

Women In International Security

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WPS+GPS: Adding Gender to the Peace and Security Equation

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Political leaders regularly make grand, public statements about the importance of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda for promoting national and international security, but their policy actions have fallen far short of their rhetorical declarations.

There are two main reasons for this. First, political leaders are the point persons for their male-dominated security establishments. These establishments do not prioritize women and gender issues in national and international security affairs. Second, the WPS agenda has been framed as a “women’s” issue, which makes it easier for the establishment to marginalize the WPS cause. Fixing the second problem will help us make more progress with the first—advancing women, gender perspectives, and gender equality in national and international security.

UN Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security, adopted in October 2000, formally established the WPS agenda on the broader international scene. It was based on the premise “that peace is inextricably linked to equality between men and women.”¹ UNSCR 1325 had three main messages. First, it emphasized the need for the participation of women at all decisionmaking levels of international peace and security efforts. Second, it stressed the importance of including gender perspectives in assessing and developing policy responses to national and international security challenges. Third, it condemned and sought to prevent violence committed against women in times of war.

Since 2000, some progress has been made to advance these goals. The United Nations and regional organizations as diverse as the African Union, NATO and the OSCE have developed organization-wide policies and action plans

to incorporate UNSCR 1325 into their deliberations and activities. At the national level, 69 states have developed National Action Plans (NAPs) to implement the WPS agenda.²

Unfortunately, progress on the WPS agenda has been limited and uneven, at best. The shortfalls are many and significant. The under-representation of women in national and international security deliberations remains glaring. Gender perspectives are insufficiently integrated into analyses of national and international security challenges. Gender perspectives are usually afterthoughts, if they are thought about at all. Violence against women in conflict zones has continued at a horrifying high level.

One reason for this sub-optimal policy record is the nature of the main policy players. The national and international security policy establishments are comprised mainly of men and run mainly by men. These traditional establishments look at national and international security issues in traditional ways. They focus on traditional security threats that are analyzed through traditional lenses and familiar policy frameworks. For many states, despite periodic rhetorical declarations of support for the WPS agenda, WPS issues have not been top priorities. Indeed, few states have dedicated substantial funds for the implementation of the WPS agenda. Most states continue to frame their national security priorities and national security policies in traditional ways.

The WPS agenda has also been held back because of its own conceptual and operational limitations.

Conceptually, the WPS agenda has been explicitly framed in terms of “women.” This has helped to highlight the important role of women in security affairs. Unfortunately, it has also made it easy for the traditional security community to pigeonhole the WPS agenda as a “women’s” issue and treat it as a secondary or tertiary issue in national and international security policy. In addition, many policy discussions of the “women’s” agenda conflate “women and girls,” “women and children,” and “women and youth.” This infantilizes women, reinforces the idea that women have no agency, and bolsters the prevailing pattern that excludes women from participating in national and international security policymaking.

Operationally, these two security-focused communities—the traditional security community and the WPS community—both work on security problems but are not connected to each other. This also makes it easier for policymakers to put the WPS agenda on a separate, secondary track. The WPS agenda is consequently marginalized in most national and international security discussions.

For the WPS agenda to advance, we need to build on the tremendous work that has been done by activists and scholars to advance the Women, Peace and Security agenda. The WPS agenda is important, and it has contributed to progress. It is established and recognized. That said, we need a formulation that will help to overcome the conceptual and operational problems noted above.

To do this, we need to broaden the lens from “women” to “women and gender.” We need to develop a new, parallel track of work that draws on a more comprehensive Gender, Peace and Security (GPS) framework. We should reframe the WPS agenda into a broader, more inclusive and integrated “WPS+GPS” agenda. This will help to overcome the idea that the WPS agenda is a “women’s” issue, and it will make it easier to connect the WPS agenda to issues the traditional security community cares about, such as violent conflict and terrorism. This will be good for the advancement of women and gender initiatives, and it will be good for the advancement of peace and security worldwide. It is a win-win proposition.

In addition, we need to build better bridges and connections between the traditional security community and the WPS community. This will be easier if “gender” is injected into the formulation. Framing these issues in terms of gender emphasizes that men are also part of the equation and that gendered power dynamics are important aspects of most security problems. This will help to situate the WPS agenda and gender issues in the mainstream of national and international security discussions.

The WPS Agenda

The end of the Cold War and the enormous suffering caused by armed conflicts of the 1990s, particularly the widespread use of rape as a weapon of war in the Balkan and Rwandan genocides, helped to draw international attention to the impact of war on women. It was against this background that the 1995 World Conference on Women (held in Beijing) called for better protection of women and greater participation of women in national and international security.

Five years later, galvanized by the advocacy of women’s groups, (particularly women’s group in conflict countries), the UN Security Council adopted UNSCR 1325. This was the first time that the UN Security Council—the main body of the United Nations responsible for international peace and security—recognized the importance of gender in achieving peace and security. UNSCR 1325 and seven follow-on resolutions are the main formal elements of what is commonly known as the Women, Peace and Security agenda.³

Through these resolutions, Council members recognized that armed conflicts have different impacts on men and women. The Council urged national and international actors to incorporate gender perspectives in their policy deliberations and programs. In addition, they emphasized the need to protect women from violence—sexual violence, in particular—and they acknowledged the need to expand the role of women in field-based operations, including military operations. The Council also recognized that women needed to participate in greater, equal levels in peace negotiations and every aspect of national and international peace and security policymaking.

To better measure progress, the UN Secretariat organized the requirements of the WPS agenda into four main pillars:

- (1) The **prevention** of all forms of violence against women, including sexual and gender-based violence;
- (2) The **participation** of women at all levels of decisionmaking related to peace and security, including participation in security institutions (military and police forces);
- (3) The **protection** of women’s physical security and their political, social and economic rights, including access to justice;
- (4) The need to make sure that women have access to **relief and recovery**.⁴

Since 2010, this framework has been widely used by states and civil society organizations to describe and organize the WPS agenda. In the run-up to the fifteenth anniversary of UNSCR 1325 in 2015, the Security Council invited the UN Secretary-General to commission a global study on the implementation

of the resolution. The 417-page study published in October 2015 is a comprehensive assessment of what UN Women's Executive Director Phumzile Mlambo-Ngcuka has called the "crippling gap between the ambition of our commitments and actual political and financial support."⁵

The WPS Record

Three of the four WPS pillars—prevention; protection; relief and recovery—are essentially focused on protection. They frame women as passive victims who need help from (male-dominated) security organizations. They constitute the "passive pillars" of the WPS agenda.

Since the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000, UN member states have focused overwhelmingly on the three passive pillars of the WPS agenda, particularly on prevention of and protection from sexual violence. In 2009, the UN Security Council recognized sexual violence as a tactic of war and a crime that undermines international peace and security. The Council also asked the UN Secretary-General to appoint a Special Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict.⁶ In 2013, the G-8 launched an initiative to prevent sexual violence in conflict. This was followed in 2014 by a British Initiative to Prevent Sexual Violence and the development of a protocol on the documentation and investigation of sexual violence in conflict.

The international efforts focused on the prevention of sexual violence are very important, but even in this area progress has been limited. The available data on conflict-related sexual violence suggest this remains an enormous problem. In 2017, the United Nations identified 46 parties (non-state actors, terrorist groups, and states) in seven countries that have committed conflict-related sexual violence.⁷ Shocking reports of sexual abuse involving peacekeepers in the Central African Republic showed that this type of abuse, first condemned in the Cambodian peacekeeping mission in 1993—almost a quarter-century ago—is still a horrific problem. In sum, conflict-related sexual violence remains widespread. Prosecutions and convictions are rare.⁸

The reason so little progress has been made is that national and international policymakers have paid too little attention to the structural factors, including gender inequality, that promote sexual gender-based violence. The lack of attention to gender, combined with a narrow focus on conflict-related sexual violence as a tactic of war, has limited the well-intentioned policy initiatives that have been undertaken. Many of these policy initiatives have reinforced existing gender stereotypes by portraying women solely as victims of violence.

The focus on protection has also meant that an important component of the WPS agenda—the participation of women in peace and security—has not been sufficiently advanced. Indeed, women remain under-represented in the halls of power, in peace negotiations, and in security institutions. While it is true that some women have held high-level political offices, less than 10% (17 out of 193) of UN member states had a female Head of State or Government in 2017.⁹ Between 1990 and 2017, women made up only 2% of conflict mediators and only 8% of peace negotiators. Most of the peace agreements that have been signed since 1990 have had no female signatories at all—zero.¹⁰

In the 2017 Security Council debate on WPS, the executive director of UN Women reported an overall decline in female participation in UN-led peace processes.¹¹ Women were under-represented in the 2016 Myanmar Union Peace Conference—only seven of 75 delegates were women. The 2017 Central African Republic peace talks (sponsored by the Community of Sant'Egidio) had no female participants.

Women are also under-represented in most national law enforcement and security forces. In UN peace operations, women constitute less than 4% of military personnel and 9% of police personnel.¹² The UN's aspirational goals in this area are actually extremely modest: The United Nations aims to have 15% of its military forces and 20% of its police forces to be comprised of women. This is far from the 50/50 participation rates that would represent a real gender balance and true gender equality.

Although the UN Security Council and UN member states have made many rhetorical commitments to female representation and female participation in peace and security affairs—almost all of their attention has focused on the three passive pillars of the WPS agenda—prevention of sexual violence, protection from sexual violence, relief and recovery. Continuing to treat women as victims who need protection doesn't threaten existing patriarchal power structures. Indeed, it reinforces established gender stereotypes and gender-based power dynamics.

Advancing the participation pillar, however, would increase female participation in security policymaking and would directly challenge prevailing staffing patterns and the prevailing balance of gender power. The participation pillar of the WPS agenda has consequently been neglected and even opposed by the establishment.

Advancing the participation pillar is essential to advancing the broader WPS agenda. Without equal representation in the halls of power, in decisionmaking, in peace negotiations, in security institutions, and in the field, the WPS agenda will continue to fall short. Peace and security will suffer as well.

Barriers to Progress

The lack of progress on the WPS agenda is due to a very large degree to the policy establishments that run national and international security affairs. This political problem is reinforced by two additional problems: one is conceptual; the other is operational.

The Conceptual Challenge

The conceptual challenge for the WPS agenda is, to some extent, a self-inflicted problem: The WPS agenda has been explicitly and formally framed as a “women’s” issue. This has helped to highlight the important roles that women play in security issues. But, as discussed above, this has also made it easier for the establishment to treat “the women’s agenda” as a secondary or tertiary priority. This, in turn, has reinforced the establishment’s prevailing tendency to think of women in passive, protective terms.

In addition, UN Security Council resolutions and national political leaders have repeatedly conflated the WPS agenda with “women and children,” “women and girls,” or “women and youth.” This infantilizes women and denies their agency. Too little attention has been paid to the underlying structural factors—gender norms and gender hierarchies—that entrench inequalities and fuel conflict. This is a fundamental deficiency that inhibits advancement of the WPS agenda.

Gender norms are reflections of power dynamics in societies. These norms are enforced through the institutions that govern human lives at personal, national and international levels. These institutions include marriage, schools, religious institutions, the military, state bureaucracies, and international organizations.

Sociologist Cecilia Ridgeway has defined gender not as “a simple property of individuals but as an integral dynamic of social orders.” Examining how gender is used and operationalized “can reveal the mechanisms by which power is exercised and inequality is reproduced.” For Ridgeway, gender is the “primary cultural frame” for coordinating behavior and organizing social relations.¹³

Research by Valerie Hudson and her colleagues has shown that gender inequalities have profound effects on politics and security at both the national and international levels. Hudson and her colleagues have demonstrated that the treatment of women is a good predictor of the peacefulness of a state—better than its level of democracy, its wealth, or its ethno-religious identity.¹⁴ There are strong correlations between gender inequalities, on the one hand, and the belligerence of states, on the other. They have also shown that archaic practices such as bride-prices and dowries—practiced by approximately 75% of the world’s population—have profound impacts on violent conflict.¹⁵

If the international community is going to tackle the root causes of violent conflict, it needs to examine and address these gender issues. The Sustainable Development Goals, adopted by UN member states in 2015, recognized the strong connections between gender equality and the prospects for “a peaceful, prosperous and sustainable world.” This rhetorical recognition is a good step forward, but it is insufficient and it has been largely ignored in practice. When policy crises develop, policymakers still rely on their familiar frameworks to understand the problems they face and to develop policy responses. For most policymakers, this usually means thinking in terms of and turning to traditional instruments of power, such as military and economic power.

In sum, despite increasing evidence that gender inequalities have profound effects on international peace and security, most national and international security policy deliberations pay no attention to gender perspectives that might help them understand the gender dynamics of these problems. The establishment’s prevailing focus on protection and prevention has reinforced the idea that the WPS agenda is a “woman’s” agenda. This in turn has reinforced stereotypical conceptions of men and women, with women depicted as helpless victims. Sidelining the core issue of gender—as a mechanism for structuring power in social, economic, and political relations—is a conceptual flaw that inhibits progress on the WPS agenda.

The Operational Challenge

The lack of progress on the WPS agenda is also connected to the operational divides that separate the traditional security community and the WPS community. The divide between these communities reinforces the idea that the WPS agenda is a distinct “women’s” agenda. This makes it harder to integrate well-developed gender perspectives into security analyses, deliberations, and policies.

The traditional security community, which is comprised mainly of men and is anchored in the policy establishment (and supported by security studies programs in universities and think tanks) has largely failed to focus on the role of gender in security. For members of this community, matters of war and peace are about power—chiefly military and economic power. In addition, many in this community tend to equate “gender” with “women” and they often—mistakenly—use these terms interchangeably. For many in this community, if they have heard about the WPS agenda at all, they tend to equate it with “protecting women.” They do not think about the broader gender agenda. The traditional security community continues to see gender as a peripheral issue, if it is in their field of vision at all. And when they do focus on it, their tunnel vision of the WPS agenda focuses narrowly on protection.

The WPS community, which is comprised mainly of women and is anchored in civil society, mistrusts the traditional security community and its focus on military action. Many members of the WPS community argue that most of the security problems that plague the world today are aggravated by an emphasis on the military aspects of security. They often emphasize human security concerns. The WPS community has also tended to have a different operational focus, with an emphasis on outreach and connections with local grassroots women's organizations in conflict and conflict-prone countries.

Both the traditional security community and the WPS community are deeply concerned about international peace and security and have much to contribute to policy analysis and policy action. Unfortunately, they do not interact much, and they often ignore each other. It is critical to bridge the divides that keep them apart and create more connections between these communities. This will lead to a more inclusive and better integrated global security community. It will also lead to smarter and more effective policies.

A More Inclusive Framework: WPS+GPS

The WPS agenda has transformational potential that it has not realized and cannot fully achieve in its current form. As long as the agenda is portrayed primarily as a women's agenda, the security policy establishment will continue to treat it as a secondary issue. At the same time, the traditional security community and the WPS community will continue to face a wide divide.

For the WPS agenda to progress, it needs to be reframed and expanded into a broader WPS+GPS formulation. This expanded formulation is based on the idea that a focus on women in peace and security affairs is necessary but not sufficient. The focus must be expanded to include **gender** as the central concept in the equation.

This will help to overcome the conceptual and operational problems discussed above. Conceptually and analytically, it will emphasize that our focus has to include women and men and, indeed, all people regardless of their gender or gender identity. This will give scholars and analysts a broader and better framework for studying and understanding security problems. Instead of focusing on half of humanity, the scope will be expanded to include all of humanity. Focusing on gender will also highlight the importance of power—and the gendered nature of power—in human relations, including the security problems that are on the global agenda.

Operationally and politically, expanding the focus to include gender will make it harder for the security policy establishment to brush off the WPS agenda as a women's issue. This should also make it easier for the traditional security studies community and the WPS community to connect on issues of concern.

More specifically, a focus on gender enables us to place more emphasis on four key factors. Put another way, the GPS framework has **four pillars** of its own:

- (1) **People:** Expanding the scope of analysis will include women and men and all gendered people; that is, every human being. This is important because security problems involve every cross-section of humanity. Agency is not limited to men; it is diffuse and dynamic. Security problems are not unidirectional; they are highly interactive and complex. At a practical level, it is important for the security policy establishment to appreciate the role of men as part of the problem and part of the solution in many issue areas.
- (2) **Power:** Gender is all about power. Gender structures power in every arena (education, economics, politics, security) and at every level (local, national, regional, global). Gender structures power through multiple mechanisms (family, society, culture, institutions). When we talk about gender in any issue area, it is important to focus on power and how power dynamics unfold. A focus on gender will place power at the center of analysis, where it belongs.
- (3) **Perspectives:** Champions of the WPS agenda have stated repeatedly (and correctly) that it is essential to include gender perspectives in security policy analyses, security policy deliberations, and security policy actions. Unfortunately, the security policy establishment usually agrees with this only occasionally and only reluctantly. And then, instead of considering a broad-based, sophisticated analysis of the gender issues at hand, the security establishment's default approach is to reduce "including gender perspectives" to "focusing on women's issues momentarily" or, even worse, "getting a woman's point of view."

A proper gender perspective should focus on people and power, it should examine gender relations and gender dynamics, and it should consider policy responses and policy implementation. In addition, considering gender perspectives must be **mainstreamed**. Gender should be a regular, normal, constant, legitimate, central policy consideration—for scholars and analysts, and especially for policymakers.

- (4) **Parity:** Promoting equitable gender participation—gender parity—will be essential to advancing progress in peace and security affairs (as well as public policy and human affairs, more generally). Promoting gender balances in security policy deliberations will be a key to making and sustaining gender equality and positive policy outcomes. Achieving gender balances, equitable gender participation, and gender equality will entail fundamental changes in power relations in multiple arenas and at every level. This will not be easy. It is unlikely that the establishment will be champions for change in the status quo. Improving gender balances in policymaking will be a priority both in the short term and over the long run.

This framework will systematically integrate gender perspectives in the analysis of security challenges and the development of policy responses. It will deepen our knowledge how gender inequalities legitimize violence within states and between states. For example, gender-based violence, including conflict-related sexual violence, is possible because of power inequalities and is about the exercise of power. Research suggests strong linkages between violence within states, including gender-based violence, and the aggressiveness of states. Many of the factors that drive sexual violence in peacetime also drive violence during war. When Oscar Arias Sanchez accepted the Nobel Peace Prize in 1987, he reminded us: “A nation that mistreats its own citizens is more likely to mistreat its neighbors.”

This expanded framework will also enhance our understanding of traditional security issues such as armed conflict and terrorism. For example, terrorist and violent extremist groups, such as ISIS and Boko Haram, have been astute in manipulating gender norms and attracting a great number of women to their organizations. Their “women’s empowerment” messages were appealing to many women. Most western intelligence organizations were blindsided by these developments because they didn’t draw on gender analyses that examined these gender dynamics. As a result, Western intelligence organizations didn’t understand the gendered appeal of extremist recruiting pitches. This, in turn, hindered the ability of Western governments to impede the spread of terrorist and violent extremist groups.

This approach will broaden the security agenda to encompass not just traditional military security challenges—arms acquisition, armed conflict, terrorism, peace operations—but also non-traditional, non-military challenges that affect national and international security—climate change, economic development, demographic changes, human rights, and governance issues. The integration of gender perspectives will enhance analysis and improve policies in all of these areas.

This approach places great emphasis not just on women’s participation but on gender parity; that is, equal levels of participation and gender balances in policy deliberations and decisionmaking. To advance this goal, it will be important to examine the power structures of policymaking institutions (including the gender hierarchies within those institutions). This should include assessments of the mechanisms that keep women out of the halls of power, decisionmaking circles, and security institutions. Ideally, this will lead to changes—better incentive structures, political cultures and institutions—that will lead to equitable, sustainable gender balances. Equality cannot be achieved without equal participation and parity.

By the same token, good policy cannot be produced by drawing on half of our human capital. Policymakers need to understand that the perpetuation of gender inequalities is not just wrong; it is stupid. The current, inequitable state of affairs has serious, negative consequences for national and international security and prosperity. Promoting gender parity in security policy affairs is the right thing to do and the smart thing to do.

Building a Broader Community

Governments, international organizations, and foundations need to invest in research and the “next generation” of WPS+GPS experts, so that policy responses can be targeted, smarter and more equitable. U.S.-based foundations have long understood that sustainable advances in international affairs require community-building and field-building efforts. Their initiatives in the 1970s were critical in building the international security studies community that exists today.¹⁶ Going forward, institutional support will be needed to build a global network of academics, analysts, activists and policymakers to advance the broader WPS+GPS agenda and unleash the full transformative potential of UNSCR 1325.

Developing the WPS+GPS agenda is the next step in advancing the WPS agenda, gender equality, as well as peace and security in the 21st century.

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- 16 In 2015, the Compton Foundation launched a two-year initiative to familiarize think tanks in Washington, D.C. with the WPS agenda. In 2016, Carnegie Corporation of New York and the John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation financed a new WIIS initiative to develop the WPS+GPS agenda. The WIIS program includes both a next generation symposium, bringing together young scholars from around the world, and a book project. For more information on these programs, visit wiisglobal.org.

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