

E X C L U S I V E

GENDER PERSPECTIVE

A Fundamental Tool in Ensuring Geopolitical, National and Individual Security

by **Lieutenant Colonel Lena P. Kvarving, PhD**
Norwegian Air Force
Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations

and **Julia Dalman**
Legal Analyst
Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations

➤ **NEW RESEARCH CONFIRMS** that the systematic subordination of women underlies all institutions, with wide-ranging implications for global security and development. Actors in the security sector are growing more aware of this through education on women, peace and security and gender perspectives. There has never been a more vital time to face the problems and implement solutions.

THE U.S. DEPARTMENT of Defense has financed a comprehensive empirical investigation that verifies how the subordination of women degrades national security and stability. The result can be found in the book "The First Political Order: How Sex Shapes Governance and National Security Worldwide."¹ This extensive research confirms the vital need for public institutions and organizations to have an agenda on women, peace and security (WPS), and for gender perspectives to permeate the security sector and foreign policy. It also serves as a timely reminder of the seriousness of these matters,

particularly for anyone who may be under the impression that NATO's focus on the women, peace and security agenda; gender perspective; and equality is some kind of politically correct fluff that may safely be ignored.

Instead, it turns out that the things that matter most to the peoples of the world, such as good governance and democracy, economic prosperity, peace, health, security, and environmental preservation are rooted in the character of male/female relations. The study by Hudson, Bowen and Nielson also shows that steps against laws, customs, and practices that disadvantage women produce positive outcomes for both women and men. The research basically offers a

new paradigm for understanding insecurity, instability, autocracy and violence, and it explains what the international community can do to promote more equitable relations between men and women and, thereby, security and peace.²

The recognition that gender inequality has a negative effect on international peace and security also lies at the heart of the WPS agenda.³ The research strikingly demonstrates that female subordination is destructive not only to the women within a society, but to the entire society in which they live.

One of the authors of the study, Valerie Hudson, a University Distinguished Professor and holder of the George H.W. Bush Chair at





Above
Midwifery students in Afghanistan, 2010; photo by Eric Kanalstein, UN. According to the UN Women website, the oppression that Afghan women and girls have been experiencing since August 2021 is unmatched in terms of scale and generational impact, with only 1% of women feeling they have influence in their communities.

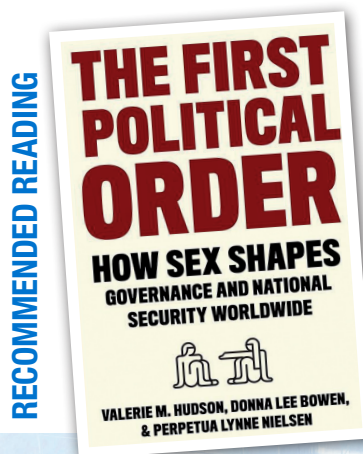
the Bush School of Government and Public Service at Texas A&M University, stated at the launch of the book that, "What you do to your women you do to your nation state. And so, if you decide to curse your women, we argue that you will curse your nation state as well."

To name an example: since 2021, the Taliban have viciously curtailed women's rights and freedoms, leaving no areas of Afghan society untouched. Their comprehensive and draconian decrees have banned women and girls from public spaces such as parks and restaurants, implemented strict dress codes along with male chaperone requirements, and denied women and girls access to education and jobs. UN experts have described the Taliban's treatment of women as "severe discrimination that may amount to gender persecution — a crime against humanity — and be characterized as gender apartheid."⁴ Afghanistan is a failing state on many levels, lacking resources, revenues, reserves and resilience.⁵

Gender inequality perseveres worldwide, and women and girls in every country across the globe struggle with its impact and effects.⁶ As the number of conflicts across the world has reached an all-time high, the situation is particularly harrowing.⁷ Experience evidences how gender inequality exacerbates in times of armed conflict, demonstrating how gender inequality prevails across a continuum of time and space. Inherently, conflicts and crises have gendered aspects, whether as a direct or indirect result of existing gender norms, bias and inequality, or as the result of gendered strategies. The war in Ukraine is a current and telling case in point. The Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations (NCGM), where both authors of this article work, is particularly knowledgeable on this aspect of the Russo-Ukrainian war.

First published in 2023, and updated in 2024, NCGM's analysis of the conflict's gendered aspects elaborates on how both Ukraine and Russia utilize gender perspective in their strategic communication, albeit in different ways. Ukraine has emphasized the alleged Russian use of sexual violence against Ukrainian women and girls, the bombing of maternity wards and women's participation in the defence of Ukraine.⁸ Russia, meanwhile, portrays Western policies on gender equality, democracy and human rights as a threat to traditional values and as a root cause of the supposed decline of the West.⁹ The conflict is an acute example of how gender dynamics play out in war, how this aspect is at times ignored and at times instrumentalized, and how it always has implications at the tactical, operational and strategic levels.

The NCGM analysis concludes that women, men, girls and boys are affected differently by the conflict, and affect it differently in turn. It also concludes that the conflict has exacerbated some gender norms and roles, and altered others, and that narratives and understandings of gender are used strategically by both parties in the war; often connected to the underlying values of equality, human rights, democracy and the rule of law.

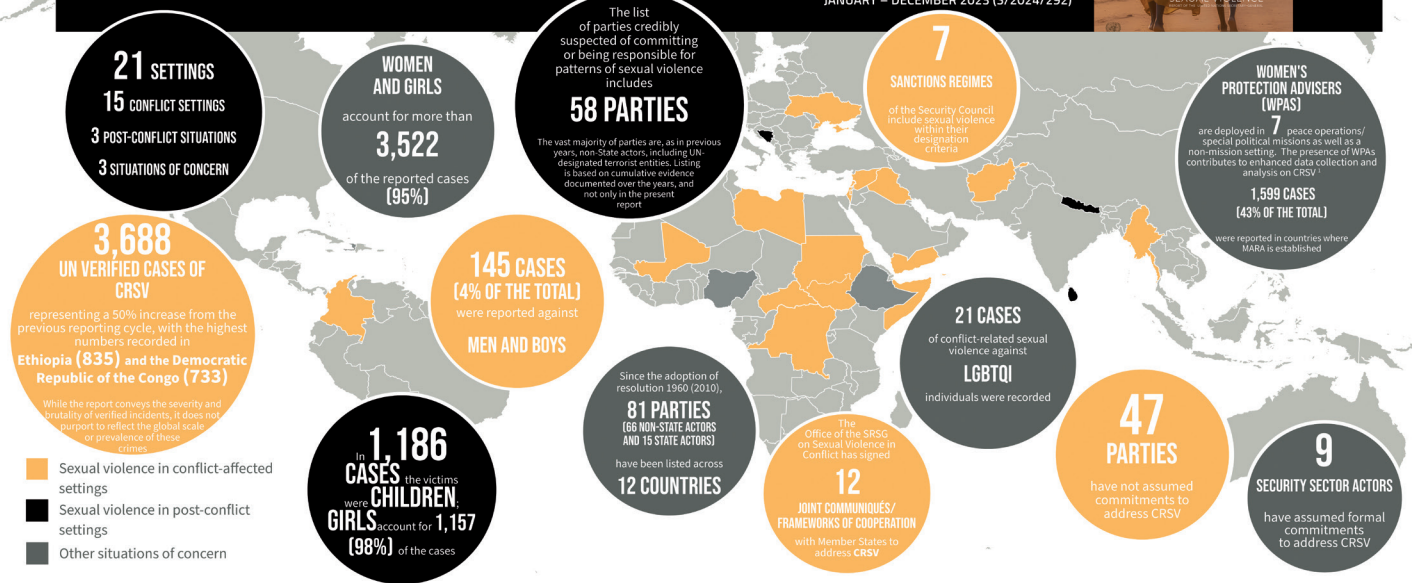


Below
Kyiv Maternity Hospital, March 2022. Pregnant women had to spend nights in the basement, seeking shelter from ongoing shelling. Photo by UN Women, Serhii Korovainyi.



15TH REPORT OF THE UNITED NATIONS SECRETARY-GENERAL ON CONFLICT-RELATED SEXUAL VIOLENCE

JANUARY – DECEMBER 2023 (5/2024/292)



The addition, a specialist is deployed at regional level focused on implementation of the framework of cooperation on preventing and responding to CRSV between the United Nations and the African Union

Above

The outbreak and escalation of conflict exposes civilians to heightened levels of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), as pointed out in the 2023 annual report of the UN Secretary General. NATO condemns all acts of CRSV and is committed within its mandate to prevent and respond to this horrific crime. Infographic © UN

So what does this mean for the NATO Alliance? NATO has embraced the WPS agenda and the realization that crisis, conflict and war affect women, men, girls and boys differently. NATO recognizes that their roles, rights, expectations and situations will vary in different nations, organizations, cultures and contexts and is therefore committed to implementing the WPS agenda and integrating gender perspectives in all core tasks, and across missions, operations and activities.¹⁰

As former NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg expressed at the Women Political Leaders Summit in June 2021:

"NATO has a robust policy on Women, Peace and Security including with gender advisors in military missions. We are gradually increasing the number of women in the military and also in political leadership roles. We know that when we bring different perspectives to the debate, we simply make better decisions (...) And we are strengthening our training on human rights and the protection of

"The things that matter most to the peoples of the world, such as good governance and democracy, economic prosperity, peace, health, security, and environmental preservation are rooted in the character of male/female relations."

civilians, also in partner countries. Finally, we are learning to recognise how security threats affect women and men differently. This way, we can shape solutions that will serve everyone. At our Summit, leaders endorsed NATO's new policy on conflict-related sexual violence. Ensuring we do everything we can to prevent and respond to these heinous crimes. They also agreed to continue to advance gender equality and integrate gender perspectives in all that we do. So you can count on NATO's continued commitment to strengthen the role of women in leadership."¹¹

Significantly, the NATO Strategic Concept (2022) and NATO Policy on WPS (2024) commit the Alliance to implementing WPS and gender perspectives across core tasks and in operations, missions and activities. These are much-anticipated undertakings that are complemented by Allied Joint Publications, policies at the level of the North Atlantic Committee, a Bi-Strategic Command directive and various documents at command level.





Gender perspective has a natural place in multi-domain operations and their development and implementation in NATO.

Above

Lieutenant Colonel Lena Kvarving, the author, discussing the cooperation between the NCGM and the JWC with the JWC's gender focal points, November 22, 2023. Photo by JWC PAO

Collectively, these documents serve as guideposts for NATO's implementation of WPS and integration of gender perspectives.

In this regard, gender analysis,¹² gender perspective¹³ and gender mainstreaming¹⁴ are the key NATO-recognized tools in seeing through this implementation. These tools are reinforced by an organizational structure in which commanders maintain overall responsibility, but are advised and supported by gender advisors (GENADs) and gender focal points (GFPs). As gender perspective has cross-functional relevance, its successful implementation requires a systematic approach across all levels of organizations and military service branches.

Being equally relevant across all three dimensions (human, physical, informational) and all five domains (land, air, sea, space, cyberspace) of warfare, as well as in the synchronization of non-military activities with civilian actors, gender perspective has a natural place in multi-domain operations and their development and implementation in the Alliance.

While NATO's commitment to the WPS agenda and gender perspective has been fortified during the past years, the translation of policy into practice must be strengthened further. We can see progress in several areas, but these efforts are still often met with resistance. There can be reluctance to acquire knowledge on the

subject, as it appears to challenge traditional masculine culture, bias and privileges, combined with insufficient leadership on the topic.¹⁵ As leaders and commanders are the main drivers for the implementation, leadership commitment is vital in successfully institutionalizing gender perspectives within an organization.

So what does this demand of the leadership? Apart from the obvious, such as a plan and resources, leaders need to take a organizational change approach in order to harness the transformative potential of the WPS agenda.

Leadership needs a cultural map of the organization — in order to stake out the direction in which they want to go, they need to know where they are. Additionally, there is a need to create psychological safety for change, with safe places to learn and train. It is important to include the learners in the process, and to have a network of change agents and good role models. There is a need for expertise and changes to structure and functions to support the change. Furthermore, a reward and discipline system is needed. And as always, there will be a need to carry out proper evaluations and redirect efforts where necessary.¹⁶

Mainstreaming a gender perspective across doctrine, policy and procedure is also imperative for its institutionalization in the organization and throughout the planning, execution and evaluation phases of NATO operations, missions and activities. More specifically, gender perspective must be implemented in doctrine, procedures and manuals to support its influence on decision-making and the actual mission. This also creates an imperative for integrating gender perspective in military education, training and exercises, to ensure that we train as we fight and fight as we train.

Collective training and exercises are essential to developing the skill sets of military personnel to prepare them for the tasks and challenges they may face. Training for the gendered aspects of conflict is no different. The Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations considers the Joint Warfare Centre (JWC) a valuable partner in ensuring that the WPS agenda and gender perspective are part

At the **2024 Washington Summit**, NATO endorsed an updated Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Policy, which will enhance the integration of gender perspectives across all of NATO's activities and structures, and advance gender equality within the Alliance, enabling NATO to respond better to broader security challenges.

The new policy outlines **four strategic objectives**: to strengthen gender-responsive leadership and accountability; to increase women's participation at all levels, including decision-making and leadership; to prevent threats that have a disproportionate impact on women and girls; and to protect women and girls against gender-based violence. It recognizes the close linkages between NATO's WPS and Human Security agendas, notably in the area of conflict-related sexual violence, as highlighted during the ongoing war in Ukraine.

For the first time, the policy references new and emerging challenges such as gendered disinformation, technology-facilitated gender-based violence, and the gender dimensions of climate change and artificial intelligence.

Did You Know



The Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations (NCGM) is an international military organization with more than a decade of experience in implementing the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda and gender perspective in operations, missions and activities. As an expert centre, NATO Department Head for the Gender in Military Operations discipline, and NATO-accredited education and training facility, NCGM provides education and training, concept development and subject matter expertise on WPS and gender perspective in military operations, enabling NATO and other military actors to increase operational effectiveness and implement the WPS agenda.

NCGM was founded in 2012 by the Nordic Defence Cooperation countries Denmark, Finland, Iceland, Norway and Sweden. Since then, the Netherlands, Canada and Australia have joined the Centre.



Endnotes

- Hudson, V., Bowen, D. L. and Nielson, P. L. (2020) *The First Political Order — How Sex Shapes Governance and National Security Worldwide*. New York: Columbia University Press.
- This article's reference to the research is based on the summary written by Cindy Zhou, edited by Sandra Yin. Sources: Center for Reproductive Rights; International Security; National Academies; "The First Political Order: How Sex Shapes Governance and National Security Worldwide," by Valerie M. Hudson, Donna Lee Bowen, and Perpetua Lynne Nielsen; UNICEF; UN Women: <https://www.wilsoncenter.org/event/first-political-order-how-sex-shapes-governance-and-national-security-worldwide-book-launch>
- UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) S/RES/1325.
- <https://www.ohchr.org/en/news/2023/09/special-rapporteur-human-rights-council-systematic-and-institutionalised>
- <https://www.iiss.org/en/online-analysis/online-analysis/2022/01/afghanistans-state-failure-and-the-problem-of-humanitarian-containment/>
- International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC), *Gendered Impacts of Armed Conflict and Implications for International Humanitarian Law*, ICRC, Geneva, June 2022, p 4.
- Uppsala Conflict Data Program, accessed March 22, 2024.
- NCGM Thematic Analysis: The use of Gender Perspective on the Conflict in Ukraine (June 2023), available < https://www.forsvarsmakten.se/siteassets/english/swedint/engelska/swedint/nordic-centre-for-gender-in-military-operations/thematic-analysis_ukraine_ncgm_june23.pdf > accessed March 22, 2023, p 12-13.
- Ibid, p 11-12.
- NATO Strategic Concept (2022) para 5; NATO Allied Joint Publication, *Allied Joint Doctrine*, (2022) para 3-44.
- NATO Secretary General Jens Stoltenberg: https://www.nato.int/cps/en/natohq/opinions_185443.htm
- Gender analysis is the systematic gathering and examination of information on gender differences and on social relations between men and women in order to identify and understand inequalities based on gender. NATO Agreed term.
- Gender perspective is the ability to detect if and when men, women, boys and girls are being affected differently by a situation due to their gender. NATO Agreed term.
- Gender mainstreaming is defined as a strategy used to achieve gender equality by assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, in all areas and at all levels, in order to assure that the concerns and experiences of both sexes are taken into account. NATO Agreed term.
- Kvarving, L. P. (2019) *Gender Perspectives in the Armed Forces and Military Operations: An Uphill Battle — Cultural, structural and functional factors that prevent or promote implementation of UNSCR 1325 in the Norwegian Armed Forces and NATO*. Oslo: University of Oslo
- Hofstede, G.H., and Hofstede, G.J. (2005). *Cultures and Organizations: Software of the Mind*. (Revised and expanded 2nd ed.). New York: McGraw-Hill and: Schein, E.H. (2004). *Organisational Culture and Leadership* (3rd ed.). San Francisco: Jossey-Bass.
- Bi-SC Directive 040-001 (2021) para 2-1, 2-2, 2-3.

of the planning and execution of exercises, just as it would be in real operations. The partnership with the JWC has demonstrated how important it is to integrate gender perspective in the early phases of planning, to ensure it is not overlooked or a mere afterthought in execution.

The proper implementation of gender perspective allows for the exercise to play out different real-life scenarios, making it possible to progress gender-responsive leadership, develop accurate gender analysis, prevent and mitigate conflict-related sexual violence and sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA), mitigate negative gendered impact of crises, conflicts and war and to promote equality, peace and security — on an individual, organizational, societal and geopolitical level.

With the Alliance's increased focus on deterrence and defence, how gender perspectives play out in crises and conflicts in the Euro-Atlantic area must form a part of education, training, exercises as well as lessons learned, so that we can learn from the mistakes of the past.

To create that robustness and generate real change, NATO recommends the presence of a full-time gender advisor (GENAD) in command groups, supported by a network of gender focal points (GFP) in dual roles in the rest of the organization.¹⁷ In this regard, NCGM plays a crucial role in providing education and training. NCGM delivers NATO-approved three-week GENAD courses and four-day GFP courses. To support the training of national and NATO staff, personnel may also attend the NATO-approved two-week Gen-

der Train the Trainer course. Furthermore, NCGM supports leadership in honouring the commitment of NATO and its member states through a transformational change approach, by offering annual commanding officers seminars at the OF-5 level and key leader seminars at the OF-6 to OF-9 levels on gender and WPS.

Professor Hudson et al. have clearly demonstrated that gender perspective is a fundamental tool in ensuring geopolitical, national and individual security, and NATO has instructed the organization to act on this insight. While some may still harbour reluctance or doubts as to the need for gender perspectives in the military, research proves that this perspective is a necessity to reach the desired end state of peace, security and stability within NATO and worldwide. As this end state appears in such peril due to current geopolitical developments, it has never been more vital for organizations, leaders and individuals to dedicate themselves to this change. ✦

Lieutenant Colonel Lena P. Kvarving, PhD, is currently Officer in Command of the Education and Training Department at the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations. She has extensive international experience in the field of WPS and gender in military operations and organizations.

Julia Dalman is an international lawyer specialized in international human rights law and international humanitarian law with two master's degrees in law from Lund University. She currently serves as the Legal Analyst at the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations.