



Injured Syrian women arrive at a field hospital 15 August 2012 after an air strike hit their homes in the town of Azaz on the outskirts of Aleppo, Syria. (Photo by Khalil Hamra, Associated Press)

Coping with Noncombatant Women in the Battlespace



Incorporating United Nations Security Council
Resolution 1325 into the Operational Environment

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When soldiers prepare to deploy to a conflict zone, it is logical for them to learn as much as possible about the area in which they will be operating. The enemy already has the home-field advantage; it is only appropriate to mitigate that advantage by learning as much as one can about the land and the people who live there. Additionally, it is important to learn more about the growing power of nonstate groups, the mounting importance of multinational organizations, and the shifting cast of allies and partner nations that may become involved in operations for their own purposes, and how each adds complexity to, and affects, operational environments.

To our Army's disadvantage, it must remain adaptable to fight across the geographical spectrum, which means it is compelled to train generically when there is no known specific threat or target. Therefore, there will be a shortage of time to train on specific geographical areas and focus on familiarizing the force with specific cultures as unexpected contingencies arise. However, even in the face of so many unknowns, experience has shown that there are constants that can be expected to emerge as factors during most foreseeable operations. These can be anticipated and our forces should prepare to deal with them. Among these are constants that were not fully recognized until comparatively recently.

Among such previously underappreciated constants is the influence noncombatant women living in the operational area have on the success or failure of operations. Experience has shown that knowing what a host-nation's population (young or old, majority or minority, male or

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female) really wants for their own state or country is key to gaining an understanding of a society. When factors of ethnicity, race, or gender are considered and included during the planning process, the outcome of the mission can be greatly affected.¹

With the above in context, over the last seventeen years of continuous U.S. involvement in both conflict as well as preconflict stabilization missions, a growing body of knowledge gleaned from both practical experience as well as organized research is revealing that the final success of stability operations is largely dependent on the ultimate status of women in the battlespace. It appears that the better women are cared for during stability operations, and the more they are included in the governing institutions of a society in the aftermath of conflict, the more likely the success of stabilization.² In contrast, the less the welfare and concerns of women are incorporated into planned stability actions, the less probability of success.

Knowledge regarding the dynamics such factors ultimately play in operational planning can assist in the efforts by U.S. forces to prevent societies from becoming failed states and can enhance the ability of those societies to transition into prosperous nations that can be governed and can protect themselves against new threats.

Therefore, a major consideration during operational planning is mitigating the lack of attention paid to vulnerable populations such as women and children, who typically make up over half of a society's population. Historically, militaries have neglected to include factors related to vulnerable populations during the planning, execution, and assessment of operations. Research by the United Nations (UN) has shown that most militaries tend to think these issues are not to be discussed until after the fighting has ceased.³ However, critical analysis of past stabilizations appears to highlight that this line of thought is not logical for future conflict prevention or operational mission success.

Therefore, in stark contrast to previous planning methodology, the considerable effect vulnerable populations, of which women make up a large part, can have on the fight should be planned for and monitored during the entire campaign. A way of looking at these types of operational concerns, which has been gaining salience due to their contributions to successful mission execution, is the incorporation into planning of UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS).

A Brief History of UNSCR 1325

In 2000, the UN Security Council adopted Resolution 1325, formally recognizing how conflict affects women and children differently than men.⁴



It is a legal framework that addresses not only the inordinate impact of war on women but also the pivotal role women should and do play in conflict management, conflict resolution, and sustainable peace. Some of the key actions it calls for include

- ◆ increased representation of women in decision-making processes related to conflict resolution, peace, and security;
- ◆ better protection of women under international human-rights law during armed conflict;
- ◆ special attention to women's welfare and roles in pursuit of postwar justice and disarmament, demobilization, rehabilitation, and reintegration of refugees; and
- ◆ encouragement of member states to significantly increase their support of initiatives that integrate women during peace, protect women during conflict, and provide gender-sensitive training.

In 2011, President Barack Obama signed Executive Order 13595, "Instituting a National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security."⁵ The national action plan represents "ongoing government-wide efforts to leverage

The United Nations (UN) Security Council votes unanimously to adopt Resolution 1325 on 31 October 2000 at the UN headquarters in New York City, urging an enhanced role for women in preventing conflict, promoting peace, and assisting in postconflict reconstruction within UN operations. Resolution 1325 calls on all actors involved to adopt a gender perspective when negotiating and implementing peace agreements and further calls on all parties to armed conflict to fully respect international law applicable to the human rights of women and girls as civilians and as refugees. (Photo by Milton Grant, UN)

U.S. diplomatic, defense, and development resources to improve the participation of women in peace and conflict prevention processes, protect women and girls from gender-based violence, and help ensure that women have full and equal access to relief and recovery resources."⁶

In August 2013, the deputy assistant secretary of defense for rule of law and detainee policy, in coordination with the Joint Staff's deputy director for partnership strategy in the Directorate of Strategic Plans and Policy, created an implementation guide directing all organizational entities within the Department of Defense



to incorporate the concepts into their programs and policies.⁷ Though this guide is currently under revision to align with an updated national action plan, it nevertheless is useful in providing the spirit and intent of the guidance that will be forthcoming.

At present, soldiers, particularly those serving at brigade level or below, may think the concept of considering a gender perspective and integrating it into the planning, execution, and assessment of all operations is outside of what they need to know in order to fight the war on the ground; or that it is above their level of concern and meant only for planners at the strategic or political level. However, the increasingly strategic nature of the operational battlespace, which has resulted from globalization of social media, now makes it imperative for all soldiers, and especially NCOs and junior officers who have the most intimate and first-hand contact with people in the operational area, to become far more familiar with and sensitive to how the social dynamics stemming from the treatment of women affect ultimate success of missions. Therefore, since NCOs and junior officers lead patrols that feed information through their reporting to the

A Palestinian woman argues with an Israeli border policeman 4 September 2015 during a protest against Jewish settlements in the West Bank village of Nabi Saleh near the Palestinian city of Ramallah. (Photo by Mohamad Torokman, Reuters)

overall intelligence picture, the culture of operational planning must change together with the elements of key information, which must be adapted to include observations relative to the evolving status of women in the operational area.

Additionally, field grade officers and senior NCOs analyzing the data collected need to become equally familiar with and far more sophisticated in understanding how female concerns and treatment affect stability operations to ensure that the troops going on patrols are gathering the right information from all relevant sources. Without a necessary change in such collection and understanding, too often troops will continue using the same methodologies for developing sources of information as the previous unit, which may not be depicting an accurate intelligence picture of what

is actually happening. While methods for developing trained sources may be a proven technique to serve a specific end, this technique may not tap the intelligence-rich observations and opinions of the average person on the street, including observations from vulnerable populations, with whom soldiers have contact as part of the broader intelligence effort. As a result, the intelligence picture developed only from trained sources has a real chance of being skewed, highly biased, and just dramatically incomplete.

This could be analogized as an investigator trying to gather information from witnesses of a crime. No two witnesses will have the same statement on what occurred because all of their perspectives are different. Their life experiences and their socially constructed upbringing will influence how they interpret what they saw. No matter how many times an investigator goes back to a particular witness for information, it will most likely alter little from the initial statement. It would be foolish to think that civilians encountered in conflict areas would be different than any other witnesses.

Additionally, with a somewhat changed focus on certain aspects of intelligence collections as they relate to direct contact with and collection on vulnerable populations, it needs to be highlighted that NCOs will play an ever-increasing role in the staff process at all organizational levels because decisions and actions at higher echelons cannot be executed successfully unless they are supported by the NCOs collecting information and executing actions at the tactical and operational levels.

Introducing WPS to the Force

In an effort to introduce planning emphasis related to vulnerable populations into the I Corps planning culture, new intelligence and analytical techniques were included in Exercise Talisman Saber 2015 (TS 15), a biennial combined training activity designed to train Australian and U.S. military forces in planning and conducting combined task force operations. TS 15 was the first combined, joint-level exercise in which U.S. Pacific Command, more specifically I Corps, was required to integrate gender perspectives supporting UNSCR 1325. Australia's designation of WPS integration as the exercise's third training objective was the drive behind the inclusion.

In April 2015 (three months prior to the exercise), I Corps identified a three-person team to support the accomplishment of the WPS training objective. The

assistant chief of staff (G-9) identified a male civil affairs senior NCO to serve as I Corps's internal representative and provide continuity for the program. The NCO assisted a female civilian contractor (a gender expert) who acted as the primary gender advisor to the I Corps commander.⁸ The third member of the team was a female Army Reserve civil affairs field grade officer with several years of experience in the field of gender studies.

The I Corps commander, during his initial remarks for academics week, mentioned the importance of WPS for mission success and spoke of the need to incorporate UNSCR 1325 guidance on WPS during the exercise. Though the majority of the soldiers that would support the exercise heard those comments, the guidance had little impact as most of them were ignorant as to what it was or how to apply the concepts. This became evident the following week during the ramp-up exercise (RAMPEX). The team's primary observation was that the majority of I Corps's soldiers (with exception of the primary exercise planning staff) were completely unaware of UNSCR 1325, gender mainstreaming, or their roles in the exercise. This was despite having a block of instruction a week prior on the topic by the civilian contractor.⁹

Key Lessons Learned

To ensure any training is successful, standards must be upheld. One of those is enforcing accountability, especially when training on a new concept in military planning and operations. One of the primary responsibilities of an NCO or an officer is to uphold and enforce accountability. It should have been the primary staff officers (colonels) and their sergeants major at the corps level that ensured their soldiers grasped the basic concepts of gender considerations and the incorporation of UNSCR 1325.

Additionally, new concepts like incorporating a gender perspective must have the support of the entire command team. Without leader emphasis from the commanding general down to the team leader, there is little chance units will take incorporating the concept of gender perspective as an effective planning consideration.

Further observations made during the RAMPEX showed there was a considerable amount of confusion about, and resistance to, incorporating WPS from staff members. The heaviest resistance to inclusion came from those with less understanding of the subject, which correlated with those who were comfortable with the way

they were already conducting their planning and operations. Those few who did grasp the concept of incorporation of a gender perspective were inclined to include it in their operations and were willing to ask for additional information on how they could better incorporate it.

A successful effort during the RAMPEX was the creation of a standard operating procedure for when soldiers would be exposed to human rights violations, specifically, human trafficking and sexually based gender violence. This product, termed “Soldier’s Card,” was later utilized by one of the major subordinate commands during the exercise. The unit was confronted with a situation in which young children were being smuggled out of the country for slavery under the guise that their uncle was transporting them to their family in a dislocated citizen camp. Because the soldiers took the time to read the standard operating procedure, which gave them a tool for identifying what that situation could look like, the unit was able to recognize what was really going on, detain the human trafficker, and reunite the children with their parents.

WPS in the exercise. During the two to three days leading up to the start of the exercise, the WPS team prioritized incorporating gender into current operations as well as mentoring subordinate gender focal points at the division level.¹⁰ Once the exercise started, the time-intensive demands of the battle rhythm left no dedicated time to continue training the force. From an after-action review perspective, the team should have dedicated time to educate personnel during the exercise through informal opportunities, possibly training individuals or sections during short breaks or creating short learning points and cycling them through with other posted morale, welfare, and recreational advertisements and announcements on television screens that were in the break rooms. In addition, training on UNSCR 1325 and gender mainstreaming should have been set up or directed for those who did not attend the classroom training, such as the liaison officers and soldiers from the major subordinate commands, many of whom were not even aware that there was a WPS training objective.

The team’s general assessment during the middle of the exercise was that the majority of the I Corps staff were still uneducated on the concept of WPS. This was exacerbated by neglecting to ensure soldiers participating in the exercise conducted a twenty- to sixty-minute familiarization course on Joint Knowledge Online—as the operation order instructed in its coordinating

instructions. Ensuring course participation would have given the entire force a basic understanding of what WPS was and why the unit was incorporating UNSCR 1325 into their mission.

Different divisions, different mindsets. Under I Corps, the designated combined forces land component command (CFLCC), there were two assigned infantry divisions that displayed markedly different levels of proficiency in the incorporation of UNSCR 1325. The first did very little in regards to WPS inclusion. It was evident through e-mail conversations that they were not going to place any priority on implementation of WPS. The task for inclusion was assigned to a female Australian officer who was given little guidance and no means to effectively communicate with the I Corps team. Not only did they fail to incorporate WPS but they also failed at training personnel in their force to establish continuity for future operations and exercises like TS 17, where the division will act as the CFLCC.

The other division followed through on what was expected by the Department of Defense as per the implementation guide. This division appointed a gender field advisor who read the CFLCC gender annex, utilized it as a guide, and established necessary reports, systems, and guidance for subordinate units, which led to incorporating gender mainstreaming effectively in the division.

The first division is a U.S. Army (active-duty) infantry division. It is my observation that they have been institutionalized with decades of carrying out military planning methodology, ensnared in a monotonous routine of executing the same operations year after year. They continually train for the same exercises, which utilize the same planning materials that their predecessors used. All their objectives are based off the same training guidance that faintly changed from the previous year. Their training cannot be based off a specific mission; it must be spread over the wide gamut of missions as they must be able to respond to threats anywhere in the world. They stick to their routine because it works, and they choose not to change because the fear of new concepts pulls them out of their comfort zone. This is no different from many other infantry units in today’s Army.

The other division, an Army National Guard infantry division, did not plan using the same mindset as the active-duty division. My observations are that the National Guard is a conglomerate of professionally trained soldiers who are also civilians. Their training is also directed



through training guidance and a mission-essential task list like that of their active-duty counterparts, but their time for training is extremely limited, giving them a different set of priorities. From my observations, the focus of their training was toward their certification to be a deployable unit and succeeding in the training objectives established for TS 15 that would certify them to deploy. Of course, one of those training objectives was the incorporation of WPS.

Even though environments differ for all soldiers, in general, I believe the active-duty military mindset is different from that of someone who spends the majority of his or her professional career working in the civilian sector. It is my observation that soldiers with civilian business-world interaction can be more adaptable and accepting of change. Civilian businesses have to adapt to ever-changing climates and demographics to continue to remain successful, and many civilian employees have learned to think “big picture” with broader perspectives so they can remain competitive in a tight economy, whereas active-duty leaders keep their lower-enlisted soldiers focused narrowly on a few tasks to accomplish the mission.

A Syrian Democratic Forces (SDF) fighter helps civilian refugees, including large numbers of women and children, who were evacuated by the SDF from an Islamic State-controlled neighborhood of Manbij 12 August 2016 in Aleppo Governorate, Syria. The SDF said the Islamic State was using civilians as human shields. (Photo by Rodi Said, Reuters)

The guard unit personnel were able to understand how incorporating the concept of a gender perspective would enable them to have greater success because it incorporated a broader perspective in the analysis of the conflict. Doing so gave them greater operational understanding of their environment. They did not push back or reject the concept as their sister division did, but rather they accepted it and used it to their advantage for mission success.

Leadership endorsement for WPS incorporation was also emphasized repeatedly by the Guard command team, with their division’s chief of staff emphasizing to the soldiers to think about how WPS ties into operations and how the second- and third-order effects would affect the success of the mission. He also tied

together intelligence, manpower, planning, logistics, personnel management, and all other aspects of the fight, showing that all elements have their part to play in mission success. He used an all-inclusive approach and challenged his soldiers to do the same.

A common philosophical aphorism of unknown origin states, “wisdom, if obtained, only comes after much experience and much reflection.” Something military leaders must never forget is that their ability to show their subordinates the bigger picture by providing them with purpose, direction, and motivation is imperative to the success of the mission. In my twenty-three years of military experience, I have found that soldiers’ attitudes have always been a direct reflection of the type of leadership they receive. If their leadership gives the impression that something is not important, soldiers will follow that lead. As with the differences in the two divisions, you could certainly tell which command supported it and which one did not.

Post-exercise survey. On the final day of the exercise, one-hundred and twenty anonymous surveys were distributed through all CFLCC staff sections; one-hundred and two were returned. The results confirmed many of the points made through this article. The main point it confirmed was that most leaders placed little to no emphasis on UNSCR 1325 or incorporating the concept of a gender perspective into the exercise despite it being a training objective and emphasized by the commanding general.

The following comments are some responses to the question, “What is the main thought that comes to mind when you hear WPS?” They reflect how leadership values became represented in the thoughts and attitudes of subordinates. In order of frequency, responders said,

- WPS is a woman’s issue;
- WPS is about protecting women’s rights;
- WPS does not apply to me or my job; and
- WPS is another staff function that is a duplication of effort.

All of these are false assumptions and could have been easily dispelled had the persons making them attended the academics training or taken the online training course.

Another pertinent response set was the answers to “What did you wish you had learned about WPS that

could have been useful (during the exercise)?” Soldiers expressed that they wanted

- to have received information and training along with expectations from leadership;
- to know impacts to targeting;
- to see how WPS applies at the operational and tactical levels; and
- to understand how operational implementation shapes strategic efforts.

These comments indicate that soldiers have a desire to learn about this new concept. Soldiers need their NCOs to learn new concepts, like WPS, that will benefit their long-term efforts in operations. They also need to hear from their officers the importance of these concepts and how these concepts are tied into the larger picture of mission success. Most of all, these soldiers want their leaders to take the time to teach them.

The “So What”

The growing power of nonstate groups, the mounting importance of multinational organizations, and the shifting cast of allies and partner nations are adding complexity to operational environments. For years, the military has ignored the effects that vulnerable populations such as women and children have as active agents in combat and how they contribute to mitigating conflict. Military history and experience have repeatedly shown that unfamiliarity with the local culture and society can result in a failure to anticipate challenges and an inability to accomplish national objectives. Yet, military leaders continue to focus the majority of their efforts on “kinetic” war-fighting capabilities and continue to presume conflicts are exclusively male oriented, perpetuating the notion that peace is solely delivered through the efforts of those same males who are doing the fighting.

With the recent constraints on resources, it is more important than ever to have soldiers with specific training and awareness of UNSCR 1325 who are able to embed the concept of a gender perspective into every staff section to provide different perspectives that can positively affect the outcome of a conflict. If certain considerations are not taken into account, a population’s trust can be lost, turning those who we are there to help against us. Losing the trust of the population can mean a greater resistance postconflict and a drawn-out transition phase to peace and stability operations. Our forces cannot

handle another drawn-out campaign that will continue to stretch our resources and our manpower thin.

Studies continue to show that WPS implementation and incorporating the concept of gender perspective save time, money, and lives.¹¹ Integrating WPS also adds a level of realism to training exercises and enhances the exercise of mission command during training by

enabling leaders to deal with a wider range of circumstances that have real-world implications.

NCOs and officers owe it to their soldiers to enable them with the ability to understand the big picture. They must take the time to grow their soldiers into the leaders of the future and not merely use them as implements to fight with today. ■

Notes

1. North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) Bi-Strategic Command Directive 40-1, "Integrating UNSCR 1325 and Gender Perspective into the NATO Command Structure," 8 August 2012, accessed 28 February 2017, http://www.nato.int/nato_static_fl2014/assets/pdf/pdf_2015_04/20150414_20120808_NU_Bi-SCD_40-11.pdf. According to NATO, gender refers to the social attributes associated with being male and female learned through socialization and determines a person's position and value in a given context. This refers to the relationships between women and men, and girls and boys, as well as the relations between women and between men. These attributes, opportunities, and relationships are socially constructed and are learned through socialization processes. Gender does not equate to woman. Sex is the classification of people as male or female. At birth, infants are assigned a sex based on a combination of bodily characteristics, including chromosomes, hormones, internal reproductive organs, and genitalia.

2. Valerie M. Hudson et al., "The Heart of the Matter: The Security of Women and the Security of States," chap. 4 in *Sex and World Peace* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2012).

3. Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations [UN] Security Council Resolution 1325* (UN Women, 2015), accessed 28 February 2017, <http://wps.unwomen.org/~media/files/un%20women/wps/highlights/unw-global-study-1325-2015.pdf>.

4. UN Security Council, Resolution 1325 (2000) [on Women, Peace, and Security], 31 October 2000, accessed 2 March 2017, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf>.

5. Instituting a National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security, 76 C.F.R. 80,205 (19 December 2011), <https://www.gpo.gov/fdsys/pkg/FR-2011-12-23/pdf/2011-33089.pdf>. President Barack Obama called for the creation of a national action plan (NAP) on women, peace, and security (WPS). NAP describes the U.S. government's course of action to accomplish the following five principles:

First, the engagement and protection of women as agents of peace and stability are central to United States efforts to promote security, prevent, respond to, and resolve conflict, and rebuild societies.

Second, by building on the goals for gender integration described in the *U.S. National Security Strategy* and the *Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review*, the U.S. efforts on WPS complement and enhance existing initiatives to advance gender equality and women's empowerment, ensure respect for human rights, and address the needs of vulnerable populations in crisis and conflict environments.

Third, in executing this policy, the United States is guided by the principle of inclusion, seeking out the views and participation of a wide variety of stakeholders—women and girls; men and boys; and members of marginalized groups, including youth, ethnic, racial, or religious minorities; persons with disabilities; displaced persons and indigenous peoples; lesbian, gay, bisexual, and transgender individuals; and people from all socioeconomic strata.

Fourth, in order to maximize the impact of the NAP, the United States seeks to ensure that activities in support of WPS are coordinated among all relevant departments and agencies of the government, integrated into

relevant U.S. foreign policy initiatives, and enhanced by engagement with international partners.

Finally, U.S. government agencies are accountable for the implementation of the policies and initiatives endorsed in the NAP.

6. United States Agency of International Development, "United States Strategy to Prevent and Respond to Gender-Based Violence Globally: 2016 Update," June 2016, accessed 2 March 2017, <https://www.state.gov/documents/organization/258703.pdf>.

7. Anne Witkowsky, "Integrating Gender Perspectives within the Department of Defense," *PRISM* 6, no. 1 (2016): 34.

8. The role of gender advisor (GENAD) is the official program of record for all activities to include plans, training, and exercises concerning WPS, gender equality, and gender mainstreaming. It is the responsibility of the GENAD to provide a conduit for WPS implementation in policies, plans, and activities.

9. Gender and UN Peacekeeping Operations (New York: UN Department of Peacekeeping Operations, October 2005), 1–4, accessed 14 April 2017, http://www.un.org/en/peacekeeping/publications/gender_brochure.pdf; see also Committee on Women in the NATO Forces (CWINF), CWINF Guidance for NATO Gender Mainstreaming (Brussels: NATO, June 2007), accessed 14 April 2017, http://www.nato.int/issues/women_nato/cwinf_guidance.pdf. Gender mainstreaming is defined as a strategy to achieve gender equality by assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies, and programs in all areas and at all levels, in order to assure that the concerns and experiences of women and men are taken into account in the design, implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of policies and programs in all political, economic, and societal spheres. This will lead to women and men benefiting equally. Gender mainstreaming in this context represents the process to recognize and incorporate the role gender plays in relation to NATO's various operational missions. Gender mainstreaming does not focus solely on women, but the benefits of mainstreaming practices recognize women's disadvantaged position in various communities.

10. Gender focal point (GFP) is a dual-hatted position that supports the commander in implementing directives and procedures with gender perspective. The GFP maintains functional dialogue with the GENAD but reports within the chain of command. The GFP at the tactical level ensures that gender perspective is fully integrated into the daily tasks of the operation. These activities could include, but are not limited to, patrolling, enabling the provision of humanitarian aid, search procedures, assisting national security forces, assessing the different security risks of men and women in monitoring and evaluation activities, and providing gender training for NATO personnel.

11. UN Security Council, "Report of the Secretary-General on Women and Peace and Security" (New York: UN, 16 September 2015), accessed 28 February 2017, <http://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/Report%20of%20the%20Secretary%20General%20on%20women%20and%20peace%20and%20security.pdf>; Natalia Zakharova, *Women and Peace and Security: Guidelines for National Implementation* (New York: UN Women, 2012), accessed 28 February 2017, <http://www.unwomen.org/~media/Headquarters/Media/Publications/en/02BPlanonWomenandPeaceandSecurity.pdf>; Hudson et al., "The Heart of the Matter."