



## NOT THE USUAL SUSPECTS

### Engaging Male Champions of Women, Peace and Security

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#### I. INTRODUCTION

In 2000, the UN Security Council unanimously passed the landmark Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on Women, Peace and Security. UNSCR 1325 is the first formal recognition of the critical role women play in effective conflict resolution and peacebuilding. It mandates attention to gender in all aspects of international peace and security decision-making. UNSCR 1325 and its subsequent, related family of resolutions are now known as the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

While men still dominate leadership roles within national and international security structures, they have remained on the sidelines of the Women, Peace and Security movement. With the increasing awareness of the Women, Peace and Security mandates in countries around the world, men who are personally moved by this agenda are stepping forward as supporters and contributors. However, there are obstructions (both institutional and perceptual) that have limited the engagement of men and the powerful impact they could have by supporting this mandate

vocally. Recently, there has been more attention on engaging men, but the efforts have been ad hoc and lessons have not been documented sufficiently.

In 2017, Our Secure Future, a program of One Earth Future, launched a new project to begin to address this significant gap. Through interviews and surveys of leaders from across sectors of the US government, US military, other governments and militaries, civil society, and international organizations, this project is collecting the reflections of men who are promoting gender equality in peace and security policy and practice. Between December 2016 and July 2017, more than 50 semi-structured phone and Skype interviews were conducted for this project and more than 20 survey responses were collected and analyzed. This study is meant to provide important foundational knowledge that can inform policy, research, and advocacy to support the next stage of growth for the Women, Peace and Security movement.

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*Find the full report, Not The Usual Suspects, at [oursecurefuture.org](http://oursecurefuture.org)*

## II. DO MEN MATTER TO WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY?

Women, Peace and Security presents an opportunity to make formal peacemaking and peacebuilding processes and structures more inclusive, effective, and sensitive to the needs and capacities of the entire population. Men are critical partners in this endeavor. Men have the power to move this agenda forward—or to obstruct it—because of their dominant roles in peace and security structures and decision-making. There are also deep interconnections between gendered norms—including concepts of masculinity and violence—and armed conflict. From the family unit to the highest levels of policy, men’s attitudes and behaviors directly affect women’s personal security and life opportunities with wider ramifications for stability and peace. Gender equality, and the transformative change that the Women, Peace and Security movement envisions, will only be achieved with men’s involvement.

Since the passage of UNSCR 1325, women have been visibly at the forefront of the Women, Peace and Security movement. Women peacebuilders were the founders of this movement and they have persistently carried it forward. Men who occupy positions of power within peace and security institutions are usually the advocacy targets for the agenda but have rarely been the advocates themselves, with a few notable exceptions. However, as peace and security institutions begin to formally integrate Women, Peace and Security actions, more men have started to participate directly. The National Action Plans (NAPs) and related policy mandates in many countries have also opened more space for men’s engagement. According to one interviewee who works specifically on developing NAPs, “We are seeing more men in the workshops. Men and women are working together.”

Men who were interviewed for this study pointed out that as men, they can convey a persuasive message about the relevance and importance of gender equality principles. When men deliver the message, it is given more weight, precisely because Women, Peace and Security is so often perceived as a “women’s issue.” Men with traditional national security backgrounds can also become credible bridge-builders between Women, Peace and Security and other peace and security policy areas. They understand the perspectives, the language, and the prism of the security sector, as well as its biases, and can identify strategic opportunities for advocacy. Men also expressed the view that as men, they can open needed dialogue about prevalent gender norms

and expectations for men, and about their consequences. They can begin to shift perceptions on gender equality and security in positive ways.

## III. A REDEFINITION OF SECURITY:

### *Women, Peace and Security as a Transformative Agenda*

The bold idea behind Women, Peace and Security was to change the way that security is conceptualized (the “what”) and pursued (the “how”) by national, regional, and international actors. The Women, Peace and Security movement recognizes that gender inequalities, power, social status, and violence are intimately linked, and as a result, violent conflict can only be prevented, managed, or solved by fully including women and incorporating all gender perspectives.

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Male advocates and experts who participated in this study highlighted the transformational potential Women, Peace and Security has to redefine security. They observed that recent experiences with terrorism, counterinsurgency and stability operations may have created much more openness to change within security-focused institutions, out of necessity. Interviewees pointed out that no government or individual can address today’s urgent peace and security issues without collaborative efforts that integrate equality and inclusiveness.

Interviewees, including those from the security sector, also expressed the view that military force cannot solve the underlying issues that drive conflict and instability. Many emphasized that the entire population needs to be engaged in finding solutions to these deeper challenges. One interviewee, a former member of the military, observed that the military is very good at “cutting the weeds”—i.e., fighting aggression with aggression—but that this approach does not change the conditions that give rise to movements such as Boko Haram. He observed that “Changing conditions starts with families, communities, and tribes,” and that women play a central role in this process.

There was a commonly expressed perspective that the current dominant approaches are failing to provide peace or security for much of the world's population, and that Women, Peace and Security, and gender equality more broadly, offers a chance for deep structural and social change. One interviewee commented that "we need to change the parameters of the system." He noted that gender equality needs to be considered in all aspects of foreign policy. "Women, Peace and Security has tremendous strategic potential that is not being tapped," according to another participant. For many male interviewees, this agenda goes far beyond institutional mandates: "We are not so much talking about policies as much as human values....We do have the capability to change how we see the world."

Interviewees pointed out that mandates are necessary but insufficient to bring needed change to peace and security institutions and processes. Much of the attention on Women, Peace and Security has remained symbolic, general, and high-level, but does not always filter down to changing practices in life and work. According to one former high-level official from a Western country: "The elements of government are based on standards and norms on one hand and laws and rules on the other. Much of the Women, Peace and Security narrative has been focused on rules and laws, but what's really important is norms."

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Men who work in the Women, Peace and Security arena made clear that this agenda should not be reduced to simply adding women to peace and security structures: "The point of 1325 is not to have more women doing what we were doing before. It's about including women to transform security. Parity is important, but it is not 1325.... It is very valid but does not supplant the need for gendered institutions." As one senior-level military interviewee noted: "Parity is not irrelevant, but it doesn't achieve the goals. To provide comprehensive security solutions you must have representatives from all of society. A diverse security sector means that all of society is invested in the solutions."

Men highlighted the need to move from general sensitization about gender to actually transforming institutions and people as being the next stage for the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Interviewees said that now is the juncture to reflect on the body of research and experiences that have been collected on Women, Peace and Security and gender equality and learn from best practices. They spoke about expanding beyond micro-interventions to focus on the larger social and structural issues that are prerequisites for peaceful societies.

## IV. OVERCOMING GENDER BLINDNESS AND BIAS

Men indicated that changing organizational cultures and leaders is the greatest impediment to implementation of Women, Peace and Security goals and related gender equality goals. They pointed to pervasive gender blindness and gender bias in the peace and security field that must be overcome. Among those surveyed for this study, half reported that they have experienced or observed instances of gender bias against the agenda.

Male advocates described personal and professional experiences, including in family dynamics and academic studies and early experiences in conflict settings, that were influential to their understanding of gender. Some men who had served in the military were deeply affected by the realities of war and its disproportionate effects on women.

## CASE STUDY: THE U.S. NATIONAL ACTION PLAN *an Insider View*

In December 2011, the U.S. government released its first National Action Plan (US NAP). The US NAP was the culmination of more than 12 months of work inside the sprawling U.S. foreign policy and national security apparatus. Individuals who were closely involved in the process were interviewed for this study.

The US NAP process demonstrated the vital importance of having senior-level champions. The unique constellation of leaders across government agencies who were personally committed to the Women, Peace and Security agenda was unprecedented. In many ways, the US NAP process was more important than the product, according to interviewees. It brought representatives from across the U.S. government together, including diplomatic, military, development, health, and other officials. The process of formulating a US NAP was strongly supported and prioritized by the president and those in senior leadership positions. Various components of the U.S. government needed to come up with a credible plan.

The process introduced many government policymakers to Women, Peace and Security for the first time. Advocates within the government found that different arguments resonated with different people as they were trying to build support. Many policymakers were influenced by the concept of improving effectiveness; others were moved by a belief in equality, human rights, and women's rights; and some were interested in unpacking issues around masculinities and security. It necessitated a fact-based and nuanced approach. Those who were leading the process framed it as a mission-driven strategy. Women, Peace and Security was presented as a new lens on complex peace and security issues.

One interviewee observed that those who responded to the Women, Peace and Security agenda positively often tapped into a personal experience (e.g., had a daughter; worked with very competent women, etc.) to recognize the importance of gender equality. The process was female-dominated (women made up the majority of government staff involved), which complicated efforts to clarify gender

equality concepts or to overcome the perception that Women, Peace and Security is a women's issue. According to one interviewee, there were 11 senior staff members from various agencies who participated in the working meetings, and only 2 of them were men (the interviewee being one of them). In comparison, Mass Atrocity Prevention teams are almost entirely comprised of male staffers.

There was more support from the Department of Defense (DoD) than anticipated. Some former officials attributed that to larger shifts within the DoD that created openness to this agenda. There was a significant increase in the number of senior-level women in the DoD and clear support from the Secretary of Defense. There was a recognition based on recent experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq that failure to engage with women in the communities was a strategic disadvantage for the military. Counterinsurgency strategies emphasize engagement of local populations, so the Women, Peace and Security agenda was understood as legitimate. Some of the men from the military were unenthusiastic, although not outright resistant, in the beginning. After some involvement in the working-group discussions, many became very supportive and began to see that this wasn't "just a women's issue."

Some participants reported that the initial momentum seen during the process of drafting the NAP has faded with implementation. According to those who were involved in the US NAP process, the biggest current challenge is that policies cannot be prioritized without adequate resources. It is very difficult to add more to the portfolios of already overextended government staff. Senior-level officials, even if they are personally supportive, are time-pressed. Many related responsibilities are given to the most junior staff, who lack influence or authority, and who are often also young women. Interviewees were uncertain about the fate of the US NAP under the new administration. Many pointed out that the implementation was moving forward. However, they emphasized that the attitudes of senior-level leaders send a very clear message about priorities that reverberates throughout the ranks of government.

## V. RECOMMENDATIONS

The participants in this study, reflecting on their experiences and lessons learned, offered recommended approaches to moving Women, Peace and Security forward in practice.

### *Cultivate Champions—Women and Men—on the Inside*

- Consider Women, Peace and Security and gender equality to be both an internal and external policy issue. Peace and security institutions need to improve gender equality internally in order to make a case for gender equality externally in bilateral and international relations.
- Cultivate support from senior-level men in order to overcome skepticism, resistance, and inertia in peace and security bureaucracies. Support gender-equality champions in the mid-level ranks of these institutions who will move into senior ranks.
- Increase opportunities for men and women in peace and security institutions to build competencies on gender equality and Women, Peace and Security. Facilitate more opportunities for learning best practices from gender experts.
- Bridge civil-society and security-sector communities working on Women, Peace and Security.
- Integrate gender advisors and focal points—both male and female—in peace and security bureaucracies to ensure policy documents or programs do not move forward without adequate consideration of gender implications.

### *Address Gender Norms as a Foundation for Peace*

- Focus on listening and open dialogue as first steps in starting conversations about gender norms and equality principles in local contexts.
- Conduct participatory research to examine gender relations and behaviors, and how these relate to peace and security in specific contexts.
- Address the role of masculinities in peace and security—including the connections between masculine norms and violence—and the development of healthy masculinities and caregiving/fatherhood attitudes. Focusing on people as fathers, brothers, and sons helps them think differently about themselves and how violence affects others.
- Utilize mixed-gender teams on the ground to facilitate contact with both women and men on peace and security issues, and to send a visible message that gender equality is relevant to everyone. When designing research and programming, communicate with women’s civil society groups to determine if women-only or mixed-gender workshops are most appropriate for context.
- Partner with civil society and women’s organizations on the ground to identify genuine champions, and to formulate approaches to Women, Peace and Security and gender equality that will resonate with the population.

### *Tailor the Women, Peace and Security Message*

- Tailor the gender equality message very carefully for specific audiences, based on an understanding of the institution and individual. Engage people from “where they are.” Consider strategic opportunities to draw attention to the gendered aspects of high-profile peace and security issues to gain the attention of policymakers and build increased support.
- Emphasize that gender equality is smart policy because it makes communities and countries safer. Offer country-specific examples to illustrate the importance of gender in a direct and powerful way. Counter the perception that this is a zero-sum game—women’s gains are men’s losses—to mitigate overt and subtle pushback.
- Push peace and security institutions to utilize data about local needs and solutions to inform policy and programs in specific, gender-sensitive ways.
- Broaden the framing for discussions to include different audiences and encourage new approaches. Develop coalitions and alliances among advocates of gender equality who approach the issue from different fields and/or disciplines to influence specific policies and programs.
- Find ways to engage young people, and other sectors, including business and media, to help formulate innovative approaches to gender equality goals in countries and communities.

## VI. KEY FINDINGS OF THE REPORT:

### *A Redefinition of Security: Women, Peace and Security as a Transformative Agenda*

- Men who participated in this study highlighted the transformational potential of Women, Peace and Security to redefine how the international community conceptualizes and approaches security.
- Among male champions of Women, Peace and Security there is a common view that current institutions and approaches are failing to achieve peace and security and that it is time for change. There is a recognition that gender forms a foundational pillar of social justice and that it is impossible to achieve social needs and human potential without addressing gender.
- Although policy mandates are a starting point for realizing this agenda, the change needs to be much deeper to address values, norms, and behaviors.
- There is increasing recognition that military force cannot solve the underlying issues that drive conflict and instability, and that the entire population needs to be engaged in finding solutions. Recent experiences with terrorism, counterinsurgency, and stability operations may have created more openness to the agenda within security-focused institutions, out of necessity.
- The vision of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 is to incorporate gender perspectives and change the way that peace and security is approached. Gender parity is important, but does not fully reflect the transformative goals of the Women, Peace and Security agenda.

### *Men's Engagement in Women, Peace and Security*

- Male advocates are often drawn to this agenda by transformative personal and professional experiences that help them overcome gender-blindness. For some men, Women, Peace and Security and gender equality work altered their perspectives on security significantly.
- Men can convey a persuasive message about the relevance and importance of gender equality principles. When men deliver the message, it is given more weight precisely because Women, Peace and Security is so often perceived as being a “women’s issue.”
- As peace and security institutions begin to formally integrate Women, Peace and Security due to international and national mandates, more men have started to participate directly as champions and experts. The National Action Plans (NAPs) in many countries have opened more space for men’s engagement.
- Male advocates echoed concerns that over-focusing on men’s engagement could dilute the Women, Peace and Security agenda. Men are cognizant of the need to visibly support the agenda as allies without dominating the conversations.
- Men who work on these issues find they have very few male colleagues, but are actively trying to bring more men into the movement as allies. Men say they have received strong support and mentorship from female advocates and civil-society organizations.



## The “How” of Gender Equality in Peace and Security

- The gender equality message should be tailored very carefully for specific peace and security audiences, based on the institution and individual. Many male advocates in government, military, or international organization contexts find it most effective to present Women, Peace and Security and gender equality principles as practical, smart policy that makes communities and countries safer.
- For many men, the case for Women, Peace and Security and gender equality has already been made, and the current challenge is to move from “why” to “how,” pushing peace and security institutions to inform policy and programs in specific ways.
- Changing organizational cultures and leaders are perceived as the greatest impediment to implementation of Women, Peace and Security. Peace and security environments are extremely resistant to changing established policy approaches and processes. Deeply ingrained gendered dynamics also obstruct gender equality efforts.
- In some cases, there is a perception that Western government and military institutions are failing to fully leverage the time and talent of those inside these bureaucracies—both women and men—who want to work on implementing Women, Peace and Security.
- Gender is an issue that intersects and cross-cuts all peace and security fields and areas of work, yet is still siloed. While many men work directly on gendered aspects of peace and security, few have formal connections with the Women, Peace and Security community.
- The strategies for promoting gender equality and Women, Peace and Security on the ground vary by individual and organization, but they share a common foundational approach: open dialogue and sensitivity to local context. Gender can be introduced as a concept that helps people make sense of the world if it is connected with everyday life and experiences.



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