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# OPERATIONALISING THE WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY AGENDA

Gender equality and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda are essential to sustainable peace. However, despite progress, it often remains difficult to turn gender mainstreaming policy into practice.

## WPS COMMITMENTS

The WPS agenda was born in the time of security cooperation against international terrorism. UN Security Council Resolution 1325, passed in 2000, emphasises that women must be meaningfully and equally included in efforts to build peace and security, including decision-making responsibilities for conflict resolution. The agenda evolved over the following years to encompass additional aspects, such as protection of women and girls in conflict environments, as well as consideration of where they can be perpetrators of violence. National military actors as well as international military alliances, such as NATO, have been increasingly engaged with WPS over the past 25 years. However, some see a fundamental challenge between WPS priorities, such as the pacifist approach to reducing the impacts of conflict on women and girls, and the approach of utilising a gender lens to improve the capacities and operating procedures of militaries engaging in counterterrorism (CT) operations and wider conflicts.

Some of these challenges are apparent because of the staunchly gender-blind nature of security institutions, especially militaries. This gender-blindness is a product of the realist international relations environment in which these institutions were established, which only considered able-bodied males as citizens of the state and capable of its protection. Other challenges are apparent because of the lack of capacity and clarity around how to implement WPS principles in operational and strategic planning. These challenges are linked.

## WPS AND HUMAN SECURITY

CT taskforces, military institutions and military alliances such as NATO must figure out how to relate WPS to the demands of operational planning and relevant civilian harms protection and human security goals. Understanding the societal impact of CT and military operations on all individuals through an intersectional gender lens is fundamental to successfully implementing the WPS agenda. Intersectionality ensures consideration of an individual's multiple identity factors, including gender, age, ability, race, etc. Capturing how these factors intersect, including how inequalities based upon these

can compound upon each other, helps operators to consider different experiences of insecurity and security responses. A 360 degree framework that takes into account cultural and contextual sensitivities is necessary to ensure the integration and sustainability of WPS efforts. Additionally, any operationalisation of the WPS agenda must be inclusive of civil society.

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At the same time, true gender mainstreaming with an intersectional approach must be internalised institutionally to reap the positive momentum of commitment across roles and ranks to the principles of WPS, thus enhancing strategic planning and policymaking in a way that can improve the effectiveness and impact of military operations.

## APPROACHES TO INTEGRATING WPS

The UK's approach to subsuming WPS commitments under their Human Security policy seeks to ensure that WPS principles – including gender analysis – are carried through all Human Security efforts, with the WPS National Action Plan directly contributing to the operationalisation of the UK MOD's Joint Service Publication 985 on Human Security in Defence. This provides an interesting comparison to NATO's approach of having distinct but complimentary WPS and Human Security policies. Both approaches present challenges and opportunities.

Having WPS under Human Security policy can allow for easier buy-in across military forces, where a majority are often more



aware and convinced of their responsibilities around civilian harms protection than the need to consider women and girls specifically. It also reduces the number of policies addressing various forms of harm by consolidating them, perhaps garnering more buy-in when time and resources are limited. Additionally, under human security policy there might be more scope for an intersectional lens to be applied to operational planning, capturing individual experiences across the range of identity factors rather than focusing solely on gender or just women and girls.

However, having WPS and Human Security separate but connected allows a clear set of commitments to WPS, which can keep the focus on gender from disappearing behind the focus on individuals. Additionally, WPS commitments are often connected to more comprehensive gender mainstreaming strategies. This can help ensure coordination of the needs for gender analysis in operational planning and the mainstreaming of gender throughout internal force policy. Overcoming institutional resistance to, including lack of resourcing for, gender-responsive operational and strategic planning requires both building capacity and addressing the internal gender inequalities of security services.

## OPERATIONALISING WPS

Operationalising WPS with clear actionable steps that are culturally and contextually tailored to the different environments in which militaries and security forces respond to terrorism concerns, can improve the effectiveness and impact of CT. As a global leader on WPS, the UK has an opportunity to lead by example and foster greater buy-in for sustainable operationalisation of WPS. This is particularly pertinent at a time when there is a perception of a wavering commitment from the international community, and global North in particular, to universally upholding human rights and gender commitments.

Furthermore, in the face of the ever-evolving threat landscape, responding to emerging threats, including in the cyber and disruptive technology domains, as well as security risks

associated with climate-change, provides an opportunity to reassess institutional approaches to operationalising WPS in practice. Integrating WPS strategically and systematically is essential to supporting the sustainability of twenty-first century deterrence and defence efforts.

In the face of the most complex security environment since the Cold War, swift adaptability in all domains, including CT, is essential and should be aligned with WPS commitments. The current context demands reassessment of what modern CT and warfare should look like and how militaries must adapt. This presents an opportunity to reemphasise the benefits of increasing diversity within the services and the additional perspective and skills this brings. However, the need remains to continue building the evidence base on how WPS improves operational effectiveness and strategic impact to support these arguments.

Ultimately, there is still often a lack of understanding of how to operationalise WPS, which remains an abstract commitment for many. This in turn contributes to a lack of robust monitoring and evaluation frameworks to assess the real-world successes and failures of operationalising the WPS agenda. Thus, defining actionable steps with accompanying monitoring and evaluation frameworks would not only help nations track their progress against WPS commitments but also improve global peace and security with gender-responsive, intersectional, and human-rights compliant CT responses in today's increasingly complex security environment.

## RECOMMENDATIONS:

- **Contextualisation:** there is a need for WPS commitments to be adaptive and address cultural and contextual specificities to respond to threats effectively.
- **Integration:** there is a need for WPS to be integrated across deterrence and defence efforts to respond to threats strategically by understanding possible gendered impacts of said threats on society and how these can be countered efficiently.
- **Learning:** there is a need for a robust M&E framework to be developed to enhance deterrence and defence efforts comprehensively by understanding the impact of WPS policies on the ground, and how they can be operationalised effectively. This will allow methodologies to be improved based on best practices and reinforce the Alliance's security.

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