Women, peace and security
The way forward


Introduction
Lisa Sharland

The articles in this Strategic Insights paper, originally published on the ASPI Strategist website throughout March 2017, include analysis about what women, peace and security (WPS) means for Australia’s defence and national security. While ASPI has been fortunate to have some great analyses from contributors on WPS on The Strategist in the past, there’s always scope for more. With Australia’s National Action Plan on WPS up for review ahead of 2019, this year’s International Women’s Day provided an opportune time to build on those contributions and examine the way forward.

Within the context of defence, it’s evident that strengthening women’s participation in the security sector and integrating gender perspectives contributes to capability and operational effectiveness. Yet it’s still an issue plagued with misconceptions and that needs to be better understood. Colonel Amanda Fielding tackles this head on, providing...
reflections and lessons from her time serving as a Gender Advisor in Afghanistan. Amy Sheridan explains the importance of taking a whole-of-government approach to integrating WPS, drawing on lessons from Australia’s largest bilateral military exercise. And Brendan Nicholson reports on some of the lessons learned by Australia and Canada in Afghanistan, drawing on his interview with the Chief of Army, Lieutenant General Angus Campbell.

Similarly, UN peacekeeping has demonstrated the importance of progressing WPS in conflict and post-conflict settings. Commander Jennifer Wittwer reflects on how improving gender equity is more likely to contribute to long-term peace and stability. And Leanne Smith draws on her experience working directly on UN peacekeeping policy to identify some of the valuable lessons that have been learned to strengthen accountability around budgetary processes, staffing and leadership in the field to ensure WPS efforts are being strengthened.

As the nature of conflict continues to evolve, the WPS agenda will need to remain adaptive. The adoption of the eighth UN Security Council resolution on WPS in 2015 (2242) included a focus on countering violent extremism (CVE), something which Laura Shepherd picks up in her analysis around some of the potential risks of integrating CVE with WPS. Sofia Patel explores the importance of distancing CVE from counterterrorism approaches in the context of WPS. And Elisabeth Buchan takes her analysis in a different direction, exploring the application of WPS as part of humanitarian and disaster response.

As I note in this introduction, despite the gains that have been made on WPS, ‘global developments suggest that efforts to progress WPS will need to remain on the defensive’. Jenny Lee reminds us in her contribution, this is not a new battle. There have been many challenges to bring this agenda to the fore over the last century. That’s likely to continue.

ASPI would like to acknowledge and thank those involved in the initial idea for this series, as well as the individuals that contributed their thoughts and ideas to this discussion.

Women, peace and security in 2017: moving forward or edging backwards?
Lisa Sharland, 6 March 2017

Australia’s first National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) was launched five years ago this week on International Women’s Day in 2012. The NAP sets out how Australia will implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the broader WPS agenda, which is an approach that has also been taken by more than 60 countries around the globe. With Australia’s first NAP set to expire in 2018, discussion and debate is already underway about how the whole-of-government plan can be improved to ensure that Australia is delivering on its commitments to WPS.

Among the issues to be considered as part of the wide-ranging review will be how to address the weaknesses in the existing NAP. An independent interim review in 2015 found that monitoring and evaluation measures weren’t sufficient to measure progress and impact. That review also found that funding and resource allocations across government agencies were uneven. The next NAP needs to be strengthened in some of those areas and could draw on the examples of other countries.

The focus of Australia’s NAP is largely external, given that Australia isn’t currently experiencing armed conflict. Nonetheless, it has domestic implications in terms of the development of policy, funding and the structure of security institutions that deploy offshore (e.g. the ADF). In the five years since the adoption of the NAP, the nature of conflict and potential drivers of instability have continued to evolve and change. Discussion is already underway about the extent to which security challenges such as countering violent extremism, issues of justice and accountability, or approaches to humanitarian and disaster response may necessitate inclusion in the next NAP.

At the same time as looking forward, however, recent global developments suggest that efforts to progress WPS will need to remain on the defensive over coming years. During an address to the UN Human Rights Council last week, Secretary-General Antonio Guterres expressed concern that: ‘Hard fought gains on women’s rights are being chipped away.’ Indeed, momentum on the issue has slowed down in the UN Security Council and is likely to face further challenges.
Reforms to increase the representation of women in the ADF haven’t been immune from criticism either. The cultural reform program in the ADF—intended, in part, to increase diversity—has been labelled ‘PC rubbish’ that would detract from Defence’s core goal of ‘war-fighting’. As my ASPI colleagues Andrew Davies and Mark Thomson have previously countered, that view may be fine if you want to keep ‘the ADF as a demographic heritage theme park’. But the ADF needs to be responsive to the evolving nature of conflict. Modern conflict situations (such as Afghanistan, or peacekeeping operations) often require engagement with the local civilian population. In these contexts, female military personnel may be in a better position to engage with the local women about potential threats. Ignoring the need to increase the number of women in the ADF—or failure to do so—risks diminishing the ADF’s future capability and operational effectiveness.

The same applies to the related but different issue of integrating gender perspectives. It’s something the international community still struggles to get right—a recent report addressing the WPS implementation gap found that the Security Council has a ‘tendency to overlook gender’ in ‘emerging or drastically deteriorating’ situations. The ADF’s experience in operations in Afghanistan, providing humanitarian and disaster relief in Fiji, as well as lessons from military exercises such as Talisman Sabre, have demonstrated the importance of integrating gender perspectives as part of military operations. Considering gender—that is, the needs of women and men—as part of policy, planning, operations and intelligence will be essential if this aspect of the WPS agenda is to be fully realised.

While the NAP is an important and internationally recognised mechanism to measure Australia’s commitment to WPS, it’s not the only measure of the government’s commitment. As the UN’s 2015 Global Study on WPS noted, NAPs are ‘simply processes and facilitators of actions, not ends in themselves.’ Ultimately, the commitment is measured by what change is affected on the ground through policies and reforms. That requires more strategic direction. As I’ve argued previously, the 2016 Defence White Paper fell short in that area. We need to be asking more deliberate questions about what implementing WPS means for our approach to international defence engagement and foreign policy.

As we mark International Women’s Day this Wednesday, we need to consider how we consolidate and build on existing initiatives to progress WPS, as part of and beyond the next NAP. We’ll be continuing that debate here at The Strategist with a series of posts exploring efforts to progress WPS in the international community, as well as what that means for Australia’s defence, national security and role in the world. It’s an important discussion that we need to have.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/women-peace-security-2017-moving-forward -edging-backwards/

Implementing the WPS agenda into Defence: concept or capability?

Amanda Fielding, 7 March 2017

‘This is not just about equity but capability.’ That was the opening line of my speech to the Council of Colonels at the Headquarters of ‘Operation Resolute Support’ in Afghanistan in 2015.

As the Mission’s first Senior Gender Advisor, I knew that I’d face resistance to my work and that I’d have to prove to my military colleagues—predominantly men—why they should care about integrating women into the Afghan National Defence Security Forces (ANDSF). Moreover, I needed to show them that UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace and Security wasn’t just a concept outlining a series of international humanitarian principles that they should adhere to, but rather, that it was something that could also contribute to the mission’s success.

There were some key lessons that I learnt from my experience as the ‘Resolute Support’ Gender Advisor that I’ve since applied to ADF operations. The first is that WPS applies to different nations in different ways depending on cultural imperatives. The second was the need to demonstrate to military planners how WPS can enhance operational effectiveness.

For example, in preparing for the Afghan fighting season, it was important for the military planners to understand that more women than combatants were being killed in Afghanistan every day, just because of their gender. In addition, women’s
empowerment in Afghanistan countered the strategy of the Taliban which was deliberately targeting women in public positions and the security forces. As such, it made operational sense to enable 50% of the population to protect themselves and contribute to Afghanistan’s security.

I’d suggest that the ADF and Australian Army personnel in particular, are weary of women’s agendas in light of the necessary and significant cultural reform that has occurred through the ‘Pathway to Change’. In attempting to integrate WPS into ADF operations, I couldn’t ignore the largely negative perceptions surrounding the positive discrimination of women and I knew that I’d need to address these issues in its introduction. Regardless of the individual attitudes, it was clear to me that four things needed to be addressed to ensure the effective implementation of WPS into the planning and conduct of operations.

First, the two agendas—ADF internal cultural reform and the implementation of WPS on operations—needed to be separated. Second, the term ‘WPS’ needed to be replaced by ‘gender’ to be more inclusive of all vulnerable groups and actors within a deployed environment. Third, the ADF needed to be educated on the fact that ‘gender’ doesn’t mean ‘women,’ but rather, refers to the roles of men and women defined through socialisation and culture. And finally, the implementation of WPS within Defence isn’t just about equity but capability and enhancing operational effectiveness.

Over the past two years, purists to the WPS agenda have raised concerns with me about focusing the agenda on ‘gender’ rather than ‘women,’ believing that it would lead to women’s issues in conflict continuing to be ignored. However, that hasn’t been the case in its practical application. In the majority of planning activities conducted by the ADF, policymakers have been able to gain a better understanding of human security issues within an operating environment. That understanding includes recognition of the correlation between the levels of violence against women within a particular society and the rates of lawlessness and escalating conflict. They’ve also recognised the cultural imperative for women’s participation in missions and the importance of identifying female leaders who can assist in resolving the violence within their communities as well as the conflict overall.

The ADF’s response to Tropical Cyclone Winston in Fiji in 2016 was an example of where the ADF was able to better understand how to respond to a crisis through engaging with local women’s groups and local women. Of note, there was an increase in the vulnerability of certain groups in the population—in particular, women and girls—and as such, Fijian female forces were allocated to some of the emergency shelters while the ADF and other agencies focused on assisting Fiji with the relief effort. The deployed Gender Advisors were also central to the integration of WPS on the operation through their subject matter expertise on the WPS agenda and ability to engage with the local population on gender related issues.

The ADF has made strong progress in implementing the WPS agenda within the past few years. However, that’s mainly due to the effort of a handful of Gender Advisors working for the ADF’s top brass. It could be argued that WPS would be more fully embraced by ADF members and better understood should it have been initially introduced into service as a capability with the necessary resources, training, doctrine and trained personnel.

Regardless of the challenges, we can’t just consider WPS as a concept to be admired by the military. After all, the agenda itself derived from military peacekeeping operations in the 1990s. We need to continue to strive to apply it practically and provide a safe and secure environment for everyone—including women.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/implementing-wps-agenda-defence-concept-capability/.

The role of the WPS agenda in countering violent extremism
Laura J Shepherd, 8 March 2017

As today marks International Women’s Day, it’s timely to reflect on the Australian Government’s commitments and priorities in implementing the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda’s international policy framework of eight UN Security Council resolutions. The agenda supports the participation of women in peace and security governance, the protection of women’s rights and their bodies, and the prevention of violence.
Historically, the ‘prevention’ pillar of the agenda has been somewhat overlooked in favour of close and sustained engagement with participation activities (ensuring that women are involved in peace negotiations, for example, or that women are represented in national security organisations) and protection activities (ensuring that women are protected from sexualised and gender-based violence). Where prevention has featured, it has predominantly related to the prevention of sexual violence in conflict.

This is changing, however, as new priorities in the WPS agenda emerge. The most recent resolution, UNSCR 2242, brings counterterrorism and countering violent extremism (CT/CVE) into conversation with WPS initiatives. The resolution therefore articulates violence prevention in a new and different way: the prevention of terrorism and violent extremism becomes central to the women, peace and security agenda.

Three paragraphs of UNSCR 2242 are devoted to explaining how the WPS and CT/CVE agendas could align better, with priority given to mainstreaming gender in the operations of the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee (CTC) and the UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate (CTED) (OP 11). The resolution also calls for better data collection in this sphere, and ‘the participation and leadership of women and women’s organisations in developing strategies to counter terrorism and violent extremism which can be conducive to terrorism’ (OP 13).

In the Australian context, we need to explore what that means both for our commitments under the WPS agenda (which are captured in the Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012–2018) and for our CT/CVE activities, not least because the government is now beginning the process of consultation around the next iteration of the National Action Plan for launch in 2019. It’s important that this next NAP reflects the integration of WPS and CT/CVE, but it’s also equally important that this integration is thoughtful, sophisticated, and informed by consultation with communities and community organisations across Australia.

There have been a number of concerns raised about the creeping integration of CVE with WPS. Those include issues with CVE strategies and initiatives articulated by many working in this field, including cases where program initiatives are poorly specified and poorly understood, addressing neither women, peace, security, nor violent extremism adequately. There’s also often a lack of appropriate gender training for practitioners engaged in CVE program delivery both within the national context and overseas, and a lack of confidence in government and a lack of trust between community groups and state actors. The government needs to state clearly what programs are intended to achieve, to ensure comprehensive gender training and to engage in extensive community consultation, such that community groups are active participants not only in delivery but also in formulation of initiatives.

A number of issues are raised within communities of scholars and practitioners about the alignment between CVE and WPS. Gender equality initiatives must be consistently applied and not bartered to appease certain political actors and to achieve specific political ends. Further, there’s often too little attention paid to the gender dynamics of radicalisation and, specifically, to the radicalisation of women and a lack of understanding of the various and often conflicted roles that women play in counterterrorism and countering violent extremism. The Australian government would do well to leverage the extensive research expertise in this sphere, both within and beyond Australia, to ensure that plans and initiatives are evidence-based and pay due attention to gender as a power dynamic as well as the roles and representation of women within the domain of CT/CVE.

It’s critical that women are neither instrumentalised, nor put at risk, in the service of CT/CVE. As advocates of the Women, Peace and Security agenda have consistently reminded us, the WPS agenda isn’t about ‘making war safe for women’. Prioritising CT/CVE within WPS in Australia, both immediately and in the next iteration of the National Action Plan, mustn’t pay lip service to the roles and representation of women but truly value women’s experiences and reflect the concerns of communities and community organisations if it is to be effective.
WPS and Talisman Sabre: learning from the past, looking to the future
Amy Sheridan, 9 March 2017

Exercise Talisman Sabre is Australia’s largest bilateral military exercise with our treaty ally, the United States. It takes place every two years, includes over 30,000 participants and is designed to enhance interoperability and build links to address shared threats within the Asia-Pacific region.

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR1325) on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) was integrated into the exercise for the first time in 2015. The resolution looks at the different impact conflict has on women and girls and calls for their greater participation in conflict prevention and resolution. The integration of UNSCR1325 into Talisman Sabre is an important story because how we prepare for operations has a direct impact on how we behave in operations. Integrating gender considerations into exercises is an effective way to build understanding and test different approaches to operationalising UNSCR1325. In the lead-up to Talisman Saber ‘17 in July, it’s timely to look back at what we learned last time and consider how we can continue to build on that work.

In mid-2014, a small group of civilian and military staff began advocating for the inclusion of UNSCR1325 into Talisman Sabre. Although this initial support came from the ground up, sustained support and engagement from Australian and US senior leadership ultimately made UNSCR1325 a key focus of the military exercise. That support ranged from statements to military commanders by Australia’s Foreign and Defence ministers and the US’s secretaries of State and Defense, highlighting the need to prioritise UNSCR1325 by specifically tasking staff. That reinforced UNSCR1325 as a foreign and security policy priority and created a strategic imperative that was difficult to ignore.

In a perfect world, integrating gender perspectives happens as “business as usual” with little to no guidance from above. However, we aren’t there yet. While grassroots movements continue to build support and demonstrate the utility of applying gender perspectives, sustained support from our national leaders via a top-down approach is still required. Diplomats and commanders alike must continue to keep UNSCR1325 central to their thinking, regularly drawing attention to it and issuing specific tasking to compel action.

Having a clear accountability framework for the integration of UNSCR1325 into Talisman Sabre was crucial. Following the release of Australia’s National Action Plan on WPS in 2012, the Australian Department of Defence developed an Implementation Plan, which specifically required the Australian Defence Force to integrate UNSCR1325 into exercises. Although there was a recognition of the principled importance of that task, having a clear reporting requirement was effective. Moving forward, there’s room to strengthen accountability around UNSCR1325. The next National Action Plan could pay particular attention to preparedness and explicitly outline how Australian government agencies can ensure UNSCR1325 is integrated into training, education and exercises. Civilian agencies could consider developing their own implementation plans that help translate strategic policy into agency-level work programs.

Integrating UNSCR1325 into Talisman Sabre highlighted a gap in soldiers’ training and education. Increasing baseline understanding about the resolution depended on a small number of specialists delivering ad-hoc presentations and sharing resources. Some staff were able to attend gender adviser training in Europe, but there was no domestic mechanism in place to train and educate a large group of people in Australia. The development of the Australian Military Gender Advisers Course is well-timed and will help to fill this gap. On the civilian side, there’s a plethora of training available on gender mainstreaming and gender in development, but there’s a gap when it comes to civilian-focused gender training for civil–military operations. With a Military Gender Advisers course in the pipeline, it might be worth considering whether civilian agencies should create something similar.

Talisman Sabre proved that integrating gender considerations into planning for operations requires a whole-of-government effort. In 2015, civilian advisers and military planners worked side-by-side to develop exercise products including the Commander’s Guide.
Strategic insights to Implementing UNSCR1325 into Military Planning. Such an approach ensured that exercise products were holistic and connected to broader political, diplomatic and humanitarian considerations.

But whole-of-government coordination doesn't just happen, it requires proactive effort. To achieve such coordination, there's room for civilian agencies to step-up their role in operationalising UNSCR1325. Building on Talisman Sabre '15, DFAT will dedicate two civilian Gender Advisers to Talisman Saber '17 to ensure consideration of civilian perspectives and priorities. The Department will also ensure that 50% of staff deployed to this exercise are female. By dedicating specific resources and ensuring equal participation in exercises, civilian agencies can have greater influence in how UNSCR1325 is conceived and planned for.

As we prepare for the next iteration of Talisman Saber, civil-military-police practitioners in Australia and the US need to remain focused on UNSCR1325. Although Talisman Sabre ‘15 highlighted how far we’ve come, it also demonstrated have far we have to go. We need to maintain strong leadership and build clearer accountability frameworks, develop more comprehensive training programs and proactively engage and invest in whole-of-government coordination. If we can do that, we’ll create the cultural and institutional change needed to ensure gender perspectives are applied in civil-military operations and enhance the on-the-ground outcomes for women, girls, men and boys.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/wps-talisman-sabre-learning-past-looking-future/

Women, Peace and Security: a century-long battle for peace
Jenny Lee, 10 March 2017

For over a century, the international women’s civil society movement has advocated for the conviction that lies at the heart of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325: that peace is only sustainable if women are fully included, and that peace is inextricably linked with equality and collaboration of men and women.

Ever since 1915, when 1,200 women met at The Hague to discuss proposals to end World War One, the Women, Peace and Security Agenda has been a symbol of solidarity, tenacity and partnership at the international, regional and national levels. Australia has taken a leadership role on the WPS Agenda in our region. The Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012–2018 (NAP) is the first outward-looking NAP in the Asia-Pacific, which focuses on work in conflict-affected countries. This NAP also shares a journey of collaboration and open discussions with civil society. As a result of these discussions, shadow report cards are written to inform the government about gaps in the implementation of the NAP.

There are ‘push-backs’ from men and women. Most are due to the limited understanding of the context and essence of the Agenda or a perspective that these principles are only relevant to those in conflict zones. A common assumption is that this Agenda is restricted to addressing ‘women’s issues’ advocated by women. For organisations such as the military or the police, the ‘practical application’ of the Agenda isn’t always apparent at first glance and therefore it’s hard to conceptualise what this looks like on the ground.

Australia has made positive progress as a result of these push-backs. We have seen the ADF ‘test and adjust’ the Agenda in the operational planning process. We saw this in Exercise Talisman Sabre 15 where it was the first time that UNSCR 1325 was integrated into a major combined exercise, helping to build understanding of how the military can operationalise WPS. Operation Fiji Assist showed that the ADF has adopted a growing awareness and understanding of women’s unique experiences and contributions in humanitarian assistance and disaster response as part of whole-of-government response. DFAT’s tremendous work in promulgating the Agenda in our region through series of excellent programs is also a good example.

The challenge for the unconverted is seeing these positive changes because they are subtle, and not immediate. It takes many years to benefit from the Agenda and this is true not only for beneficiaries in conflict or post-conflict areas, but for us in Australia. The difference is, in Australia we can discuss and debate the Agenda’s relevance and importance, and how it’s applied in a non-conflict context. This is a vital contribution to our region.
These opportunities and solutions can always be shared. This doesn’t mean dictating Australia’s solution to our regional partners, but is reciprocal learning of how the Agenda is interpreted and applied in different environments, cultures and norms.

The ACMC was fortunate to experience some of the positive outcomes of the Agenda first hand. We found that Australia’s approach to the constant consultative process with civil society was unique. Australia shared the journey of our NAP at the Asia-Pacific Regional Symposium on National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security in Bangkok last year, highlighting the important role of civil society in monitoring and sharing best practices and lessons learned. The Australian civil society report card was shared amongst colleagues who were present from the region, and there was a collective expression of praise for Australia.

Domestically, we saw the value of sharing knowledge through our own WPS workshops. We learned that members of different government agencies and civil society have much to share through discussions, application methodologies and thinking. As with all civilian-military-police engagements, many return to their agencies understanding the importance of the Agenda. We have also seen similar experiences with international engagements. The International Policy Division-run WPS workshop between TNI and ADF last year contributed to preparations for the Australia-Indonesia co-chairing of the ASEAN Defence Ministers Meeting-Plus Experts Working Group Meeting on Peacekeeping Operations, which commences this year. This workshop indicated that Australia isn’t only willing to learn from regional nations, but is open to sharing ideas and solutions.

There is much work to be done to pursue implementation of the WPS Agenda in our region and we are in a special position to do this through engagement and collaboration with our partners. Not simply for the sake of pursuing the WPS Agenda, but in pursuit of durable solutions in our region through effective regional civilian-military-police engagement with the collaboration of civil society.

The WPS Agenda is a tool that may pave the way for that change.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/century-long-battle-peace/.

Achieving gender parity is as critical in the field as it is anywhere else
Jennifer Wittwer, 14 March 2017

When delivering a speech in advance of becoming the UN’s new Secretary-General, António Guterres made it clear that gender equality was a clear priority, not only for staff appointments with the organisation, but also in peacekeeping deployments, in peace negotiations and in peace building through economic empowerment.

The international community has long recognised that gender equality and women’s empowerment are critical elements for building sustainable peace and security locally and globally. UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the subsequent resolutions on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) affirm the importance of participation by women and the inclusion of gender perspectives in peace negotiations, peacekeeping operations and post-conflict peacebuilding and governance. The resolutions further stress the importance of equal and full participation by women as active agents in the promotion of peace and security, and call for building gender responsive capabilities among all personnel involved in maintaining peace and security. Women and girls are poised to be key drivers of progress and growth, but they need to be empowered through equal rights and equal opportunities. They need to be valued as leaders, peace-builders and breadwinners in their communities and societies.

In his message to the Special Committee on Peacekeeping Operations in February 2017, Guterres decreed that achieving gender parity in all respects is as critical in the field as it is anywhere else. He also said that the UN absolutely must increase the number of civilian and uniformed women, as well as the number of women in leadership positions in peacekeeping operations, peace processes and the ranks of special envoys. Despite efforts since the adoption of Resolution 1325, the participation of women in armed forces generally hasn’t changed significantly. In 1993, only 1% of all deployed uniformed personnel were women. By 2016, women comprised less than 4% of UN peacekeepers globally, accounting for about 3% of UN military personnel and about 9.7% of UN police.
Those rates fall far short of the goals set for women’s participation in peacekeeping missions by Resolution 2242 in 2015 (which called for member states to double the numbers of women in military and police contingents of UN peacekeeping operations over the next five years). The reasons for this vary among member states, but research in 2013 offered that the state of play reflects a lack of understanding about Resolution 1325 and UN policy on gender equality in peace operations, a gap in data and analysis, and the prevalence of social norms and biases that perpetuate gender inequality within the security sector. Much work is needed, through implementation of national action plans on WPS and gender strategies, to address those barriers to women’s equal participation in national security forces.

The UN also recognises that greater numbers of women in peacekeeping have been proven to increase the UN’s credibility, its protection reach and its relationship with communities, as well as to decrease incidents of sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). SEA has become the maelstrom of modern peacekeeping. Specific investigations commissioned by the UN, for example, in the Central African Republic in 2016, identified that UN peacekeepers have been committing acts of child abuse and exploiting women, girls and boys, with much of that abuse characterised as sexual favours in return for food or cash.

Inevitably, SEA is capitalising on the vulnerability of the local population due to poverty, lack of access to resources or power, inequalities in social status, and enhancing women and girl’s exposure to sexual and gender-based violence. The UN Security Council, in building on previous efforts to address SEA, has taken steps through the adoption of Resolution 2272 in 2016 to implement better procedures for investigating such misconduct and international crimes. In addition, the Secretary-General created a high-level task force in 2017 to examine ‘outside the box’ measures to prevent, address and respond to SEA.

Research suggests that the presence of female peacekeepers will help address SEA. To promote ‘out of the box’ thinking will also require promotion of gender equality in missions and ensuring local women and girls’ equality and empowerment, in order to decrease dependency on peacekeepers. A universal response needs to address a holistic view of gender inequalities: girls’ access to a quality education, women’s economic empowerment (critical for safeguarding food security), universal access to sexual and reproductive health and rights, ending violence against women and girls, and the inclusion of women’s voices, leadership and influence in peace processes and peace building.

A gender perspective needs to be a consideration from the outset when missions are mandated through to their transition and exit, and reinforces the link between peace, security and development. Only by achieving gender parity across those important and influential factors further exacerbated in conflict, can we conclude that we’re maximising our capacity to sustain peace and security.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/achieving-gender-parity-critical-field-anywhere-else/.

The WPS agenda must also be responsive to natural disasters

Elisabeth Buchan, 16 March 2017

When Foreign Minister, Julie Bishop, and her Labor counterpart, Penny Wong, visited Samoa, Solomon Islands and Vanuatu in December, emergency response was at the forefront of the agenda. Disaster response is a key priority of regional humanitarian action; most crises in the Indo-Pacific were the result of natural disasters, and from 2005–2014 natural disasters affected 1.4 billion people in the Asia-Pacific region, 80% of the global total.

But there is another key statistic here: the impact on women. Women are more likely to die during disasters, and incidence of sexual and gender-based violence spikes in post-disaster settings. So any strategy for women, peace and security (WPS) in the region must incorporate humanitarian response.

WPS is founded in UNSC Resolution 1325 and targets the disproportionate and unique harm suffered by women and girls during and after times of conflict. Australia formalised its commitment to Resolution 1325 and its subsequent resolutions—collectively the WPS Agenda—through the establishment of a WPS National Action Plan (NAP) in 2012. (Read Susan Hutchinson’s assessment
of the first NAP here). The 2015 UN global study on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 identified women’s vulnerability in humanitarian-settings as an emerging theme in WPS. Recognising that ‘principles of gender equality in humanitarian assistance are not limited to conflict-affected settings but equally relevant to natural disasters’, the study provided the impetus to expand WPS beyond the traditional parameters of armed-conflict. The Independent Interim Review of Australia’s NAP raised the possibility of expanding WPS action to include humanitarian response.

Disaster relief should be treated as a WPS issue for two reasons.

First, the disruption caused by natural disasters is analogous to armed conflict, and the security issues facing women in the two contexts overlap, because:

- the breakdown of rule of law exposes women to increased violence, including gender-based violence
- the destruction of key protective infrastructure like homes, police stations and shelters leaves women vulnerable to exploitation and abuse, including human trafficking
- food and water shortages force women and girls to travel further and in less secure circumstances to gather basic resources and
- the disruption of essential services, especially reproductive and maternal services, threatens women’s health.

Second, there’s a growing movement toward a gendered approach to disaster relief. In 2012, the UN Commission on the Status of Women adopted resolution 56/2, which highlights the disproportionate impact of natural disasters on women, and the social and economic factors that underscore women’s vulnerability. In March this year Australia co-hosted the high-level event ‘Achieving Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment in Humanitarian Action through the World Humanitarian Summit’. Ensuring that humanitarian programming is gender responsive was one of 32 core commitments developed ahead of the Summit. That attention has inspired a wealth of policy papers on improving gender awareness in humanitarian response in the Asia-Pacific (see here, here and here). The Australian Civil Military Centre has published a comprehensive paper on incorporating gender issues into Australia’s natural disaster response.

The two agendas are mutually reinforcing. They both promote a gendered approach to peace and security during and, after a violent disruption, many of the prescribed relief efforts in disaster and armed conflict are convergent.

In the field, Australia’s Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) effort following Cyclone Winston, Operation Fiji Assist, is a prime example of the benefits of incorporating the WPS agenda into civil-military operations, including disaster response. A military gender adviser was included as part of the deployment of about 650 ADF personnel, to advise the Joint Task Force headquarters on incorporating WPS considerations into planning. Aid donations from ADF personnel were targeted at women and girls, including items such as sanitary products, nappies and school books.

Australia is a prominent contributor to disaster relief. In the past two years, the government provided humanitarian assistance to regional neighbours including Indonesia (Aceh earthquake), Vanuatu (Cyclone Pam), the Philippines (Typhoon Melor) and Fiji (Cyclone Winston). From July 2015 to April 2016 alone, Australia responded to 20 crises. The 2016 Defence White Paper (DWP) noted that humanitarian disasters have the potential to cause instability in our immediate region. It’s in Australia’s national interest to maintain a leading role in the Indo-Pacific to support humanitarian and disaster relief operations. Integrating gender perspectives into those operations will be essential to their overall effectiveness.

When it comes to including women’s security in natural disasters, some of the policy guidance is already there. Gender equality and women’s empowerment is a thematic priority of DFAT’s 2016 Humanitarian Strategy, and the DWP affirms the ADF’s ongoing support for WPS. Within the next two years DFAT will develop a new Foreign Policy White Paper and commence work on the second NAP on WPS. These are real opportunities to improve WPS outcomes where natural disasters occur.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/wps-agenda-must-also-responsive-natural-disasters/.
ADF women are already ‘in combat’

Brendan Nicholson, 24 March 2017

Lieutenant General Angus Campbell, the first Special Forces officer to command the Australian Army, wants more women in his combat units to make those units smarter.

‘To me it’s all about talent,’ Campbell tells The Strategist. ‘I don’t have enough of it and I want more. I am not drawing on the full potential of the population. I can’t possibly imagine, therefore, that the Army is as smart as it could be and as it needs to be.’

That army, he says, is modestly sized, with 30,000 full-time and 15,000 part-time soldiers. ‘If you’re small, you need to be smart. If you’re drawing on the talents and skills and energy of the breadth of the Australian population, you’ve got your best chance of being as smart as you possibly can be.’ Women make up 12.4% of the full-time Army and 13.5% of the part-time force.

Campbell says the experience of the infantry in Western armies indicates that Australia could in time have about 80 women in combat roles in infantry units. ‘That’s 80 women dispersed over seven infantry battalions. I’m very comfortable with that. I don’t mind how many women join the infantry other than that they pass the physical employment standard (developed by the Defence Science and Technology Group) and that they are volunteers,’ Campbell says.

‘And I don’t mind how many women join any other part of the force because I know the more competition there is for employment, the more I have to choose from and the greater will be the talent and skills and abilities of the Army.’

On a visit to an infantry company in Afghanistan, Campbell asked the young Australian men how many local women they’d spoken to. ‘The answer, of course, was none.’ That’s a practical disadvantage, he says, of having all-male combat forces there.

Male and female soldiers operating together worked more effectively with local communities and the Army found other ways to bring women into that environment. ‘But it’s easier when you don’t have to think about doing something extra because inherently your force is designed to have the most powerful effect that the Australian people, through its army and its defence force, can generate.’

Female soldiers were deployed deliberately to balance the all-male composition of the infantry companies and there was much more engagement with women in the villages, Campbell says. There would be either no engagement or the most cursory engagement otherwise. ‘I think on occasions we got information that was of value to us and that was the very point of deliberately designing women into our scheme of manoeuvre.’

It’s crucial to put the most effective force into the field, he says. ‘In a culture where it’s routinely forbidden for women to have interaction with males not of their family, having women involved in your operations has a very powerful effect.’

The Canadian Army in Afghanistan found local women were much more likely to approach a patrol if it contained female soldiers and on occasions they warned the Canadian women about bombs or ambushes on the road ahead.

Until 2013, 93% of ADF tasks were open to women, but they weren’t allowed to serve as ‘front-line’ infantry or in Special Forces, where they might be involved in close combat, in armoured or artillery units or in some areas where materials toxic to unborn children were used. Nor could they serve as Navy mine clearance divers or as RAAF airfield defence guards.

That changed in January 2013, when all of those positions were opened up to women who could meet the physical standards.

In the wars the ADF is now involved in, anywhere can become the ‘front lines’ and the many Australian women who’ve served on dangerous operations must be bemused by occasional suggestions that they aren’t already ‘in combat’.

Warfare in places such as Afghanistan or Iraq can bring death or injury from any direction and it doesn’t discriminate. In August 2006, a female Australian soldier was wounded by a rocket which hit her base in Baghdad.
And when the Army’s big Chinook helicopters blasted through Afghan valleys carrying Special Forces to attack an insurgent base, their pilots included women.

The combat medic crouching over a wounded soldier 100m behind a firefight involving coalition troops could well have been an Australian woman. Armoured troop-carrying vehicles in operational areas have long been driven by women who are as vulnerable to bombs as any other soldier. In Afghanistan and Iraq, any routine road convoy could become a serious military operation.

Female crew on the Australian frigates in the 55C heat of the Persian Gulf or on counter-piracy operations off the Horn of Africa regularly go on boarding parties to search suspect ships. Sailors in their fast, rigid inflatable boats are heavily armed and alert for an ambush. In 2004, three US sailors were killed during such an operation when terrorists blew up a vessel. The Americans were under Australian command and the boarding party could easily have come from an Australian ship. Women also serve in the Navy’s submarines on intelligence-gathering operations.

And when the RAAF’s twin-seat Super Hornet strike aircraft fly missions in Iraq, some of their crew members are women. Soon, RAAF fast jets will be piloted by women.

‘But we’re not there yet,’ says Campbell of the Army, ‘there’s more work to be done.’

Peacekeeping and the WPS agenda: ‘less talk and more action’
Leanne Smith, 27 March 2017

In the Security Council debate around Resolution 2242 in 2015—which marked 15 years since the adoption of the ground breaking Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS)—a key refrain was: ‘we’ve been paying lip service to the importance of this issue for 15 years. It’s now time for less talk and more action’.

Resolution 1325 has become the guide for all UN policies and programs in supporting women in conflict and post conflict societies. In this context it’s essential that our work focuses not only on protecting women but on empowering them to participate fully in all the processes that affect them. UN Peacekeeping implements this mandate primarily through gender advisers at headquarters and in the field.

Our first gender advisers were deployed to Kosovo and East Timor in 1999 and as mandated we now have them on the ground in all 16 peacekeeping missions. Their core functions, as articulated in our Gender Equality in UN Peacekeeping Operations Policy (2010) are to provide technical guidance and support to senior management of the peacekeeping mission; to mainstream gender issues into all civil, military and police components; and to build the capacity of personnel to guide the gender mainstreaming efforts.

After a recent DPKO internal evaluation of our work on WPS, it’s clear that the UN has put an impressive amount of effort into putting policies, guidance and training programs and materials in place to support implementation of this mandate. Unfortunately, what remains is a general lack of understanding of why gender mainstreaming is important and how it adds value to our broader peacekeeping mandate and responsibilities.

Firstly, there is a lack of leadership on this mandate from senior management in UN peacekeeping. This isn’t surprising given the competing priorities faced by the leaders of peacekeeping missions. Secondly, the level of gender adviser posts and their structural location within our missions have reduced the access of our Senior Gender Advisers to mission leadership and created a kind of ‘gender enclave’ rather than supporting the mainstream effort.

We have had a high turnover of gender advisers, have an under resourced Gender Unit at headquarters and had posts removed or reallocated in our missions. These factors have also led to a lack of perceived career path for gender advisers. Due in part to our inability to show the value-added of the WPS mandate to the overall mandate of the missions, it’s sometimes perceived as a technical/niche area and not the responsibility of all mission staff. This is problematic because of the positive impact that our WPS work could potentially have on issues like community access, information gathering and analysis, and early warning mechanisms.
Nevertheless, there are several examples of what we know works. All our missions now hold ‘Global Open Days’ on WPS every year, where the head of mission reaches out to local women’s groups across the country to give high level political attention to their concerns and to enhance their roles. In Darfur for example, at the most recent Open Day women from four states came together to create an institutional mechanism to support the implementation by government of Resolution 1325 and create a women’s protection network.

The Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) Forward Looking Gender Strategy (2014-2018), combined with Resolution 2242 and a series of high-level peace and security reviews have generated new momentum and strengthened the hand of those working to improve our work on gender within the Secretariat. DPKO leadership will now elevate the Senior Gender Adviser at UN headquarters to the office of our Chief of Staff to facilitate regular access to both Under Secretary-Generals. We have finalised standardised gender reporting training materials and are developing gender-based conflict analysis training for mission planners to ensure a gender lens is applied from the start-up of our missions.

In the field, our Senior Gender Advisers now report directly to our Heads of Mission. Gender targets will now be used as specific indicators of individual performance of all senior managers. Now all gender officer posts that have been mandated must be budgeted for in missions and filled with appropriate staff.

At the UN we now focus on five entry points for WPS: through policies such as one addressing gender-specific conflict analysis; through women’s participation in post conflict decision making processes; through personnel by creating an enabling environment to achieve 50-50 gender parity; through protection by ensuring that all UN action takes into account the protection of women and girls; and finally through partnership that can broaden mainstreaming efforts and make our impact more sustainable.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/peacekeeping-wps-agenda-less-talk-action/.

How should Australia’s WPS National Action Plan tackle terrorism?
Sofia Patel, 29 March 2017

Julie Bishop’s new aid policy framework which seeks to include countering violent extremism (CVE) programs across Australia’s foreign aid development projects is a welcome step in the right direction.

The framework directly refers to the roles women play in ‘perpetuating and/or preventing violent extremism’, after much international debate on how gender can be used to tackle aspects of terrorism (see UNSCR 2242, and the Secretary-General’s Plan of Action to Prevent Violent Extremism).

We now need to consider whether integrating counterterrorism (CT) and CVE in Australia’s forthcoming National Action Plan could add real value. The complexity of CT/CVE operations domestically and internationally and their varying objectives and practices means that a successful integration into the NAP would only be achieved through a careful, highly nuanced, approach.

A recent global study conducted by the UN indicates that development and human rights practitioners are wary about integrating WPS and CT/CVE. This stems from the hard security practices (military operations and intelligence) within which CT strategy is rooted, which some practitioners consider incongruous with the rest of the WPS strategy.

Laura Shepherd has further highlighted, the considerable challenges to successfully integrating CT/CVE with WPS. At an operational level, CVE practitioners may not have appropriate levels of gender training. At a conceptual level, incorporating CT/CVE practices within a framework to empower women within their communities might lead to contradictory practices being developed that could negatively impact the broad WPS and CVE agendas.

For example, the UN study’s recommendations on how to integrate CVE within WPS says all capacity building should be through civilian agencies, far removed from military processes. This approach has been hotly debated between peacebuilding and security professionals. The latter aren’t convinced that such a soft approach is appropriate when dealing with issues of national security while the former argue that counterterrorism frameworks are confusingly positioned somewhere between police operations and warfare, which may contribute towards compromising both women’s rights and human rights.
Clearly both arguments raise valid issues, but Bishop’s comments demonstrate that lessons should be taken from both approaches. I have argued that CVE in Australia would benefit from a re-focus that distances itself from CT operations. In the same way, I would suggest that a NAP should separate the two agendas to avoid confusing their very different objectives.

CT in the NAP should be addressed separately from CVE as it can be seen as a vehicle that uses women in international communities to advance security operations. CT operations need to be highly sensitive to situations on the ground, prioritising long-term solutions rather than immediate transformation.

CVE should be approached through a nation building agenda rather than under a CT strategy. Engaging civil society appropriately will incorporate varied strategies across sectors including development, healthcare, education and law enforcement. Women are already highly organised and engaged in these fields, and their existing participation, autonomy and leadership in such areas would greatly benefit CVE operations. The framework of the NAP would need to be able to reflect the diversity within different international communities when tackling CVE or CT.

The NAP has been criticised in the past for its approach to monitoring and evaluation processes. If CVE/CT were to be integrated, issues of accountability, transparency and efficiency with regard to WPS and CT/CVT must be adequately monitored and measured in accordance with specific guidelines and objectives. If this doesn’t happen, this could exacerbate conditions which can produce terrorism or violent extremism.

The Foreign Minister’s commitment to re-focusing CVE is welcome, and her mission to cultivate a cross-sector approach will hopefully prove beneficial. At present, ‘many initiatives incorporating women within CVE remain haphazard and simplistic, resulting in ill-equipped and poorly resourced program structures’ that neither benefit gender equality nor help counter violent extremism.

Although the NAP could be a good vehicle to help move CVE away from security-oriented policies, the challenges of untangling processes from existing CT/security led initiatives could be complex and difficult. It must be carefully thought through.

In its own words, the NAP is ‘a living document that will provide ongoing guidance to inform the work and policies of Australian Government agencies and departments.’ It would be timely to integrate CT and CVE within it, but it will take time and careful training of practitioners. Unless we get it right, it might do more harm than good.

For print readers, the original piece with live links is at https://www.aspistrategist.org.au/australias-wps-national-action-plan-tackle-terrorism/.

Acronyms and abbreviations

ADF  Australian Defence Force
ANDSF  Afghan National Defence Security Forces
CT  Counterterrorism
CTC  UN Counter-Terrorism Committee
CTED  UN Counter-Terrorism Committee Executive Directorate
CVE  countering violent extremism
DWP  Defence White Paper
NAP  National Action Plan
SEA  sexual exploitation and abuse
WPS  women, peace and security
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