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UN Resolution 1325 at 15: Understanding Gender and Peacekeeping*

By Louise Olsson and Theodora-Ismene Gizelis

Synopsis

As UN Resolution 1325 celebrates its 15th anniversary, it is time to take stock of its progress and challenges. On one central theme of the resolution, gender and peacekeeping, there is a need for more systematic knowledge about how we can create a more equal peace for men and women, and how we can ensure a more gender-aware implementation.

Commentary

ON 13 OCTOBER 2015, the United Nations Security Council held its yearly Open Debate on Resolution 1325, the first thematic resolution on Women, Peace and Security. The day-long row of statements did indeed contain all the correct rhetoric on a wide array of topics and processes, which today have grown into a very broad agenda.

To take stock of developments, the Open Debate was preceded by an ambitious [Global Study](#). In parallel, the report from the [High Level Panel on Peace Operations](#) complemented the debate. In fact, given the vast amount of information available, it can be difficult to keep track of ongoing developments, even if we limit ourselves to the area of peace operations.

Putting the (Gendered) peace into peacekeeping

In our book [Gender, Peace and Security: Implementing UN Security Council Resolution 1325](#) and in a commentary in [International Peacekeeping](#), we therefore make an attempt to structure the debate and find that current discussion on gender and peacekeeping to a large extent revolves around two strands of questions. First,

what form of peace does peacekeeping contribute to establishing? Hence, it focuses on developing our understanding of the 'gendered' contents of 'peace' in peacekeeping. The second strand focuses on the actual 'keeping'. In short, does it matter how peacekeeping operations are conducted?

[Theodora-Ismene Gizelis'](#) research indicates that more gender-equal societies have a significantly higher capacity for benefitting from any international support provided. Thereby, the result is a decreased risk of renewed conflict. Similarly, there are early indications that female participation – at least at the local level – in post-conflict reconstruction can help UN-led peace missions to overcome some of the many hurdles that frustrate the establishment of a durable peace.

What this also indicates, as [Louise Olsson](#) has previously observed, is that 'peace' should not be presumed to automatically have the same 'quality' for women as it does for men. This is important to note as research often defines peace as the lack of armed conflict. This means that 'peace' does not have a specific content. [Feminist theorists](#) have argued that to use this 'negative' definition of peace disregards the fact that there might not even be 'peace' for women if their security and political roles have not been an integral part of the peace process.

In a more [radical interpretation](#), peacekeeping is even perceived as being part of a militaristic approach to world order which, in turn, is based on gender inequality. Hence, while much research discusses the impact of gender on peacekeeping success, feminist research, in the words of [Cynthia Enloe](#), has instead argued that '[t]o take seriously the full implications of gender entails shining bright lights into the cultures, the structures, and the silences of peacekeeping.' In essence, there is a need to understand that peace is not automatically the same for men and women and that it is highly 'gendered'.

Gender and the keeping of peace

From the mid-1990s, gender mainstreaming became established as the main approach to integrate women's and men's situations and needs in the core work of peace operations. However, [Gizelis](#) highlights that despite the overall interest on the topic there has been little systematic research and evidence on whether the current gender mainstreaming programmes have any discernible impact.

One exception that illustrates the salience of such research is [Helen Basini's](#) study of the disarmament, demobilisation, rehabilitation, and reintegration (DDRR) process in Liberia where she shows that in spite of lobbying, the process never addressed questions of sexual violence and inequalities linked to the process of DDRR.

With the continued release of gender disaggregated data from multilateral institutions such as the [UN, EU, NATO and OSCE](#), research is also on the rise regarding women's participation in peacekeeping operations. In one of the first statistical studies, [Sabrina Karim and Kyle Beardsley](#) examine military components deployed in UN peacekeeping. They find that women personnel are primarily sent to less hostile environments rather than to theatres of operation where conflict violence against local women, in accordance with international policy, would have warranted a higher degree of female military presence.

[Annica Kronsell](#) observes the same phenomena regarding participation in military peacekeeping in Europe. She notes that the problem of women's participation is linked to military organisations not having dealt with norms of masculinity and the ideals of the protected and the protector. To paraphrase [Joshua Goldstein](#), while gender in peacekeeping is a topic that includes both men and women, it “ultimately revolves around men somewhat more than women”.

Considerable progress, despite the critique

The critique from other feminist researchers has been rather severe with regard to how the above focus, in the words of [Sandra Whitworth](#), risks emptying “ ‘gender’ of its radical political potential and shift our attention away from the people who are *affected* by peacekeeping missions and toward those who conduct those missions”. The critique includes specifically that one form of personnel behaviour – Sexual Exploitation and Abuse – is thereby toned down. Withworth argues that this behaviour is instead fundamental to understanding peacekeeping.

In 2013, [Ragnhild Nordås and Siri Rustad](#) compiled the first global dataset on Sexual Exploitation and Abuse. While struggling with data reliability, they still find that large missions operating in a poor country or in conflicts with considerable sexual violence are more likely to record reports of sexual exploitation and abuse. Interestingly, they relate these findings to similar arguments as the feminist literature on the vulnerabilities and perceptions of the personnel who conduct such violence.

It is thus important to note that in spite of the critique, there has been considerable progress in the field of gender and peacekeeping over the last 15 years. The anniversary will, hopefully, contribute to a renewed interest in even further increasing our systematic knowledge both on what peace we seek to create and how we best can keep it.

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