

Q & A

with JWC's Gender Advisor,
Squadron Leader Diana Bird

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British Air Force Squadron Leader Diana Bird is a member of the Joint Warfare Centre's Training Advisory Team and has also been the Centre's Gender Advisor since 2018. In her latter role, she has witnessed the ongoing developments regarding the gender perspective in NATO Armed Forces, especially at the strategic and operational levels. Her feedback:

"If we neglect the GENDER PERSPECTIVE, we are essentially surrendering part of the battlefield to our adversaries."

Squadron Leader Bird, thank you very much for giving us this interview. Can you describe your role as the Gender Advisor at the Joint Warfare Centre (JWC)?

— I am here to ensure that we consider men, women, boys and girls equally in how we deliver our mission. My role is three-fold: to advise the Commander and staff on the integration of the gender perspective in our day-to-day internal JWC business; to ensure that we realistically represent the human environment in our exercises, remembering that men, women, boys and girls all have a voice and role to play in conflicts; and, finally, to help the NATO Alliance to better understand how the gender perspective influences operations through our warfare development work.

What are some of your current activities to promote and integrate the gender perspective in JWC?

— The Joint Warfare Centre has a great team of gender focal points who I have been working

with to look at areas as diverse as the gender balance (and roles) of our Short Term Operational Contractors through to the Centre's behaviour card — our organizational Code of Conduct and Values, providing guidance to both the JWC personnel and those who support our exercises.

What is the advantage of acknowledging and implementing a gender perspective in operations? What could be the implications of disregarding it?

— Everyone in a society is involved both in war and peace. By considering this we can help to minimise the length of conflict and secure a lasting peace. On operations, unintended consequences of our actions, be it a misconstrued comment in a press conference or the targeting of a bridge, are often our undoing. By considering the gender perspective in all phases of planning we can reduce the likelihood of any unintended consequences. From another angle, we can use tools like social media to exploit our opponent's gender perspective (e.g. their perceptions regarding the role of men and women) to win the information war.



“The gender perspective should absolutely be part of **targeting, cultural analysis, medical estimates, civil preparedness and resilience.**”

Would you agree that operational-level exercises provide the best venue to integrate UNSCR 1325 and the gender perspective into the NATO Command Structure? How do you see JWC's role in this?

— United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 or UNSCR 1325 is a political statement, which has an impact at the operational

and tactical levels. As part of a comprehensive approach to warfare, the gender perspective needs to be integrated at all levels of the NATO Command Structure. The operational level is important in translating the political and strategic intent into something actionable, and, similarly, translating the results of actions back into strategic and political language. The Joint Warfare Centre is very experienced in producing a comprehensive environment, where action and inaction equally translate into consequences across the various layers of command.

During the development of exercise scripts, what makes Opposing Forces different from, for example, Information Operations in the way they achieve their Training Objectives?

— The Opposing Forces, or OPFOR, have so much more freedom than NATO does; we are committed to the UNSCR 1325 and are bound by Human Rights Law and Law of Armed Conflict in a way that OPFOR may not be. Similarly, NATO is bound by the collective moral compass of 29 Member Nations and the eyes of the world, which prevent us from "manipulating" the gender perspective as our adversaries do, for example, through fake news reporting.

Although gender is increasingly recognized as a contributor to sustainable peace and security, some still ask "why does gender matter so much?" They claim that gender works better when it is part of an in-depth target audience or cultural analysis. What is your view?

— I think it's a fair question and one with a two-part answer. Firstly, there are a series of resolutions that all our Nations and NATO have committed to. NATO and Nations need to demonstrate that we are committed to abiding by these UNSCRs. Having trained gender advisors is one way to ensure that. Secondly, the gender perspective should absolutely be part of targeting, cultural analysis, medical estimates, civil preparedness and resilience. However, as we see in the vast majority of our exercises, it is usually forgotten by the wider headquarters until the gender advisor pushes for its inclusion. Our potential adversaries; both state and non-state actors, are exploiting the gender perspective within their campaigns — just look at how the use of women by the so-called ISIS evolved during their rise and fall. If we neglect to do this then we are essentially surrendering part of the battlefield to them through apathy, which is inexcusable.

United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS):

The Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 on Women and Peace and Security on 31 October 2000. The resolution reaffirms the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peace negotiations, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and in post-conflict reconstruction and stresses the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security.



Sqn Ldr Diana Bird with Rear Admiral Jan C. Kaack, Commander JWC. Photo by JWC PAO



Gender is a very wide concept. When we talk about it in NATO, we may refer to the UNSCR 1325 principles for women, men, girls and boys, focusing on sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response, or we may be talking about women in the military, focusing on gender balance and equal opportunities. Ideas of gender around the world, meanwhile, may refer to totally different concepts. Is this a challenge?

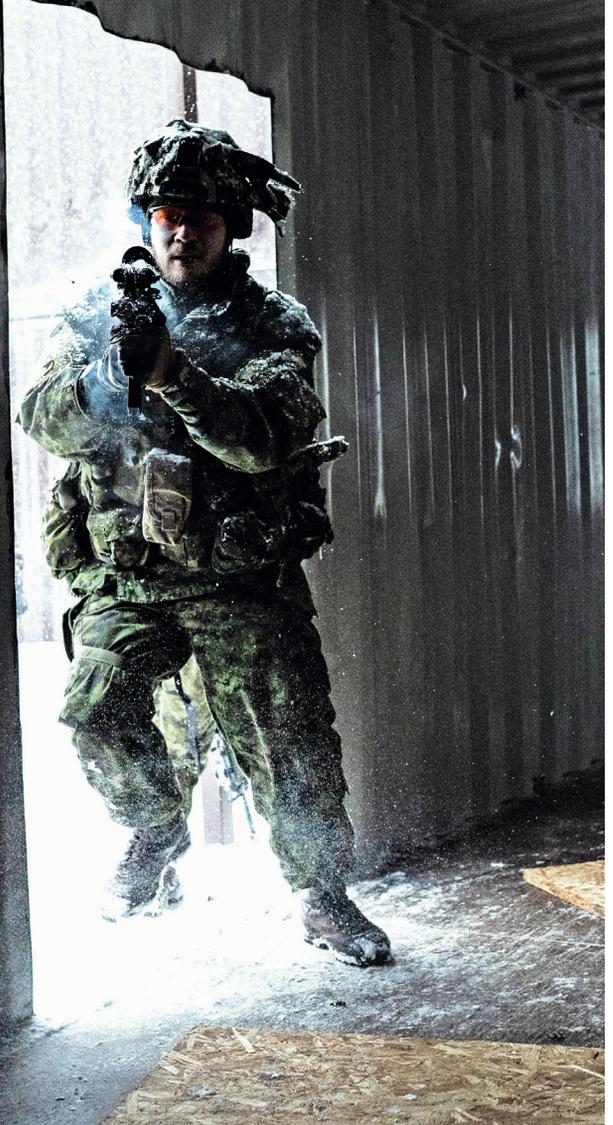
— It's a huge challenge which is why I like to divide my work into three sectors: the "internal" part where I look at how we operate as an organization; the "external" part about how we represent the world through our exercises; and, finally, the warfare development piece, considering how NATO can best leverage the gender perspective to gain an operational advantage. Luckily, I am supported by a committed group of gender focal points, who ensure that we can deliver all of this in addition to our primary roles.

You are saying that a holistic overview of gender is important to fully understand the battlespace and diverse human security needs. Is this correct?

— Gender is one of a collection of cross-cutting topics that have evolved over the past five years. Whilst at the political level it is absolutely right to keep these separate, within military operations there is a significant overlap between them. For example, protection of civilians, children and armed conflict, and gender are all different aspects of the same object — a human being. Therefore, several NATO Member Nations consider that what we are actually talking about from a military perspective is *human security*, and that a commander needs a single advisor/subject matter expert who understands all these concepts and can provide them with advice based on all these factors instead of just one. Looking to future wargaming scenarios, including urbanization and fighting in "mega cities", this will become even more important as civilians will occupy more of the physical and virtual battlespace.

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NATO Battlegroup Latvia conducts urban operations training. Photo by NATO



"No sustainable peace is possible without JUSTICE, INCLUSION and EQUALITY for all."

Benedetta Berli
Office of the NATO Secretary General

Is it true that the North Atlantic Council (NAC) has recently endorsed a Human Security Unit within the NATO Headquarters? What will it be responsible for?

— Yes, in September 2019, the NAC endorsed the foundation of a Human Security Unit within the Office of Secretary General's Special Representative for Women Peace and Security. Whilst the exact remit is still being worked through, this is a real opportunity to bring topics such as children and armed conflict, gender, conflict-related sexual and gender-based violence and the protection of civilians together in a single, unified policy. For the JWC's Training Audiences this will also allow these issues to be considered more holistically and, hopefully, cut down the number of different "voices" commanders are hearing during the decision-making process. ✦

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