

What's Sex Got To Do With It? Women, Peace and Security for Future Operations

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The military ability to influence is predicated on understanding the target audience. This is as true for conventional warfare as it is for counterinsurgency and applies to an adversary's leadership, the local population, and the British people. Given half of the world's population is female, gender underpins many social and cultural issues. However, it is significantly overlooked by campaign planners and in operational execution. The role of women, particularly in developing countries, is largely underappreciated and misunderstood. This article will explore the importance of women's security needs and the requirement for the British military to better understand gender issues. It is time that gender was acknowledged as a key component of military capability that should be used to improve the effectiveness of both current and future operations.

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Introduction

So what has sex got to do with it? For this article, the answer is both everything and nothing. There is direct military relevance to the outcome of a conflict if half the population in the affected country - the women - are ignored; the effects on the operational outcome of a campaign that fails to recognise the importance of gender could be catastrophic. Yet gender issues are largely absent from current doctrine defining how we conduct operations. Recent doctrinal publications, including the well received JDP 04 '*Understanding*' and JDN 3-11 '*Decision-making and Problem Solving: Human and Organisational Factors*' purportedly seek to promote better appreciation of the complexities of the human domain in any operating environment. They highlight the necessity to consider social, political and cultural issues to gain deeper understanding of the operational environment, but appear to omit gender from these discussions. Gender is a term often misunderstood, particularly by largely male populations, such as the military, who typically associate its use with women and feminism.¹ The aims of this article are to demystify gender issues, highlighting the importance of comprehensive understanding of this to UK military operations; it will focus on what women bring to the table as this is often overlooked. According to the Development Concepts and Doctrine Centre, 'the battle of the narratives will be key, and the UK must conduct protracted influence activity, coordinated centrally and executed locally'.² The gendered dimension of this is of vital importance, influencing the outcome of future wars and delivering real post-conflict stability.

Are Women Important?

World Bank research recognises the positive impact of women's political participation. The Bank's corruption index demonstrates that such levels are lower where women's influence in public life is greater. Women are not just agents of development; they are directly affected by development choices and have often been shown to have different priorities to men. As an example, in the West Bank and Gaza, men generally choose infrastructure projects rather than social, economic or health programmes more normally favoured by women.³ Furthermore, since women in developing countries are often the primary users of many development facilities, water and sanitation projects that have been designed and run with the full participation of women have been shown to be more sustainable and effective.⁴

Economists have promoted the importance of women to a nation's economic development and have been trying to address women's unequal status since the 1970s. In 1989, a US Agency for International Development report highlighted gender as 'an essential and critical variable in development' as women make a major contribution to a nation's economic output and 'the use and expansion of women's productive capacities is a necessary condition for social and economic progress'.⁵ The report also highlights that women's education promotes a positive cycle 'which can lead to lower fertility [rates], better family health, reduced infant and child mortality, higher formal labor [sic] force participation and greater economic growth'.⁶ Statistics support claims that women's participation in economic activity has positive effects

for a country: women will, on average, spend 90% of income they control on their family, providing better nutrition, healthcare and education, compared to 30-40% by men.⁷ These reports take as a central premise the notion that a nation's economic potential cannot be met if half of the adult population is not economically active and that security cannot be achieved if that half of the population – the women – is unable to access basic services, including access to justice.

Conversely and despite this evidence, the contribution of women during times of conflict receives virtually no recognition and women are largely considered as victims. In reality, women play a wide variety of roles during a conflict; they can be active participants, combatants, providers, supporters and peace activists. These roles are not mutually exclusive and can vary during different stages of a conflict. As an example, women in North East India often act as mediators and facilitators, yet accounts from other conflicts highlight women as motivating men to fight.⁸ Women have also been active in demining efforts in Cambodia and collecting weapons in Albania.⁹ Yet women are frequently excluded from post-conflict activities, which can perpetuate insecurity if their security needs are not addressed.

Women and their experiences should not, however, be considered in isolation from the rest of the population or from cultural beliefs; it is vital to regard women in relationship to their community. For example, women's employment (a particularly complex issue) is considered desirable for its positive contribution to economic output. However, women often have existing responsibilities in the home, which do not lessen when they are economically active; even in the UK, for example, women carry out 2.5 times as much housework, childcare and domestic tasks on average as men.¹⁰ There are also cultural sensitivities: whilst it may be considered practical for a woman to work to increase the family income in the UK, many patriarchal societies consider it a man's duty to provide for his family. These are complex issues and are difficult circles to square, but this should not detract from their importance. Women have a vital role to play in all societies, one which is often neglected and needs to be further encouraged, to improve the economic and security prospects for those societies.

Gender, Security and the International Community

The United Nations (UN) has led the way in recognising the importance of gender equality. In 2000, the UN Security Council passed Resolution 1325 recognising the adverse effect armed conflict has on civilians, particularly women and children. This followed on from the 1979 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women and the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, which advocated a policy of gender mainstreaming where the concerns of both men and women should be central to all activities from policy development to resource allocation. More recently, Resolution 1325 has been augmented by a number of Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security, and Sexual and Gender-based Violence.¹¹

Following the Cold War, there has been a debate about what constitutes security. In 1994, the UN defined human security as having two main aspects: first, safety from the chronic threats

of hunger, disease and repression and second, protection from sudden and hurtful disruptions in the patterns of daily life—whether in homes, in jobs or in communities.¹² This article subscribes to this broader UN definition and includes within it physical security. Assessing the contribution that women can make to achievement of these aspects of security demands a more detailed understanding of the important role they play within societies across the world. Women ultimately have different experiences of armed conflict to men and their perspectives, aspirations and priorities must be incorporated into any peace-building activity. An effective (population-centric) counterinsurgency strategy, for example, cannot ignore half of that population simply because it is seen as not having a voice or is difficult to access. What happens to women is not just a women's issue but 'is the central issue of stability, development and a durable peace'.¹³ The complex interplay of gender issues, within a conflict environment, can best be highlighted by experiences from on-going operations in Afghanistan.

Lessons From Female Engagement In Afghanistan: Necessary But Insufficient

The Western view of the role of women in Afghan society is often over-simplified and lacks both nuance and context. In 2001, as the US-led campaign to remove the Taliban from power began, Afghan women were widely portrayed as hapless victims of the Taliban. This narrative blithely ignored that women had been treated in similar way by the mujahidin, supported by the US in the 1980s, and that the Taliban imposed equally strict interpretations of behaviour on men including banning music, many books and the popular activity of kite-flying. When ISAF military operations expanded outside Kabul and into Helmand in 2006, it was largely assumed that women had no value as a target of influence operations in support of the counterinsurgency effort as they were hidden from public life. This assumption crucially undervalued the role of women in Afghan society and failed to both exploit influence opportunities and to address security issues for the complete population in a holistic manner.

The degree of influence and authority Afghan women wield varies dramatically, based not least on locality and education. Women derive their power from their extended social network, developed through marriage, and can exert leadership at the family, village and national levels through this network; *Pashtunwali* also gives women responsibility for a degree of conflict resolution between households, men and women, and occasionally between men. A woman's status also increases with the number of children she bears so it is often older women who are the most influential. Women also exert a degree of control over the use of resources within the family and senior women normally initiate the search for potential partners for male relatives, though neither boys nor girls have much choice about marriage.¹⁴ However, the effects of civil war have undermined many traditional sources of authority and rural women often have little decision-making power about the household budget or even the number and spacing of children.¹⁵

Generalisations about women's influence, or lack thereof, are of little use unless accurate local information can be collected and used effectively. Afghan women have criticised development projects that prioritise women's work over men without considering the impact this can

have on communities. Ignorance of such sensitivities can result in a backlash against the few rights that women do have. Twentieth Century Afghan history clearly shows a cycle of reform driven by the centre, often promoting women's rights, met by conservative rural resistance, often violent, as traditional ways of life are challenged. As such, it is vital that Afghan men are educated about the benefits of women's participation in economic and social life so they come to support and understand the needs of their wives, daughters, sisters and mothers. Gaining traction in this area will take time and effort but it is important. The role of gender in conflict or post-conflict situations should not be considered in terms of the potential value of either men or women to an operation but as a vital aspect to any population-focused security effort.

The importance of engaging with Afghan women has gradually been realised by international forces in Afghanistan. The US Marine Corps deployed its first Female Engagement Team (FET) in 2009, when female Marines were tasked to support a cordon-and-knock operation in Farah Province. The female Marines met with the village women, engaging in lengthy discussion as well as distributing school supplies and hygiene products. The After-Action Review noted that the two significant benefits of the mission had been information gathering and an information operations victory.¹⁶ The 2nd Marine Expeditionary Brigade began to employ more female teams and, in November 2009, International Joint Command Headquarters mandated that all International and Afghan security forces establish FETs.¹⁷ A UK female engagement approach was developed during 2010, with a Tactical Doctrine Note on FETs issued in April 2011. The FETs normally comprise one or two individuals per battlegroup to act as a conduit for information between British forces and the local population, particularly but not limited to its women. However, a lack of appropriately trained personnel with experience of dealing with gender issues or engagement, combined with a limited number of personnel with the appropriate language skills, has meant that progress has been disappointingly slow and UK FETs are unlikely to achieve a significant role before the end of combat operations in 2014. Furthermore, FETs continue to be poorly integrated into wider influence operations and patrols, often being employed at short-notice without adequate planning. This limited employment has not capitalised on the opportunities the FETs present. The prevailing military attitude towards female engagement appears largely to be one of "what can women in the military do for us" rather than "what can we do for local women". As conflicts become increasingly complex and the battle for influence continues, the ability to understand and address the security concerns of the entire population, including women and not just the male portion of it, will continue to be a critical component of successful operations and post-conflict planning.

In Support of Gender Mainstreaming

In stark contrast to the approach of western militaries, the UN has taken a more dynamic view of how to meet such challenges. The UN Department for Peacekeeping Operations (UN DPKO) released a policy directive on gender equality in 2006 to implement the UN's gender mainstreaming strategy, followed in 2010 by *Guidelines for Integrating a Gender Perspective*

into the Work of United Nations Military in Peacekeeping Operations. The DPKO's policy is built around four principles: inclusiveness; non-discrimination; standard setting; and efficiency. These principles require that both men and women are consulted about the decisions affecting them and that such decisions uphold and protect equal rights for all. They also require that peacekeeping missions provide a role model for gender equality, including women's participation in decision-making, to inspire local women and show communities the positive effects of integrating both sexes into the peace process. Finally, operational efficiency demands that peacekeeping missions harness all human resources capacity to sustain the peace process.¹⁸

UN peacekeeping missions now employ gender experts to promote and support gender sensitivity in the implementation of their mandate.¹⁹ There are currently nine gender advisers as part of mission headquarters on peacekeeping operations, supplemented by gender focal points in each functional unit, normally established as an additional duty. Gender advisors and focal points can be of either sex and have three priority tasks: to provide strategic planning and policy advice; to provide operational support; and to provide training and capacity development for mission personnel.²⁰ To further promote effective mainstreaming, Gender Task Forces are established at mission and headquarters levels. In Afghanistan, for example, the UN Assistance Mission in Afghanistan (UNAMA) is actively involved in supporting the Afghan Government's Gender Mainstreaming Task Force.²¹ These efforts are achieving mixed results, with varying degrees of success across areas of work such as women's participation in politics or peace negotiations, disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration (DDR), legal and judicial reforms and security sector reforms.²² Changing deeply ingrained social habits is a long and complicated process that is constantly evolving. Understanding and accountability of senior mission management will be crucial for driving future improvements.

The UN is not alone in recognising the importance of women and gender to the conduct of operations. The North Atlantic Council has been working with NATO member countries since 2007 to implement Resolution 1325.²³ According to its briefing paper on Women, Peace and Security, 'NATO is working to mainstream gender perspectives into its operations by educating and training staff, with a view to developing better operational procedures' and to 'increase female participation in the international military and political staff' of member countries.²⁴ However, while there are a number of publications on NATO's website regarding gender, there is little evidence that this is producing meaningful change in member countries and the conduct of operations. NATO Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen has recognised the need to consider women's concerns in that 'the empowerment of women in unstable countries benefits not only them, but all of us. It is crucial component of a comprehensive approach to the security challenges of the 21st Century'.²⁵ In Afghanistan, this has led to the appointment of gender advisors in ISAF Joint Command and ISAF Headquarters. In 2009, NATO published a Directive on integrating gender setting out a number of key concepts including striving for a representative workforce, training for all staff on the protection, rights and needs of women and girls and the importance of involving women in operations and

missions.²⁶ It also suggested that deployment and national training programmes should include cultural awareness that provides appropriate understanding of the gender context in the area of operations.²⁷ Such training, however, focuses heavily on equal opportunities, diversity and sexual harassment rather than the gendered dimensions of conflict and affected populations. Then Chairman of NATO's Military Committee, Admiral di Paola, stated 'the challenge for NATO is to ensure that gender perspectives are an integral part of every mission that unfolds'; this remains work in progress.²⁸

The UK, as a permanent member of the Security Council, has endorsed Resolution 1325 and has led the way by publishing a National Action Plan (UK NAP) on Women, Peace and Security, which clearly recognises the importance of meeting women's needs and promoting gender equality to securing durable peace.²⁹ The Ministry of Defence (MOD) has commitments under the UK NAP to reduce the impact of conflict on women and to promote their inclusion in conflict resolution, including the greater integration of gender into defence activity and the need for all personnel to be aware of the women, peace and security agenda. However, these core principles have yet to be fully embraced by military culture and so-called 'women's issues' remain poorly understood and are deemed to be of low importance; Equality and Diversity training, for example, does not include gender issues on operations.

In increasingly hybrid conflicts, defence will have to act alongside other government departments and non-governmental organisations; the armed forces must seek to better understand and support activities designed to promote gender equality in conflict and post-conflict situations. Ultimately, what happens to women is not just a women's issue but is a central question for peace and stability that has fundamental consequences for communities. While addressing these questions is not the sole responsibility of the military, armed forces must do more in the application of gender mainstreaming principles, including the incorporation of gender considerations within joint doctrine. Gender equity has positive effects on security and development, is morally fair and is vital to the successful conduct of future operations when it is considered as a central tenet of influence activity.

Summary

Any military operation ultimately stands or falls on its understanding of its adversary and the environment in which its forces operate and gender is a crucial part of that understanding. There can be no lasting or meaningful security unless the needs of the whole population are met, so women's security concerns need to be addressed. The perspectives of both men and women need to be fully incorporated into policy, planning and programme delivery; in particular, women must be able to participate fully in all of these activities as they are so often underrepresented or ignored. The importance of gender issues, and the failure to understand and address them, has been particularly evident during counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and it is crucial that key lessons which have been identified are not lost for future operations of all descriptions. The principles of gender mainstreaming need to become a core part of military thinking and included in JDP04 on its next review. The MOD needs to

develop gender and cultural expertise across the rank structure as well as enhancing the gender awareness of all military personnel and this needs to go far beyond just the current and bureaucratically compliant Equality and Diversity training. In addition, it is vital that senior defence leadership and policy makers adopt these principles as an important part of war-winning strategies. The UK Government has already demonstrated its commitment to gender mainstreaming through the publication of the UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security; the MOD must now embrace this nationally endorsed strategy and implement programmes that will fully deliver its intentions.

Notes

¹ Gender refers specifically to the socially constructed concept of traits and behaviours associated with each sex; men can be just as constrained by notions of masculinity as women can be by notions of femininity. The principles of gender mainstreaming promote the inclusion of all people, regardless of sex, in all planning and policy activities.

² Ministry of Defence *Strategic Trends Programme: The Future Character of Conflict* (Shrivenham, Defence Doctrine and Concepts Centre, 2010), p.6

³ Camille P Conaway, 'Charting Progress: The Role of Women in Reconstruction and Stabilization', Companion Article to the Special Report, Stabilization and Reconstruction Series, (Washington D.C., United States Institute of Peace, 2005) p. 17

⁴ *ibid.* p.20

⁵ Rae Lesser Blumberg, *Making the Case for the Gender Variable: Women and the Wealth and Well-being of Nations* (Washington DC, US Agency for International Development, 1989) p. xv

⁶ *ibid.*

⁷ Isobel Coleman, 'The Better Half: Helping Women Help the World', *Foreign Affairs*, Vol. 89 No. 1 (2010) p. 127; Cristina Killingsworth, "Empowering Women in Conflict Zones: An Interview with Zainab Salbi", *Yale Journal of International Affairs*, Vol. 6, No. 1 (2011) p.14

⁸ *ibid.* p. 4; Donna Pankhurst, 'The 'Sex War' and Other Wars: Towards a Feminist Approach to Peacebuilding' in Haleh Afshar and Deborah Eade (Eds.) *Development, Women, and War: Feminist Perspectives* (London, Oxfam Publishing, 2004), p. 14

⁹ Conaway, *Charting Progress*, p.6

¹⁰ UK 2000 Time Use Survey <http://www.statistics.gov.uk/TimeUse/default.asp>

¹¹ Resolutions 1820 (2008), 1888 (2009), 1889 (2009) and 1960 (2010)

¹² United Nations Development Programme, *Human Development Report 2004: Cultural Liberty In Today's Diverse World* (New York, United Nations Development Programme, 2004), p.23

¹³ Ann Jones, 'Remember the Women?', *The Nation*, 21 October 2009

¹⁴ Jennifer Heath, 'Introduction' in Jennifer Heath and Ashraf Zahedi (Eds.) *Land of the Unconquerable: The Lives of Contemporary Afghan Women* (Berkeley and Los Angeles, California: University of California Press Ltd, 2011) p. 15

¹⁵ Neamatollah Nojumi, Dyan E Mazurana and Elizabeth Stites, *After the Taliban: Life and Security in Rural Afghanistan* (Plymouth, Rowman and Littlefield Publishers, Inc., 2009), p.91

¹⁶ Sasha Mehra, *Equal Opportunity Counterinsurgency: The Importance of Afghan Women in U.S. Counterinsurgency Operations* (Masters' Thesis, US Army Command and General Staff College

Fort Leavenworth, Kansas, 2010), p.22

¹⁷ Matt Pottinger, Hali Jilani, and Claire Russo, 'Half-Hearted: Trying to Win Afghanistan without Afghan Women', *Small Wars Journal*, 18 February 2010, p. 1

¹⁸ Department of Peacekeeping Operations [DPKO], *DKPO Policy Directive: Gender Equality in UN Peacekeeping Operations*, (New York, UN Secretariat, 2006), p. 3

¹⁹ Department of Peacekeeping Operations [DPKO], *Guidelines for Gender Advisers and Gender Focal Points in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations* (New York, UN Secretariat, 2008), p.4
²⁰ *ibid.*

²¹ DPKO, Progress Report 2010, p. 12

²² Department of Peacekeeping Operations [DPKO], *Ten-year Impact Study on Implementation of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) on Women, Peace and Security in Peacekeeping* (New York, UN Secretariat, 2010)

²³ NATO, *NATO Briefing Paper: Women, Peace and Security* (Brussels, NATO Public Diplomacy Division, 2010), p. 1

²⁴ *ibid.* p. 2

²⁵ *ibid.*

²⁶ NATO, *Bi.Sc Directive 40-1 Integrating UN SCR 1325 and Gender Perspectives in the NATO Command Structure Including Measures for Protection During Armed Conflict* (Brussels, Supreme Allied Commander Europe, 2009), p.1-2

²⁷ *ibid.* p. 1-2

²⁸ NATO, Briefing Paper, p. 2

²⁹ *UK Government National Action Plan UNSCR 1325 Women, Peace and Security* (London, HMSO, 2010), p1

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