

Gender, the military and the media: Gendered framing of the first Afghan women fighter pilots

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Introduction

Gender plays an extremely important role in the militaries around the world. From the division of labour, to norms associated with masculinity, everything can be related to gender relations (Winter and Woodward, 2007). There has been a change in the gender relations that previously existed with the removal of the combat ban on women in the armed forces (Fisher, 2013). But with this changing trend comes the question of representation of these women officers in the media as well, an area which has not been studied that much. This research tries to look into this area by analysing the coverage by the press media of Afghanistan's first women fighter pilot, Niloofar Rahmani

Methods

■ Newspapers from 4 countries were chosen for the study: India, Afghanistan, US and UK

■ A total of 24 articles were analysed, found using NexisLexis and google search

■ Articles pertaining to Niloofar Rahmani as well as other women fighter pilots of the Afghan Air Force were analysed

■ Each article was coded using the software NVivo for analysis.

■ The articles were coded for the number of times a distinction based on gender of the officers was made, instances where the officers were denied agency and mention of personal stories of these officers

	A: Afghanistan	B: India	C: UK	D: US
1: Personal Story	0	1	9	4
2: Total articles from each country	1	4	13	6
3: Percentage of articles with Personal Story mentioned	0	25%	69.23%	66.67%



Figure 1: Captain Niloofar Rahmani, the first female fixed-wing pilot in the Afghan Air Force, (The Independent, 2018)

References

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Results

- ❖ In the newspaper articles, male officers are just called 'officers', since it is not out of the normal. But since a women officer is not the norm, therefore a female officer is referred to as 'women officer' over 340 times for it is something special.
- ❖ The same is also true for the instances where other aspects of these officers are being presented. While this is not done for male officers, 14 out of 24 articles mention this for female officers such as their favourite movies and how they learned certain languages mentioned. Out of these 14, 13 were from the US and UK. Both of these nations were involved in training her. This attention allows them to improve their own image as militaries who promote gender neutrality. But, the high level of attention given to her shows that there is gender bias present (Enloe, 1993).
- ❖ Also, there were 44 instances where these officers are being rejected agency as the media coverage shows their inclusion in the military as part of an ulterior motive for the newspaper article to push forward while not focusing on the pilot herself for example how forward Afghanistan is moving due to the NATO.

Conclusion

The press media while making distinctions between male and female officers and, by giving special attention to female officers shows that even though the military is making strides in gender parity, the same is not true for the representation of these officers. Representation is important, for the audience are the future and present generations of citizens who make gender constructs by reading the news (Scheufele and Tewksbury, 2007)