulf has been promoted in the recent decade to secure opportunities for the national population along with the increased amount of expatriates in the GCC. A sense of increased national identity is prominent among the populations of the Gulf countries and it is agreed that in the face of booming development, females are put at the top of present agendas in the Gulf. As a result, new initiatives to allow for the widespread jobs for women in every sphere of society shall not be overlooked. Analyzing the patterns of women's participation in domestic and military security demands in the Gulf economies is unique for in the GCC.

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