



Security Council Resolution 1325 at 20: What Next for the Women Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda?

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Summary

This research paper takes stock of the achievements of the WPS agenda since the passing of its founding Security Council Resolution 1325, twenty years ago. It outlines the challenges it currently faces like the implementation gap; the global push-back against women's rights and multilateral cooperation; the increase of a strongly gendered nationalist populism; the political climate amongst UN member states and within the Security Council; and the Covid-19 pandemic. It discusses whether this challenging situation points towards prioritising the maintenance of the gains achieved in the field of WPS since the passing of Security Council Resolution 1325, instead of pushing for progressive changes. It puts forward the argument that the current situation makes it more relevant and necessary than ever to apply a more comprehensive understanding of what gender entails and how it is integral to politics, conflicts and peace efforts. It is argued that this approach must form the basis for analyses of conflict situations, as well as for understanding the challenges that the WPS agenda currently faces. Hence, the promotion and utilisation of such an approach should be a priority for the WPS agenda in the years to come.

Security Council Resolution 1325 and the WPS agenda

This year, we are celebrating the 20th anniversary of Security Council Resolution 1325. This resolution – often described as “a landmark resolution” – brought into focus the unique impact of armed conflict on women and girls, and their often neglected but indispensable contribution to international peace and security, particularly in conflict prevention, resolution and peace building. Based on this, it urged member states to increase the participation of women at all levels of decision-making in these areas, including UN peace operations; to incorporate a gender perspective in peace processes, peace operations and post-conflict reconstruction; to respect fully international law regarding the rights and protection of women and girls; and to provide training for UN personnel on the protection, rights and the particular needs of women.¹ The resolution's mandates were organised around four basic pillars – Participation, Protection, Prevention, and Relief and Recovery – and had implications for all UN member states and the entities of the United Nations system.

The passing of this resolution marked the genesis of what has become known as the Women Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, which by now also includes 9 subsequent Security Council resolutions.² These subsequent resolutions defined sexual violence as a tactic of war and a matter of international peace and security; introduced and strengthened measures to monitor, report on and end such violence; and stressed the accountability of perpetrators. They introduced measures to monitor the implementation of Resolution 1325 and to address obstacles to its implementation; and called for the integration of the WPS and terrorism and violent extremism agendas. Moreover, they positioned gender equality and women's empowerment as critical to international peace and security; recognized the differential impact of all violations in conflict on women and girls; and called for full and consistent application of the WPS agenda across the work of the Security Council. As a result, WPS is now considered to be a cross-cutting issue in the work of the Council and the Secretary-General reports annually on this issue, as well as on conflict-related sexual violence. In addition, increased attention has been paid to the problem of sexual abuse and exploitation by UN staff, and the Secretary-General has put forward a zero-tolerance policy and a New Approach strategy, which aims to prioritise the victim; end impunity; engage the member states and civil society; and improve strategic communication for education and transparency.³ By now, 86 UN member states have developed national action plans for the implementation of Resolution 1325, and other multilateral organisations, like NATO, the European Union and the African Union, have devised their own action plans or comprehensive approaches to its implementation.

In 2015 the UN published reports from three large reviews which took stock of its activities in the field of peace and security: the report of the High-level Independent Panel on Peace Operations (HIPPO), the report of the Advisory Group of Experts (AGE) on the UN Peacebuilding Architecture, and the Global Study report on the implementation of UNSCR 1325.⁴ All three viewed the WPS agenda as central to peace and security, and included

1. S/RES/1325 (2000).

2. S/RES/1820 (2008); S/RES/1888 (2009); S/RES/1889 (2009); S/RES/1960 (2010); S/RES/2106 (2013); S/RES/2122 (2013); S/RES/2242 (2015); S/RES/2467(2019); S/RES/2493 (2019).

3. A/72/751, Special measures for protection from sexual exploitation and abuse. Report of the Secretary-General (2018).

4. For an overview, see, Eli Stamnes and Kari M. Osland (2016). Synthesis Report: Reviewing UN Peace Operations, the UN Peacebuilding Architecture and the Implementation of UNSCR 1325. NUPI Report 2-2016. Oslo: Norwegian Institute of International Affairs. <https://nupi.brage.unit.no/nupi-xmlui/handle/11250/2379246>.

numerous recommendations relevant to the WPS field.⁵ The recommendations can broadly be sorted under the three headings: participation and organisational reform; protection; and gender sensitivity. Under the first heading, there were recommendations for a UN-wide gender parity strategy for increasing female representations within the organisation's leadership at headquarters and in the field, and for the recruitment of senior gender advisors to the offices of Special Envoys and Special Representatives in political missions and peacekeeping operations. There were also calls for the increased participation of women in UN-backed peace processes and for the inclusion of women's civil society organisations at donor conferences and in peace and security and humanitarian initiatives, in order to inform analysis, planning, monitoring and implementation. The need for accountability measures for UN leadership was also highlighted, along with the need to include UN Women in senior management forums.

Under the heading of protection, there were recommendations as to how to improve prevention and response to sexual exploitation and abuse and a call for UN-wide strategies towards this end. Under the final heading of gender-sensitivity there were numerous calls for the development of gender-sensitive approaches: in early warning for conflict prevention; in transitional justice approaches and mechanisms; in peacebuilding strategies; in budgeting for peacekeeping missions; in protection strategies; in countering and prevention violent extremism; in humanitarian response; and in disarmament, demobilisation, and reintegration (DDR) and security sector reform. The need to strengthen gender-sensitive conflict analysis and its role in planning and resource allocation was also highlighted.

In his 2018 annual report on WPS, the Secretary-General called for an assessment of the implementation of the WPS recommendations of the three review reports.⁶ The findings from the resulting mapping exercise were published in 2019. It found that only 50% of these recommendations have been implemented, while 40% are inconsistent or need progress in their implementation, and that in the case of 10%, the development has gone backwards or not progressed at all. Worryingly, among the recommendations that had seen a backward trend was the accountability measures directed towards senior leadership for the promotion of gender mainstreaming across all mandated tasks.⁷

Maintenance of gains or further advances?

The implementation gap is one argument for concentrating on maintaining and fully implementing the gains achieved in connection to the WPS agenda over the last 20 years, instead of seeking to add progressive elements to it in the years to come. The political climate among member states, and within the Security Council, is another such argument. While some member states have progressive agendas domestically and recognise the importance of including gender perspectives for the maintenance of international peace and security, other member states, including permanent Security Council members, resist progress, and even the maintenance, of some of the agenda's elements. The negotiations leading up to the two 2019 WPS resolutions⁸ exposed big differences in attitudes towards elements of the agenda, and proved to be very difficult. As was widely reported, references to sexual and reproductive health rights had to be removed from resolution 2467 as the US threatened to use its veto. Nevertheless, China and Russia abstained from voting, something that had never happened before in connection to the WPS resolutions. The reason given by China for its abstention was the concern that the Security Council would go beyond its mandate in addressing sexual violence and that this should instead be entrusted other bodies. Russia had already expressed similar concerns that combatting sexual violence would take the Security Council beyond its remit of maintaining international peace and security. This represents a backlash against the gains made already in 2008. In such a political climate, it may be argued, attempts to add more progressive elements to the agenda may exacerbate divisions and impair the implementation of the gains achieved.

In addition to this, there is significant push-back against women's rights in many UN member states. At the time of writing this policy brief, large demonstrations are taking place in Poland against restrictions of abortion

5. The Global Study offered, of course, the most comprehensive analysis of WPS issues.

6. S/2018/900.

7. Louise Allen, Policy brief Policy Brief: Mapping of the Gender Recommendations from the 2015 Reviews (2019), <https://www.unwomen.org/-/media/headquarters/attachments/sections/what%20we%20do/peace-security/policy-brief-mapping-gender-recommendations-in-the-three-2015-peace-and-security-reviews-en.pdf?la=en&vs=426>

8. S/RES/2467 (2019) and S/RES/2499 (2019).

rights. In the US, a new supreme court judge has been sworn in, whose presence on the court may well be the harbinger of similar restrictions there. National populists are gaining ground in a number of other democracies, with the desire to restrict women's rights a common feature of their politics, as well as public discourses that seeks to reassert traditional notions of masculinity while denigrating the claims of feminism for equality. Another common feature is, of course, the tendency to turn away from multilateral cooperation. The current Covid-19 pandemic adds to this sad picture. The pandemic has turned the political attention away from gender issues while at the same time having significant gendered effects. These effects are manifest in the home (increased domestic violence; disproportionate burden of unpaid care work; and more traditional gender roles during lockdowns); in the work place (women make up more than 70% of healthcare workers at the forefront of the pandemic; more women than men work in low-paid and informal sectors with poor or no social security and job safety) and on the international stage (the handling of the crisis is prioritised financially and politically at the cost of e.g. gender equality initiatives and WPS). In terms of the WPS issue areas, the pandemic has led to decreased female participation in formal peace processes; has exacerbated the threats faced by women peacebuilders; and has reduced financing of female participation in peacebuilding and peace operations.⁹

In this context it does indeed seem prudent to concentrate on maintaining the WPS gains achieved over the last 20 years, rather than prioritising a push for the inclusion of further, more progressive elements onto the WPS agenda. There are however reasons to question this assumption.

Towards a more comprehensive gender analysis

In the issue area of gender analysis it could be argued that this is exactly the time to work for progress, in order to fully grasp what is going on. The 2015 UN review reports highlighted the need to strengthen gender-sensitive conflict analysis to inform all peace and security decision-making and throughout all stages of the different activities, but what this entails is an issue for debate.

An important part of the WPS agenda is to work for the increased participation of women in peace operations, peacebuilding and peace processes, and at all levels of decision-making in these fields. It is also important to examine how violent conflict affect men and women differently and to ensure the protection of women and girls from conflict-related sexual violence. This can very easily (albeit not necessarily) lead to the equation of gender to biological sex and gender issues to women's issues. Thus, it may be easy to ignore the male 'story'; to essentialise women; and to treat them either as victims or heroines. And this is unfortunately how the WPS agenda is understood by many.

The concept of gender mainstreaming, as defined in 1997¹⁰, helps underpin a different understanding. It includes assessing the implications for women AND men of any planned action and making women's as well as men's concerns and experiences an integral dimension of the design, implementation, monitoring and evaluation of policies. Its ultimate goal is gender equality. The gender mainstreaming mindset has strongly influenced the UN's thinking around gender and has been influential in its analytical work.

In order to fully analyse the gender dimensions of violent conflict there is a need to move beyond the understanding that women and men may be affected differently and have different concerns and experiences in the context of the conflict, and also ask how gender works in the context of the particular conflict analysed. This involves investigating how concepts, identities, institutions and practices are shaped by ideas about gender. So, instead of viewing gender as an attribute of an individual, gender is seen as something that structures all forms of social life. It is institutionalized in a variety of ways and provides the optic through which we view the world. Thus notions of gender impact on both actions and ideas. Dominant ideas of femininity and masculinity result from and reproduce power and hierarchies between genders and are thus an integral part of politics and conflict.¹¹

9. UN Women, 'COVID-19 and Ending Violence against Women and Girls,' 2020; International Labour Organization, 'Women Health Workers: Working Relentlessly in Hospitals and at Home,' April 2020; Masooma Rhamati and Jasmine Jaghab, 'Peacebuilding during a pandemic', International Peace Institute, September 2020.

10. ECOSOC 1997 agreed conclusions.

11. Cynthia Enloe (2014) *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. Oakland, CA: University of California Press.

Viewed in this way, violent conflicts cannot be fully understood without investigating the gendered hierarchies underpinning them. In this way, a gender analysis is therefore much more than making sure that men and women are accounted for.

Since the publication of the 2015 review reports, the term ‘gender responsiveness’ has replaced ‘gender sensitivity’ and a policy for Gender Responsive United Nations Peacekeeping Operations has been developed.¹² This is designed to guide the UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations and Department of Field Support in operationalising gender equality and implementing WPS mandates. Herein lies the potential for a shift of focus in future conflict analyses. The policy document defines gender as

the social attributes, roles and opportunities associated with being male and female in each society. These attributes, roles, opportunities and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization and conform to the value system of given societies. They are context/ time-specific and changeable. Gender defines power relations in society and determines what is socially expected, allowed and valued in a woman or a man within a given context.

The definition of gender analysis presented in the same policy document does not fully embrace this definition of gender, though, but focus on understanding ‘the relationships between men and women, their access to resources, their activities, and the constraints they face relative to each other’. Nevertheless, this policy represents a stepping stone for further work on advancing the WPS agenda towards a more comprehensive conception of gender and how it works in violent conflicts.

Indeed, such a comprehensive gender analysis can also be utilised to understand and address many of the challenges that the WPS agenda face as well as the current more general push-back against women’s rights and multilateral cooperation. Even the widely held assumption that the more progressive WPS agenda issues must wait while the world is dealing with more serious issues like the pandemic, is an expression of certain gender hierarchies, in which certain voices and topics are labelled ‘serious’ and others are marginalised. As Cynthia Enloe demonstrates, the conception of ‘seriousness’ is deeply gendered. It (re)produces the association of masculinity with seriousness and femininity with marginality or triviality.¹³ Perhaps the most important step for the WPS agenda in the years to come is to boldly fight its marginalisation by basing the work upon a more solid gender analysis of its challenges.

Conclusions

The gap between WPS provisions and their implementation; the global push-back against women’s rights and multilateral cooperation; the rise of a strongly gendered national populism; the political climate amongst UN member states and within the Security Council; and the Covid-19 pandemic all combine to point towards prioritising the maintenance and consolidations of the gains achieved in the field of WPS since the passing of Security Council Resolution 1325. It could be argued that this is not the time to push for the inclusion of more progressive issues and measures on the WPS agenda. That said, when it comes to the issue area of gender analysis, the current situation makes it more relevant and necessary than ever to apply a more comprehensive understanding of what gender entails and how it is integral to politics, conflicts and peace efforts. Academics, policymakers and practitioners cannot afford to wait while international institutions deal with more ‘serious’ issues, like a pandemic or other crises, before applying such an approach in gender analyses. If we are to fully understand what is going and how to address it, this approach must form the basis for the analyses of conflict situations, including the situation in which the WPS currently finds itself. Hence, this should be a priority for the WPS agenda in years to come.

12. https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/gender-responsive-un-peacekeeping-operations-policy-en_0.pdf

13. Cynthia Enloe, *Seriously! Investigating crashes and crises as if women mattered*, University of California Press, Berkeley, 2013: pp. 15-18.

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