



THE THREE SWORDS
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ARMED CONFLICT, WOMEN AND CLIMATE CHANGE

by Jody M. Prescott
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This book written by former legal advisor at the Joint Warfare Centre, Colonel (U.S. Army Retired) Jody M. Prescott, focuses on the topic of women and climate change as well as displacement, food and energy insecurity and male out-migration, helping the reader to better understand how mitigation and adaptation efforts across the world need to be sensitive, both during peace and in situations of armed conflict.

*Interview by Inci Kucukaksoy, JWC Public Affairs Office,
 Lieutenant Colonel Adrian "AJ" Sullivan, U.S. Army, former JWC Gender Advisor*



Jody Prescott, photo © Erica Housekeeper

Colonel Prescott, thank you for taking time to talk to us about your new book, "Armed Conflict, Women and Climate Change". You served as a legal advisor here at the Joint Warfare Centre (JWC) from 2006 to 2008,

then as the chief legal advisor for ISAF in Kabul from 2008 to 2009, and then finished your military career teaching at West Point after you returned. In this book, you explain that climate change has significant geopolitical impacts around the world, contributing to poverty, environmental degradation and political instability. You also focus on the gendered dimensions of climate change, saying that men and women experience climate change differently. Could you be more specific as to the main risks that climate change poses to different population groups?

— I am no climate change or gender expert, but I think I can give you a decent example. The risks posed by climate change to any given population group are the results of a large

number of factors, some of them natural, some of them purely human. Location matters—for example, let's say you live in a developing country. If you live in a low-lying coastal area, the freshwater aquifers you rely on might become increasingly saline and unusable because of rising sea levels. If you are a member of a poor farm family, this could impact both the crops you can grow and the amount of time spent by family members securing sufficient supplies of freshwater for home uses. If you can't grow enough food, and you haven't another income source, your family likely eats less or eats less nutritious foods. If it takes longer to find sufficient water for daily use in cooking and cleaning, those responsible for drawing it will spend more time on their usual chores, leaving



less time for school or learning a new skill to generate income. If the community in which you live is socially conservative, and you are a woman or a girl, these factors could lead in the end to you becoming malnourished because you not only eat last in your family, there is not enough nutritious food to go around. The extra work necessary to finish your chores, however, requires more calories. If you are a girl, you have less time to attend school, and when you can go to school, you are both too hungry and too tired to really concentrate on learning. Without an education, it is difficult to break this cycle of poverty, and you will lack both the material resources and the intellectual capital necessary to adapt to or mitigate the effects of climate change. Your risks to the negative effects of climate change increased as you were experiencing them.

How can gender-sensitive approaches mitigate the effects of climate change especially in the world's poorest communities?

— I believe that from an operational perspective, in civilian-centric operations in particular, military efforts that are aware of the gender-differentiated impacts of armed conflict and climate change are well-placed to understand that these two phenomena could have compounding effects on at-risk groups in populations. These effects are likely to be most pronounced upon the poor and the socially marginalized in any country.

If a civilian-centric operation does not recognize this possibility, and how its efforts geared towards creating stable economic, social and political conditions could be undermined by the effects of climate change, it also fails to recognize a potential threat to long-term stability. The risk this poses to mission success can be mitigated by approaches that acknowledge that environmental degradation and climate change are processes that can be related to each other in a theatre of operations, and that this relationship likely has most effects on

those population cohorts that are already most at risk. The use of Agriculture Development Teams in Afghanistan by the U.S. towards the end of the ISAF mission provides an example in certain ways of such an approach.

What are your views on the evolution of NATO's Women, Peace and Security agenda to achieve sustainable and lasting peace?

— As you probably noticed in the book, I don't talk about this agenda. Instead, I look at the evolution of the actual tools that NATO has created at different levels to foster the inclusion of a gender perspective in its activities and operations. I believe this evolution shows real promise to reduce the suffering of women and girls in situations impacted by armed conflict. This reduction could lead to fewer civilian casualties and less property damage among those most at risk of the compounding effects of climate change and armed conflict.

For example, the most recent iteration of the Bi-Strategic Command Directive on Women, Peace and Security shows a marked improvement over earlier versions in terms of realistic tasks and goals for Gender Advisors and Gender Focal Points. Coupled with the suite of gender-related training courses offered by the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations, this should have the effect of delivering more and better-trained Gender Advisors and Gender Focal Points to units in positions where they can make a meaningful difference in the way deployed headquarters consider gender in their operations.

Could you suggest any innovative ways that our operational-level exercises could incorporate gender?

— Serving at JWC for two years as an Observer/Trainer for headquarters' training exercises was an incredibly rewarding professional experience. I learned so much about working with people from different backgrounds and with very different perspectives, in seeking to

help Training Audiences work together better and more effectively.

The process of developing the scenarios, and then creating the Injects to move them along, and then making sure both remained consistent with the overall goals and realism of the exercise was no easy task. If I could make a recommendation it would be this—don't include gender just for the sake of checking a box in the training objectives list. Instead, find a line of effort, preferably civilian-centric, in which the operational relevance of gender can be clearly and objectively established. Work backward from that to force the development by the Training Audience of an operational gender analysis that identifies the risk of failing to address gender. Focus JWC attention on the Training Audience elements and personnel necessary to the completion of this analysis and provide them the instructional resources to develop their capacity as quickly as possible. Ensure they get face time with the Training Audience command team to brief on operational gender risk analysis—not gender. Bring in experts to talk to the command team and the heads of staff sections about the operational relevance of gender, and its limitations.

On that basis, do you believe that gender can only be made relevant to a Training Audience in exercises that prepare them for non-Article 5 Crisis Response Operations?

— Absolutely not. Although the significance of gender is most obvious in civilian-centric operations such as humanitarian relief, gender concerns might present operational risks in any type of operation. From this perspective, gender is not relevant in all operations all of the time—but unless you are objectively analyzing a mission from a gender perspective, you will not know whether it is relevant.

Do you mean during kinetic operations? Can you provide an example of what you mean?

— Sure. For example, suppose a Norwegian

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A member of Norwegian "Jegertroppen" (Hunter Troop)—the world's first all-female Special Forces training programme at the Norwegian Army Special Operations Command. Photo by Torbjørn Kjosvold, Forsvaret

F-35 were to encounter a turboprop bomber from a neighbouring country skulking about well inside Norwegian airspace over the North Cape. Suppose the pilots of both aircraft were women, and the commanders of each air operations centre were female. Given the high levels of training, education and experience that would be necessary for each of these women to reach the positions they were occupying at that point in time, is that engagement going to play out differently than if they were all men? I could be wrong—but I rather doubt it.

This does not mean that gender is not relevant in the kinetic parts of kinetic operations—these operations can be very civilian-centric. When an operation potentially involves civilian women and girls suffering death, injury or property damage, gender is relevant. Particularly if these women and girls are already at risk to the gender-differentiated impacts of armed conflict because they are living in societies in which they are marginalized and which are experiencing the negative impacts of environmental degradation and climate change. Few people actually realize this—in the dynamic targeting that we conducted in ISAF, steps in the targeting methodology actu-

ally had the effect of recognizing the impact of gender to a degree, although it was of course not presented in that light.

You said earlier that you have seen real progress in NATO in how it operationalizes gender. Do you see any major hurdles preventing progress, especially regarding the application of UNSCR 1325 to operations?

— Yes. First, we need to do a more comprehensive job in including gender considerations, when and where operationally relevant, into our doctrine. Until we do, I worry that we will make at best modest progress in understanding how gender plays out in operations, especially in civilian-centric operations.

Second, I am concerned that the full scope of UNSCR 1325's requirements on women, peace and security regarding international humanitarian law is not being considered. I believe that we must find ways to incorporate gender perspectives in the kinetic parts of kinetic operations. Up until now, the focus has been primarily on preventing sexual and gender-based violence. This is very important, but it is not enough—we also need to look at the application of lethal armed force.

Third, we need data. We need to collect reliable information that lends itself to rigorous qualitative and quantitative analysis as to where gender is operationally relevant and why.

Fourth, we need analysis methodologies that will provide us accurate assessments of the risk to operations because of failure to employ gender perspectives. As I already mentioned, even a well-documented gender analysis of a given area of operations is of limited use—if I were a commander I would not be interested in a sociological assessment of an area unless it could be coupled with analysis that highlighted risks to operational success through failure to consider gender. That would get my attention.

How important is it to understand the physical environment in civilian-centric operations such as humanitarian relief, peacekeeping and even armed conflict? Can environmental factors as well as cultural and societal changes have an impact on military operations?

— Environmental factors have always had an impact on military operations. What we have not necessarily considered as well as we should, however, is how climate change as a process is impacting the very civilians that are the subject



of our civilian-centric operations. Right now, for example, the U.S. defence establishment seems to consider climate change as a process to be addressed in hardening bases and facilities to make them more resilient. Operationally, however, it seems to address it as just a fact of a given situation or area, and not recognize the need to treat climate change as a process with differentiated effects on people depending upon the way their communities construct gender roles. From one perspective, a typical humanitarian relief operation for a military unit might be measured in weeks, while the process of climate change might unfold over decades. Should climate change impacts on the people who desperately need immediate help really be a command focus? I argue it should. Once the people's urgent needs for food, water, shelter and medical care are met, we should start thinking about their future, and what steps could be taken that would align military efforts to at least be consistent with long-term civilian recovery efforts. This should include potential climate change effects that are gender-differentiated.

Photo by Torbjørn Kjosvold, Forsvaret



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As to armed conflict, although the causal relationship between climate change and war has not been definitively established in the scientific literature, the reverse is obvious—armed conflict often results in environmental degradation. In a time of climate change, this lessens the resilience of the environments in which people live and upon which they depend for their food, water and shelter. This then potentially accelerates the impact of climate change in the aftermath of armed conflict. For a deployed command to not recognize this possibility would seem imprudent.

Finally, should gender matter for everyone?

— Well, from an operational perspective, as I said earlier, I don't believe that gender is always relevant all the time. As with my North Cape aerial encounter example, I can imagine different force-on-force engagements in isolated areas where even if all the combatants were women, gender might play no meaningful role in terms of operational risk.

On the other hand, in a civilian-centric operation, where operations are being conducted amongst the very people whose economic, political and social stability is the desired end-state, gender could matter a great deal. Especially when a particular population cohort, such as women and girls, is suffering more severe and different impacts than men and boys because their typical gender roles in their communities place them in a disadvantaged economic, political and social status. Unless we engage in a meaningful and forthright operational gender analysis from a perspective of risk to the mission in all operations, we simply won't know whether gender matters, and how much.

I am a big fan of General Sir Rupert Smith's concept of "war amongst the people." As the world's population continues to grow and continues to urbanize, the growth of the megacity across the globe will present increasingly complex challenges for military organizations to crack—particularly if the popula-

tions of these areas are enduring the negative impacts of climate change. Add to this mix the ever-increasing role of cyber in the lives of anyone—male or female—who can get an internet connection. Our world is changing, and gender is an aspect of missions that both our shared democratic values and operational necessity compel us to address. †

COLONEL (Ret.) JODY M. PRESCOTT retired from the U.S. Army Judge Advocate General's Corps in 2011 after 25 years of active duty service. In addition to his NATO tours, he served two tours in both Germany and Alaska, and was an assistant professor at the U.S. Army Command and General Staff College and the U.S. Military Academy at West Point. He now works as a deputy in the Commercial and Administrative Law Division in U.S. Immigrations and Customs Enforcement, where he does commercial litigation and environmental law. As a lecturer at the University of Vermont, he teaches courses on environmental law, energy law and climate change, and cybersecurity law and policy.