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NATO and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Time to Bring It Home

*Marriët Schuurman**

The year 2015 is a year of global reflection: celebrating the seventy years of the United Nations, the twenty years of the Beijing Declaration and Platform for Action for gender equality and women's empowerment, the end year of the Millennium Development Goals, and the fifteenth anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325). Together, these milestones urge us to reflect on what difference these groundbreaking international institutions and collective efforts have actually made.

UNSCR 1325 is the landmark "No Women, No Peace" resolution, which recognizes that there can be no sustainable peace without equal inclusion of women and men alike. UNSCR 1325 sets a comprehensive agenda for mobilizing the power of women with a view of better and lasting peace and security. It is the mother resolution that was followed by six related resolutions in subsequent years, together setting the international framework for empowering women to take their rightful, active, and meaningful role in preventing and resolving conflicts, in restoring peace and security, and in building resilient and prosperous societies.

Looking back at fifteen years of implementing UNSCR 1325, the following questions arise: has the world indeed become a safer place for women and girls? Are women heard and have they gained their rightful place at the table when it comes to preventing and resolving conflict, rehabilitation and reconstruction, building resilient communities, and contributing to lasting peace and security?

My conclusion is that we have come far in norm setting, designing policies and plans, guidelines, and directives. Awareness is on the rise, gender expertise was augmented, tools have been developed to better integrate a gender perspective into our daily peace and security efforts. The devastating nature of conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence is finally getting the attention it needs. Now is the time to implement, to deliver tangible results, on the ground and in real life. Translating principles into practice requires perseverance and above all political will and leadership. The main challenge ahead of us will be to keep the women, peace, and security agenda on the political agenda in a time when our security environment has drastically changed. When we are no longer mainly concerned with exporting peace and security but are also forced to re-think how we protect peace and security *at home*, in our own countries and region; how we defend the principles on which our peace and security is based: individual freedom, democracy, human rights, and rule of law; how we safeguard a Europe at peace, whole and free.

In this article I will highlight some of NATO's major achievements in implementing its women, peace, and security policy, identify work ahead, and argue the relevance of

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the women, peace, and security agenda for better responding to the many new security challenges we face.

NATO's Achievements and Best Practices: Groundwork in Place

One of NATO's most remarkable achievements in implementing Resolution 1325 and related resolutions is the institutionalization of the agenda in its organization. The first NATO policy on women, peace, and security dates back to 2007, the same year in which the first "1325" National Action Plans came to light. NATO's first Action Plan was drafted in 2010. A revised Policy and a new Action Plan were adopted in 2014 by NATO, Allies, EAPC partners and six global partners. In total, fifty-five nations signed off on the new NATO Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security. In 2009, NATO's two Strategic Commands—Allied Command Operations and Allied Command Transformation—issued a Directive (BI-SC Directive 40-1) on integrating UNSCR 1325 and the gender perspective into the NATO command structure. The Directive was updated in 2012.

The experiences gained from our operations, particularly in Afghanistan, have been instrumental in improving the integration of the gender perspective into NATO-led military operations. Following a request by Allied leaders at the 2012 Chicago Summit, an international team of independent experts on the subject assessed how current gender policies and plans have been implemented in NATO-led missions in Kosovo (KFOR) and Afghanistan (ISAF). Their findings can be read in a public Review that takes stock of efforts to date and offers recommendations for strengthening future work in this area.¹

The Review finds that "significant progress" has been made in implementing the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security in NATO-led operations in Afghanistan and Kosovo, but says there remains "ample room for improvement."² Areas of progress include the establishment of gender advisor positions within senior level military commands, the appointments of Gender Focal Points within different branches of KFOR and ISAF, and the use of gender enablers (such as the ISAF Female Engagement Teams). Recommendations include (1) the further deployment of female staff as well as male and female Gender Advisors; (2) the further integration of a gender perspective in military assessments, intelligence, planning, operations and reporting; and (3) the need to identify local women as important actors in our mission areas and consult with them on that basis.

Following the review, continued efforts have been made to integrate a gender perspective into planning documents, handbooks, and directives – mostly as part of the regular revision process of these documents, but occasionally for the specific purpose of integrating a gender perspective, as was the case with the Operational Plan for the Bal-

¹ Helené Lackenbauer and Richard Langlais, eds., *Review of the Practical Implications of UNSCR 1325 for the Conduct of NATO-led Operations and Missions* (Stockholm: Swedish Defense Research Agency (FOI), 2013), available at http://www.nato.int/nato_static/assets/pdf/pdf_2013_10/20131021_131023-UNSCR1325-review-final.pdf.

² *Ibid.*, 4.

kans. The planning process for the new Resolute Support Mission to Afghanistan demonstrates that gender is no longer an afterthought: a gender perspective was integrated from the political decision-making level down to the drafting of the operational plan for the mission and the troop generation process.

Gender expertise has been further increased and institutionalized. Specific gender training modules have been developed for all levels, for both pre-deployment training and advanced learning. In September 2014, a NATO Education and Training Plan for Gender in Military Operations was approved, which unifies and synchronizes gender education and training at all levels. The Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations (NCGM) was designated the NATO Department Head for Gender Training. As such, it is responsible for assuring the quality control, coherence, and coordination of gender training available to NATO and its Allies and Partners. The NCGM also provides Mobile Training Teams to respond flexibly to specific gender training needs of Partner Nations. In addition, NATO is developing a National Gender Training and Education Package to be released in June. This package will be openly available on the Internet and will serve as a handbook for Nations on available gender training, with a specific focus on pre-deployment training.

Gender is also integrated in the planning, execution, and evaluation of exercises. This year's strategic level Crisis Management Exercise (CMX15), which tests decision-making at the highest strategic and political level, was the first at that level to employ an integrated gender perspective: the scenario included indicators that conflict-related sexual violence takes place as a tactic of war, and tested how these indicators might influence strategic decision-making. Initial outcomes of the exercise are positive in this respect; a formal evaluation will be completed later this year.

Furthermore, a network of gender advisors and Gender Focal Points has been established throughout the entire organization—on both the civilian and military side—in all departments, units, and levels of command. This network aims to ensure that a gender perspective is integrated in the day-to-day work of all branches, with the gender advisors reporting directly to the highest civilian and military leadership (from commanders to the Secretary General), thus having direct influence on strategic decision-making.

The nomination in 2014 of a NATO Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security as a permanent NATO position is the latest contribution to further institutionalizing and securing gender expertise within NATO, particularly at the strategic level.

Work to Be Done: Equal Participation and “Gendered” Mindsets

Much has been achieved in laying the groundwork: the framework is in place and now is the time to start using it. The NATO Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security sets the course for this with two overarching objectives. Firstly, it aims to reduce barriers to the active and meaningful participation of women in the security institutions and operations of NATO, Allies, and Partners. Comparative data show that progress in including more women in our institutions has been modest, and mixed. Secondly, that Action Plan strives to integrate a gender perspective into the day-to-day security business. Beyond institutionalizing gender, we must now internalize it.

When it comes to improving the gender balance in NATO, over the past decade some progress has been made in increasing the percentage of participating women, particularly in leading positions. Currently, 37% of the international staff is female and 21% of the senior decision-makers are women. However, in the most recent years, progress has stagnated and in some areas even reversed, partly as a consequence of the downsizing and reduction of support staff. In an effort to increase the share of women overall and particularly the share of women in senior positions, diversity scorecards have been developed for each division as a tool to guide decision-making in recruitment processes. In addition, a mentoring program is underway to encourage and empower talented female professionals to move on to leadership positions.

To increase the share of female troops deployed in missions and operations, NATO depends on the Nations contributing troops. Currently, analytical work is being undertaken under the NATO Science for Peace and Security Programme to compare data on women in armed forces, the gender policies of the Allies since 2000, and to identify best practices in improving the gender balance in national troops. The results of this project, developed by the Rey Juan Carlos University (Spain), the Australian Human Rights Commission, and the Australian Chief of Defense, will be presented in June this year. Preliminary results demonstrate that in the past fifteen years, all Allies have developed policies and legislation for female participation in armed forces, but that increase in participation remains slow: women's representation in the Allied Forces has increased from 7.14% (in 1999) to 10.6% (in 2013). The participation of female troops in NATO-led operations during that time is only 6.7% (2013). There are still certain positions in a number of Allied countries that remain closed to women: mostly combat positions, but also work in submarines or tanks. A "glass ceiling" continues to limit the possibility of women reaching top positions.

The study also identifies a number of best practices for improving women's participation in the armed forces. These include strong leadership, commitment, targeted recruitment strategies, targeted strategies for retaining female officers, implementation of strong evidence-based measures to prevent sexual violence and harassment, gathering of accurate data on women's representation and experiences in the military to inform leadership action, implementation of gender policies, and ensuring the transparency of the institutions. The final results of the study, along with its comparative data and lessons, will have the potential to reenergize national efforts and strategies to improve the gender balance in national troops and national contributions to operations.

As for integrating a gender perspective in everyday security work, this first and foremost requires a change of mindset. It is a process of change and transformation. Like all change processes, the key tools are education and training, building partnerships and coalitions of change both inside and outside the organization, and creating transparency and accountability through reporting and external scrutiny.

Priorities in the NATO 1325 Action Plan therefore include leadership training, integrating gender in core training and standard curricula, and making gender sensitivity part of the professionalism of all staff – not just the specialty and responsibility of individual gender experts. Within the timeframe of the Action Plan, some specific policy

areas have been identified where a gender perspective should be integrated and strengthened: arms control, small arms and mine action, building integrity, counterterrorism, children and armed conflict, human trafficking, and the protection of civilians.

Intensifying cooperation with partners such as Nations, international organizations, and civil society is key also to encouraging and feeding change within our organization. The Women, Peace and Security Agenda has proven an important platform for deepening partnership and fostering awareness and learning. Gender is part of the different partnership tools that NATO has to offer: partnership programs, Trust Funds, and the Science for Peace and Security Programme are open to support gender related initiatives. Formalizing consultations with civil society through a civil society advisory board will be critical in enhancing accountability and oversight in the implementation of our commitments and allow for sharing experiences and tapping into the rich knowledge base civil society has to offer.

The Leadership Challenge: The Relevance of 1325 in Facing New Security Challenges

The Women, Peace and Security Agenda is an agenda of transformation, of change. It forces us to look at peace and security, worldwide and at home, in a more comprehensive and inclusive way. This transformation can only be achieved with committed leadership. The leadership commitment of NATO and its Allies is reflected in the Wales Summit Declaration: “We attach great importance to ensuring women’s full and active participation in the prevention, management, and resolution of conflicts, as well as in post-conflict efforts and cooperation. (...) Our on-going efforts to integrate gender perspectives into Alliance activities throughout NATO’s three core tasks will contribute to a more modern, ready, and responsive NATO.”³ Indeed, this means integrating a gender perspective in all three core tasks of the Alliance: collective defense and cooperative security in addition to crisis management, operations, and missions.

However, the world around us is rapidly changing. Multiple new security threats present serious challenges to global leadership. Therefore, if we want to keep the women, peace, and security agenda in the focus of our political leadership in times of multiple threats directly affecting our own security, we must demonstrate its relevance in our efforts to find better responses to the threats we currently face. This will require a revitalization of efforts towards improving gender balance in our own security institutions as well as in those of our Partner Nations. It will also require integrating a gender perspective into other security policy areas such as hybrid warfare and extremist violence. This is not an easy task, but NATO’s Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg has repeatedly expressed the ambition to make this happen. Promoting gender equality will allow us to respond in a better and smarter manner to the many security challenges we face today. Gender equality is not optional, but fundamental for NATO: our Alliance is built on the historic lesson that our peace and security can only be based on the respect

³ Wales Summit Declaration, 5 September 2014, par. 90, available at http://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/official_texts_112964.htm.

of our fundamental rights and freedoms – the very same fundamental principles that the Alliance is meant to defend and promote.

NATO aims to continue to lead by example and demonstrate in practice that it makes sense to apply a gender perspective to our day-to-day security needs. This is particularly so in times of increased insecurity and a rapidly changing security environment.

Conclusion: Bring It Home

Our main lessons learned, best practices, policies, and tools are linked to operations “out of area.” In particular, experiences with ISAF in Afghanistan and KFOR in Kosovo have taught us that it makes a difference to have more women in our forces and staff and to integrate a gender perspective into our analysis, planning, and execution of operations. It has given us better access to the local population, more popular support, better information, better situational awareness, and smarter interventions with less risks and better outcomes. It has enhanced our operational effectiveness. The presence of women in our forces has also served as an example for increasing the acceptance of public roles for women in professional life. It has allowed us to lead by example and to practice what we preach.

Looking ahead, we will have to sustain what has been achieved and learned, and apply it beyond our peace operations: we must bring the agenda home. In doing so, we must consider how equal participation and applying a gender lens to today’s security challenges will help us find better, smarter, more sustainable solutions to the challenges we face, and how to integrate a gender perspective also into our collective defense, because equal participation is part and parcel of the fundamental values on which our peace and security is built, and of the founding principles that NATO is meant to safeguard and promote. Because we are convinced that these values, diversity and inclusion, will make our societies stronger, more stable, and more resilient. Because we know that mixed teams perform better and are more creative. And creativity is what we need to respond to the many and complicated security challenges we face together. Because a safer world starts at home.

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