WOMEN PEACE & SECURITY IN PROFESSIONAL MILITARY EDUCATION
PART 1
Implementing and Incorporating a Gender Perspective
Chapter 1
Introduction

On 31 October 2000, the United Nations (UN) drafted and approved Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS). The adoption of this resolution was a landmark event as it recognized “the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women” in addition to emphasizing the “importance of women’s equal and full participation in the prevention and resolution of conflicts, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding.” The United States did not develop a framework through which the WPS could be implemented across the Department of Defense (DOD) for two decades after the passage of UNSCR 1325. The recent William M. (Mac) Thornberry National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2021 (NDAA) requires the DOD to develop a strategic framework and implementation plan and identifies the secretary of defense as the lead agent for its employment. Included in this language is the requirement to address the following three objectives: implementing the 2020 Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan (WPS SFIP); establishing policies and programs that reinforce the SFIP objectives and equities; and adequately training personnel to advance the WPS agenda. Further, the NDAA specifies this action is to be completed by the end of September 2025.

The WPS SFIP is broad, and the authors herein elected to initially focus on ways in which a gender perspective can serve as a capability across the Joint Force. Each presents definitions of the problem in separate chapters. When combined, they address many of the challenges associated with advancing the WPS agenda. With greater than 50 percent of the American population being female, it was essential that we address what is meant by a gender perspective as the foundational step for research, before examining the other facets of WPS-related research.

It is important to note that implementing a gender perspective is not limited to one gender, nor is it about women’s rights, feminism, or any other women’s issue. The value of a gender perspective lies in its critical examination of behaviors, attitudes, and beliefs. The DOD has worked diligently to address the patriarchal structure of the past; however, much work is left, requiring a culture change. The DOD must build awareness and address behaviors and biases, which left unchecked may further delay achieving many of the WPS objectives.

Army lieutenant colonel Ellen I. Coddington, authors the first piece in this series, “Closing the Capability Gap.” In this initial chapter, she introduces the gap as it exists

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1 Anne A. Witkowsky, “Integrating Gender Perspectives within the Department of Defense,” Prism 6, no. 1 (March 2016): 35.
3 Female persons, percent, “Quick Facts, United States,” U.S. Census Bureau, accessed 11 February 2022.
in the organization and addresses the first of three objectives in the SFIP: a diverse and inclusive fighting force.\(^5\) This objective cannot be met within a culture where divisiveness, fear, and mistrust are common. Coddington further examines how three of the equities discussed in the SFIP—diversity and inclusion, sexual harassment assault and prevention, and gender-based violence—negatively impact military culture and cohesiveness. For this piece, she examined parts of the final report of the Fort Hood Independent Review Committee (FHIRC), formed as a result of the death of U.S. Army Specialist Jessica Guillén in April 2020. Although the FHIRC focused its investigation on Fort Hood, its findings and recommendations will ultimately benefit the U.S. Army and most likely the DOD writ large.\(^6\)

Significant strides have indeed been made over the last few decades in advancing the role of women within the various U.S. defense agencies. Women have been authorized and accepted on a volunteer basis to pursue combat military occupational specialties and units, and they have been admitted to and graduated from specialized schools, such as Ranger School. Additionally, there have been uniform changes and relaxing of grooming standards, yet there is still much work to be done. Formations across DOD are becoming more diverse both in race and gender, and even this continues to evolve with the further acceptance of gay, lesbian, and transgender servicemembers.

Diversity and inclusion are the most logical first step that must be seriously considered before the other equities can ever be achieved. The absence of this equity fosters a permissive and toxic environment where other questionable behaviors can fester and prevail. Thus, sexual harassment, often referred to as gateway behavior, also becomes an acceptable behavior, setting the environment to become capable of escalating to sexual assault and gender-based violence.

The second offering in this series, USN Commander Kristen Vechinski’s “A Strategic Imperative,” focuses on applying WPS in military operations to achieve effectiveness in the security environment. Here, Vechinski suggests that delaying the WPS agenda—specifically incorporating gender perspective—puts the United States and the Joint Force at a disadvantage in the security environment. Anecdotal evidence intimates that incorporating gender perspective as a capability improves operational effectiveness when applied to the planning and execution of information gathering, increasing credibility and legitimacy, and enhanced force protection.\(^7\)

When considering the current security environment, the Joint Force must demonstrate proficiency across the competition continuum, denying and deterring adversaries any gains or advantages. Vechinski examines how female engagement teams

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employed in Afghanistan facilitated gains during counterinsurgency operations using gender-focused strategies in the human domain.  

The DOD must move to institutionalize WPS principles as a fundamental part of full-spectrum military operations. As demonstrated in the Afghanistan case study, the incorporation of gender perspectives into operations will build capacity within the Joint Force, improving efficiency and increasing lethality in support of national defense objectives.

The third and final contribution to this work, ARNG Colonel Steven J. Siemonsma’s “A Kotter Approach for Geographic Combatant Commands,” directs attention to the global combatant commands as a focal point to begin the culture changes necessary to operationalize gender perspective and introduce WPS principles globally. At present, the geographic combatant commands (GCCs) still exhibit many of the characteristics associated with the patriarchal organization, even as the United States criticizes other nations abroad for continued gender-based inequalities within their organizations and cultures.  

The United States is a global leader, and, in this position, must set the standard. When the United States shows up for the fight, it must be willing to lead. Simply put, the United States cannot set expectations for everyone else and then do something different. When situated abroad, the GCCs are in an ideal position and location to institute this much-needed culture change as a forward presence, lending credibility to change efforts and the facilitation of democratic values abroad.

As a result of his research, Siemonsma recommends that the GCCs employ the eight-step process described in Dr. John Kotter’s book Leading Change (1988) to guide the cultural changes required to implement a gender perspective at the organizational level successfully. This process will enable the GCCs to incorporate a systematic approach in developing effective programs and strategies, enabling leadership to facilitate opportunities and exploit the advantages of gender perspective and WPS principles at home and abroad.

As the reader navigates through these three chapters, they will note several common themes. To successfully implement WPS strategies, DOD must first address its culture across the entirety of its battlespace. High-functioning organizations are mission-focused, trained and ready, and foster a culture and environment rich in diversity, inclusion, dignity, respect, and excellence. To ensure credibility with U.S. partners and allies, this must first be done at home, within the U.S. military’s ranks at both the highest and lowest levels. The volatility of the global security environment demands that the implementation of WPS principles be taken seriously. The DOD must capitalize on the opportunities and advantages of incorporating the gender

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8 Vechinski, “A Capability for Improved Military Effectiveness.”  
10 Siemonsma, “A Kotter Approach for Geographic Combatant Commands.”
perspective as a capability. Senior leaders across DOD must become engaged in deliberating effective policies that implement the WPS SFIP through doctrinal changes, training, advocacy, and culture change that will ensure a diverse, inclusive, and lethal fighting force.