

NATO's Gender Turn: From Policies to Operations

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Countries, like Sweden and Canada, are announcing feminist foreign policies; celebrities, like Angelina Jolie and Emma Watson, are teaming up with international organizations to promote gender equality; and NATO, the world's most powerful alliance, is working to integrate a gender perspective in its policies and operations. Since the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in 2000, governments and international organizations have embarked on a journey of normative change to align their international activities with principles of gender equality, emphasizing the inclusion of women in conflict resolution and peace processes in particular. NATO's own experience with the WPS agenda took off in earnest just over a decade ago, with its first Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC) policy on the implementation of UNSCR1325 in 2007. Shortly after, in 2009, NATO's military branch proceeded with its own guidance by adopting Bi-Strategic Command Directive 40-1 (Bi-SC 40-1) on Integrating UNSCR1325 and Gender Perspective into the NATO Command Structure.

While the policies and directives are in place, implementation continues to be dogged by a general lack of understanding of what these concepts represent and what they mean for NATO's day-to-day activities.¹ The most useful concept that NATO provides in this context can be found in the latest iteration of Bi-SC 40-1 where gender mainstreaming is defined as "assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programmes in all areas and at all levels". In a nutshell, gender considerations should be front of mind for any NATO policymaking or operational tasks. But definitions, no matter how well articulated, can only take organizational transformation so far.

Gender mainstreaming means:

"Assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies and programs in all areas and at all levels"

- NATO Bi-Strategic Directive 40-1 *Integrating UNSCR 1325 and Gender Perspective into the NATO Command Structure* (2017)

In order to offer a clear explanation of what this gender turn implies for NATO, the Centre for International and Defence Policy at Queen's University teamed up with the NATO Defence College in Rome to host a workshop that would draw from the expertise of academia, civil society, government and members of the armed forces to develop a common understanding of how including a gender perspective can improve NATO's policies, operational planning and missions.²

The panels were designed to approach the subject of gender and security through the lens of evidence-based research. What the research demonstrates is that there are gender-based differences that are manifest in conflict and thus it is important for policymakers and military planners to situate the WPS agenda within a broader social context. For example, Erik Melander's research showed that the way masculine traits are socially constructed impacts men's likelihood of participation in political violence. Consequently, cultivating a greater sense of awareness of the prevalence of hypermasculine traits in communities where operations are taking place can facilitate the pre-emption of violence.



Special Envoy for the High Commissioner for Refugees Angelina Jolie and Secretary General of NATO Jens Stoltenberg. Brussels, January 31, 2018.

Other examples focused on the experiences of women in conflicts in Afghanistan and Ukraine, and within NATO militaries. Participants noted the unintended consequences of NATO's engagement with the WPS agenda in Afghanistan and demonstrated the importance of ongoing evaluations of the local impacts of NATO's military operations and peacetime command structures. These evaluations are typically performed by Gender Advisors (GENAD), who are military officers that provide the commander with advice on the social impact of the mission, based on an understanding of local gender dynamics. Jessica Trisko-Darden examined the role of women in irregular conflicts, notably Ukraine. The data showcased varied rationales for women's engagement in conflict. However, questions about the post-conflict environment remained common, indicating that demobilisation programmes must be responsive to women's needs, and reduce their vulnerability in post-conflict social configurations.

An important word of caution was expressed by the workshop's experts as the gender perspective is often

justified on the basis of improving operational effectiveness, which risks obscuring the overarching equality goals which are sought by the UN resolutions that are linked to 1325. Indeed, claiming that increasing the number of women can improve militaries' intelligence capabilities because they are better able to connect with local community members is appealing from an operational standpoint, but does little to further gender equality goals on the ground. Bearing this important consideration in mind, Katharine Miller demonstrated that it does not have to be a dichotomy but that, instead, both can be mutually reinforcing. Gender equality is fundamental to the UN and NATO's stated values. As a result, it is key to the successful implementation of the WPS agenda, which is, in part, intended to improve operational effectiveness. Consequently, the best practice would be to ensure that both gender equality goals and the operational benefits identified as part of the policy and operational designs are treated with equal seriousness.

These connections were strengthened by Louise Olsson's examination of the *NATO/EAPC Policy for the Implementation of UNSCR 1325*, which identified four key impacts of an improved research-policy dialogue: First, it breaks down the mandate for mainstreaming a gendered perspective into comprehensible objectives and tasks. Second, it improves NATO's capacity to deliver the expected outcomes of the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and related resolutions. Third, it advances understanding of the participation of women in conflict in a host state and, fourth, it enhances understanding of women's participation in NATO militaries.

When it comes to NATO's day-to-day activities, the former GENAD for the International Military Staff Jesus Gil Ruiz echoed the concerns expressed by Nina Wüstemann over the concept of 'gender' being conflated with 'women', with the two terms often being used synonymously in the Headquarters. The present challenge with the implementation of UNSCR 1325 at NATO is therefore to include more men in gender mainstreaming processes. Jesús Palomo also identified implementation challenges,

demonstrating that slow progress had been made on gender integration in NATO, but that a cultural shift is needed to comprehensively advance women’s representation across the Alliance’s armed forces.

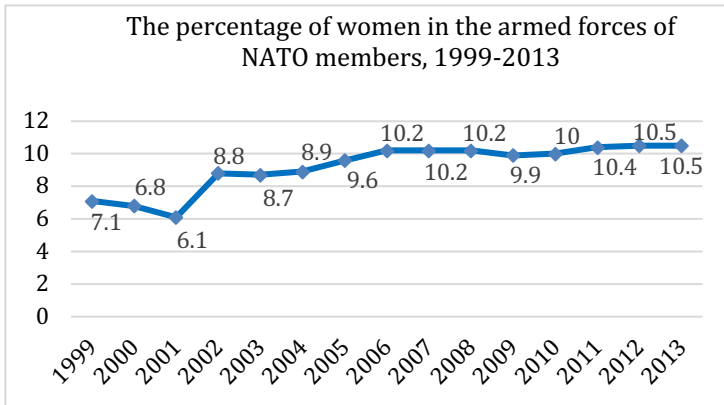


Figure 1 - Data reproduced from UNSCR 1325 Reload: An Analysis of Annual National Reports to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives from 1999-2013 (Figure 9, p. 26).

The issue of women’s representation vis-à-vis men was linked to broader consideration of the gender perspective, which refers to a holistic framework including the consideration of both men and women’s unique experiences with recruitment, career development, work-life balance and sexual assault and harassment protection. Bi-SC 40-1 defines a gender perspective as “Assessing gender-based differences of women and men [as] reflected in their social roles and interactions, in the distribution of power and the access to resources”. These considerations are key to transforming NATO’s own organizational culture. As Agata Szymanska argued, the elimination of gender gaps across the organization requires the visible commitment of leadership as well as the collection and tracking of data on representation and integration policies.

Beyond improving gender equity policies, organizations like NATO are mandated to integrate

gendered perspectives into operational planning and missions. While operational planning guidelines can be supported by NATO, ultimately implementation is the responsibility of nations as they deploy their troops under the NATO umbrella. The Canadian Armed Forces (CAF), for example, have recently changed their practices to include one GENAD in each of their operational deployments. There are also GENADs at the strategic level to advise senior military leadership. The GENAD for the Canadian Joint Operations Centre, Lieutenant-Colonel Guillaume Tremblay, outlined the Operational and Institutional ‘Lines of Effort’ through which the CAF has integrated UNSCR 1325. Significantly, strategic messaging regarding this integration stressed operational effectiveness, rather than the normative imperative of compliance. Stéfanie von Hlatky and Heidi Hardt’s research on NATO’s armed forces demonstrate that this focus on operational effectiveness has incentivized armed forces to implement UNSCR 1325, so the CAF experience is far from unique. Going forward, NATO member states and partners should consider how to better harmonize gender mainstreaming activities for both civilian and military organizations.



Attendees and participants at the Gender, Women, and International Security symposium, Bader International Study Centre, October 2017.

In sum, a number of important concepts and considerations should be well anchored for NATO to move forward on implementing UNSCR 1325. The following recommendations are intended to support ongoing progress by NATO as an organization, but are equally relevant for the Alliance's member and partner nations:

- There needs to be consistency in the definitions employed as misunderstandings persist with regard to the terminology on gender: harmonization across the Alliance should be facilitated with references to existing documents such as the EAPC Policy on Implementing 1325 and the Bi-SC 40-1 on *Integrating UNSCR 1325 and Gender Perspective into the NATO Command Structure*. These foundational concepts should form the basis of training approaches at the Alliance and national levels;
- Understanding the gender-based differences of women and men leads to a social analysis that is important in designing policies, operational plans and missions. It is not the responsibility of women or of gender advisors, but rather, should become a practiced skillset, in the same way risk and needs-based analyses are conducted regularly by policymakers and military planners. Gender advisors and gender focal points can provide resources to assist in incorporating a gender perspective in policy and operational planning tasks, but gender literacy should be treated as a core competency for any security and defence professional;
- Policies should be guided by a clear distinction between representation goals and the incorporation of a gender perspective in NATO decisions and processes. Representation goals are linked with improving gender equity in security and military organizations and the increased participation of women in conflict resolution

and peace processes. The gender perspective refers to assessing the implications of gender in policy and operational designs to improve outcomes;

- Further evidence-based research is required, along four primary lines of enquiry:
 - o The recruitment, retention, experiences, and career trajectories of women in NATO.
 - o The way in which gender advisors and gender focal points are used in mission planning and operations.
 - o The role of women and perceptions of gender in 21st century conflict.
 - o The effect of gender-based planning on operational outcomes. The benefit of a incorporating a gender perspective is incontrovertible, but the way that it can be most effectively leveraged is more unclear.
- Although highlighting the improvement in operational effectiveness that can stem from appropriately including a gender perspective in mission planning and execution should remain a central tenet of efforts to implement UNSCR 1325, this must not be over-emphasised and nor should it be seen as a panacea. Most significantly, it should not come at the expense of stressing the central goal of equality, which is fundamental to the WPS agenda;
- A greater degree of openness and co-ordination between NATO member states in their gender mainstreaming processes, ideally leading to the collaborative development of best practices.

Endnotes

1. Lackenbauer, Helen and Richard Langlais (eds), *Review of the Practical Implications of UNSCR 1325 for the Conduct of NATO-Led Operations and Missions* (Brussels: NATO, 2013).

2. This workshop was also supported by a Defence Engagement Grant from the Canadian Department of National Defence.