

**WPS Breaking Barriers Podcast**  
**Episode 7: Argentina**  
**Original Interview in Spanish**

Lt. Col. Turner [1:09] Welcome everyone to our podcast Breaking Barriers. It's a pleasure to have you with us for this new episode. Today we have the privilege of having Major Auditor Natalia Vazquez as our guest. She is the chief of the Gender Office for Argentina's armed forces. Natalia was born in Bahia Blanca, where I had the great pleasure of visiting in 2015. Major Vasquez joined the Argentinian military in 2017 and has played roles including chief of the Department of Military Justice of the Command Corps. She has also served giving legal advice for the Joint Chiefs of Staff in support of the Chief of Staff for the Argentinian armed forces. This year, in 2021, she leads the Gender Office full-time. She has established herself out as a UN peacekeeper. She is a military officer who breaks barriers. Welcome, Major Vasquez. It's a pleasure to have you with us.

Major Vazquez [2:15] Hello, I send you all my regards from here in Argentina in Buenos Aires.

Lt. Col. Turner [2:22] What a pleasure. You know I had the opportunity to live in Buenos Aires for three months. The people were wonderful, and the military collaboration that we have with Argentina makes me very glad to have you here today. Can you tell us a bit about yourself and share some of your experiences as a military officer in Argentina?

Major Vazquez [2:40] In my experience with the military in Argentina, I can say that my first destination was to work with people in Command Corps, both men and women, and this shaped me in the sense that I am an auditor, a lawyer. So, in this case, after having spent 14 years with this group in the city of Mar de Plata, this formed me and showed me how the commando corps work. From there, in 2020, I was transferred to another office—first in the legal advice office and then in the gender office, now with a different feel, perspective, and specialization, helping women in situations of vulnerability. But having spent 14 years in the city of ciudad de Mar de Plata with the soldiers and military officers formed me and allowed me to be able to help in situations that you wouldn't normally see in an office—you really must be in a combat unit.

Lt. Col. Turner [4:11] Yes, I agree. Many times, being together with our fellow service members who have been in combat roles, gives us a wider vision of what the true value and use of the armed forces is—managing the use of force, keeping peace. This way we can connect it to the many different functions that military personnel play. I'm glad to know that you had that opportunity, and that now you have the opportunity to be the first chief of the Gender Office, which is a new organization. We know that Argentina has made great strides towards the integration of women into the Armed Forces, as well as now this position that you're in. We know that Argentina has made great progress



towards the integration of women into the Armed Forces. Can you tell us about what circumstances are women's integration into the Argentinian Armed Forces, and what are some positive points of this integration?

Major Vazquez [5:18] Well, the integration of women into the armed forces has been seen in Argentina since 1994, where the incorporation of volunteer soldiers began in 1997, when women from the commando corps entered. Then the most recent incorporation was into the infantry and cavalry. This was something new, something you couldn't. And it was a big step forward. This policy was carried out by Minister Garré in the presence of Néstor Kirchner. And well, they were great advances, among other advances that were the ones that also helped the male staff, like in not asking for me to get married and allowing pregnant women to continue their careers within military institutes. It is to generate maternal gardens for women in the military. With a lot of gender perspective. And well, these have been great advances for women, especially the creation of the Office of Gender and protocols for domestic violence. All these initial changes with Minister Nilda Garré, the big changes related to women in particular.

Lt. Col. Turner [6:44] I am particularly pleased to hear about these important changes. These internal mechanisms are necessary for women to enter the Armed Forces. To be in the Armed Forces and that they can grow through the ranks. These internal mechanisms are therefore very important for formalizing the presence of women, the integration of women into the Armed Forces. A few months ago, we had an important high-level bilateral meeting between the United States and Argentina and among the number of issues that they discussed about defense and security, I was very pleased to hear that they also included gender inclusion. The role of women in the Armed Forces, that is, the road, seems to be quite positive. What is the current policy on the role of women in uniform in Argentina?

Major Vazquez [7:41] Well, today with the current policy, uh, we are working together with the Ministry of Defense, with the Directorate for Gender Policy and from there we have the gender councils with which we meet monthly or periodically and from there we do policies, resolutions, directives to contribute our experiences in each meeting with different professionals. This year, professionals have also joined the command corps to give their perspective. Not only psychologists and auditors, but also people from the command corps, and what is done to work with new masculinities and try to ensure that women in a command corps are not so reluctant around gender issues, but to defend their rights, so to speak. I know it's harder for them. And in this case, I also must give what is labor violence and domestic violence, supporting people who are victims of domestic violence and sexual harassment, something like that. Well, that's what we're always working at the Ministry of Defense. In this case this year, has been very particular in terms of COVID a lot has been done quite a bit virtually on all different mediums, through email, by telephone, or any other means available, with phones available 24 hours, and always being as present as possible for staff who need help, who is vulnerable or in situations of vulnerability.



Lt. Col. Turner [9:34] That educational part, those real programs is what we like to refer to as normalizing the presence of women not only as victims, because we know that is a problem that we need to solve. But we, too, women in uniform and men working to intervene to make interventions, so that such violence, and victims of it do not have to suffer. So, it's that paradigm where we have women who are victims, but we also have women who are part of the defense of security and that is very important, to have that bond that maybe years ago we didn't have. Yes. From what you tell me, it's obvious that we've succeeded, that, Argentina has made great strides, progress in integrating women into defense and security, but I think there remain obstacles. What do you think are the next steps to advance these goals?

Major Vazquez [10:35] Well, the steps as usual is to continue the work being done on this issue, it obviously remains to eradicate the issue of domestic violence. But eradication is difficult. Using the tool of the Ministry of Defense, et cetera. We work continuously with new protocols, and so on. I think it is also important for women to have higher positions of command than they do not today and achieve equity and that there is equal opportunity between men and women. Today women have not yet reached command posts in Argentina within the years when they were incorporated. That is important. And also, work is under way by the Ministry of Defense with statistics to determine that women can participate in peace missions and with time longer than six months and that they can be up to one year like male staff, since the large number of men going is not the same as the number of women on family matters or for different issues. Um, well, all these issues are still being worked on day by day.

Lt. Col. Turner [11:55] And that part of having the number of women is important, but sometimes when we talk about the integration of women into the Armed Forces, some people think that just add numbers, mix, and the problem has already been solved. But this point you highlight that it is important that women have a significant presence, that they have positions where they can lead, where they can ascend. That's very important. The formula is not quotas, they are not numbers. It goes further. It is more complex so that we can really create lasting change. I really like this point it makes. Thank you very much. Now I would like to change a little bit and to a more personal level and ask, what was a moment in your career as a woman in uniform that has brought you the greatest pride? Do you have any personal stories you'd like to share with us?

Major Vazquez [12:55] Well, my greatest pride has been when I deployed to Cyprus and achieved, of course, with a different perspective. Months had passed and then, when I returned to Argentina, I managed to convert what, from the perspective of gender, masculinity or from what is the Argentine tradition, is considered weakness on the part of women. For example, having a family, having a two-year-old child when deploying to Cyprus, could have been considered a weakness. Then the death of my mother, too. She passed away while I was in Cyprus and I managed to turn those weaknesses into strengths and achieve the peace mission. People approached me and I realized that the



people who approached me came close to me with bigger problems than mine and telling me their experiences. Then I also became a source of support, especially of the male staff, who many times and when already ending the mission, wanted to return to their country. I became support for them so that they did not repatriate and that was very, very interesting to help them, especially support the male staff because women were very strong and showed how, in the forces, women in situations that can be considered vulnerable, can, like men, complete the mission, participate, finish and be at the same height as the male staff.

Lt. Col. Turner [14:41] That point is very interesting, very important because for example, in my case, for more than 20 years I served was not mom. And then I became a mom and my whole career. Of course, I served my country with great pride, many times focusing on my accomplishments, but now that I'm a mom it's no longer about my achievements, that's what I want to leave to my children. So, my commitment to my uniform is even greater, my desire to do better, to leave a legacy for them that highlights the achievements I have made, the uniform, the contributions to my country. No, it's no longer personal respect, but for my children. I give even more effort and I'm a better military person today because I'm a mom. Sometimes people can look at a mom and think, "How will you be able to do all that and be a mom?" It gives many of us even more strength. What do you really think?

Major Vazquez [15:39] Being a mom gives us more strength. And well, me personally when I flew from Cyprus, not only the male staff, but also many women considered it bad for me to travel to Cyprus leaving my 6-month-old son in Argentina. In other words, the change must be not only in the mentality of men, but also of women, which often and especially in Argentina, is a sexist mentality. And it is not understood that a woman also wants to develop professionally, obviously accompanying the family, and bring that together, but change must come from both men and women.

Diu [16:28] Yes. Here at Southern Command, we like to say that women, peace, and security, it's not something we do, but it's how we think and once that mindset changes— that's when we're going to see all those barriers break. We're going to break all those barriers when we changed the way we think. How you would define, as a woman, as an Argentinian, as a soldier, how would you define your leadership style?

Major Vazquez [16:59] My style of leadership, I handle it with empathy. I try to be empathic and when I hear a problem, I listen to it, and I put myself in the other person's place. I also base it on situations I've experienced from age, from being a mother, and from professional experiences. So, I think with empathy one can manage to understand the other person, put yourself in place of someone else and work in this way, in a better way and be able to reach a solution where everyone is comfortable and can continue their profession accordingly. Solving the problems such as harassment at work, sexual harassment, etc., but always being a support, listening actively and always my way of working is empathically. Not listen and that's it, but rather really listen to the person.



Lt. Col. Turner [18:06] You know that I and I received book called Emotional Intelligence and talks a lot about leadership and one of the most important features of emotional intelligence is empathy. There are even companies here in the United States that is already a part of acquiring new employees— to consider their talent and their level of emotional intelligence, because that empathy is what can really change teams and moves the company forward. I think that in our armed forces, that characteristic of emotional intelligence is a force that can make our teams more cohesive, and our missions more effective. One of my first activities when I started as head of the Women, Peace, and Security program here at Southern Command, was to work with 50 cadets from Argentina who came on a ship and came here by Southern Command, where I had the great opportunity to introduce them to our program. And I saw that there was a lot of enthusiasm. That new generation has a lot of enthusiasm. So, my question to you is what would you say to young people, particularly women, who want to join the Armed Forces?

Major Vazquez [19:26] Well, I'd tell women who wants to join the Armed Forces that this means a lifestyle. To bear the flag with pride, the country with pride. It means learning to work as a team, acquiring strengths, being part of the change that is already happening, having women in their day-to-day reflect their perspective and adding or advocating for the incorporation of both men and women. For all of us to be part of this change that has come from a couple of years ago but is getting stronger and stronger.

Lt. Col. Turner [00:20:19] We are now coming to the end of the episode, and we have a question that we always ask all our guests, which is as follows. When thinking about the gender perspective in the Defense and Security Forces, how do you think that each individual, men and women can participate in making the invisible visible?

Major Vazquez [20:43] Well, from my point of view. I believe that this is achieved with the commitment of every individual and of high-ranking men and women engaging and becoming involved with— and this has a little to do with the previous question— engaging with your neighbor. If there is no commitment to one another, to truth, justice, equality, and equity, one cannot achieve visibility of those who are invisible. Commitment, love of neighbor, empathy, and fearlessness. If we're afraid, then we can't move forward. So, to make the invisible visible, we need that commitment to the other person.

Lt. Col. Turner [21:28] I congratulate you on being an Argentinian soldier who operates fearlessly and breaks so many barriers. For all our listeners today, what a privilege to have with us today the Major Auditor, Natalia Vázquez, of the Argentine Armed Forces. Major Vázquez, thank you again so much for sharing with us your experiences, for representing Argentina and for everything you do. You're truly, a great role model, and an inspirational one who breaks barriers. It was an honor.



Major Vazquez [21:59] Thank you very much. It was a pleasure.

