

PRIPADNICE OBOROŽENIH SIL V MIROVNIH OPERACIJAH IN POLITIKA RESOLUCIJE 1325 VARNOSTNEGA SVETA OZN

MILITARY WOMEN IN PEACEKEEPING MISSIONS AND THE POLITICS OF UN SECURITY COUNCIL RESOLUTION 1325

Povzetek Po letu 2000 je Varnostni svet Organizacije združenih narodov sprejel osem resolucij o zaščiti in opolnomočenju žensk v konfliktnih situacijah. Med glavnimi cilji teh resolucij je povečati zastopanost žensk v mirovni operacijah, še zlasti med uniformiranim osebjem. Med vojaškimi pripadniki v mirovni operacijah je le tri odstotke žensk, ta odstotek se je v zadnjih letih komaj kaj spremenil. Slab napredek v misijah OZN je sovpadal z obdobjem zgodovinskega napredka pri vključevanju žensk v nacionalne oborožene sile. V tem obdobju sta se zaradi mandатов in oblike mirovni operacij pojavila bolj ali manj neposredna in odkrita potreba po sodelovanju žensk ter vse večje spoznanje zagovornikov enakosti spolov, da se sodelovanju pripadnic na mirovni misijah posveča prej preveč kot premalo pozornosti. V članku so predstavljeni argumenti razprave, ki v Združenih narodih na to temo poteka zadnjih nekaj let, ter poskusi razlage teh navideznih protislovij.

Ključne besede *Spol in mirovne operacije, ženske v oboroženih silah, Resolucija 1325, ženske, mir in varnost.*

Abstract Since 2000, the United Nations Security Council has adopted eight resolutions on the protection and empowerment of women in conflict situations. Increasing the representation of women in peacekeeping, and particularly among uniformed personnel, is one of the most repeated goals of these resolutions. However, only three percent of military personnel in peacekeeping operations are women and this percentage has barely budged in recent years. This lack of progress in UN missions has coincided with a period of historically significant advances in the integration of women in national armed forces, a time in which the mandates and design of peacekeeping operations more directly and explicitly called for the participation of women, and a growing perception among gender equality advocates that the presence of female troops in peace operations was being given too much emphasis,

rather than too little. This article outlines the parameters of this debate in the United Nations over the last few years, and attempts to explain these apparent contradictions.

Key words *Gender and peacekeeping, women in armed forces, Resolution 1325, women, peace and security.*

Introduction At the turn of the century, the United Nations Security Council recognized that gender equality and women's leadership are crucial for the maintenance of international peace and security. Since then, this has since become a prominent theme in deliberations and resolutions of the Security Council, and an important area of work for the international community. Although many of these commitments and declarations are often only partially met and sometimes altogether ignored, there has been undeniable progress since Resolution 1325 was adopted in 2000. There are more women in government and international and regional organizations, more and better examples of meaningful inclusion of women in peace negotiations and national dialogues, more financial resources spent on women's empowerment in post-conflict contexts, a full body of international jurisprudence devoted to sexual and gender-based crimes, and programmes assisting hundreds of thousands of women where none existed two decades ago in crisis settings.

However, one of the most repeated goals of these resolutions is the one that has experienced arguably the least amount of progress: more women in peacekeeping, including in the military component of UN peacekeeping operations. In 22 years, the representation of women has only inched up two points, from one to three percent (Coomaraswamy, 2015, p. 139). This is paradoxical for multiple reasons. One, this lack of progress by the United Nations has coincided with an era of significant advances in the integration of women in national armed forces. Two, the nature and mandates of modern UN peacekeeping operations, and the normative framework of the organization in general, lead to a reasonable expectation that, on the matter of gender balance, the UN should out-perform other actors involved in military operations, rather than lag behind. And three, the perception among many gender advocates is that the goal of having more female troops in UN operations has been given too much emphasis, rather than too little, and that military and security actors have co-opted and narrowed down the women, peace and security agenda. This chapter will outline the parameters of this debate in the United Nations over the last few years and will attempt to explain these apparent contradictions.

1 WOMEN IN THE ARMED FORCES: RECENT ADVANCES

The integration of women in the armed forces has witnessed considerable progress in recent years. Many countries have opened all positions in the military, including combat positions, to women. For example, by eliminating all remaining restrictions to women in the United States armed forces, close to 140,000 jobs will open up to women in 2016, and for the first time women graduated from its elite Ranger programme for special forces (Burns, 2015). The US Marine Corps pioneered the

use of Female Engagement Teams in Iraq and Afghanistan more than a decade ago, deploying female soldiers to interact with women in the affected communities (Bumiller, 2015). After 350 years, women are finally allowed to join the Dutch Marine Corps. Norway has begun experimenting with universal conscription for women as well as men, unisex dorms in military barracks, and all-female Special Forces units (Braw, 2016). Less than a third of NATO members still have positions closed to women in the armed forces -mostly in combat positions and in submarines and tanks-, more than two-thirds have a military entity dealing with gender integration, and all 28 members of the military alliance have specific policies for women's participation in armed forces. In 2000, only five countries did so, and only six had equal enlistment for women and men. A growing number of countries, including Slovenia, have reached double digits in the percentage of women in their armed forces, and many have set ambitious goals. Canada wants to reach 25 percent in ten years, and Australia is aiming to reach the same threshold for its Navy and Air Force by 2023. Many have adopted concrete measures to increase the representation of women: targeting recruitment campaigns to women, using the image and testimonies of female military officers; setting recruitment and retention targets and diversifying career paths, promotion boards, and candidate pools; conducting studies and surveys and collecting systematic data on the experience of women in the military; making changes to family and child care policy; adjusting facilities, uniforms, equipment, trainings, minimum-period-of-service and physical requirements, and cracking down on sexual harassment and abuse (Coomaraswamy, 2015, pp. 137-138).

Many of these changes have taken place in developed countries. However, several developing countries have much higher percentages of women in their armed forces. For example, South Africa is aiming for 40 percent of its armed forces to be women, and has reached 34 percent already. Rwanda has a target of 30 percent female representation among its peacekeepers. Bangladesh recently set a target of 20 percent in its Air Force. India, which has one of the largest armies in the world, is opening up combat roles in all sections to women and expanding the availability of women to serve in full military commissions and be eligible for pensions when they retire (Iyengar, 2016). Pakistan has women flying warplanes (Husain, 2014). News organizations have made a point of repeatedly featuring the stories of women fighting against ISIS, whether it is the women fighter pilots from the United Arab Emirates leading airstrikes in Syria (Tharoor, 2014), the thousands of Kurdish Peshmerga women fighting in the frontlines in northern Iraq (Valentine, 2016), or the first all-female brigade of Yazidi fighters (Moroz, 2015). In 2000, only three Ministers of Defence in the world were women and more than twenty occupy such a position currently, in both developed and developing countries.

2 GENDER EQUALITY AND UN PEACEKEEPING: MISSING THE TARGET

In September 2016, close to 80 military chiefs and Ministers of Defence of countries from all over the world gathered in London for a one-day high-level summit on peacekeeping, as follow-up to the one that President Obama had convened the year

before in the margins of the UN General Assembly. In the London summit, countries were supposed to pledge greater resources to peacekeeping operations, such as more readily available and trained soldiers, Special Forces, intelligence and reconnaissance units, combat engineers, and helicopters. But women, peace and security was one of the highlight themes of the day. Angelina Jolie, the world's best-known humanitarian, made it the centerpiece of her speech: "The fact is that increasing the number of UN peacekeepers alone will not be enough to resolve the conflicts that we are experiencing. It has to be accompanied by a new way of conducting peacekeeping, one that has the rights and protection and involvement of women at its heart." One after another, most of the ministers in attendance echoed her call, and noted that a better gender mix in the forces was an urgent operational necessity. At the end, they signed a communiqué urging the UN Secretary-General to double the numbers of women in military and police contingents of UN peacekeeping operations by 2020, hold senior leaders in UN missions accountable for mainstreaming gender and improving gender balance in their operations, as well as using Mixed Engagement Teams with female officers to improve the outreach to women in the communities; emphasizes the need to have more women serving as Staff Officers and Military Observers, and attending specialized trainings for these positions, with the goal of reaching a new and ambitious 15 percent target by the end of 2017; calls on all Member States to take immediate and concrete measures to help reach this goal, including in the framework of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security, and to regularly provide information to the UN about the presence of women, per rank and specialization, in their armed forces and military academies; and supports and reiterates the need for more robust measures to ensure the UN's zero tolerance policy on sexual exploitation and abuse (United Kingdom, 2016).

Some of these elements were new, such as setting a 15-percent target for staff officers and military observers to be women in just a few months, which would represent a significant improvement over less than 4 percent at the end of 2014. Similarly, never before had so many military chiefs, in one room, repeated so unequivocally the importance of this agenda for the operational effectiveness of their missions. However, they were repeating a message that has been a staple of yearly UN meetings and Security Council resolutions since 1325 was adopted, as noted in the table below:

However, as noted above, the percentage of military women in peacekeeping operations has only increased two points in 22 years. In that time, both peacekeeping mandates and practice have changed in other many aspects related to gender equality. For example, gender advisors are now an expected component of civilian staffing tables in peacekeeping missions, whereas only the missions in Kosovo and Timor Leste had them in 2000, where they were a recent innovation (UN DPKO/DFS, 2010, p. 40). Now, most missions have gender advisory units and women protection advisors, who focus on conflict-related sexual violence specifically (UN DPKO/DFS, 2014, p. 8). Almost every mission mandate and military directives now include provisions on women, peace and security. The trainings offered on these issues are

Table 1:
Security Council references to increasing the number of women in military components of peacekeeping operations (2000-2015)

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| 1325 (2000) | OP 4: Further urges the Secretary-General to seek to expand the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel. OP 6: Requests the Secretary-General to provide to Member States training guidelines and materials on the protection, rights and the particular needs of women, as well as on the importance of involving women in all peacekeeping and peacebuilding measures (...). |
| 1820 (2008) | OP 8: Encourages troop and police contributing countries, in consultation with the Secretary-General, to consider steps they could take to heighten awareness and the responsiveness of their personnel participating in UN peacekeeping operations to protect civilians, including women and children, and prevent sexual violence against women and girls in conflict and post-conflict situations, including wherever possible the deployment of a higher percentage of women peacekeepers or police. |
| 1888 (2009) | OP 19: Encourages Member States to deploy greater numbers of female military and police personnel to United Nations peacekeeping operations, and to provide all military and police personnel with adequate training to carry out their responsibilities. |
| 1889 (2009) | OP 4: Calls upon the Secretary-General to develop a strategy, including through appropriate training, to increase the number of women appointed to pursue good offices on his behalf, particularly as Special Representatives and Special Envoys, and to take measures to increase women's participation in United Nations political, peacebuilding and peacekeeping missions. |
| 1960 (2010) | OP 12: Underlines that, in order to carry out their mandate, missions must communicate effectively with local communities; and encourages the Secretary-General to improve their capacity to do so. OP 15: Encourages Member States to deploy greater numbers of female military and police personnel to United Nations peacekeeping operations, and to provide all military and police personnel with adequate training on sexual and gender-based violence, inter alia, to carry out their responsibilities. |
| 2106 (2013) | OP 14: Recognizes the role of United Nations peacekeeping contingents in preventing sexual violence, and, in this respect, calls for all pre-deployment and in-mission training of troop- and police-contributing country contingents to include training on sexual and gender-based violence, which also takes into account the distinct needs of children; further encourages troop- and police-contributing countries to increase the number of women recruited and deployed in peace operations. |
| 2122 (2013) | OP 9: Encourages troop- and police-contributing countries to increase the percentage of women military and police in deployments to United Nations peacekeeping operations. |
| 2242 (2015) | OP 8: Welcomes the Secretary-General's commitment to prioritize the appointment of more women in senior United Nations leadership positions (...), and encourages him to review the obstacles preventing women's recruitment and professional advancement, further welcomes efforts to incentivize greater numbers of women in militaries and police deployed to United Nations peacekeeping operations, and calls upon the Secretary-General to initiate, in collaboration with Member States, a revised strategy, within existing resources, to double the numbers of women in military and police contingents of UN peacekeeping operations over the next five years. |

now typically longer and more practical and operational, based on real situations and tailored to different roles within peacekeeping operations. Targeted monitoring and reporting, particularly on conflict-related sexual violence, has improved, and missions attempt to ensure that their patrols are better adjusted to the daily routines of women and girls, including when collecting firewood or water outside of refugee and IDP

camps. All-female formed police units have been deployed in a handful of missions (Anderholt, 2012). Peace operations have supported mobile courts and special police units to bring justice to survivors of gender-based violence, facilitated the provision of fuel-efficient stoves and rolling water containers that alleviate the burden and risk incurred by women and girls trying to feed their families, and used their budget for quick impact projects to build shelters for women or sex-segregated latrines in camps. Furthermore, since 2010, when the UN celebrated the tenth anniversary of Resolution 1325, peacekeeping missions open their doors to representatives of women's organizations in the host country, to listen to their concerns, priorities, and suggestions. Some of these initiatives are piecemeal or lack scale and scope to make a tangible difference in the lives of women and girls, but others represent system-wide changes in the way missions operate. For example, in the first nine months of 2011, the hybrid UN-AU mission in Darfur reported the conduct of more than 26,000 patrols that escorted women and girls when collecting firewood, water, and grass. This number represented close to one-third of all patrols conducted by the mission, and reports indicated that it had helped in limiting the prevalence of sexual violence during the farming and cultivation season.

And yet, the percentage of women peacekeepers remains stubbornly low. As of August 2016, a total of 2,899 women out of 87,134 military personnel have been deployed in the military components of the sixteen on-going United Nations' peacekeeping operations. That means that women constitute only 3.3 percent of the military personnel currently deployed. This percentage ranges from some 10 percent of the 41 military observers monitoring the ceasefire between India and Pakistan in Jammu and Kashmir, to 1.5 percent of more than 10,000 military personnel deployed by the United Nations in Mali.

There are multiple reasons that are used to explain this deficit. Perhaps the most used is that there are very few military women in the world and the countries that send the majority of troops have even fewer women in their armed forces, while Western countries that have a greater percentage of women in their military send very few troops to UN peacekeeping operations, as opposed to NATO or EU-led operations, among others. This explanation is unsatisfactory. One, there is no correlation between the percentage of women in national armed forces and the percentage of women in that country's deployments to a peacekeeping operation. European countries, many of them with ten percent or higher female representation in their armed forces, deployed 106 military observers to the UN mission in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2012, and only one of them was a woman.

Developed and developing countries alike deploy a smaller percentage of women than there are in their national armed forces. For example, if a peace agreement is reached in Colombia, it will be verified by a UN observer mission, which is expected to include a few hundred unarmed military observers drawn from countries in the region. For the first time ever in the history of mission planning in the UN, the Secretary-General's report indicated that at least 20 percent of these observers should

be women, a target that had been proposed in various forums by the host country and the UN's Special Envoy (United Nations, 2016, p. 9). In Colombia, the observer mission would follow a peace process that has been unique for the high levels of women's participation and leadership, and in a context where the percentage of women associated with the armed groups is higher than in most other settings, ranging between 20 to 40 percent in the FARC-EP. Furthermore, the countries that have been requested to send these military observers are Latin American countries that have higher percentages of women in the military than the largest traditional troop contributing countries to peacekeeping operations. In 2014 in Argentina, more than 14 percent of the army, 16 percent of the navy, and 22 percent of the air force were women, with close to 140 officers with the rank of Colonel and Lieutenant Colonel, and many more with lower ranks. Mexico, Uruguay, Chile, Paraguay, Guatemala, and the Dominican Republic also have female representation in the double digits (Donadio and Tibiletti, 2014). Due to language, geographic and cultural proximity, and level of development, the deployment of women from the region should present less difficulties than for far away peacekeeping missions. And yet, preliminary reports indicate that the nominations by the countries participating in this observer mission include very few women so far, showing that other dynamics are at play than the sheer lack of availability of military women.

Another reason offered is that women do not join UN peacekeeping operations due to personal or cultural reasons that make it harder for them to leave their families. This is undoubtedly an important factor, but one that is less often offered by military women themselves than by their male peers or by civilians in charge of peacekeeping. When one speaks to women in the military, they often say that these peacekeeping opportunities are frequently not communicated to them, probably as a result of gender biases and discrimination, professional competition for positions that offer privilege and career advancement, and a perception of danger in duty stations by commanders and decision-makers. In fact, there are studies that indicate that an unintended consequence of the advocacy and increased awareness of sexual violence in peacekeeping theaters in recent years is that it may have made it harder for women to be deployed out of protection concerns (Karim and Beardsley, 2015).

Another reason, less often mentioned, is that the number of uniformed personnel in peacekeeping operations has tripled over the last 15 years. As a result, the percentage has remained virtually stable even though a greater number of women are deployed now than a decade ago. However, this still shows that gender balance considerations do not yet feature into the planning of missions and their size and composition.

In my view, the most important reason is that the United Nations neither nudges nor forces the countries that contribute troops to include women in their deployments. Until very recently it has seemed as if the United Nations, both the Security Council and the Secretariat, limited themselves to reiterating the need for more women year after year, as if merely saying it would make it so. This has begun to change. Resolution 2242 established an explicit target of doubling these numbers in the next

five years. The Office of the Military Advisor of the Department of Peacekeeping Operations, which now includes a full-time gender advisor and is embedding gender advisors in the military components of several missions, has a strategy to meet these targets, including the maintenance of a network of female military officers who have peacekeeping experience, a new Gender Advocate of the Year award – whose first recipient, at the London Summit in 2016, was a female Major from Niger for her work when she was deployed in Mali-, and the commitment to ensure, in the short term, that a sizeable minority of military observers posts be filled by women. In 2015, UN Women developed and piloted a two-week international course exclusively for female military officers with an interest to deploy to peacekeeping operations. This was an unprecedented activity that aimed at providing a space for exposure, visibility, and opportunities for professional advancement to military women from all over the world; encouraging the preparation and deployment for female military officers for UN peacekeeping operations; and providing them with the technical skills demanded by commanders in the ground. Before the end of 2016, this international course had taken place in India, South Africa, China, and Kenya, and many other countries had expressed their interest to host or fund these courses (UN Women, 2015). Interestingly, in conversations with participants in these courses from countries of very different religions and income and development levels, they all seemed to share a universal experience as women in a male-dominated military world. This included a common passion for the military career from an early age, the denial of opportunities for professional development and international deployments in spite of knowledge, experience, or performance, the need to prove their merits and aptitude much more than their male peers and, when reaching positions of command or authority, seeing this authority undermined or challenged by their male subordinates.

The 2015 high-level reviews of both UN peace operations and implementation of 1325 proposed suggestions to remedy the lack of conditions or incentives to the deployment of women by troop contributing countries. One is that peacekeeping budgets, which already constitute the largest category of spending by the United Nations, could develop a tool to monitor their investment on gender-related issues and identify ways of making mission facilities and mission life in general more suitable to women, from accommodation quarters, sanitary facilities, specialized medical care, or special leave arrangements, to welfare and recreational spaces and activities. Another proposal suggests adding financial incentives to the reimbursement rates received by troop contributing countries. In the latest negotiations on these rates, Member States and experts discussed the introduction of different kinds of premiums for individuals in units assuming exceptional levels of risk, for contingents deploying force multipliers and enabling capabilities, and for troops and equipment that were ready to deploy in short notice. The 2015 global study on the implementation of Security Council Resolution 1325 recommended a gender equality premium, which would be added to the overall reimbursement depending on the percentage of women in the contingent, their rank and function, the specialized training on gender issues received by the overall contingent, and their compliance with the due diligence,

screening, and vetting required by human rights policies (Coomaraswamy, 2015, p. 142). This proposal has not yet been discussed by Member States.

Finally, increasing the percentage of women in peacekeeping operations may be a recurrent theme of Security Council resolutions on women, peace and security, but has not been a priority of the global women's movement. In fact, as mentioned above, women's organizations and gender advocates have often expressed concern that actors have over-emphasized this question at the expense of others, much more strongly demanded by feminist activists, and that particularly actors in the Global North have increasingly interpreted 1325 through these narrow lens (Cook, 2016, p. 355). For decades, the main constituency behind women, peace and security issues have been women's organizations that are fundamentally opposed to militarization. To their dismay, some of the main goals of the 1995 Beijing Platform for Action, such as reducing excessive military expenditures, promoting non-violence and fostering a culture of peace, have been neglected. Instead, what has followed is the steady growth of military budgets and the frequent use of military force to settle disputes, including the tripling of the UN's peacekeeping budget in the last fifteen years. Even though a commitment to equality under the Convention to End Discrimination Against Women requires that women be given the same employment opportunities as men, including within military structures, military women and feminist organizations working on peacebuilding make unlikely allies. In the eyes of many gender equality advocates, many governments have limited their implementation and interpretation of 1325 to increasing the presence of women in the military.

This perception is understandable, given the comparatively large policy space that institutions like NATO and DPKO occupy in global policy forums, or that Ministries of Defence have in the development and implantation of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security. This is part of the trade-offs and risks that come from policy mainstreaming and involving the most powerful actors in policy agendas pushed by marginalized groups. However, this perception is also misguided. The slight increase of women in the military of many countries predates the signing of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security or the adoption of 1325 as a frame of reference, but has more to do with domestic social or political pressure that, when they come from feminist advocates or policymakers, only recently started using Security Council resolutions as additional justifications. In fact, most of the handful of non-NATO countries that have experienced the most dramatic increases of female representation do not have these National Action Plans on 1325 nor link their advances to international policy. Most often, changes in most countries have come from court decisions brought about by trailblazing litigants, lobbying and sustained pressure by military women themselves, or women leaders in positions of influence in the government and the security sector.

Furthermore, progress has been unacceptably slow in all areas of the women, peace and security agenda, but as much as we can (imperfectly) measure them, there has been much more progress in areas like women in decision-making, in peace

negotiations, or as beneficiaries and participants in peacebuilding, recovery, and humanitarian assistance, than as members of armed forces. The perception that this is a priority is also belied by the fact that we do not even count the number of women in the military. Neither the UN's Department of Peacekeeping Operations nor any other institution have ever kept track, and many member states do not collect or do not share this data. Some of the activities mentioned above, like the UN Women course for female military officers, are relatively modest interventions that have begun to take place in the last two years, in the absence of any large-scale efforts by the United Nations to address this gap.

Conclusion Missed opportunities

The dismal numbers of women in peacekeeping operations are especially worrisome because of the nature of these missions. Unlike military operations that operate behind military compounds and are focused on destroying an enemy, peacekeeping operations have much more contact with the population, engage much less in direct combat, and collaborate with civilian partners in multiple tasks, from facilitating humanitarian aid to helping with the disarmament and demobilization of armed groups and the reform of the security sector in the host country. UN guidelines for the military on how to mainstream gender in peace operations demonstrate the need for women to be able to effectively implement these tasks, from checkpoints and cantonment sites to building and guarding correction facilities or participating in investigations or cordon-and-search operations (UN DPKO/DFS, 2010b).

As stated many times both by advocates and commanders themselves, women broaden the range of skills and capacities among all categories of personnel and improve the mission's image, accessibility, and credibility vis-à-vis the local population. They may be seen as less threatening and more accessible to affected populations, and particularly women and girls who prefer to communicate with female military officers, especially in settings where it would be a cultural taboo to communicate with a man in the same function. Targeted outreach to women in host communities is particularly needed to capitalize on their familiarity with local protection strategies that affect women, early warning on patterns of attack that affect women and girls disproportionately, tensions in social relations and in the community, and threats to personal, family, and community security, interacting with survivors of gender-based violence, and screening women in disarmament and demobilization sites.

Without women, mission cannot fulfill their goals of improving their protection of women and girls. For example, to respond to atrocities against civilians, and particularly against women and girls in Eastern DRC, the UN mission developed an intricate system full of innovations and protection and monitoring tools. However, without the involvement of women in these tasks, they could not be effective. In 2013, only 10 percent of community liaison advisors, who performed the crucial task of interacting with the community, were women. Less than a third of the hundreds of joint protection teams –meant to have a mixture of military, police and civilians with different skills and functions- deployed since 2009 included at least a woman,

typically one woman as part of a large team. And even though the mission was supposed to monitor for early warning signs of conflict-related sexual violence, there were only 16 female military observers in a country as big as Western Europe that year.

Crucially, the presence of women is correlated with fewer allegations of sexual exploitation and abuse by blue helmets themselves. Over the last year, investigators have uncovered a string of allegations of sexual abuse by peacekeepers that is shocking in its scale and unthinkable in its brutality. These atrocities have been committed both by UN and non-UN forces, and the international community is trying to punish these criminals, assist their victims, and prevent this from happening again. Without dramatic changes in the composition of peacekeeping missions, this is likely to continue to happen. In UN peace operations, 97 percent of blue helmets, 90 percent of police, 80 percent of the leadership, and 70 percent of all civilian staff, are men. If the perpetrator is identified and repatriated, his supervisors –and I say “his” because there has never been a confirmed allegation against a woman peacekeeper since the UN keeps track- are likely to be men, and so are the people involved in a hypothetical military court back home, if it gets that far. The investigators of these abuses –interrogating traumatized women and children- are also likely to be men, as are the decision-makers that determine how this is all handled. Reversing this gender imbalance is urgent and is a central piece to addressing this global emergency. For the victims of these gross crimes, ‘where are the women’, a question gender advocates insistently raise and is sometimes dismissed as unimportant, matters a great deal.

For many peacekeeping missions –often struggling with limited resources, obstructions by the host government, and at the mercy of political dynamics in the Security Council or troop contributing countries- actually keeping the peace can be extremely challenging. But what the United Nations should be able to control more directly is how cardinal values of the UN Charter like human rights or gender equality become a visible part of the mission’s presence, posture, and profile. As the face of the UN in many settings, widespread sexual exploitation of the local population profoundly undermines what the mission is trying to accomplish. Conversely, even if violations of women’s rights cannot always be prevented, it does have a positive impact for societies where women are valued so much less than men to see that in the UN women and men work alongside each other as equals, or to see women in positions of leadership. In the end, drastically improving the gender mix of UN missions is not just a question of operational effectiveness, but a question of credibility and legitimacy too.

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