

Considering gender and gender issues as a powerful tool towards peace and security.

United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 was unanimously adopted on 31 October 2000. The Resolution was a cornerstone and recognised that women are important interlocutors in the greater discussion on peace and security. In 2007, NATO passed its first policy document and, since the ratification, there have been many successes with respect to gender. However, the integration of gender perspective could still be considered to be in its nascent stages.

Gender Requires a Change of Mindset

Innovation entails a certain sense of 'newness', of invention, of originality. In light of this understanding, what does 'gender' have to do with innovation? Moreover, is 'gender', at all, innovative? The most obvious answer is: no. Gender as a subject – as a concept – is neither new nor innovative. It is rather the manner in which gender dimensions are considered and applied within the armed forces and in armed conflict that is very modern. In reality, such actions to incorporate the perspectives of both genders should already be part of our normative organisational behaviour. Thus, what we consider as 'new', to integrate gender perspective, is actually a reflection of the change in mindset and the perception of what is "normal". Consider a woman's right to vote. Not so long ago, in western democracies, women did not have the right to vote. Now, because it has been "normed" we do not even consider the question.



What is Gender?

Gender refers to the socially constructed roles and responsibilities between men and women. These roles are heavily influenced and learned by one's culture. In creating societies where roles are divided according to labour, it is typical to find men in dominant positions and women in subordinate positions. However, as these responsibilities are socially constructed, they may be altered or changed completely, thereby changing what is "normal". In this way, Gender

Advisors work to assess and evaluate differences between men and women in order to create and revise current policies, directives, education and training in consideration of the two genders.

What Does it Mean to Integrate Gender Perspective?

Properly integrating gender perspective involves the understanding that men and women perceive security risks, armed conflict and safety differently. Women in particular, are more negatively affected by, and in, armed conflict. Yet women are, more often than not, side-lined when it comes to addressing their particular needs with respect to protection and post-conflict reconstruction in particular. Therefore, by solely concentrating on security measures and freedom of movement for men, the needs of half of any given society are ignored. To prevent further exclusion, women need to be involved and represented at all stages of a decision-making process to ensure a more holistic, inclusive approach. The Alliance has also called for more women to be represented in national armed forces. In this manner, developing military structures with the ability to recognise and tackle multi-faceted conflicts and crises, including lobbying for a more gender-balanced force, contribute to greater operational effectiveness.

What, if at all, is 'New' About Gender?

The new part about gender is that nations and NATO believe gender perspective is integral to the Alliance's success, and, as such, there are currently Gender Advisors newly installed throughout the Peacetime and Crisis Establishments. They work to implement gender dimensions and provide direct advice on gender-related dimensions to the Commander. In this way, Gender Advisors streamline and address what should be normative behaviour and eventually will become the norm. Gender Advisors should not be the only staff officers to be single-handedly charged with integrating gender perspective. Considering gender dimensions should be part of what we do in each of our jobs, at all levels – from the strategic to the tactical levels. Such recognition by nations and the Alliance as a whole to mainstream gender reflects a new comprehension in the face of conflict. It is now widely-acknowledged that the lynchpin of a stable future depends (in part) on the successful integration of the women, peace and security agenda. We have gained a deep understanding that properly addressing gender dimensions is a powerful tool and a relatively untapped force towards peace.

Nonetheless, if we return back to our initial premise that socially constructed differences have persisted throughout time, then it is the manner in which we address these differences by creating policies, recommendations, education and training, and operational planning guidance, that is new. This, itself, involves a change in mindset and an admission that: 'we are not there...yet.' Integrating gender perspective benefits everyone – not just women. The Alliance must work to continue to actively engage and incorporate gender considerations so that such organisational behaviour is not left to the sole responsibility of an 'innovative' Gender Advisor.

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