

Empowering Change: The Evolving Role of Women in NATO-led Stability Operations

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Abstract. The participation of women in peacekeeping and stability operations, particularly within the framework of NATO missions, has evolved significantly over the years. This article explores the changing role of women in NATO-led operations, tracing the historical trajectory from the Revolutionary War to present-day peacekeeping efforts. It examines the integration of women into peacekeeping plans, the significance of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security, and current initiatives aimed at enhancing women's participation in stability operations. Despite progress, persistent challenges and barriers continue to hinder the full realization of gender equality within peacekeeping missions. The article concludes with recommendations for advancing women's roles in peace operations, emphasizing the importance of concerted efforts by international organizations, member states, and civil society to promote gender mainstreaming and women's empowerment in conflict resolution and peacebuilding endeavors.

Keywords: NATO-led operations, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, Advancing Women rights in Peace, and Security, & Gender and Peacekeeping

Introduction

The historical narrative of women's involvement in military endeavors traces back centuries, with notable figures like Deborah Sampson exemplifying the early contributions of women in conflicts such as the Revolutionary War. Over time, as conflicts have evolved and global dynamics have shifted, the roles of women in military and peacekeeping operations have undergone significant transformations.

In the contemporary context, women continue to play an increasingly vital role in various aspects of peacekeeping and security operations conducted by organizations like the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO). Since the founding of NATO in 1949, the alliance has continually adapted to address emerging security challenges and promote stability in the international arena. As conflicts persist and new threats emerge, the need for diverse and inclusive approaches to peacekeeping becomes ever more apparent.

Statistics indicate a growing presence of women within NATO forces, with a rising number actively participating in peacekeeping missions and logistical support roles. According to recent data, women comprise a significant percentage of personnel deployed in NATO-led operations, reflecting the organization's commitment to gender equality and diversity in its ranks.

In recent years, NATO has implemented initiatives aimed at further enhancing the participation of women in all aspects of its operations, including peacekeeping and logistical support. These initiatives encompass recruitment, training, and career advancement opportunities for women within NATO member states' armed forces.

Despite progress, challenges remain in achieving full gender parity and inclusivity within NATO operations. Addressing systemic barriers and biases, as well as promoting a culture of equality and respect, are ongoing priorities for NATO and its member states.

As we navigate the complexities of contemporary security challenges, the contributions of women in peacekeeping and stability operations are increasingly recognized as indispensable. By harnessing the diverse talents and perspectives of women alongside their

male counterparts, NATO continues to strengthen its capacity to promote peace, security, and prosperity on the global stage.

Integrating Women into the Plan

Since the establishment of the United Nations, efforts to promote gender equality and women's rights have been integral to the organization's mandate. The UN Charter reaffirms the principle of equal rights for men and women, emphasizing the importance of protecting the rights and freedoms of all individuals regardless of gender.

Throughout the decades, the issue of women's integration and equality has evolved within the framework of international development and peacekeeping. In the 1960s, discussions on women's roles in development were nascent, with the focus primarily on humanitarian aspects and legal rights. However, attention to the role of women intensified in subsequent decades, spurred by initiatives such as the International Development Strategy and seminal works like Ester Boserup's "Women's Role in Economic Development."

The Fourth World Conference on Women held in Beijing in 1995 marked a significant turning point, shifting the focus towards achieving gender equality through transformative initiatives. Rather than merely ensuring equal access to resources, the emphasis expanded to restructuring institutions and challenging gender relations. This shift in approach reflected a broader recognition of the need for systemic changes to address gender disparities effectively.

In the 1990s, the discourse on gender and development increasingly emphasized political empowerment and participatory approaches. Women were recognized as equal partners in the development process, with efforts aimed at fostering self-generated empowerment. This transformative approach underscored the importance of enabling women to take greater control of their lives and shape gender relations according to their aspirations.

Within the context of NATO, similar efforts have been underway to integrate women into peacekeeping and stability operations. Member states have implemented initiatives to enhance the participation of women in both military and civilian roles within the organization. These initiatives encompass recruitment policies, training programs, and efforts to combat gender-based discrimination and bias within military and security institutions.

NATO's commitment to gender equality is reflected in its ongoing efforts to mainstream gender perspectives across its operations and missions. By recognizing the unique contributions and perspectives of women, NATO seeks to strengthen its effectiveness in promoting peace, security, and stability worldwide.

Resolution 1325: Advancing Women, Peace, and Security

The adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security in October 2000 marked a significant milestone in recognizing the vital role of women in conflict prevention, peacekeeping, and peacebuilding efforts. Resolution 1325 underscored the disproportionate impact of armed conflict on women, as well as the invaluable contributions women make to promoting peace and security at all stages of conflict.

Resolution 1325 called upon member states, international organizations, and parties to armed conflict to take specific actions to advance the participation and rights of women in peace and security processes. These actions included gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping operations, increasing women's representation in decision-making processes, and addressing the specific needs of women in conflict and post-conflict settings.

In the years following the adoption of Resolution 1325, there have been concerted efforts within NATO member states to increase the representation of women in their armed forces and peacekeeping missions. While progress has been made, challenges remain in achieving gender parity within NATO forces. According to recent statistics, the representation of women in the

armed forces of NATO countries has increased since 2001, with some countries surpassing the 5.5% average reported in 2001.

However, despite these advancements, achieving the 50/50 gender balance outlined by NATO by the year 2015 has proven to be a formidable challenge. While strides have been made in recruiting and retaining women in military roles, barriers to full participation and advancement persist. Efforts to address these barriers include initiatives to promote gender diversity, combat gender-based discrimination, and provide support for women in military careers.

NATO member states continue to work towards realizing the objectives outlined in Resolution 1325, recognizing that the full and equal participation of women is essential for building sustainable peace and security. By fostering an inclusive and diverse military culture, NATO aims to harness the talents and perspectives of women to enhance its effectiveness in addressing complex security challenges.

Current Efforts of Women in Stability Operations

Efforts to increase women's participation in stability operations and address gender-based violence continue to be a priority for international organizations and member states. In recent years, various initiatives and conferences have been convened to advance women's roles in peacekeeping missions and promote gender equality within conflict zones.

One such initiative occurred in March 2008 with a conference held in Kigali, focusing on enhancing women's participation in peacekeeping missions and addressing sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV). This conference, supported by the UK Department for International Development (DFID), aimed to strengthen the capacities of the Rwanda Defense Forces (RDF) in combating SGBV and building awareness among military personnel and local communities.

Similar discussions took place in November 2006 during a gathering of experts in New York and Washington, where participants discussed strategies to improve peace operations by advancing the role of women. Convened by organizations such as the Stanley Foundation and Women in International Security, the gathering brought together practitioners, policymakers, and experts to identify barriers to women's advancement and propose concrete ways to enhance their participation in peace operations.

In response to the growing recognition of the importance of gender equality in peacekeeping operations, the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) disseminated a policy directive on Gender Equality in UN Peacekeeping Operations in late 2006. This directive emphasized the need to increase women's participation in both civilian and military roles within field missions and outlined strategies to achieve this goal.

Furthermore, NATO member states have been actively developing national action plans for the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which calls for increased participation of women in peacekeeping operations. These action plans include measures to recruit and retain women in various roles within peacekeeping missions, including heads of mission, military personnel, civilian police, and international and national civilian staff.

By prioritizing gender equality and women's participation in stability operations, NATO and its member states are working towards building more inclusive and effective peacekeeping efforts that reflect the diverse perspectives and talents of all individuals involved.

Challenges/Barriers for Women

Despite efforts to promote gender equality and increase women's participation in peace operations, significant challenges and barriers persist, hindering progress towards achieving gender balance and inclusive leadership within these missions.

Recent statistics illustrate the implementation gap and the underrepresentation of women in key leadership and operational roles within peacekeeping missions. While there have been some incremental improvements, disparities persist across various sectors:

- There remains a notable absence of female heads of mission, with zero out of 18 operations led by women, and limited representation among deputy heads.
- Women constitute only a small fraction of military personnel and police forces deployed in peace operations, comprising just 1 percent and 4 percent respectively.
- While women make up a higher proportion of international civilian staff, particularly at lower levels, they are significantly underrepresented in management positions, especially at the D-1 level or above.
- Nationally recruited civilian staff also face challenges, with women often relegated to service and clerical roles at the lowest grades, despite constituting 22 percent of total staff.

These statistics underscore the persistent barriers that women encounter in accessing and advancing within peace operations. Some of the key challenges include:

- An opaque and informal hiring process, lacking formal job descriptions and transparent criteria for selection.
- Limited support from member states for women candidates, particularly for national positions, which are often viewed as political appointments.
- A lack of political will to prioritize gender balance in leadership appointments, resulting in continued underrepresentation of women in key roles.
- Competition from other career opportunities for women with relevant experience, leading to challenges in recruitment and retention.
- Reluctance among some women to accept appointments in conflict-affected regions due to concerns or obligations related to family and personal safety.

Efforts to address these challenges are underway, both within NATO and across international organizations. Initiatives aimed at promoting gender equality, creating more transparent recruitment processes, and providing support for women's career advancement are critical to overcoming these barriers and realizing the full potential of women's contributions to peace and security.

Conclusion and Recommendations

Despite the challenges and barriers outlined, it is evident that there is a pressing need for greater advancement in actively recruiting and integrating women into international peacekeeping environments. Women's participation has been demonstrated to enhance the effectiveness of peacekeeping operations, contributing unique perspectives and skills essential for promoting sustainable peace and security.

As stated by Kofi Annan, former Secretary-General of the United Nations, gender equality is not only a goal in itself but also a vital means to achieving sustainable development, good governance, and effective humanitarian assistance. Therefore, it is imperative that efforts to promote women's participation in peace operations are prioritized and sustained.

In line with this imperative, recommendations put forth by experts and practitioners offer actionable strategies for advancing gender equality within NATO forces and United Nations peacekeeping missions:

- The Committee on Women in the NATO Forces (CWINF) should actively engage with decision-makers in the United Nations Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and identify opportunities for women's involvement at top levels of peace operations.
- Efforts should be made to promote gender mainstreaming in peace negotiations and ensure that peace agreements and accords include gender perspectives.

- The DPKO must institutionalize gender mainstreaming in peacekeeping missions and ensure that all training material includes gender awareness training.
- Accountability mechanisms should be established to ensure that all personnel take responsibility for gender mainstreaming in their work, and gender units should be established in all major UN peacekeeping missions.
- Continued research and mentorship programs focusing on the involvement of military women in peacekeeping operations are essential.
- Networks should be created among military women to facilitate support and mentorship opportunities.
- Men must be actively involved in promoting gender equality and recognizing the importance of women's participation in peace operations.

These recommendations, along with ongoing efforts within NATO and the United Nations, are critical for advancing gender equality and realizing the full potential of women's contributions to peace and security on a global scale.

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