Gender Perspective and its Place within ACO Now and In the Future

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This article describes gender perspective at NATO’s Allied Command Operations (ACO) while addressing key achievements and challenges in the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) and related resolutions and concludes with a consideration of future developments.

IN OCTOBER 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS). This was the first time women’s experiences of conflict were linked to the international peace and security agenda, which recognized the disproportionate impact that armed conflicts have on women. It also acknowledged the fact that women continue to be excluded from participation in peace processes and as such, stressed the importance of women as active agents in the prevention and resolution of conflicts. In 2007, through the adoption of the first policy on UNSCR 1325, NATO took the first step on its path of implementing 1325 and has since been developing its own capacities to understand the role that gender plays within conflict. This commitment was reinforced through new versions of policies, the latest from the summer of 2004, and then again in March 2015, with General Philip M. Breedlove, Supreme Allied Commander Europe (SACEUR) stating that “gender equality and women’s empowerment are critical to the security and success of the Alliance and its Partners.”

MEN, WOMEN, BOYS AND GIRLS all suffer from war and conflict. Such suffering comes in many shapes, not only death and injury, but also displacement, trauma, abuse, and loss of control over and access to essential resources for life. The different impact that these changes has on different social groups results in exacerbation of gender inequalities during periods.
1325: Greater participation of women in conflict resolution, more respect for women's rights in conflicts and more women's perspectives in peacekeeping.
GENDER PERSPECTIVE

DID YOU KNOW?

In 2006, seven award-winning playwrights joined together and created a documentary theatre piece; seven monologues that illuminated seven extraordinary women and their inspiring journeys. Then, they worked together to weave these monologues into the acclaimed documentary play, "Seven". After its tour around the globe in 2013, "Seven" achieved its military premiere at HQ SHAPE on 11 March 2014, during which seven high-ranking military personnel gave their voices to seven women's rights activists.

In May 2015, the ACO Gender Advisor Office, together with SHAPE WoMen, arranged the reading of the documentary play for the second time. Over 150 people came to see this second performance on 7 May at 7 p.m. In addition to the SHAPE community, the audience also included members from NATO HQ, showing that "Seven by SHAPE" was truly an event that was supported by all elements of SHAPE as well as the broader NATO community. Mrs. Cindy Breidlo, an active supporter of SHAPE WoMen, in her welcoming remarks, linked the powerful stories of "Seven by SHAPE" and the work by NATO to support women as actors in peace building in conflict situations.

"Since the reading at SHAPE last year, 'Seven on Tour' has worked in Latvia, Montenegro, Ukraine, Sweden, Kosovo, Norway, the United States and in Bangladesh and has started activities in Belarus and Egypt," said Hedda Krausz Sjögren, the producer of the play. She added proudly: "In all of these countries, the reading by SHAPE Generals has received great attention. Many positive voices have been raised about the fact that a military organization and its top leadership acknowledge women's rights and gender equality in their internal as well as external processes."

In summary, by taking on the task of playing the parts of women militating against gender-based discrimination, the high-ranking military personnel showed their absolute dedication for women's rights and equality during this 70-minute play.

of armed conflict. Unless addressed, this situation can continue during post-conflict reconstruction, undermining the fabric of a society already overwhelmed by the immediate impact of the violence. Women’s participation in conflict resolution is essential and thus differing gender dimensions need to be considered during the analysis, planning, conducting and evaluation of operations. Combined with the essential need to protect civilians, this requires NATO personnel and planners at all levels to ensure that they develop a comprehensive understanding of the military operating environment and the wider civilian setting.

Within NATO, gender perspective is a cross-cutting theme where responsibility lies with the Commander. Gender advisory personnel within ACO have a critical role to play in ensuring that there is an active promotion of women’s empowerment and gender equality in NATO’s military contribution to long-term security and stability.

The work within the NATO Strategic Commands is focused on the institutionalization of an integrated gender perspective into NATO operations, missions, training and exercises. According to the NATO definition, the integration of gender perspective is a way of assessing the gender-based differences of women and men that are reflected in their social roles and interactions in the distribution of power and the access to resources.

Key achievements and challenges

A critical step forward for NATO’s military component was the development of the practical proposals and guidelines for implementing UNSCR 1325 in the form of the Bi-SC Directive 40-1, which is a comprehensive directive providing adequate and relevant guidance for all levels of the military structure, including national military forces of Member Nations and its Partners.

"WOMEN’S PARTICIPATION IN CONFLICT RESOLUTION IS ESSENTIAL AND THUS DIFFERING GENDER DIMENSIONS NEED TO BE CONSIDERED DURING THE ANALYSIS, PLANNING, CONDUCTING AND EVALUATION OF OPERATIONS." With every policy comes the need for a supporting structure to ensure its implementation. A successful implementation of the UNSCR 1325 and gender mainstreaming within NATO is therefore only achieved through the establishment of gender advisory positions throughout the organization. At the NATO Strategic Command level, both ACO and Allied Command Transformation (ACT) have Gender Advisors who report directly to the Commander as well as to the Joint Force Commands at the operational level. This has then been mirrored by the creation of gender advisory positions at the theatre/tactical level. These advisors are situated so that they report directly to the Commander to achieve maximum effect.

The main challenge for the advisor structure is the dilemma posed by vacant positions. If positions at the various levels remain vacant, it creates a situation that will interfere with the chain of command, which in turn will have a decisive effect on implementation of the directives and orders related to UNSCR 1325 and Bi-SC Directive 40-1. In addition to the appointment of full-time and part-time Gender Advisors, there will also be a need for our individual commands to appoint Gender Focal Points, with gender as a secondary role, across their organizations. Appointing Gender Focal Points is an

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An effective approach to supporting full integration where the objective is for each and every part of the structure to work with an integrated gender perspective. These functions should be seen in the light of the Special Representative to the NATO Secretary General on Women, Peace and Security, first appointed in 2012.

Even though a robust policy platform has been formalized, the challenge still lies in successfully putting the policies into practice throughout our organization. Starting a new initiative where one struggles to understand the why and how of it, constitutes a challenge. This is why the integration of gender perspective into daily activities such as analysis, planning, conducting and evaluation of operations and exercises has proven to be very helpful in making it understandable for colleagues. Indeed, suddenly a light bulb goes off and they often say: “this isn’t how I thought it was.”

Integrating gender perspective into exercises has been very important and effective in terms of transforming the views of colleagues to where they can genuinely see how gender, as a cross-cutting theme, relates to day-to-day business and operations at a military HQ.

Outside of exercises, the Resolute Support Mission (RSM) in Afghanistan has embodied a key step forward in this regard. "UNSCR 1325 and Gender Equality" is one of the Military Strategic Objectives for the RSM. Its planning process showed that integrating a gender perspective is no longer an afterthought, but part of the entire planning cycle, from political decision-making, to development of the Operational Plan (OPLAN) and generation of forces. RSM was also the first mission where Allies and Partner Nations made the required gender expertise available at all levels from the very beginning of the mission.

NATO, as well as other deployed military forces, is integrating a gender perspective in the regular tasks of training, advising and assisting
local forces. The importance of military personnel as role models and positive agents for change in this regard must not be underestimated, especially in mentoring and training. This is particularly true in the context of Security Sector Reform and Security Force Assistance, as well as other capacity building exercises for local security forces, which aim to increase local ability to address and handle issues of Conflict-related Sexual and Gender-based Violence (CR SGBV), and to provide equal security to men, women, girls and boys in their societies.

From policy to practice: Working through organizational change

Dealing with the theory of change has been instrumental for ACO’s transformation and implementation. In short, it deals with the concept of leadership commitment and active involvement, local ownership, and responsibility of first and foremost the Commander, but also that of everyone else (top-down and bottom-up). For ACO, this meant a need to find and define our own internal stakeholders and actors who would assume responsibility for the change process as well as for reaching our desired goal. Individuals with already perceived strong platforms and high status participated in the first echelon. The agents for change have been, by purpose, individuals with substantial understanding and knowledge of the organization, or key personnel who could easily communicate and relate to both the people as well as the tasks.

As is well understood, change from within is more likely to be accepted, sustained and implemented, and this has been evident in the case of ACO’s implementation of gender perspective. Based on prior experience with organizational change, it is clear that one of the most common reasons for failure is a neglect of the organization’s culture. In a military organization, it is imperative to understand the military culture and its potential impact on a change process. It is also vital to accept that there may be resistance to change at the organizational as well as individual levels. Such resistance occurs for various reasons. For many, a change process can be perceived as a threat to their rank, or the proposed change might challenge existing values and culture. Most importantly, if the reasons behind a change process are not fully understood by those in the institution, resistance is much more likely to occur. To ensure success, ACO has expended great effort in anchoring the change processes with a focus on bringing on board key leaders, both formal and informal, throughout the organization. But, changing the mindset of an entire organization takes time. Creating and fostering change is not only about building competence on gender and women’s perspectives; it requires skills in sociology and change management too. It must be understood that the integration of gender perspective will be made mainly on the organization’s own terms, and taking ownership of these issues in the organization is a must.

GENDER EQUALITY and women’s empowerment are critical to the security and success of the Alliance and its Partners. Unfortunately, the overall picture for women in many parts of the world remains dark and grim—Conflict-related Sexual and Gender-based Violence
remains a significant and widely overlooked problem. In countries where NATO conducts ongoing missions we must utilize all our capabilities to make sure that Conflict-related Sexual and Gender-based Violence makes it onto the security agenda. NATO can demonstrate best practice, and act as a role model, especially when it comes to capacity building and providing training for local security forces—a key element in establishing upstream security. NATO must help national security forces take the lead in addressing the gender perspectives by regularly liaising and mentoring of their forces, and by encouraging their training development with “Train the Trainer” programmes for their security institutions. Additionally, within and together with the host nations, we must work to synchronize our efforts with other organizations that are operating in the same environment as part of NATO efforts. Finally, NATO must ensure a continued focus on the incorporation of the gender perspective based on the core principles of UNSCR 1325: participation, protection and prevention.

**What lies ahead of us?**

Achieving gender equality requires both gender balance and gender mainstreaming. Conflict-related Sexual and Gender-based Violence is a symptom of inequality—gender inequality—and while almost everyone agrees that gender equality is critical, there has been a slow progress on the broader underlying gender equality front in most nations, including the NATO Alliance and its Partners.

This year’s NATO Committee on Gender Perspective Conference featured the topic of the recruitment and retention of women in our armed forces. Many of the NATO Nations’ militaries still struggle with full integration of women into their military forces where women are still mainly present within the lower ranks and in supportive roles. These internal weaknesses constitute challenges for the Alliance when it implements the agenda of Women, Peace and Security, and addresses Conflict-related Sexual and Gender-based Violence.

This begs the question: how can NATO, with its own internal gender-related challenges, credibly respond to security problems and participation of women in its external operations? The short answer: NATO will struggle, but ambitions are high, the policy framework in place and Nations’ commitment outspoken and strong. However, this will still call for challenges not in the least when it comes to maintaining our own organizational credibility as we look to ensure equal participation and protection of men and women in a crisis.

One positive change is that the pervasive "boys will be boys" attitude within military institutions, including peacekeeping operations, is slowly changing. In many nations, military culture is coming under increasing scrutiny, and the armed forces are trying to better understand, prevent and respond to cases of sexual harassment, assault, abuse, discrimination and sexualized treatment of female, as well as male personnel. They are also trying to eradicate often widespread cultures that blame, encourage silence, and act with hostility toward victims.

Sexual harassment, discrimination, sexual abuse, and sexual assault in our own institutions cannot be left out unmentioned. A victim of Sexual and Gender-based Violence perpetrated by a fellow soldier, officer, or other official within an organization, where trust is fundamental for unit cohesion, is indeed troubling. The internal aspects matter in relation to the execution of operations and missions—if there is no respect and protection within a unit, the ability to foster and develop respect and protection for the local populations has to be questioned. We must continue to invest in explaining, training and educating, and what is more: we must continue to practice what we preach.

A more diverse military; a stronger and more capable armed forces. Picture shows a member of the Female Engagement Team talking to a group of children after securing their compound during a foot patrol in Afghanistan. Photo by NATO (ISAF, 2012).

Charlotte Isaksson, the Gender Advisor to the SACEUR and Allied Command Operations.

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