Women, Peace, and Security in Professional Military Education

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Chapter 3
A Strategic Imperative
by Commander Kristen Vechinski, USN*

Would you make the effort to study a new perspective if you knew that you could achieve greater situational awareness than you ever had before? Or would you be outraged if an enemy discovered your neglect and used this perspective against you?

~Lena P. Kvarving and Rachel Grimes

Women account for half the world’s population; research shows that when half the population does not participate in conflict prevention and resolution, stability and prosperity are unlikely. Moreover, studies reveal that including women in peace building and conflict resolution results in peace agreements that are 64 percent more likely to succeed and 35 percent more likely to last at least 15 years. In 2000, the UN championed the strategic imperative of including a gender perspective in peace and security activities with the passage of UNSCR 1325, which laid the foundation for the WPS agenda. The WPS agenda defined a shift in recognizing women as not just victims of conflict but also as valuable resources and contributors to security through participation.

The WPS agenda is not about making conflict safer for women, it is about preventing and ending conflict. The United States faces national security challenges with a rise in nationalism, violent extremism, and transnational criminal activity which promote violence and instability. Today’s dynamic security environment demands the Joint Force be prepared to operate at all levels of competition and must not cede advantage to adversaries by failing to incorporate a gender perspective. This chapter examines how incorporating a gender perspective as a capability can improve military effectiveness by building a more lethal force and capacity which in turn can reduce operational risk.

This chapter focuses on the opportunities to maximize advantage in the security environment through the advancement of the DOD’s defense objectives to promote WPS principles, providing examples of how incorporating a gender perspective im-

* The views expressed in this chapter are solely those of the author. They do not necessarily reflect the opinion of Marine Corps University, the U.S. Marine Corps, the U.S. Navy, the U.S. Army, U.S. Army War College, the U.S. Air Force, or the U.S. government.


94 “Preventing Conflict,” 191.
proved military effectiveness in counterinsurgency operations in Afghanistan and pos-
ing challenges and recommendations based on lessons learned on how incorporating
a gender perspective as an integral element of military operations can increase the
ability of the Joint Force to deliver effects across the competition continuum.

**Evolution**

The UN developed the WPS agenda as a political framework that focuses on gender
in international security based on four pillars for policymaking: prevention, protection,
participation, and relief and recovery. In 2000, the UN unanimously passed the
landmark UNSCR 1325, the first time the Security Council addressed the dispro-
portionate and unique impact of armed conflict on women; recognized the underval-
dered and underutilized contributions women make to conflict prevention, peacekeeping,
conflict resolution, and peace building. The UN further defined WPS concepts with
seven subsequent supplemental resolutions reinforcing the importance of the WPS prin-
ciples in relation to global norms and designed to influence the work of organizations
supporting peace and security activities.

As a result of the landmark WPS agenda, the United States published its first
WPS national action plan in 2011 under Executive Order 13,595. The U.S. nation-
al action plan was the first legal framework to recognize WPS as a key element of
conflict prevention and resolution efforts. In 2016, a second U.S. national action plan
was created, followed by the U.S. Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017, signed
into law in October 2017. Two years later, the United States published the United
States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security, which outlined a comprehensive
whole-of-government approach to WPS. The Women, Peace, and Security Act of
2017 designated DOD as a key federal organization for implementing WPS. In turn,
last year DOD published the WPS SFIP, which highlights three long-term defense
objectives to support the four national WPS lines of effort across 16 DOD equities
supporting 7 global WPS principles.

**WPS—What It Is**

The WPS agenda is a wide-ranging framework that outlines the role of women in
the prevention and resolution of issues such as conflicts, peace negotiations, peace

96 “WILPF’s Women, Peace and Security Programme,” Peace Women, Women’s International League for
Peace and Freedom, accessed 20 January 2021; and UN Security Council, Resolution 1325, Women,
President, White House, 2011); and “What Is UNSCR 1325?: An Explanation of the Landmark Resolution
100 Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan (Washington, DC: Depart-
building, peacekeeping, humanitarian responses, and post-conflict reconstruction. In addition, the WPS agenda emphasizes the increased participation of women and the incorporation of gender perspectives in peace and security activities.\textsuperscript{101} In relation to the security environment, gender can be described as the term to define the social construct related to the role one learns and performs in society as both men and women.\textsuperscript{102} Often gender issues are viewed as matters only related to women. Gender, women, or sex are not interchangeable terms.\textsuperscript{103} Further, WPS is not a woman’s issue, for and by women. To have a gender perspective means to observe, analyze, and understand all the roles individuals play in a culture or society.\textsuperscript{104}

As a social construct, gender varies across cultures. From a gender perspective, war and conflict affect men, women, boys, and girls differently, which is relevant to the planning and execution of military operations. For example, adversaries can leverage gender in the security environment by weaponizing sexual violence or other forms of repression.\textsuperscript{105} The gender ecosystem also includes men’s and boys’ perspectives on human security. A gender perspective takes account of the economic, political, and sociocultural constraints and opportunities of women and men.\textsuperscript{106} To incorporate a gender perspective, the military must not simply embrace this in an internal context of inclusion and diversity but employ it externally as a capability that can have strategic, operational, and tactical impact on military operations.

**WPS—What It Is Not**

Critics argue WPS is a Western agenda and undermines social norms in non-Western countries by incorporating a gender perspective in military operations, which creates unintended consequences by disrupting the existing social order in the security environment. Inadequate cultural training and awareness can create pitfalls for female engagement teams.\textsuperscript{107} Nonetheless, women from non-Western states such as Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Syria, and Libya, risk their lives to resolve conflict and promote peace.\textsuperscript{108} To suggest women involved in peace and security is a Western agenda undermines their contributions to promote stability. For example, the female Kurdish People Protection Units in Syria were instrumental in increasing military effectiveness during the war with the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria (ISIS) near the northern Syrian border. The female-led units executed operations to reclaim key terrain such as

\begin{itemize}
\item \textsuperscript{102} Kvarving and Grimes, “Why and How Gender Is Vital to Military Operations,” 2.
\item \textsuperscript{103} Joana Cook, *A Woman’s Place: US Counterterrorism since 9/11* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2020), 5.
\item \textsuperscript{104} Col Veronica Oswald-Hurtkay, USA, email message to author, 9 February 2021.
\item \textsuperscript{105} Laura Sjoberg, *Gender, War, and Conflict* (Cambridge, United Kingdom: Polity Press, 2014), 41–42.
\item \textsuperscript{106} Cook, *A Woman’s Place*, 5.
\item \textsuperscript{108} Sjoberg, *Gender, War, and Conflict*, 40.
\end{itemize}
Raqqa, the former capital of the Islamic State in Syria.\textsuperscript{109} The female militia members served as a force multiplier that increased lethality and built capacity in their military operations against ISIS. Their participation in security operations also served to promote social and cultural advancement of Kurdish women in their society.

WPS skeptics question why women matter in security operations when it is primarily men who engage in conflict. While it is men who overwhelmingly participate in war and conflict, the number of women soldiers, insurgents, and terrorists is on the rise, in part because of the specific advantages in weaponizing women.\textsuperscript{110} Terrorist groups or insurgent groups may use women in suicide bombing missions because they are less likely to be scrutinized than men. For instance, in the Vietnam Conflict, the Viet Cong sent women into the jungle holding cluster bombs disguised as babies.\textsuperscript{111} In violent extremist organizations, women’s role as terrorist actors in support of political violence has increased. Whether in a traditional combat role or being leveraged for aspects of their gender role in a particular environment, women have always been actors in conflict.\textsuperscript{112} Not all women are peaceful, but overwhelmingly women are the first to mobilize for peace and reconciliation.

Therefore, incorporating WPS principles can be viewed as a complement to other policies and strategies of security partners and supporting institutions such as the UN and NATO. Additionally, others believe that WPS equates to promoting the concept of gender neutrality or more specifically gender blindness. Gender blindness is defined as the lack of awareness of how men and women are differently affected by a situation because of their respective roles, status, and priorities in their societies.\textsuperscript{113} However, gender blindness in military operations is counter to improved effectiveness as it discounts the various interests, threats, or needs of women, men, boys, and girls in a security environment. International organizations such as the World Bank have collected empirical evidence that suggests a gender-blind approach to peace and security will lead to failure and increase instability and violence.\textsuperscript{114}

**WPS—Why It Matters**

The 2017 NSS emphasizes terrorists and transnational criminal organizations “prey on the vulnerable” and actively compete against the United States, its allies, and


\textsuperscript{111} Sjoberg, *Gender, War, and Conflict*, 42.

\textsuperscript{112} Cook, *A Woman’s Place*, 2–4.


its partners. Malign actors pose a threat to national security and human security. Implementing WPS principles in the operational environment is generally considered a soft power approach to security challenges. Soft power tools are persuasive and population-focused that can help shape, influence, or stabilize the environment. Furthermore, the definition of security evolved to emphasize human security where the social and human terrain is as important as the land terrain. Frank Hoffman and Michael Davies emphasize this point with their assertion that “to succeed, Joint commanders must be able to successfully maneuver in the most decisive domain, and that is the Human Domain.” A human security approach requires the understanding of particular threats to a particular group in order for the group of people to have freedom from fear or freedom from want. Naval War College professor Joan Johnson-Freese further highlights the shift in priorities in the security landscape from conventional warfare to irregular warfare where the population is essential to achieving political aims. Similarly, the UN shifted from the state-centric focus of safety from military aggression to one that is centered on the security of individuals and their protection and empowerment. The core of operationalizing WPS principles as a capability to build capacity and increase lethality depends on understanding the forces and trends in the security environment from different perspectives.

The passing of UNSCR 1325 through significant research established the strategic value of a gender perspective in peace and security affairs. The military plays a key role as the organization to operationalize WPS principles in security affairs. In turn, WPS enables the military to maximize its effectiveness in support of national policy goals. In the most basic terms, an effective military succeeds by performing the tasks its political leadership asks of it. According to the Joint Operations, Joint Publication (JP) 3-0, effective operations require an understanding of the multidimensional battlespace, including the “interrelationship of the informational, physical, and human aspects that are shared by the OE [operational environment] and information environment.” There is evidence that incorporating a gender perspective in operations in Afghanistan contributed to improving the effectiveness of ground combat and Special Operations Forces (SOF) missions.

116 Cook, A Woman’s Place, 3.
121 Egnell, “Gender Perspectives and Military Effectiveness.”
122 Joint Operations, Joint Publication 3-0 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2018), iv-1, iv-2.
PART 1

WPS Done Right—Afghanistan
The long wars in Afghanistan and Iraq highlight the population’s significance in the shift from conventional to irregular warfare. Countering violent extremism and insurgency requires more than a traditional military response. General Rupert Smith’s theory, “war amongst people,” states that modern conflict is unlikely to be resolved by force alone, in particular when complex socioeconomic and political problems exist in the security environment. Incorporating a gender perspective as a strategic imperative underscores the relevance of a population centric focus on warfare whether categorized as irregular, hybrid, or new generation warfare. In Afghanistan, the incorporation of a gender perspective as a capability in military operations enhanced operational effectiveness and reduced risk with enhanced situational awareness.

To illustrate, during the insurgency in Iraq, U.S. Marine Corps units created the female Lioness Teams as special cordon and search teams to fill a security gap and improve military effectiveness by mitigating the security limitations of searching the local female population. The culturally sensitive search methods in a gender-segregated area of operations allowed military forces to identify females who were active participants in the conflict and in some cases male insurgents who used full traditional female garments to avoid detection. The complex and asymmetrical threats of the battlespace required an expanded security capacity of forces to have access to all aspects of the population. The Lioness Teams joined male Marines and Army soldiers on raids, security patrols, and security checkpoints intended to search for weapons and explosive vests. Using female troops in a population of neutral citizens, including women, children, and the elderly, can create conditions to leverage the population for support. By leveraging both women and men, a counterinsurgency operation has the potential to disrupt insurgent activity and deny a base of support to the adversary.

Similar to Iraq, given Afghanistan’s gender-specific cultural and social norms, military units incorporated a gender perspective as a capability in order to increase military effectiveness with the growing counterinsurgency operations. In 2009, Female Engagement Teams (FETs) in Afghanistan evolved from the success of the Lioness Teams in Iraq as an operational innovation to increase security and information operations and to build credibility with the local population.

125 Cook, A Woman’s Place, 30.
communities, the teams created access to the female population without increasing tension with local Afghan males, in particular village elders who held considerable sway over village politics. Information provided by local village women proved useful; more importantly, the village elders willingly gave their approval since the FETs did not violate their cultural rules. A successful counterinsurgency operation must have a comprehensive knowledge of the society and culture. The inclusion of a gender perspective as capability not only improved information gathering about the communities where U.S. and NATO troops were operating, it enhanced the credibility of the military operations with the local population.

The FETs served a particular operational role in the counterinsurgency campaign. As such, the FETs embodied the definition of enabler: “an organization or capability that supports a particular course of action and/or accomplishment of a particular objective.” In direct support of companies or battalions, the female enablers engaged Afghan men and women to leverage the population in accordance with operational objectives in all phases of counterinsurgency operations. FET employment built capacity in information dissemination, medical outreach and education, security support, and civil-military activities. Further, access to the population allowed the FETs to gather useful intelligence about Taliban and al-Qaeda positioning based on input from local Afghan women. The passive information collection built capacity through improved human terrain understanding. Moreover, the FETs provided an opportunity to leverage a gender focus for cooperation with the local population, operational partners, and international organizations in the complex multidimensional battlespace of Afghanistan. Female enablers in military operations can foster cooperation and respect with the local population across families and social networks, which can be a powerful tool when operating in the human terrain to counter violent extremism.

Furthermore, Afghan men often viewed female soldiers as a third gender, which allowed them to interact with all aspects of the population since the elders did not hold them to the same standards as local women. Confronting threats in the contempo-

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130 Cook, A Woman’s Place, 33–34.

131 Ledet, Turner, and Emeigh, “Recognizing the Ethical Pitfalls of Female Engagement in Conflict Zones,” 204–5.


135 Bedell, “United States Marine Corps Female Engagement Teams.”

136 Sjoberg, Gender, War, and Conflict, 42.


primary security environment requires intervention with both combatants and noncombatants to achieve effects. Incorporating a gender perspective through FET employment increased lethality in security missions and built capacity in women’s governance (via shuras, or councils, and medical outreach events). In a counterinsurgency environment with the population as the center of gravity, mission success depends on the ability to engage and influence the population within complex cultural norms and societal roles. By 2011, NATO’s International Security Assistance Force “stated that the [FETs] were ‘battlefield enablers that influence [and] inform’.”

Founded in the accomplishments of Lioness Teams and FETs, U.S. Special Operations Command (SOCOM) established Cultural Support Teams (CSTs) to support similar humanitarian activities and required search skills. The CST model was not as structured as the FET model. The key difference between the two is that FETs were used for activities to “soften the footprint” of coalition forces while the intent of CSTs was to build capacity for persistent presence and engagement in vulnerable Afghan villages. The CST concept included support of counterterrorism raids and village stability operations (VSO) conducted with SOF personnel as part of the counterinsurgency campaign in Afghanistan. SOCOM commander Admiral Eric Olson championed the all-female team concept. Admiral Olson asserted that the United States needed to be agile, adaptive, and innovative to be effective. Olson built on the idea to incorporate a gender perspective in the special operations missions to “increase the team’s ability to assess cultural climate and understand the local environment.”

To increase the lethality of their teams and offer affective options for commanders, Olson argued with senior leaders that female enablers created a capability worth building. Olson acknowledged that “America wasn’t and isn’t going to kill its way to the end of its post-9/11 wars.” While Olson met with organizational resistance within DOD, Joint Special Operations Command (JSOC) commander Admiral William McRaven supported the assertion that female enablers could make U.S. Army Ranger missions more successful. Both leaders agreed the counterinsurgency mission would not get done if the SOF teams did not have access to half of the Afghanistan population.

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140 Cook, A Woman’s Place, 33–34.
144 Lemmon, Ashley’s War, 13–14.
145 Lemmon, Ashley’s War, 12–13.
146 Cook, A Woman’s Place, 187.
148 Lemmon, Ashley’s War, 14–15.
JSOC’s request for forces for female soldiers to serve alongside the 75th Ranger Regiment during night raids came from the idea of a strategy to make their mission more effective, not by means of gender inclusion as equality.\textsuperscript{149} Correspondingly, senior leaders made the choice of avoiding the “female” label in the branding of the capability and used cultural support to identify the opportunity for the CSTs to access the people and places where all-male units could not. SOCOM leadership recognized that regardless of how proficient SOF teams were at targeting insurgents, teams needed to adopt a gender perspective to understand and develop trust with the local population.\textsuperscript{150}

CSTs demonstrated SOCOM’s strategic approach to improve operational effectiveness of the night raids and VSO missions by incorporating a gender perspective in the security environment. The traditional SOF missions, such as counterinsurgency, stability operations, and foreign internal defense, form the foundation of the VSO mission.\textsuperscript{151} The CSTs increased the lethality through their ability to facilitate communication with the local population when conducting sensitive operations.\textsuperscript{152} Incorporating a gender perspective can expand the battlespace to include all of the population through WPS engagement activities in security, governance, and development.\textsuperscript{153} Army SOCOM commander Lieutenant General John Mulholland reinforced the capability CSTs brought to the fight as a force multiplier through incorporating a gender perspective in the complex security environment. Referencing the CST impact on operations in Afghanistan, he remarked, “Make no mistake about it, these women are warriors; these are great women who have also provided enormous operational success to us on the battlefield by virtue of their being able to contact half the population that we normally do not interact with.”\textsuperscript{154}

Colonel Mark O’Donnell of the 75th Ranger Regiment also supported how CSTs increased effectiveness of information gathering, asserting, “From an intelligence standpoint what they provide by engaging women and children on the objective contributes immeasurably to our success.”\textsuperscript{155} The ability to gather information about terrorist activity from talking to all of the local people allowed the female enablers to pick up crucial information on patterns of behavior. In building trust, the female enablers had access to immediate and actionable information.\textsuperscript{156}

Research from Carnegie Mellon University and Massachusetts Institute of Technology indicates that a group’s collective intelligence may increase as the percentage

\textsuperscript{149} Lemmon, Ashley’s War, 15.
\textsuperscript{150} Lemmon, “The Army’s All-Women Special Operations Teams Show Us How We Will Win Tomorrow’s Wars”; and Jared M. Tracy, “The U.S. Army’s Cultural Support Team Program: Historical Timeline,” Veritas 12, no. 2 (2016).
\textsuperscript{151} Katt, “Blurred Lines,” 107.
\textsuperscript{152} Cook, A Woman’s Place, 187.
\textsuperscript{153} Cook, A Woman’s Place, 188.
\textsuperscript{154} Lemmon, Ashley’s War, 257.
\textsuperscript{155} Lemmon, Ashley’s War, 259.
\textsuperscript{156} Rivers, Beyond the Call, xxi.
of females in the group increases due to women’s “social sensitivity” in reading other people’s emotions, a key skill when gathering information.\textsuperscript{157} In sum, lessons learned from the war in Afghanistan demonstrated military forces cannot always execute all the critical supporting functions without a gender perspective incorporated into military operations. More importantly, incorporating gender perspective as a capability improved operational effectiveness through improved passive intelligence gathering, enhanced legitimacy, and better force protection by accessing all of the Afghan population.

As demonstrated through the operational innovations in Afghanistan, the successful implementation of WPS principles hinges on the flexibility and adaptability of military operations. To date, the DOD has engaged with more than 50 partner nations to demonstrate the significance of women’s meaningful participation in national security as well as share best practices on the recruitment, retention, and employment of women in the military forces to increase interoperability with many U.S. security partners.\textsuperscript{158} WPS needs are different in the various areas of operations as highlighted by the diverse WPS activities of geographic combatant commands.

According to Cori Fleser, a WPS advisor on the Joint Staff, combatant commands and their components have advanced DOD’s implementation by incorporating gender and human security issues in campaign plans, security cooperation, and exercises and training. For example, U.S. Indo-Pacific Command’s (INDOPACOM) WPS office conducted workshops and disaster relief exercises led by U.S. Army Pacific to improve WPS integration in humanitarian and disaster response support. U.S. Southern Command’s WPS program supports women’s participation in security matters during its key leader engagements with strategic partners in their areas of responsibility, while U.S. European Command directs its efforts to an interagency approach to WPS implementation by supporting NATO. Finally, U.S. Africa Command successfully incorporated WPS principles in its peacekeeping activities to build capacity with African troop-contributing countries.\textsuperscript{159}

Utilizing a gender perspective to their advantage, terrorist organizations like ISIS often attempt to exploit gender norms to gain support from local populations and increase instability. Local women’s organizations are repeatedly stakeholders in increasing resilience within the community to counter violent extremism. Recognizing the link between gender perspective and military effectiveness, U.S. Special Operations Command Africa highlighted the role of female security forces and violent extremist organizations’ exploitation of gender dynamics during their 2017–19 Flint-


\textsuperscript{159} Garamone, “Women, Security, Peace Initiative Militarily Effective.”
lock Exercises. The INDOPACOM gender advisor acknowledges that WPS has evolved from a smart power asset to a learned and applied capability.

Adding a gender perspective to military operations not only has the power to elevate the strategic appraisal of how to best use the military instrument to support national security objectives to achieve political goals, it can improve the military effectiveness to achieve those goals. Countering violent extremist organizations (CVEO) has the opportunity to use a gender perspective in the security environment as a capability against armed nonstate actors. CVEO will likely remain an enduring theme in the global security landscape with an increase in right-wing extremism and jihadism. Malign actors such as ISIS affiliates not only spoil peace building and stability, they complicate the human security environment as a strategic challenge to vulnerable states and the allies working with them. As noted, leaders can tailor WPS on the tactical level or incorporate it into regional efforts or theater perspective.

**Way Ahead**
The operational capabilities demonstrated by FETs and CSTs in Afghanistan should not be viewed as just a U.S. Central Command area of responsibility requirement because of the local culture’s strict gender separation. Military operations can employ a gender perspective as a capability in any security environment. When the strategy involves engaging the local population, a gender analysis of the environment is essential.

Implementing WPS principles in future contingencies, to include nonlethal military operations, will likely be necessary to engage with all aspects of the local population. Gender perspective as a capability can allow units to gain better acceptance from the local population and increase tangible information collection to enhance operations.

To maximize the effectiveness of incorporating a gender perspective in the operational environment, implementation of WPS principles should be proactive and not reactive. Effectively assessing and operating in the human terrain is necessary for success in a spectrum of activities: stability, peace, humanitarian, and CVEO operations. The military serves as an integral supporting national instrument in achieving national policy goals to deter aggression, disrupt al-Qaeda and related terrorist networks, and prevent an ISIS resurgence. Integrating WPS principles into conflict prevention and stability operations not only advances important national interests to break the cycle of fragility and promote peaceful self-reliant nations,

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161 Sharon Goveia Feist, email message to author, 19 April 2021.
163 Cook, A Woman’s Place, 418–20.
164 Cook, A Woman’s Place, 204.
165 Cook, A Woman’s Place, 421.
incorporating a gender perspective can improve effectiveness in counterinsurgency operations. Therefore, WPS should not be categorized as a unique consideration, as outlined in Stability Operations, Army Doctrine Publication (ADP) 3-07. Instead, it should be considered a necessary element of a comprehensive approach to the training, planning, and execution of military operations. WPS is not the singular answer to the multifaceted problems that exist in the global security environment. However, incorporating a gender perspective can be a force multiplier in the security sector and it can increase the peacekeeping capacity of interagency, nongovernmental organizations, and host nation partners.

**Challenges**

When leaders incorporate a gender perspective into mission and define clear objectives, WPS principles can be operationalized beyond the incremental success. Empirical evidence and interviews with former FET members underscore how the often-ad hoc nature of FET projects or lack of consistency with FET engagement undermined their utility. For instance, the lack of coordination during the relief in place/transfer of authority between units sidelined progress on projects and key relationship networks that took months to rebuild. Efforts for sustainable implementation of WPS principles require that the military personnel tasked with executing the WPS-related activities have relevant and standardized training. Additionally, both military and civilian leadership must support and value the incorporation of a gender perspective in military operations beyond the legal mandate. Moreover, the military must move beyond incorporating a gender perspective as simply female engagement or a special program nested inside military activities.

NATO secretary general’s special representative for WPS, Ambassador Marriet Schuurman, asserted in a 2017 interview that operations in Afghanistan demonstrated the relevance of gender perspective to improve strategic awareness, mitigate harmful consequences, and contribute to lasting peace. NATO considers WPS principles as part of its core planning process and a capability beyond just integrating women—it is about how a gender perspective contributes to a more effective military team. Critics argue there is not enough evidence to truly establish women’s contribution to peace and security efforts in Afghanistan. However, the research that forms the very foundation of UNSCR 1325 and follow-on resolutions related to WPS establishes the value of gender perspective in both peace operations and military affairs.

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168 Rohwerder, Lessons from Female Engagement Teams, 3–5.
169 Holliday, “Female Engagement Teams,” 93.
172 Egnell, “Gender Perspectives and Military Effectiveness,” 74–75.
WPS Implementation

To achieve effective use of a gender perspective as a capability, WPS principles should be institutionalized and elevated from a special area of professional military education. Across all levels of Service schools, leadership needs to include the overarching WPS Agenda and subsequent DOD SFIP into applicable core curriculums. At the same time, bottom-up awareness and training can be readily introduced through existing general military training (GMT) topics linked to WPS pillars such as mandatory GMT on inclusivity and diversity, sexual assault, and trafficking-in-persons. The institutionalization of WPS principles within the military organization GMT structure assists in anchoring WPS in general knowledge, training, and application across the entire organization, not just with members tasked with working WPS implementation.

Since the signing of UNSCR 1325, DOD has spent 20 years developing its SFIP for advancing WPS principles. The fiscal year 2021 National Defense Authorization Act mandates that the secretary of defense lead the DOD effort to implement the DOD WPS SFIP no later than September 2025. While the law requires an SFIP, DOD must not miss critical opportunities to implement a gender perspective in future military operations to improve effectiveness. Enabling a gender perspective allows opportunities to tailor military operations and techniques to harness the energy of the population in demanding security environments with competing interests.

WPS principles of prevention, protection, and participation are constants, but how a strategy incorporates them varies. Senior military leaders should consider WPS principles in planning and executing operations that can ultimately improve mission effectiveness. NATO embraced the WPS agenda when it assigned a gender advisor (GENAD) at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels in Afghanistan. Moreover, NATO recognizes gender analysis as a capability that can increase the possibility to reveal challenges and opportunities to the mission objective.

WPS principles intersect and support several activities in the range of military operations including, but not limited to, humanitarian engagements, security cooperation, peace operations, and CVEO activities. When women are viewed as resources and not as victims, they can be active participants and contributors to their own security. The DOD has taken several steps to institutionalize WPS principles into guiding documents and activities. Currently, WPS principles are referenced in multiple national level strategies, Joint publications, and geographic combatant command guidance.

However, successful implementation of these principles will rely on not only institutionalizing the DOD WPS SFIP through policy and strategic guidance, but from the

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176 Cook, A Woman’s Place, 32–34.
efforts of top-down and bottom-up proactive leaders who work to promote change from within as champions of WPS principles. Proactive senior military leaders understand the international and national frameworks that support the WPS agenda. They also recognize operational opportunities and institutional challenges within the military organization. Admirals Olson and McRaven pursued groundbreaking solutions to address the complex problems of the Afghanistan counterinsurgency campaign. They established the CSTs for their operational capabilities. Continued progress requires forward-thinking innovative senior leadership to implement the WPS agenda into action for measurable success within applicable DOD equities.

Further, effective WPS implementation requires male champions to achieve a cultural shift within the typically male-dominated security organizations. Support from senior male leaders can help overcome the resistance and skepticism of WPS principles’ operational effectiveness. Senior leaders can cultivate champions of WPS inside the military organization to anchor new approaches. Champions can then advocate for the operationalization of WPS principles as an external and internal priority. As illustrated from experiences in Afghanistan, incorporating WPS principles can be a force multiplier in the battlespace, but when leaders treat gender perspective as an ad hoc afterthought, success will remain elusive.

Conclusion
The question remains on how to close the gap between the WPS framework and the operational environment. While there has been progress in implementing the WPS agenda from the top down, the DOD needs to accelerate its efforts to incorporate a gender perspective in doctrine at the strategic, operational, and tactical level as an integral element of military training, planning, and operations. An effective U.S. security strategy must be a cooperative whole-of-government approach with partners and allies to create conditions for long-term stability, which is core to the DOD WPS Strategy line of efforts and equities. The failure of the Joint Force to use gender perspective as a capability, when and where it is applicable, poses a risk to maximizing operational effectiveness.

The Biden administration’s 2021 Interim National Security Strategic Guidance does not call out the WPS agenda specifically, however, it calls for a “new and broader understanding of national security.” In an era of constrained and declining budgets, implementing WPS principles provides a low-cost investment with potential to yield measurable dividends. Increasing effectiveness by adding gender perspective as a capability to military operations offers new ways to think through or approach multidimensional security problems. As illustrated through the examples of female engagement teams in Afghanistan, enabling a gender perspective allows

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the opportunity for senior leaders to tailor responses and techniques in a volatile and complex security environment.

As a leader in the global security environment, the United States has a responsibility to lead from the front in its alliances and partnerships to build lasting security relationships, which includes putting into action the principles of UNSCR 1325. Similarly, as the United States reengages with international institutions and modernizes partnerships around the world, incorporating a gender perspective in support of DOD equities supports shared norms and human dignity. The military can capitalize on this valuable tool as a means of effectiveness as a force multiplier in operational planning and execution in three principal ways: improved information gathering, enhanced credibility, and better force protection by reaching all of the population.²⁹ Incorporating gender perspectives in all phases of an operation as a strategic imperative, should be both a goal and means to improving the effectiveness of military operations to support the political objectives of US national policy.