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A Gender Framework for Arms Control and Disarmament

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In recent years, gender has come up in arms control and disarmament deliberations. Ireland, for example, submitted working papers on gender to preparatory committee meetings of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation-Treaty (NPT) Review Conferences.¹ The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW) emphasizes that nuclear weapons use affects men and women differently and calls for equal representation in disarmament negotiations.² However, such references to gender are so far the exception rather than the rule in arms control and disarmament talks.

We argue that a systematic inclusion of gender perspectives advances arms control and disarmament deliberations and negotiations in four main ways. First, a gender lens calls attention to the human and gendered consequences of the development and use of weapons. Second, it exposes arms control and disarmament agreements that lack gender provisions. Third, a gender lens highlights the absence of diversity in arms control and disarmament communities.³ Fourth, gender perspectives help reveal hierarchical power structures and encourage critical reflections on the legitimacy of established processes and agreements. In sum, the inclusion of a gender perspective produces more humane, effective, legitimate and sustainable agreements.

This policy brief has a twofold aim: first, to demonstrate how gender perspectives can advance arms control and disarmament efforts, and second, to provide a framework to help policymakers and practitioners integrate gender perspectives in their work. We propose a three-P framework—**Provisions, Participation, and Perspectives**—to guide these policymakers and practitioners.

We use the term “arms control and disarmament” as an umbrella for international efforts to ban, reduce, limit, regulate or control weapons.⁴ We define “gender” as a set of social constructs that refer to the social and cultural attributes, norms, roles and behaviors associated with men (masculinities) and women (femininities). These constructs have developed over the course of human history. They have been passed down from generation to generation through an array of social institutions. Indeed, “gender structures power in every arena (education, economics, politics, security), at every level (local, national, regional, global), and through multiple mechanisms (family, society, culture, organizations).”⁵ We use the terms gender lens, gender perspective and gender analyses interchangeably to refer to approaches that highlight the importance of gender in the use, development, control, and disarmament of weapons.

This policy brief is organized in three parts. In the first part, we provide an overview of the gendered impacts of weapons. In the second part, we present our framework for incorporating gender in arms control and disarmament deliberations and negotiations. In the third part, we recommend policies and suggest further research that can advance the inclusion of gender perspectives in arms control and disarmament deliberations and negotiations.

Gendered Impacts

All weapons, from pistols to advanced drones, have gendered impacts. That is, they affect people differently depending on biological sex and social norms, including gender norms. Policymakers and practitioners who develop proposals to

regulate the development, possession and use of weapons, including response and assistance plans, must acknowledge the gendered impact of weapons if those proposals are to have the intended impact.

Explosive weapons, such as landmines and other explosive remnants of war (ERW), can cause enormous harm to people and communities.⁶ While the weapons themselves can kill or harm regardless of gender or sex, men and boys are more likely to experience immediate injury from landmines and ERW than women or girls. In 2019, men and boys suffered 85 percent of all landmine and ERW casualties.⁷ The effects of landmines and ERW on women and girls are often long term and indirect. For example, the division of labor in agriculture is often highly gendered, determining whether men or women work in the fields, including fields that are mined or carpeted with cluster bombs.⁸ In some countries, gender norms make it more difficult for women to enter public spaces outside the house, which could prevent their coming in direct contact with ERW. At the same time, less engagement in public spaces might also mean less access to information about the locations and potential harms of these weapons. In addition, gender norms may make it more difficult for women to gain access to survivor assistance when they are struck by these weapons.

The impact of small arms and light weapons (SALWs) is similarly gendered. In many societies, the possession of weapons is seen as a symbol of masculinity—that is, perceived to represent power, strength, domination and authority. Indeed, men own the majority of small arms. Such notions of masculinity encourage and normalize acts of violence within communities.⁹ These weapons result in a violent death every 15 minutes: 84 percent of these victims are men and boys.¹⁰ Women are less likely to own and use small arms. That said, compared to their ownership, the percentage of women killed by small arms is disproportionately higher than that of men.¹¹ Women are also more likely to be threatened, intimidated and coerced by small arms in the hands of men. Violence against women, including femicide, rape and gender-based sexual violence as a tactic of war, often involves small arms. Gender-based violence that includes the use of small and light weapons is widespread in non-conflict and conflict settings.¹² Gender provisions in disarmament agreements would acknowledge these gendered dimensions of SALWs' possession and use and would allow policymakers and practitioners to better address gender-based violence.

While data on the sex- and gender-specific impact of chemical and biological weapons are limited, studies have indicated significant sex-specific problems in reproductive health from exposure to toxic agents and disease. For instance, exposure to chemical and biological agents may lead to miscarriages, birth defects and male infertility.¹³

Gender norms and roles may also lead to different levels of exposure for men and women and cause different levels of social stigma after exposure.¹⁴ Research about the impact of chemical weapons attacks in Syria has shown that women have a higher mortality rate, and they experience many gender-specific physiological and mental health consequences, including greater obstacles to care and recovery.¹⁵ Care for female victims of chemical weapon attacks is often lacking either because medical personnel have no knowledge of the particular effects of the chemicals on women's health, including reproductive and maternal health, or because gender norms may limit or slow care for women. For example, a first step in dealing with a chemical attack involves undressing the victim and rinsing chemical agents from the victim's body. This must happen quickly and often in a public setting. In some cultural contexts, women may feel uncomfortable with these processes and refuse them.¹⁶ A gender-sensitive approach to arms control and disarmament agreements must account for these types of gender dynamics.

Discussions about the potential gendered effects of biological weapons have started under the framework of the Biological Weapons Convention.¹⁷ Scientists have shown that a person's vulnerability to microorganisms is determined by a combination of biological (sex) and social (gender) factors. For example, early in the 2001–2002 Ebola outbreak in the Congo and Gabon, the number of men infected was greater than the number of women.¹⁸ Indeed, men were the first to come into contact with the virus, as they handled the carcasses of dead infected animals while hunting for food in the forests. Infection rates reversed in the later stages of the outbreak, when women caring for the sick became infected.¹⁹ Similarly, the Covid-19 pandemic has revealed many differences between men and women in morbidity (rates of infection) and mortality. Some of these differences are due to sex and genetic predispositions, but many are due to social and gendered factors, including political and socioeconomic standing.²⁰ A people-sensitive approach to the control and disarmament of biological weapons needs to reflect these gender dimensions.

The use of nuclear weapons will cause mammoth harm to all humans—regardless of gender. Between 110,000 and 210,000 people died in the atomic bomb attacks on Hiroshima and Nagasaki.²¹ Many survivors had long-term physical and psychological injuries. Depending on sex and gender, some were better able to cope than others. For example, research on the effects of the ionizing radiation caused by the atomic attacks has shown that women were two times more likely to develop solid cancers than men. Ionizing radiation also led to increases in stillbirths, miscarriages and birth defects.²² Survivors of the atomic bombs in Japan also had to deal with stigmatization. They became outcasts and social pariahs, unable to get jobs and function normally in Japanese society. These social and resulting economic problems were often worse for women.²³

The effects of nuclear weapons on people were at the heart of the three conferences organized in 2013 and 2014 by Austria, Mexico and Norway.²⁴ These countries have cooperated with the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and put the human effects of nuclear weapons—including the gendered effects—at the center of their advocacy for the TPNW.²⁵ The treaty is one of the rare arms control and disarmament agreements to acknowledge the gendered impacts of nuclear weapons use. ICAN has further stressed that the human effects are not restricted to the use of these weapons but also connected to weapon production, testing and storage. Along with other civil society organizations, ICAN has shown how displacements and radiation released during tests conducted decades ago continue to affect indigenous communities in former nuclear testing areas (including in Algeria, Australia, Kazakhstan, the Marshall Islands, and the United States).²⁶ The TPNW exemplifies how a human security and gender-sensitive approach can strengthen arms control and disarmament treaties.

The gendered impacts of new defense technologies, including those related to cybersecurity, communications and artificial intelligence, have received very little attention in the security community, including multilateral arms control and disarmament fora.²⁷ It is widely understood that military technologies have always been important in the conduct of war. Researchers have pointed out that many of those participating in discussions about new technologies believe that these discussions are gender neutral. In reality, these discussions are gender blind: They do not consider gender.²⁸ Gender norms and unconscious biases shape the development of technologies—mostly by men. Such biases and blind spots in turn affect how technologies are used.²⁹ Many data-gathering systems either under- or misrepresent women.³⁰ Artificial intelligence and algorithms based on biased data might therefore be fundamentally flawed. They might also reproduce gender stereotypes. These flaws affect the use of weapons dependent on new technologies, including who (and what) is targeted and killed or destroyed.³¹ Attacks on critical infrastructure and the disruption of essential services have human, and thus gendered, impacts. Gender norms might also downplay certain harms. Nonphysical harms (for example, sexual cyberattacks) might be given less priority by governments than attacks that lead to other harms.³² It is consequently key that policymakers and practitioners pay attention to the gender dimensions of cyber weapons when they develop strategies to limit, control and disarm these forms of weapons.

In sum, a recognition of the different and disproportionate ways in which women and men suffer from different types of weapons makes an important contribution to the understanding of their human and gendered impacts. Policymakers and practitioners should adopt a framework for arms control and disarmament that acknowledges these gendered dimensions.

A Gender Framework for Arms Control and Disarmament

We propose a three-P gender framework that policymakers and practitioners should use to develop human-centric and gender-responsive arms control and disarmament. Our framework focuses on (1) gender-sensitive **provisions** in arms control and disarmament agreements; (2) gender-balanced **participation** in deliberations and negotiations; and (3) gender **perspectives** that can elucidate and enhance the intellectual foundations of arms control and disarmament.

Provisions

Only 3 of 37 bilateral and multilateral arms control agreements that have been signed since 1945 have gender provisions: the 2008 Convention on Cluster Munitions; the 2013 Arms Trade Treaty (ATT); and the 2017 Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons.³³ The UN Program of Action on Small Arms and Light Weapons and the Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention have adopted gender commitments in subsequent review conferences. It is expected that some gender language will also be included in the final document of the 10th Review Conference of the Non-Proliferation Treaty to be held in 2021. (For details on the gender provisions in arms control agreements, see table 1.)

The inclusion of gender provisions in legal and political arms control commitments got a boost with the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) in 2000 and the adoption of UN General Assembly Resolution 65/69 on women, disarmament, nonproliferation and arms control in 2010.

UNSCR 1325 and subsequent WPS resolutions call for increasing the participation of women in peace and security decisionmaking processes, as well as the importance of integrating gender perspectives in peace and security deliberations. More specifically, the WPS resolutions call on states to take into account the different needs of men and women ex-combatants in disarmament, demobilization and reintegration processes and to consider the special needs of women and girls in mine-clearance and mine-awareness programs.³⁴ General Assembly Resolution 65/99 and subsequent resolutions focus on representation and participation.³⁵ The Security Council and General Assembly resolutions gave civil society organizations extra leverage for pressuring states to retrofit existing arms control agreements with gender provisions and to integrate such provisions in new arms control agreements.

Civil society organizations have been the main drivers of the WPS agenda. They have also been the main drivers of initiatives to integrate gender provisions in arms control agreements. ICAN, for instance, played a key role in

Table 1: Gender Provisions in Arms Control and Disarmament Agreements

Agreement	Acronym	Year	Gender Provisions	Subsequent Actions
Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons	NPT	1968	--	In 2017, Ireland introduced a Working Paper (WP) to the Preparatory Committee of the 10th Review Conference on the role of gender in the NPT. Subsequent WPs have addressed the gendered impact of nuclear weapons and the participation of women in the negotiations. ¹
Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention	APMBC	1997	--	In 2019, at the 4th Review Conference, states adopted an Action Plan, which requires countries to mainstream gender considerations in mine-action programming and to remove barriers to the full, equal and gender-balanced participation in mine action and Convention meetings. ²
Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons	CCW	1980	--	In 2019, discussions on Lethal Autonomous Weapons (LAWs) called attention to gender bias in algorithms governing autonomous weapons. ³
UN Program of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons (SALW)	PoA	2001	Preamble: Recognizes the negative impact of the illicit trade in SALW on women and girls.	In 2012, at the 2nd Review Conference, states expressed grave concern about the negative impact of the illicit trade in SALW on women, men, children, youth, the elderly and persons with disabilities and called for improved understanding of the concerns and needs of these groups. States also recognized the need to further integrate the role of women in efforts to combat and eradicate the illicit trade in SALW. Lastly, member states undertook to facilitate the participation and representation of women in SALW policymaking and to explore means to eliminate the negative impact of the illicit trade in SALW on women. In 2018, at the 3rd Review Conference states reaffirmed their previous commitments. They recognized the relationship between the illicit trade in small arms and gender-based violence and called for the collection of sex-disaggregated data. They also encouraged gender mainstreaming in policies and programs combating the illicit trade in SALW and the full participation and representation of women in decisionmaking, including in leadership roles. ⁴
Convention on Cluster Munitions	CCM	2008	Preamble: Recognizes the importance of gender-sensitive assistance Article 5, para 1: Contains an obligation to provide age- and gender-sensitive victim assistance	In 2015, at the 1st Review Conference states adopted a five-year road map for the implementation of the CCM—the Dubrovnik Action Plan. The plan calls on states to mainstream gender in their clearance response plans and involve victims in the decisionmaking assistance processes in a gender- and age-sensitive manner. ⁵
Arms Trade Treaty (ATT)	ATT	2013	Preamble: Notes that civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict and armed violence. Article 7, para 4: Calls on states to assess whether there is a risk that the exported weapons will be used “to commit or facilitate serious acts of gender-based violence or serious acts of violence against women and children.”	In 2016, at the 2nd Conference of States Parties to the ATT (CSP2) a Working Group on Effective Treaty Implementation (WGETI) was established. A sub-working group focuses on Articles 6 and 7. The group has developed a list of guidance documents related to article 7.4. See the letter of the Chair, ATT/CSP7.WGETI/2021/Chair/655/M.LetterWorkPlans (March 31, 2021). The 7th CSP will take place August 30 – September 2021. ⁶
The Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons	TPNW	2017	Preamble: Notes the disproportionate impact of nuclear weapons on women and girls as a result of ionizing radiation and commits to supporting and strengthening the effective participation of women in nuclear disarmament. Article 6: Commits states to provide “gender sensitive assistance, without discrimination, including medical care, rehabilitation and psychological support, as well as provide for their social and economic inclusion.”	The first meeting of the States Parties to the TPNW will take place January 12-14, 2022 in Vienna, Austria. ⁷

1. See Ireland, Gender, Development and Nuclear Weapons, NPT/CONF.2020/PC.I/WP.38 (Vienna: May 10, 2017); Ireland, Impact and Empowerment: The Role of Gender in the NPT, NPT/CONF.2020/PC.II/WP.38 (Geneva: April 24, 2018); Australia, Canada, Ireland, Namibia, Sweden and UNIDIR, Improving Gender Equality and Diversity in the NPT Review Process, NPT/CONF.2020/PC.II/WP.25 (New York: April 18, 2019); Australia, Canada, Ireland, Namibia, Sweden and UNIDIR, Integrating Gender Perspectives in the Implementation of the NPT, NPT/CONF.2020/PC.II/WP.27 (New York: April 18 2019); Ireland, Gender in the NPT: Recommendations for the 2020 Review Conference, NPT/CONF.2020/PC.II/WP.48 (New York: May 7, 2019). See also Chair’s Factual Summary (Working Paper), NPT/CONF.2020/PC.II/WP.41 (Geneva: May 16, 2018), para 10.
2. See the Oslo Action Plan, APLC/CONF/2019/5/Add.1 (Oslo: November 29, 2019).
3. See United Nations, UN Disarmament Yearbook 2019 (New York: United Nations, 2020), p. 221.
4. See Outcome Document, Programme of Action to Prevent, Combat and Eradicate the Illicit Trade in Small Arms and Light Weapons in All its Aspects, A Conf.192/2012/RC.4 (September 2012).
5. See UNIDIR, Gender and Disarmament Resource Pack for Multinational Practitioners (Geneva: UNIDIR, 2020).
6. See Verity Coyle and Anna Crowe, The Arms Trade Treaty’s Gender-Based Violence Risk Assessment: A Questionnaire for Information Sources (Washington, DC and Cambridge, MA: Stimson Center and International Human Rights Clinic, Harvard Law School, February 2021); Emile LeBrun, ed., Handbook: Gender-Responsive Small Arms Control: A Practical Guide (Geneva: Small Arms Survey, 2019); Control Arms, Interpreting the Arms Trade Treaty: International Human Rights Law and GBV in Article 7 Risk Assessments (New York: Control Arms, April 2019); Saferworld, ATT Expert Group: Implementing the ATT: Undertaking an Arms Transfer Risk Assessment, Briefing No.6 (London: Saferworld, August 2018); Ray Acheson, Gender-Based Violence and the Arms Trade Treaty (Geneva: Reaching Critical Will, WILPF, 2015).
7. See Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons, A/Conf.229/2017/8 (New York: United Nations, July 7, 2017).

advocating for the acknowledgment of the gender dimension in the TPNW.³⁶ Efforts by civil society organizations to integrate gender provisions in arms control agreements have also built on obligations states have assumed under the UN Charter, international human rights law, international humanitarian law and political commitments such as UNSCR 1325—that is, commitments to promote gender equality, nondiscrimination and the protection of civilians.³⁷

The inclusion of gender provisions is a necessary first step for delivering human-centric arms control and disarmament agreements. At a minimum, provisions in arms control and disarmament agreements should address the effects of weapons on people. Response and assistance plans can incorporate gender perspectives and provide for gender-specific measures to prevent and alleviate harms. The collection of sex-disaggregated data can help practitioners to tailor inclusive arms control provisions that cater to the needs of all people. Gender-sensitive provisions should also address the issue of participation and representation. They should make sure that all genders are represented and have equal opportunities to participate and occupy leadership positions in the development and implementation of arms control and disarmament agreements. Ideally, arms control and disarmament agreements should include provisions that oblige states to conduct gender analyses. An example of a good practice in this regard is the ATT, which calls on states to assess the impact of the export of certain weapons on gender-based violence in the recipient state.³⁸ Lastly, to ensure implementation of gender-sensitive provisions, agreements should provide for monitoring and verification processes and procedures.

Participation

Women have long been active in disarmament movements, including nuclear disarmament groups.³⁹ Even so, women have been mostly absent from formal arms control and disarmament deliberations and negotiations.⁴⁰

Article 36 (a UK-based NGO created in 2011) and the UN Institute for Disarmament Research (UNIDIR) have shown that the proportion of women in key UN disarmament fora averages around 20–35 percent and is markedly lower than in other issue areas, such as climate change or labor issues.⁴¹ In 2017, only 32 percent of the delegates at the UN General Assembly First Committee—the committee in charge of international security issues—were women.⁴² This percentage drops to an average of 21 percent for the eight NPT review conferences held between 1999 and 2015.⁴³ UNIDIR has noted that “when states can only send a single representative, they almost always send a man. Women are typically included as the second or, more often, third or fourth member of their respective delegations.”⁴⁴ Women also remain underrepresented in discussions of new technologies that affect the development of weapon systems, including

those that deal with communications, cyber and artificial intelligence.⁴⁵ In sum, stereotypical gender patterns persist: Women are usually assigned to discussions about “soft” humanitarian issues rather than “hard” security and arms control issues.⁴⁶

Women are similarly underrepresented in the national security and nuclear fields in the United States. Between the 1970s and 2019, women held only 11 of the 68 leadership positions at the Department of State, 2 of the 21 National Security Advisor positions and 13 of the 109 Arms Control and Disarmament Agency leadership positions.⁴⁷ In 2020, Women In International Security (WIIS) surveyed the representation of women in US think tanks as well as publications on international security, including arms control and disarmament issues. It found persistent underrepresentation of women at both the leader and expert levels. In 2020, women led only 19 percent of think tanks in the international security field. Women represented 35 percent of all experts of working on foreign policy, national and international security in US think tanks, and only 30 percent of all experts working on nuclear and arms control issues.⁴⁸ Women were also underrepresented in international security journals: They wrote only 23 percent of articles published between 2015 and 2019. The number of articles written by women on nuclear security and arms control is a fraction—15 percent—of all articles on arms control and nuclear security.⁴⁹

The underrepresentation of women in international security matters has not gone unnoticed. With the adoption of UNSCR 1325 in 2000, members of the UN Security Council recognized the importance of the full participation of women in preventing conflict as well as establishing peace and security. Starting in 2010, the UN General Assembly has adopted (every other year) a resolution on “women, disarmament, non-proliferation and arms control.” These resolutions urge UN member states to promote the equitable representation of women in the field of disarmament and to strengthen women’s effective participation.⁵⁰ In 2015, the UN Office for Disarmament Affairs in Vienna launched a multiyear educational capacity-building program for women, which included a particular focus on women from the Global South.⁵¹ In 2018, the UN Secretary-General’s agenda for disarmament called for the full and equal participation of women in all decisionmaking processes related to disarmament and international security. The UN Secretary-General also committed to gender parity on all panels, boards, expert groups and other bodies established under his auspices in the field of disarmament.⁵² In 2018, the International Gender Champions Disarmament Impact Group published a *Gender and Disarmament Resource Pack* to help multilateral practitioners integrate a gender lens into their work and gender balances within their ranks.⁵³

Nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) have also undertaken a range of initiatives to raise awareness about the lack of women in the arms control and disarmament field.⁵⁴ A number of organizations have set out to empower and mentor young women as they start their professional careers in the security field.⁵⁵ In November 2018, former US Ambassador to the International Atomic Energy Agency Laura Holgate, together with the Ploughshares Fund, launched the Gender Champions in Nuclear Policy (GCNP), an initiative committed to addressing gender imbalances in the field.⁵⁶

In the run-up to the November 2020 US elections, the Leadership Council on Women in National Security (LCWINS) asked all presidential candidates to sign a gender parity pledge in national security appointments. Both Joe Biden and Kamala Harris signed the pledge. As of April 2021, the Biden administration is close to delivering on its pledge: 47 percent of its Cabinet appointments are women.⁵⁷ At present, the administration has the highest representation of women ever.⁵⁸

These initiatives reflect policymakers and practitioners' recognition of the importance of gender equality in arms control and disarmament diplomacy. Yet they also suggest that policymakers and practitioners have predominantly operationalized "gender" to mean increasing the number of women in negotiating and deliberative fora. The sustainability and effectiveness of these types of initiatives to improve women's representation depends on mechanisms to hold organizations accountable for commitments they have made. Monitoring by civil society organizations, including scorecards by WIIS and tracking efforts by LCWINS, are critical in this regard.

Perspectives

Gender perspectives are essential to advance arms control and disarmament. They do so in three main ways. First, they demonstrate how gender norms and gender stereotypes shape weapon-related discourses. Second, gender perspectives show how arms control and disarmament regimes create and maintain social and political hierarchies. Third, gender perspectives offer new vantage points and approaches to security challenges by emphasizing the interests of people rather than those of states.

First, gender perspectives enhance our understanding of discourses about weapons, arms control and disarmament. Discourses shape policies and our social worlds, including arms control and disarmament policies. Gender perspectives and gender analyses show how notions of femininity and masculinity are embedded in discourses and the ways in which policymakers and practitioners ascribe legitimacy to some policy options while dismissing others. The feminist scholar Carol Cohn has argued that gendered language

structures the thinking about weapons, including their objectives and roles. According to Cohn, gendered language "creates silences and absences. It keeps things out of the room, unsaid, and keeps them ignored if they managed to get in."⁵⁹ Cohn has shown how the technostrategic language of defense intellectuals enabled them to think and speak about nuclear war in ways that were detached from the human consequences and realities of nuclear weapons and their use.⁶⁰ Cohn also emphasized that sexual metaphors have been an important part of the nuclear discourse since they act as "a way to mobilize gendered associations and symbols in creating assent, excitement, support for, and identification with the weapons."⁶¹ Like Cohn, Ray Acheson claims that "the dominant nuclear weapons discourse is full of dichotomies such as hard versus soft security, strong versus weak, active versus passive, and national security versus human security. The masculine identified sides of these pairs are almost always attributed more value than the other."⁶² Gender perspectives and gender analyses show how weapons-related discourses are imbued with gendered language. This in turn has impacts on arms control and disarmament practices and strategies.

A focus on the gendered dimensions of the language used by policymakers also reveals why some policy options are considered as more rational and legitimate than others. For example, Lauren Wilcox has shown how military strategies and debates about offensive versus defensive strategies are not only determined by the overall state of military technology, as generally contended, but also by gendered discourses. She highlights how perceptions of technological developments are gendered and coded as either feminine or masculine. This coding of technologies is based "not on their material contribution to offensive or defensive combat strategies but instead on their relationship to idealized images of soldiers' masculinity bound up in strength, bravery and chivalry."⁶³ The "cult of the offensive" is associated with masculine attributes such as strength, aggression, boldness.⁶⁴ Wilcox's gender perspective offers a new way of understanding tendencies to support offensive military strategies. It also explains why many policymakers tend to "overestimate the strategic advantages of the offensive (...) even if, as military balance theorists allow, the defense usually has the objective advantage in war."⁶⁵

Gender perspectives also demonstrate how some actors become delegitimized through gender-coded language. In his analysis of nonproliferation discourses by US policymakers, Hugh Gusterson has shown how NPT-recognized nuclear-armed states are portrayed as responsible, rational and disciplined; states with nuclear ambitions are framed as impulsive, emotional and irrational.⁶⁶ Gusterson has noted that, "whereas the United States is spoken of as having 'vital interests' and 'legitimate security needs,' Third World nations have 'passions,' 'longings,' and 'yearnings' for nuclear weapons which must be controlled and contained by the

strong male and adult hand of America.”⁶⁷ Similarly, Acheson has examined how nuclear weapon states and their allies depicted those advocating for the TPNW as naïve, unrealistic and emotional.⁶⁸

In sum, a better understanding of the gender dimensions of weapons discourses can help policymakers and practitioners reflect on the ways in which they might prioritize masculine values over feminine ones. Gender perspectives further offer ways of examining why policymakers might perceive some policy options (such as expanding arsenals) as more rational and legitimate than others (disarming arsenals).

Second, gender perspectives can help policymakers and practitioners understand how hierarchical structures in world politics are created and maintained. The nuclear nonproliferation regime exemplifies how hierarchies are created. Scholars such as Shampa Biswas, Nick Ritchie and Jan Ruzicka have examined the hierarchical nature of the NPT.⁶⁹ Specifically, the NPT created a system in which five states—China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States—can legitimately possess nuclear weapons while all other states commit to abstain from developing them. Gusterson has shown how the hierarchy of the nonproliferation regime is policed by “othering” and “feminizing.”⁷⁰ Susan Wright has noted how masculinist values, including “othering,” “power over” and seeking “military advantage” guided arms control and disarmament efforts in the 1960s. She has argued that the tenets of arms control and disarmament developed in the 1960s were determined by stereotypical masculine values of seeking “power over” and military advantage.⁷¹ For Acheson, nuclear weapons are “the ultimate tool(s) of violence, (...) dominance and control,” and they are therefore the ultimate symbol of the patriarchy—an unequal gendered hierarchy dominated by men.⁷²

Unequal power hierarchies created by arms control and disarmament regimes are unstable and vulnerable to contestation by those who feel treated unfairly. The tensions in the nuclear nonproliferation regime are a good example. Non-nuclear states have long been frustrated with the nuclear powers’ lack of progress in making good on their disarmament pledge and thereby undoing the unequal hierarchy of a regime that rests on a distinction between nuclear weapon states and those without nuclear weapons. Gender perspectives would encourage practitioners to identify ways in which arms control regimes create and maintain unequal hierarchical structures in world politics.⁷³

Third, feminist and gender perspectives offer alternative frameworks for conceptualizing security, including arms control and disarmament. Feminist scholars challenge the idea that nation-states are the primary referent objects of security.⁷⁴ They ask how security policies would change

if they were to represent the experiences and needs of marginalized groups in societies. Shifting from national to human security perspectives has important implications for arms control and disarmament debates. It may show that individuals feel insecure in a state that bases its national security on the possession of certain categories of weapons. A human security approach can strengthen calls for arms control and disarmament while challenging the validity of deterrence postures. The TPNW made this shift by reframing the issue of nuclear weapons in human security terms rather than in state-centered strategic stability terms.

Feminist perspectives also expand conceptions of who matters in world politics. Scholars such as Cynthia Enloe have examined the multiple roles that women play in world politics.⁷⁵ A gender-sensitive approach to arms control and disarmament recognizes multiple international actors, including civil society actors and not just powerful states. The TPNW exemplifies how this can work in practice. Promoted and advanced by non-nuclear armed states and civil society actors, this treaty represents an expression of “diplomacy of resistance” by non-nuclear armed states and civil society within a nuclear order that has institutionalized a superior position for nuclear-armed states.⁷⁶ Policymakers and practitioners who embrace gender perspectives can thus promote the inclusion of different groups of actors in the development and implementation of arms control and disarmament agreements.

In sum, the integration of gender perspectives has multiple benefits for policymakers and practitioners who work on arms control and disarmament. Gender perspectives can help them understand why actors value certain weapons and resist policy options that lead to banning such weapons. They can also alert policymakers and practitioners to the destabilizing effects of unequal power hierarchies. Lastly, gender perspectives allow for alternative approaches to conceptualizing security that shift the focus from state security to human security.

Conclusions and Recommendations

In this policy brief, we have presented a Gender Framework for Arms Control and Disarmament. Policymakers and practitioners who seek to develop and implement arms control and disarmament agreements that are gender-sensitive should draw on the three pillars of our framework. A first step to taking gender seriously is to examine whether arms control agreements have sufficient **provisions** to account for the gendered impact of the class of weapons that are governed by the agreement. Alongside this effort, policymakers and practitioners need to ensure that the groups who negotiate and implement arms control and disarmament agreements reflect equal **participation** of

men, women, trans- and nonbinary individuals. Gender **perspectives** further offer various ways for policymakers and practitioners to critically reflect on the legitimacy of their policy proposals and examine the power hierarchies embedded in arms control and disarmament regimes.

We make the following recommendations to policymakers and practitioners who seek to implement our framework.

Provisions: Gender provisions offer one way for policymakers and practitioners to include considerations of gender in arms control and disarmament agreements. These provisions should target all three dimensions of the framework we have presented. Review conferences offer a suitable avenue to call for the inclusion of gender provisions in existing agreements. Working papers on gender have been submitted to the Preparatory Commissions of the NPT Review Conferences, for example (see table 1). Policymakers and practitioners should support existing working papers and present their own proposals to promote the inclusion of gender provisions in the NPT. The ATT and TPNW provide some non-exhaustive examples. Additionally, policymakers and practitioners should call for the integration of gender provisions in yet-to-be negotiated agreements, especially in the cyber and artificial intelligence arenas.

Participation: Women remain underrepresented in international and national arms control and disarmament fora. One way to operationalize a gender-forward approach is to make sure that delegations are gender diverse. Policymakers and practitioners should support existing initiatives by nongovernmental organizations, such as the Gender Champions in Nuclear Policy, and call for proactive steps toward diversity by states and international organizations active in arms control and disarmament. While initiatives have been created to advance women's roles in negotiations and international fora, state and nonstate actors have not routinely engaged in robust monitoring and evaluation—critical for holding states and organizations accountable and for assessing the effectiveness of diversity initiatives. Initiatives like the WIIS Gender Scorecard should be expanded.⁷⁷

Perspectives: Policymakers, practitioners, civil society organizations and foundations should bring gender perspectives into arms control and disarmament deliberations in four main ways. First, they should apply the insights gained from the gender perspectives set out in this policy brief to their work. Second, policymakers and practitioners should commit to putting gender perspectives on the agendas of conferences, workshops and events related to arms control and disarmament. Third, policymakers, practitioners and civil society organizations should support next-generation educational initiatives, including nuclear policy-related boot camps, WIIS next-generation programs

and winter/summer schools. Fourth, foundations active in the arms control and disarmament field should support research projects on gender, arms control and disarmament. We have identified four strands of research to advance understanding of the gender dimensions of arms control and disarmament.

1. Systematic assessment of gender impacts of weapons: Future studies should systematically examine the gendered impacts of weapons, including the gendered impacts of cybersecurity and new technologies. The role of gender and the gendered impact of new technologies on military doctrines and organizations remain largely uncharted terrain. Future studies on the gender dimensions and gendered impacts of cybersecurity and new technologies, such as artificial intelligence and uncrewed aerial vehicles (drones) would make important contributions to the understanding of the gendered impact of these new forms of weaponry.

2. Bringing “gender” into existing arms control and disarmament agreements: A second strand of research should systematically explore how existing arms control agreements could be retrofitted with gender provisions and how gender provisions could be monitored and verified. This revision would require undertaking a systematic gender analysis of arms control and disarmament agreements. Multilateral agreements and monitoring and verification institutions would provide a starting point for research. The Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons should, for instance, examine what gender provisions should be added to the Chemical Weapons Convention. It should also review its assistance, monitoring and verification procedures. Similarly, the International Atomic Energy Agency should engage in a systematic gender analysis of its programs, procedures and processes.

3. The state of diversity in the arms control and disarmament community: Research should build on existing studies that take stock of the state of diversity in arms control and disarmament communities. Such research should continue to monitor gender balances in arms control and disarmament fora. It should be expanded to identify the barriers women face at both a national and international level. Research should also analyze what qualitative differences arise from the diversification of arms control negotiating teams, including the participation of women.

4. The impact of gender identities on arms control and disarmament: A fourth strand of research should examine how ideas about gender, including notions of masculinity and femininity, shape the way in which policymakers and practitioners pursue arms control and disarmament negotiations. Feminist scholars have established that gender identities shape the way in which individuals act. Yet little is known about the ways in which these identities shape

the ways in which policymakers and practitioners negotiate and develop arms control and disarmament agreements. A first step to find out whether and how gender identities matter would be to conduct exploratory interviews with policymakers and practitioners in diplomatic positions, defense and state departments, nuclear laboratories and international organizations. Research that explores how gender identities matter could further examine whether and how gendered discourses affect negotiations. US discourses about the North Korean and Iranian nuclear programs could be good case studies.

In this policy brief, we have demonstrated how a gender lens enhances arms control and disarmament deliberations. Some policymakers, practitioners, international organizations, advocacy organizations and individual researchers have taken commendable first steps to diversify the arms control and disarmament field and have begun to consider the importance of gender. These efforts are important and should be built upon. Our policy brief provides policymakers and practitioners with a framework focused on provisions, participation and perspectives to give them multiple entry points to take gender seriously in their arms control and disarmament efforts.

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50. See UN General Assembly A/Res/65/69 (2010); A/Res/67/48 (2012); A/Res/68/33 (2013); A/Res/69/61 (2014); A/Res/71/56 (2016); A/Res/73/46 (2018); and A/Res/75/48 (2020). In addition, the Geneva-based Conference on Disarmament held its first informal meeting on gender and disarmament in August 2015. In May 2016 it held a second informal plenary on *Women and Disarmament*, in which delegations restated their support to increase the role of women in the disarmament field.
51. See United Nations Office for Disarmament, Scholarship for Peace and Security.
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