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THE FUTURE OF WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY AT NATO

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NATO's approach to Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) has developed significantly since it first adopted a policy on the topic in 2007. From a much problematized 'add women and stir' approach to improve operational effectiveness in Afghanistan, it has become a prominent feature of the alliance's new Strategic Concept adopted at the Madrid Summit. Here NATO reiterated its commitment to integrate the WPS agenda across all tasks and 'to continue to advance gender equality as a reflection of our values'.[1] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn1) WPS should therefore form a core part of NATO's changing priorities, primarily in response to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in early 2022. Yet where we might have expected to see NATO leadership commit to include WPS as part of their response, in particular the defense of 'Western values', we have instead seen WPS marginalized by the Alliance despite stated policy commitments.[2] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn2)

The WPS agenda is encapsulated in UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and the nine follow-up resolutions. It calls for the better representation of women in peace and security, while also acknowledging the gendered impact of armed conflict (on men and women) through the integration of gender perspectives, along with addressing the use of conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV). The adoption of UNSCR 1325 was groundbreaking, it marked the first time the Security Council had discussed women's experiences of conflict and also because of the significant involvement of (feminist) civil society in supporting the Resolution's adoption.[3] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn3) Civil society is therefore integral to keeping the agenda alive at the Security Council but also through holding governments, and international organizations, to account for their WPS commitments.[4] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn4) Such external scrutiny is integral to realizing the transformative potential of the WPS agenda, for example, highlighting where implementation is racialized and 'others' those on the receiving end of WPS initiatives[5] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn5), rather than seeking to transform gendered and racialized structures underpinning existing foreign, security and defense policy apparatus.

Central to the future success of NATO's WPS work is the Secretary General's Special Representative (SGSR) on WPS. The establishment of this high-level role in 2012 was recognized as an example of best practice by the UN.[6] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn6) The SGSR provides leadership on WPS at NATO, acting as the external face of NATO's WPS work, for example, through addressing the UN Security Council.[7] (applewebdata://4F393647-

CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn7) However, most crucial is their internal role where they must bring together allies to operationalize NATO's WPS commitments. Each of the previous three incumbents of the role and the current SGSR, Irene Fellin, have brought different qualities to the role. However, what has proved critical to the success of the SGSR position to-date is their ability to leverage external scrutiny to push for NATO to do more on WPS and to hold the alliance accountable for its stated priorities.[8] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn8)

NATO's first engagement with WPS came in 2007 when it adopted a policy in conjunction with the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council (EAPC). This has since been revised three times; all such policies have been accompanied by action plans, the most recent of which was approved at the October 2021 Defense Ministerial. In 2009, Bi-Strategic Command 40-1 translated the WPS agenda to apply to the Strategic Commands (and has since been revised three times). There have been some challenges to putting WPS into actionable policy at NATO, for instance, the initial 2011 WPS action plan was classified which meant civil society could not hold NATO to account for its WPS work as is common more broadly on WPS, yet the subsequent declassification served to limit the applicability of WPS to sensitive areas of NATO's work.[9] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn9)Despite such challenges, NATO's WPS policies have developed substantially and are applicable across all of NATO's tasks. There is therefore a significant policy commitment to WPS by NATO, its allies, and partners; what remains is to operationalize these commitments across the Alliance's tasks.

There are several challenges to operationalizing NATO's WPS policy in practice. First, NATO's commitment to WPS has been primarily external facing, rather than concerned with reforming its own gendered structures. For example, WPS has served as a 'safe issue' through which NATO can build relationships with 'awkward' partners,[10] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn10) including partner states such as Georgia, Jordan, Japan, and Ukraine.[11] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn11) NATO's work on WPS has also been projected as a 'good news story' for the Alliance during the challenges of its involvement in Afghanistan[12] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn12) and more recently as a public diplomacy tool to reach 'new audiences' through engaging celebrity.[13] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn13) Second, NATO's initial engagement with WPS through its intervention in Afghanistan led to an understanding of WPS as a tool to increase operational effectiveness, through the use of Female Engagement Teams (FETs)[14] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn14) and Gender Advisors. Finally, while a growing number of individuals at NATO are committed to WPS, inadequate resourcing[15] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn15) and the gendered policing of WPS work[16] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn16) are reflective of significant institutional resistance which serves as a hindrance to operationalizing WPS policy commitments in practice.

"A more recent and serious challenge concerning NATO's changing priorities and the place of WPS is the gendered silences surrounding NATO's response to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This is surprising given this is a war fought not just in terms of territory but also represents a fundamental attack on democracy and NATO values including individual liberty, human rights, and the rule of law."

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A more recent and serious challenge concerning NATO's changing priorities and the place of WPS is the gendered silences surrounding NATO's response to the full-scale Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. This is surprising given this is a war fought not just in terms of territory but also represents a fundamental attack on democracy and NATO values including individual liberty, human rights, and the rule of law. Russia's conduct of the invasion, with allegations of the widespread use of CRSV,[17] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn17) runs directly counter to the law of armed conflict and is directly applicable to the WPS agenda. Further, Ukraine is a signatory to NATO's WPS policy, and the alliance has supported the development of Ukraine's WPS policy since 2014[18] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn18) and the absence of WPS from NATO's response and support for Ukraine undermines the efficacy of the agenda. If NATO were 'to continue to advance gender equality as a reflection of our values'[19] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn19) as the new Strategic Concept commits it to, then we would expect WPS to be activated

here. This would entail the inclusion of Gender Advisors as part of the NATO forces deployed on the eastern flank and for WPS to be mainstreamed into NATO's public diplomacy in order to uphold and defend NATO values more broadly. There is still time for NATO to act here; it is therefore important to consider what concrete actions are needed to operationalize WPS in all of NATO's tasks going forward.

Future-proofing NATO through WPS

As NATO re-orientates back towards its collective defense purpose to protect allies in the face of a recalcitrant Russia, the implementation of the WPS agenda is more relevant than ever. Over the last decades, conflict has become profoundly marked by transnational terrorism and violent radicalization, as well as the return of territorial annexation and contested sovereignty in disputed territories, as the case of Georgia, Nagorno-Karabakh and Ukraine have showed. NATO has also recognized space and cyberspace as new operational domains, and the Alliance is currently developing an initial concept for Multi-Domain Operations. There are also new challenges posed from growing geopolitical competition, advances in warfare technology and hybrid threats, and from climate change.

The strategic environment has evolved into a highly complex, hybrid and dynamic system with many new, state, and non-state actors (both local and international). Understanding their roles, relationships and their interdependencies is key to assess their potential impact to NATO's security. Considering the highly gendered nature of war and the increasing complexity of the strategic environment and its interrelation with the human dimension, requires an in-depth understanding of how new and more advanced patterns of warfare affect whole populations, how women, men, girls and boys can differently have influence on and be impacted by threats to our security due to their gender.[20] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn20) This demonstrates how through operationalizing WPS, NATO will build resilience to ensure allies can better respond to threats and withstand attacks below the threshold of conflict more effectively. The resulting ability to analyses a situation through a gender perspective enables NATO to conduct a comprehensive analysis of conflict to better predict, prevent and mitigate risk on the battlefields of the present and future.

Leadership

Internally, WPS should be reframed within NATO as a core leadership topic, not a women's issue, or something extra but as something essential. This means ensuring that all leaders across the Alliance are required to have a working knowledge of NATO's commitments on WPS and how to operationalize it. Given the reality of the highly gendered composition of the alliance, with men significantly overrepresented in leadership roles in the military but also (to a lesser extent) political structures, it is essential that this topic be a key part of any learning curriculum for senior NATO leadership and forms part of their professionalization. There are already a number of men who support WPS within their roles at NATO[21] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn21) but we need more of these men, including key alliance military leaders with a grasp of the basic tenets of WPS and understanding of its relevance to the Alliance's tasks, who can take the reins and push the agenda forward.

Representation

WPS brings to the fore the issue of representation, and women's representation is important to address at NATO, particularly in senior leadership positions where men dominate.[22] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn22) However, the WPS agenda is about far more than that, and caution should be sought before placing women into WPS roles solely by merit of their gender, rather than their prior expertise. Likewise, we should be cautious about calls seeking to increase the number of women in NATO (and NATO forces) on an essentialized stereotypical assumption that women can, and will, bring about the change expected of them on the basis of their gender, even though they have signed up to the same institutional values as their male colleagues.[23] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn23) It is therefore essential to resist this narrow understanding of WPS which frames the agenda as a 'women's issue', WPS is not just applicable to women, as NATO's own policy attests, it calls for the integration of gender perspectives to ensure actions do not disproportionately impact one gender over another. In placing the onus on women, who are in a disadvantaged position structurally within the alliance, we not only put them in an impossible position, but we let men off the hook and overlook wider calls for institutional reform.

Accountability

As a result of NATO's engagement with WPS, the alliance has begun to consult civil society formally in the policy making process for the first time through the Civil Society Advisory Panel on WPS (CSAP).[24] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn24) CSAP provides an important forum for NATO to engage with WPS experts from a range of civil society based in member and partner states, along with those on the receiving end of NATO operations, to gain external evaluation of NATO's WPS work. There have been some challenges with CSAP, in particular perceptions of the value NATO places on civil society feedback, which have contributed to a reluctance among some civil society to engage. However, these teething problems are to be expected given the alliance's lack of previous experience here and are far outweighed by the benefits CSAP has the potential to bring to NATO's WPS work.[25] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn25) This is because engaging civil society through such a forum is crucial not only to holding NATO to account for its WPS commitments,

but to ensure its WPS policies and priorities align with changing operational priorities. This will ensure NATO maintains a strategic edge going forward, including preventing and minimizing harm in future engagements. It is essential therefore that CSAP's mandate continues to be renewed.

Professionalization

The practice of WPS requires the acquisition of specialist knowledge on the topic of gender perspectives and its relevance to peace and security, or its professionalization. Such a process needs, however, to be cognizant of the wider global power structures in which NATO operates to ensure it reflects the brevity of the WPS agenda and is not exclusionary.[26] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn26) NATO Gender Advisors and those responsible for WPS are in a number of cases well positioned structurally within the alliance with direct access to leadership, though more needs to be done to make this consistent across the political and military structures and ensure these roles are adequately resourced. Another significant challenge to realizing the efficacy of Gender Advisors is the professionalization of the practice of WPS. Gender Advisors continue to be appointed in some instances with no education or training and no prior experience working on WPS.[27] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn27) This puts that individual at a significant disadvantage, with them having to play 'catch up' to learn about an agenda which is far from common sense. In some cases, women are appointed to these positions on an assumption that women 'know gender' by merit of being women, this further undermines the WPS agenda, and the expertise required to implement it. Such work at NATO should be cognizant of the wider critiques of WPS professionalization, notably that it removes 'experts' from the lived experiences of those on the ground through creating hierarchies of knowledge[28] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn28) and should seek to address the hegemony of whiteness which pervades such spaces.[29] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn29) NATO must therefore continue to engage, and listen to, civil society in its WPS practice to provide accountability and should seek to diversify and strengthen its training programme.

Training

NATO's department head for gender in military operations training is the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations (NCGM) based in Sweden. Until this point the NCGM has not been on an equal footing with other specialists at NATO with its expertise unable to be recognized as a Center of Excellence because it is a partner state which hosts it (despite other NATO members contributing). Sweden's imminent membership of NATO provides an opportune moment to address this imbalance and to place gender expertise on a par with other specialisms including cyber security, military medicine, and strategic communication. Designating NCGM a NATO Centre of Excellence (COE) is an essential part of this. COEs offer recognized expertise and experience of value to NATO, through assisting in the development of doctrine, identifying lessons learned, and contributing to improving interoperability among allies, while avoiding duplication.[30] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn30) Bringing NCGM further 'into the fold' of NATO offers an important opportunity for other NATO nations to contribute staff to NCGM beyond the Nordics (and Canada and the Netherlands who have also seconded personnel), to demonstrate unity and that WPS is a topic *all* allies are actively seized of. It is also an opportunity to engage with NATO partners further afield, and utilize civil society expertise, to ensure knowledge is reflective of the full depth and breadth of the global WPS agenda.

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Doctrine

Gender doctrine is integral to operationalizing NATO's WPS commitments in practice. Military Doctrine refers to the 'fundamental principles by which military forces guide their actions in support of objectives'[31] (applewebdata://4F393647-CEC2-4DD2-8C7D-BB527CB4DE2C#_ftn31), it helps to standardize the way things are done and ensures that everyone is doing

things in the same way and producing the necessary reports and outcomes needed for mission support. NATO must approve gender doctrine and simplify 'how to do' WPS in a way that is accessible, replicable, mission focused, and standardized. This should be through the provision of a simple, general tool on how to integrate gender perspectives into missions and operations; including examples of particular situations that are field tested and proven to work. There also needs to be overall guidance for how to integrate gender perspectives into strategic, operational, and tactical level situations beyond WPS. This is in addition to guidance on how to mainstream gender perspectives into all other doctrine documents; specifically what aspects are the most important, and how do they relate to other doctrinal practices. To put this into practice, NATO will need to call on its most skilled practitioners to work with experts from other areas of military focus in order to make sure that the requirements are the correct fit for each area that gender perspectives as a cross-cutting topic touches.

Concluding Remarks

NATO has the highest-level commitment of allies to WPS through the new Strategic Concept, it also has the policies to put these aspirations into place, yet as we have detailed here significant barriers remain to operationalize this to future-proof the alliance in the face of changing priorities. To address this, our six key takeaways for NATO are to:

- Drive WPS forward as a **leadership** issue,
- Understand the importance of meaningful **representation**,
- Provide **accountability** through engaging on WPS externally,
- **Professionalize** the practice of WPS through valuing gender expertise including resourcing it,
- Invest in WPS **training** through designating NCGM as a COE,
- Develop gender **doctrine**.

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