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**FOREIGN POLICY & DEFENSE**


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## Women In Arms

"Should Women be Kept Out of Combat?" by Beverly Ann Bendekgey, in *The G.A.O. Journal* (Summer 1990), Rm. 4129, U.S. General Accounting Office, Washington, D.C. 20548.

During the 1989 U.S. invasion of Panama, a platoon of American military police exchanged gunfire with Panamanian soldiers outside of Panama City. What made this firefight different from others, however, was that the platoon was led by a woman.

Officially, American women shouldn't have been fighting in Panama at all. Women in all branches of the armed forces have been barred from combat duty ever since the 1948 Women's Armed Services Integration Act opened the regular military to women. (Since the removal of the two percent ceiling on women in the military in 1967, female representation has grown to 11 percent.) "Combat exclusion laws" purportedly "protect women from the hazards of war." But Bendekgey, of the U.S. General Accounting Office, argues that actually they do little more than limit job and promotion opportunities for women in uniform, arbitrarily shutting them out from some high-risk positions but not from others.

The problem, she says, is that it is virtually impossible for the combat exclusion laws to meaningfully spell out what they mean by "combat" and "high risk." Women in the Air Force, for example, are not allowed to fly fighter planes or bombers because their "principal mission is to deliver munitions against an enemy." Women *can*, however, "deliver munitions" by firing a land-based missile, and they are allowed to fly tanker planes that refuel F-111 bombers in flight.

But it is far from clear that these jobs are much safer than the "combat" jobs. Similarly, aircraft carriers and their escort

ships are closed to women, but women may serve on the supply ships that shuttle cargo to the carriers. Often, such policies cause irrational use of personnel. When the Army's 82nd Airborne Division was sent to Panama, it was forced to leave behind a female intelligence officer. Her specialty: Panama.

In 1988 the Defense Department tried to iron out the inconsistencies by ruling that women could be excluded "only from those noncombat positions that are exposed to risk that is equal to or greater than that faced by associated combat



*The several thousand women sent to Saudi Arabia were armed with M-16 rifles, but weren't supposed to use them.*

units." As a result, several thousand more positions were opened to women. Still, Bendekgey says, many more remain out of reach. Clinging to the dated notion that

women need to be "protected" is ridiculous, she believes, especially when that "protection" is meaningless and merely complicates the management of troops.

### *Gorbachev's Road Ahead*

Former Secretary of State Henry Kissinger, in his April H. J. Heinz Company Foundation Distinguished Lecture, described the obstacles confronting Soviet President Mikhail Gorbachev.

*Gorbachev is the first Soviet leader who cannot be removed by the Communist party and who, in fact, governs according to what we in the West would consider normal governmental structure. He has a fixed term in office and a regular bureaucracy. On the other hand, in order to get where he is, he has had to set in motion processes that will be difficult, if not impossible, to manage.*

*In the Western media these processes are described as "multiparty pluralism." I do not believe that is altogether true because it depends to such an extent on what part of the Soviet Union you are talking about. In the Russian Republic, which is half the Soviet population, it has moved from one-party to*

*one-man rule. The whole process of glasnost has not yet produced one single national organization extending over the whole of the Soviet territory, which might become the nucleus of a political party. . . .*

*The only national organizations left in the Soviet Union are the army and the KGB. . . .*

*All these political processes have up to now produced in the ethnic republics organizations confined strictly to the republics and therefore implicitly hostile to Moscow. So Gorbachev's unresolved dilemma is that, in order to push economic reforms through in the face of entrenched vested interests, he must centralize authority in Moscow. Yet to break the power of the Communist Party, he has had to enlist voters who are inherently hostile to Moscow. When Gorbachev visited Lithuania, he said, "To have a divorce, you need discussions between both parties." Lithuania responded, "But we are not married." And that is the fundamental problem.*

### *Tenuous Friendship*

"America and Israel: How Bad Is It? Will It Get Worse?" by Steven L. Spiegel, in *The National Interest* (Winter 1990-91), 1112 16th St. N.W., Washington, D.C. 20036.

Even before Iraq invaded Kuwait on August 2, U.S.-Israeli relations were tense. Israelis worried that the United States would abandon them; Americans were dismayed by daily reports of violence between Arabs and Jews in Israel's occupied territories. It appeared that the two allies might be nearing a major falling out.

But Spiegel, a political scientist at UCLA, argues that tension is the rule, not the exception. Historically, U.S. support of Israel has always been balanced against America's desire not to alienate oil-rich Arab nations and against other national interests. "Despite the myth of consistent amicability and unity of purpose between Washington and Jerusalem," he writes, "the path of their relationship has been a crooked and rocky road indeed."

As early as 1946, two years before Israel became a nation, President Harry S. Truman was frustrated by Zionist balking at Britain's plan for Palestine. "If Jesus Christ couldn't please them, how can I?" he once complained. In the 1956 Suez crisis, President Dwight D. Eisenhower forced the Israelis, and their British and French allies, to stop their attack on Egypt.

The U.S. warmed to Israel under presidents John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson, who sold arms to Israel as a hedge against hostile Arab states and began to speak of a "special relationship." But they sold arms to Arab states such as Jordan as well. While President Richard M. Nixon was the first to consider Israel a "strategic asset," Spiegel writes, he regarded the 1967 Six Day War as a major