

NATIONAL & INTERNATIONAL

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AUSTRALIAN MILITARY QUESTIONS ALLOWING WOMEN TO SERVE

Aleigha Page
Staff Writer

Because of low numbers in military enrollment, the Australian government is now considering allowing women to serve in combat posts, including driving helicopters, serving in person-on-person combat, and being on the front lines. However, controversy surrounds the issue.

In Australia, women currently serve in 92% of employment positions. The government hopes to increase female participation in the military by 13% over the next decade. On an international scale, Germany, Denmark, New Zealand, and Israel do allow women to serve in combat. However, Australia's major allies—the United States and the United Kingdom—are more restrictive with respect to the roles of women in the military.

Junior Defense Minister Greg Combet supports women participating in front lines, stating, "The only exceptions should be where the physical demands cannot be met according to criteria that are determined by scientific analysis rather than assumptions about gender." Combet has worked with the University of Wollongong to draw up a new plan for physical employment assets that would determine admittance into the Army based solely on physical abilities, not on gender. One female soldier, Capt. Anne-Marie Russell, says, "If women can compete to the same standards as a male,

then there should be no limitations on what roles they can do." She told Sky News, "[T]here should be no lowering of standards to enable women to join certain work environments."

According to one publication, *The Australian*, the most common debate is that anatomically, women are not equal to men and are not capable of the same tasks. Another debate is that women could create distractions for the men. The final argument is that women could jeopardize a battle; if a man were to notice an injured woman, he would instinctively come to her aid and potentially put an operation at risk. There are more disturbing details entangled in the debate as well. POWs endure the worst kind of torture imaginable. If women are POWs, there is a whole new realm of torture potential. Neil James, executive director of the Australian Defense Association, is highly critical of the plan, saying to Sky News, "Unfortunately, too many people are looking at using civilian gender equity guidelines rather than the requirements of the battlefield."

The Meredith Community also has opinions on women in the military. Nicole Bruce believes that women should be able to serve in any military position available to men. "If I join the Army, I want to be able to be anything I want to." Bruce also believes

that military acceptance should be based off of physical assets, not gender. Lauren McCoig believes that this is a very mixed issue. She also believes that women could be distracting in the event of emergency or

injury. "Men could stop what they are doing to rescue a woman militant."

The decision, even if made now, will take years to become active. The Australian government is faced with several ques-

tions; Are women and men equal in strength? Are the restrictions based entirely on physics and biology, or are cultural norms and stereotypes fueling the debate? Are those stereotypes true or just antiquated? These, among multitudes of others, are questions the Australian government must take into consideration as they make a world changing decision.

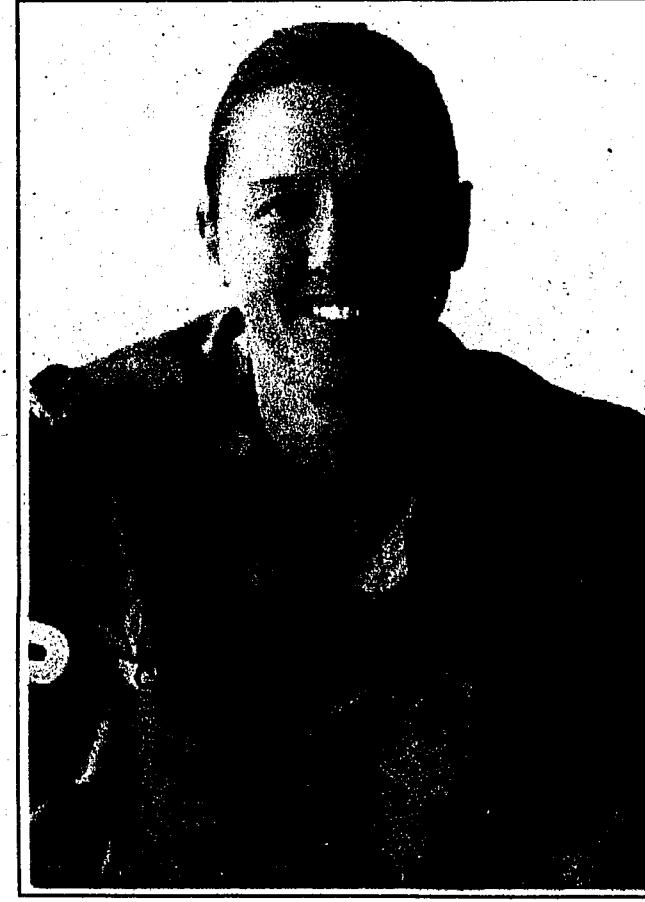


Photo Courtesy <http://www.australianapprenticeships.gov.au/about/stories/Photos/NoLimits2/Rebekah-Castner.jpg>

HIKERS DETAINED IN IRAN

Anna Perry
Staff Writer

Three Americans—Sarah Shourd, Joshua Fattal and Shane Bauer—were detained in Iran, on July 31, 2009, for crossing the Kurdistan border into Iran "without permission." The group was hiking in the northern Iraq region when they crossed the border. The Iranian government has confirmed the three are being held but has not allowed authorities from the Swiss Consulate, acting on behalf of the U.S. government, to see the detainees. The United States has not had diplomatic relations with Iran since the American hostage crisis in 1979.

Shon Meckfessel, a friend who was traveling with the trio, believes that his friends had no idea they were nearing the Iranian border and made "a simple and regrettable mistake." Meckfessel has said he stayed behind at a hotel because he had a cold. Meckfessel could have been detained as well if he had not been sick. Relatives and friends have launched www.freethewalkers.org to inform the public of efforts to free the three after Iran took them into

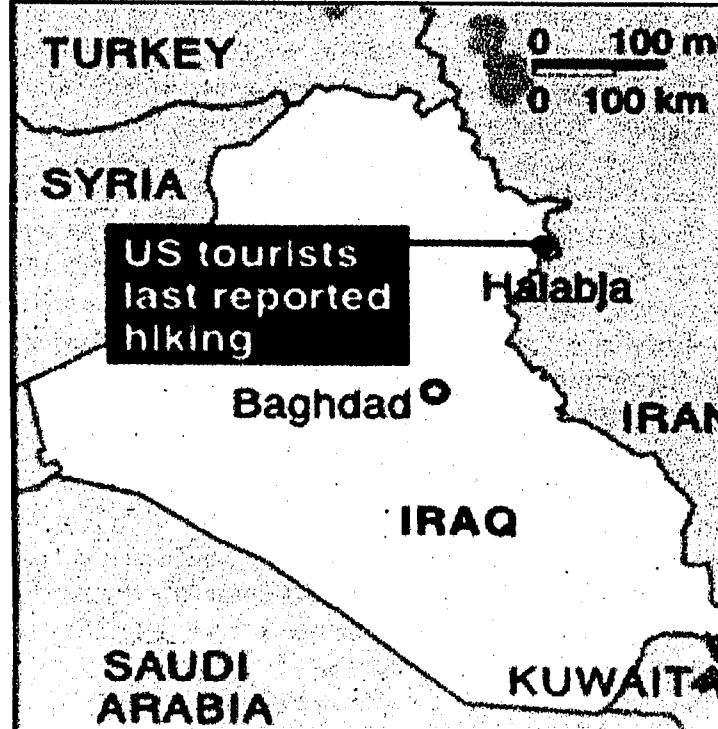


Photo Courtesy <http://www.allword-news.co.uk/images/Report%203%20American%20Hikers%20Arrested%20In%20Iran.jpg>

custody. The families feel very strongly that the trio had become disoriented and accidentally crossed the border. Supporters have appealed to Iranian authorities to grant consular access to the trio. The hikers, all graduates of the University of California at Berkeley, entered northern Iraq from Turkey on July 28 and planned to spend five days touring, according to the families' Web site.

This situation is difficult for our nation. With all that has happened between the United States and Iran, these three people may be suffering for the tensions between the two countries. We as a nation must stand together and become one. The support we give each other may show others how to handle this situation and other situations like this in the future. Keep these hikers in mind as you go through your day. It may show all of us just how lucky we are just being here with difficult classes and surviving our next exams.