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ENDOWED WITH THE SAME DIGNITY: INCORPORATING GENDER PERSPECTIVES TO IMPROVE OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

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Solo Flight

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ENDOWED WITH THE SAME DIGNITY: INCORPORATING GENDER PERSPECTIVES TO IMPROVE OPERATIONAL EFFECTIVENESS

“We cannot all succeed when half of us are held back.”

- *Malala Yousafzai (education activist and Nobel Peace Prize laureate)*

Today’s modern battle space is a complex environment, one that encapsulates numerous operational domains. Friction points are not limited to just the air, land and sea but have now permeated to artificial environments such as information and cyber. In an effort to remain operationally relevant and competitive, it is therefore important for Canada to establish itself as an inclusive nation. Regretfully social attitudes and perceptions have hindered the realization of this endeavour. Annica Kronsell, a prominent academic on gender and peacekeeping, contends that “men have been the norm for military practices and for defense and security activities. Women, on the other hand, have been either excluded from these organizations and their activities or perceived as deviant.”¹ In addition to the ethical and moral concerns this raises, there is the pragmatic aspect of wilfully hindering the advancement of a sizeable portion of a state's population. Unfortunately society has often been indifferent to this problem, Ericson describes “such institutionalized orientations as both salient and tacit, that is, until they are challenged.”² That being said, there has been progress with many nations, influential international organizations and alliances leading the figurative charge. In 2014 the United Nations (UN) appointed Major-General Kristin Lund as the first female commander of a UN

¹ Annica Kronsell, *Sex and the Postnational Defence: Militarism and Peacekeeping*. (Oxford University Press USA: New York, 2012), 24.

² Mathias Ericson, “Gendering risk and vulnerability: Tensions and conflicting views in crisis preparedness work in Sweden,” *Gender Work Organ* 27 (May 2020): 1311.

Peacekeeping Force.³ The North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) has also recognized the importance of gender perspectives, although “implementation is only partial and varies across NATO’s membership.”⁴ Nonetheless, it has been captured in strategic directives that “the active participation of men and women is critical to the security and the success of the Alliance and its partners.”⁵ Through the consideration of gender mainstreaming, which “is about integrating gender-based analysis as part of policymaking and operational design at every stage of the process”⁶, this paper will argue that a commander can successfully incorporate gender perspectives within a battle space to improve operational effectiveness. The discourse will consist of scrutiny predicated upon key policies and academic writings, in an effort to clearly articulate the benefit that such a viewpoint can bring to an organization or operation. The essay is divided into two major parts, which are focused on specific aspects of counter insurgency (COIN) and peace support operations (PSO) respectively. For the former, discussion will focus on the potential benefits that gender perspective can introduce to combat and intelligence gathering. Regarding the latter, emphasis will be on the importance of gender mainstreaming to civil-military cooperation (CIMIC) and to facilitating the ethical conduct of peacekeeping forces.

³ “FEATURE: UN's first female force commander talks peacekeeping and why she's not taking her Harley to Cyprus”, UN News, United Nations, last modified 14 May 2014, <https://news.un.org/en/story/2014/05/468292-feature-uns-first-female-force-commander-talks-peacekeeping-and-why-shes-not>

⁴ Stéfanie von Hlatky, “The Gender Perspective and Canada’s Armed Forces,” in *Women and Gender Perspectives in the Military: An International Comparison*, edited by Robert Egnell and Mayesha Alam, (Washington: Georgetown University Press, 2019), 240

⁵ “Bi-Strategic Command Directive 040-001 (Public Version),” SHAPE, North Atlantic Treaty Organization, last modified 17 October 2017, https://www.nato.int/issues/women_nato/2017/Bi-SCD_40-1_2Rev.pdf.

⁶ von Hlatky, “The Gender Perspective and Canada’s Armed Forces,” 22

In accordance with Joint Publication 3-24, the United States Department of Defence defines insurgency as “the organized use of subversion and violence to seize, nullify, or challenge political control of a region.”⁷ As the name suggests, COIN is the means by which a nation, alliance or coalition disrupts and addresses this threat. The process is often multi-faceted, using a whole of government approach to apply a combination of hard and soft power, termed smart power by Joseph Nye⁸, in an effort to defeat the adversaries. Gender considerations have an important role in this variation of conflict and when applied and resourced sufficiently, can improve operational effectiveness.

The first is the application of gender perspectives to combat. Enhanced operational effectiveness can be realized by considering the philosophical or ideological conditions where gender could be leveraged to disrupt, degrade or diminish the adversary's combat capabilities. Conversely, an internal reflection from that same view point can help identify gender-based risks and threats. Unfortunately the study of this specific discipline has not received comparable attention as other supporting domains of COIN, with notable scholars suggesting that there has been insufficient focus in this context. For example in *WPS and Nato*, von Hlatky is critical of NATO for the alliances' lack of detail in gender-based publications. She contends that “beyond creating ties with local communities and intelligence gathering, however, these reports fall short of offering a compelling assessment of how gender perspectives can improve 'hard security' tasks, such as

⁷ Joint Chiefs of Staff, Counterinsurgency, JP 3-24 (Washington, DC: Joint Chiefs of Staff, 2020), 25, https://www.jcs.mil/Portals/36/Documents/Doctrine/pubs/jp3_24pa.pdf.

⁸ Joseph Nye, "Get Smart: Combining Hard and Soft Power." *Foreign Affairs* 88, no. 4 (2009): 160.

targeting decisions and combat.”⁹ While there may be a lack of official doctrine and formal publications on this subject, gender mainstreaming has nonetheless been used with success in a modern context. An example supporting this position are the Kurdish Women's Protection Units (Yekîneyên Parastina Jin, YPJ), an all-female fighting force whose contributions in the conflict against ISIS are credited with helping bring down the caliphate. They have effectively used gender to both challenge ISIS' preconceived notions of masculinity, as well as exploit the core aspects of their belief system. For the former, one needs an understanding of who the YPJ are and what they stand for, which was eloquently articulated by YPJ commander Jiyan Afrin. She explained that “our struggle is not just to defend our land. We as women, take part in all walks of life, whether fighting against ISIS or combating discrimination and violence against women. We are trying to mobilize and be the authors of our own liberation.”¹⁰ This is in direct contrast to ISIS who are rooted in extreme patriarchal foundations, one where women are considered far below men in the social hierarchy. Therefore, a female combatant capable of applying lethal force against a male adversary suggests a recognition of equality, at least in terms of combat veracity. Regarding the latter and when based on the ISIS philosophy, consider the consequential fear of a man dying at the hands of a woman. “For ISIS it’s a *haram*. If you’re killed by a woman, you don’t go to paradise.”¹¹ Given the risk and threat this

⁹ Stéfanie von Hlatky, “WPS and NATO,” in *Oxford University Press Handbook on Women, Peace and Security* (WPS), edited by Sara E. Davies and Jacqui True, (New York: Oxford University Press, 2019), 372.

¹⁰ Pinar Tank, “Kurdish Women in Rojava: from Resistance to Reconstruction,” *Die Welt des Islams* 57 (2017): 418, <http://web.a.ebscohost.com/cfc.idm.oclc.org/ehost/pdfviewer/pdfviewer?vid=1&sid=0fccdc87-4754-4af1-9506-805bdf237063%40sdc-v-sessmgr02>.

¹¹ “The women taking on Isis: on the ground with Iraq's female fighters”, Sarah Moroz, The Guardian, 11 September 2015,

would entail from the perspective of the ISIS insurgent, it is likely that a sense of hesitancy or concern would be present amongst the troops, with morale more poignantly effected should they witness the death of their comrades by YPJ forces. These examples illustrate how a commander may analyze their adversary's gender biases and subsequently posture their forces to exploit weaknesses identified from cultural stereotypes.

Conversely, an adversary can also exploit gender perspectives to target a commander's weak or vulnerable areas. To illustrate this point, consider the roles of women in many societies throughout the world. Jiménez summarizes this well stating that “historically, women around the world have acted as culture transmitters or symbols of a nation or culture. If women represent the honour of a society, their abuse may be used as a strategic weapon of war by the enemy.”¹² As a result an insurgent force may introduce gender focused, sexual violence throughout an area that a commander was mandated to safeguard. This would impose a devastating effect to the victims and their communities, in addition to reducing the credibility of the mission and its assigned forces. In an effort to counter that risk, gender mainstreaming could be used to identify the details and locations of vulnerable groups. This would ideally provide a commander with the necessary situational awareness to assign forces and protect those populations.

Applying gender mainstreaming to support intelligence gathering efforts is the second means discussed. There are several factors that enable this effect, such as an understanding of culture and the role of gender within it, means of expanding intelligence sources and networks through population engagement and finally, integral expertise and

¹² Ximena Jiménez, *Gender Perspectives in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, (Williamsburg: Peace Operations Training Institute, 2018), 71.

capacities to analyze information and track progress. One of the first steps towards this goal is to comprehend culture, which can be defined as “a system of both implicit and explicit meanings, beliefs, values, and behaviours shared by members of a community or a group.”¹³ A keen understanding of the cultures within an area of operation, as well as the connection gender plays, will promote an improvement to the quality, quantity and diversity of intelligence assets. In *The battle to get more women into the military*, the author establishes a correlation between culture and gender by articulating that “accounting for the roles played by women and men is critical to operational planning and securing lasting outcomes. Understanding how gender intersects with social and cultural factors leads to greater situational awareness.”¹⁴ Many COIN campaigns have been conducted in male dominated societies where interaction between men and women is very limited. Generally speaking, women have remained at home throughout these conflicts, filling multiple domestic roles that include managing the household and caring for family. Elias and McDermott summarize the situation of women caught in the midst of such conflict, they state that “surviving in war-torn conditions is difficult. In order to survive, women develop skills that bring them more confidence and knowledge about life outside the domestic sphere.”¹⁵ It is arguably due to their unfortunate situation that these women have acquired valuable insight into the challenges, both security and otherwise, that impact their community. Regrettably the cultural dynamics in such regions, a situation

¹³ Lieutenant-Colonel (retired) Egil Nordli, *Methods and Techniques for Serving on a Peacekeeping Mission as a UN Military Observer*, (Williamsburg: Peace Operations Training Institute, 2014), 103.

¹⁴ Stephanie von Hlatky, “The battle to get more women into the military”, *The Canadian Press*, 28 June 2017, <https://theconversation.com/the-battle-to-get-more-women-into-the-military-79980>.

¹⁵ Anne Elias and Lt Col Michael McDermott, *Ethics in Peacekeeping*, (Williamsburg: Peace Operations Training Institute, 2008), 32.

aggravated by the gender imbalance of many troop contributing countries in favour of male soldiers, has often severely hindered access to this important and significant portion of the population. This aligns with von Hlatky's position that "in Afghanistan, gender segregation was embedded in local cultural practices, and intelligence collection and community outreach required an understanding of gender-based power dynamics to gain access to Afghan women as collaborators and to gain a fuller operational picture."¹⁶ Such was the Norwegian Armed Forces' observation throughout their tenure in that location, they concluded that an "an operational need existed for highly-trained female soldiers who could gather intelligence and interact with women and children."¹⁷ Other nations committed to implementing gender perspectives within their respective forces have addressed this challenge in a variety of ways. For example, The Irish Defence force "encourages mixed-gender units in order to have female and male personnel available to respond to any given situation."¹⁸ Conversely, the United States have established several variations of female engagement teams (FETs) tailored to desired operational function. These teams were noted to have "provided value in Afghanistan by building rapport with women and children, which led to critical information on high value targets and hidden weapons, while also promoting Afghan government legitimacy."¹⁹ While tangible benefits have been realized from these efforts, there have also been limitations and challenges.

¹⁶ von Hlatky, "The Gender Perspective and Canada's Armed Forces," 225.

¹⁷ "Meet the Hunter Troop: Norway's tough-as-nails female soldiers," Kevin Ponniah, BBC News, last modified 31 March 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-europe-39434655>.

¹⁸ Glen Segell, "Irish Defence Forces Implementing United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325," in *Rethinking Military Professionalism for the Changing Armed Forces*, ed. Krystal Hachey, Tamir Libel and Waylon Dean, (New York: Springer International Publishing, 2020), 89.

¹⁹ Warrant Officer Class One Raymond Kareko, "Female Engagement Teams," *NCO Journal* 28, no.10 (2019): 3, <https://www.armyupress.army.mil/Portals/7/nco-journal/images/2019/October/FET/FET.pdf>.

Most notable is the lack of study and data concerning this particular discipline.

McNierney supports this argument stating that “with the information provided, the researcher is unable to determine the level of impact FETs have had on achieving COIN objectives.”²⁰ This suggests certain limitations within the gender mainstreaming process, which are a lack of integral expertise on the application of gender analysis to disaggregate, evaluate and synthesis intelligence, as well as some means to track milestones and assess the degree of their success (or failure). Thus a commander seeking to improve their intelligence capacities, through the inclusion of gender perspectives, will need to address at least four distinct areas. The first is an understanding of culture, specifically the cultures within their area of operations and how gender intersects with those societies. Second, some level of gender balance within their force so as to be able to reach out to all segments of the population. Third, relevant gender-based training for both the tactical forces who engage the population, as well as the operational staff who process the intelligence acquired. Fourth, some variation of data analytical capabilities to process large volumes of information, manage milestone completion and assess degree of effect achieved.

Like COIN, modern peace support operations are complex and multi-dimensional efforts. Whereas traditional peacekeeping refers to the separation of belligerent forces by a third party, in contemporary armed conflict (CAC) most peace missions involve “the coordinated presence of military, police, and civilian personnel responsible for a wider

²⁰ Dr. Brooke A. McNierney, *Female Engagement Teams: An Evaluation Of the Female Engagement Team Program in Afghanistan*, (Newport: US Naval War College, 2015), 85.

range of tasks.”²¹ They require significant resources from a variety of stakeholders and contributors, in order to maintain some variation of peace and stability while a sustained political conclusion to hostilities is negotiated. This assessment is aligned with Castellan who contends that “support for the process and determination by the international community, including the Security Council, the Human Rights Council, donors, TCCs, and humanitarian actors, is essential.”²² Unfortunately and as illustrated in the diagram below (figure 1.1), disaster and conflict are still rampant throughout the world, with the continent of Africa more adversely affected than other regions.

*Figure 1.1 – Early Action and Readiness Report*²³



As such the inclusion of gender perspectives throughout all activities is a crucial step

²¹ Professor Tom Woodhouse, *Peacekeeping and International Conflict Resolution*, (Williamsburg: Peace Operations Training Institute, 2015), 48.

²² Patrick Marega Castellen, *Human Rights and Peacekeeping*, (Williamsburg: Peace Operations Training Institute, 2012), 262.

²³ “IASC Early Warning, Early Action and Readiness Report”, Inter-Agency Standing Committee, United Nations, accessed 03 April 2021, https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/iasc_early_warning_jun_to_nov_2016.pdf.

towards the path of peace, a position echoed by Forde who writes “mission leaders bear a special responsibility and are accountable for ensuring that gender mainstreaming occurs in all actions and decisions.”²⁴ Unfortunately these challenges and the stressors of conflict often introduce negative consequences to communities and people. CAC tends to intensify pre-existing gender inequalities between men and women in a society. When studying a society’s or community’s gender relations, “some of the first pieces of information to arise are gender-related stereotypes.”²⁵ A well-developed gender analysis however, will provide a commander with unique insight into the powerful influence that gender has, as well as offer advice on how to address concerns raised.

Consider gender mainstreaming that is internally focussed, that is with an eye to identify in what internal measures could be implemented to improve the situation. CIMIC addresses this challenge well through engagement initiatives and community development. Gender mainstreaming can identify activities that, within a certain culture or context, may be regarded as exclusively feminine or masculine tasks. To address such typecasts, a commander could direct that community outreach operations include endeavours that challenge gender stereotypes. For example, Kronsell suggests a community outreach engagement suitable for environments where women predominately fulfill domestic responsibilities. It consists of presenting “a male military officer in uniform, cooking dinner for himself and others, in full view of the local population.”²⁶ As it pertains to infrastructure development, a gender perspective can help ensure that impact

²⁴ Major General (retired) Tim Ford, *Leading Within United Nations Peace Operations*, (Williamsburg: Peace Operations Training Institute, 2014), 223.

²⁵ Jiménez, *Gender Perspectives in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, 77.

²⁶ Kronsell, *Sex and the Postnational Defence: Militarism and Peacekeeping*, 94.

projects designed to enhance local capacities actually meet the needs and desires of the community. In *Peacekeeping*, the author provides an example whereby “the women of a small Afghan village regularly walked a long distance to the local stream to fetch water, so a well-intentioned NGO drilled a well in the village; however, the well was destroyed soon after it was built.”²⁷ What was missed during the analysis phase of this project was the gender perspective, which was that the women enjoyed their free time to talk and socialize going to and from the water source. In essence this project replaced a perceived, although arguably nonexistent, deficiency with another less desirable outcome that eliminated social contact outside of their family unit.

A major internal challenge to peacekeeping forces, especially those multinational in disposition, is the conduct and behaviour of the force with the local population. This is especially pertinent through interactions with vulnerable groups. Peacekeeping personnel, in particular the military and police components, are granted privileged positions from the host nation. That privilege is predicated on trust, in essence a conviction that the peacekeeping force will protect and respect their citizens, as well as provide some reprieve from violence. Behaviour that violates that trust will most likely reflect on the force as a whole and can jeopardize the entire mission. Elias and McDermott contend that peace support forces “must take every precaution to act in an exemplary manner. Peacekeeping personnel must not contribute in any way to such activity and become part of the problem.”²⁸ To illustrate, it is unfortunately common for commercial sexual enterprises to establish a presence near concentrations of peacekeeping forces, catering to

²⁷ George F. Oliver, Ph.D., *Peacebuilding*, (Williamsburg: Peace Operations Training Institute, 2019), 146.

²⁸ Elias and McDermott, *Ethics in Peacekeeping*, 36.

the soldiers, police and humanitarian personnel. Even if such practices are not illegal in the area of operations or nation from which the forces are generated, there is really no way to confirm that those providing sexual services were not the victims of human trafficking, sexual violence (SV) or sexual exploitation and abuse (SEA). This is supported by Wittwer who explains that “in the context of a post-conflict environment, it is overwhelmingly likely that any commercial sexual activity in the area is in some way exploitative.”²⁹ Therefore a Commander incorporating gender mainstreaming may consider additional gender-based training education for their forces, frequent communications and frank discussions with the senior national representatives concerning the disciplinary aspects of SEA. Finally an increased police presence or frequent patrolling through locations where commercial sexual activity is known to transpire may dissuade peace support forces from partaking in those activities. A more firm disposition could also be implemented, as was done in numerous UN missions, which “specified which buildings and areas were frequented by prostitutes, and they were declared off-limits to all personnel. A network of focal points on SEA in all missions was implemented to facilitate incident reporting.”³⁰

The development of gender mainstreaming, specifically with its application to improving operational effectiveness, is a comparatively young speciality. While progression has been hindered, due in large part to deep rooted social perceptions and structures that designate certain groups as protectors and others as those to be protected, some progress has been achieved. Interestingly the military, which is the institution that

²⁹ Jennifer Wittwer, CSM, “*Preventing Violence Against Women and Promoting Gender Equality in Peacekeeping*,” (Williamsburg: Peace Operations Training Institute, 2014), 176.

³⁰ Jiménez, *Gender Perspectives in United Nations Peacekeeping Operations*, 163.

has imposed and sustained many of these restrictions, may be the entity best suited to now challenge them. Gender has arguably always been an influencing factor during conflict but it is only in recent times that it has been developed as a recognized academic discipline and sought after military capability. Consider Kronsell's eloquent summary of the military from a social hierarchical perspective, which states that "the strong identification of the military with the nation gives the armed forces a kind of influence and privilege not matched by any other societal institution."³¹ By leveraging the aforementioned influence and privilege to develop and include gender perspectives, historic barriers can be challenged and a commander can enhance the effectiveness of their forces. These benefits can be far reaching and include but are not necessarily limited to, combat and intelligence gathering efforts in COIN. This was demonstrated by female units combatting highly patriarchal, belligerent forces or through reaching out to historically ignored segments of a population to develop better tactical situational awareness. On a different part of the operational spectrum, that being peace support, the sheer complexity of CAC warrants gender mainstreaming in virtually all activities in order to understand what vulnerable groups are present and what their needs are. As well, an internal analysis on a force's conduct may identify potential issues that could be addressed before they become a reality.

³¹ Kronsell, *Sex and the Postnational Defence: Militarism and Peacekeeping*, 23.

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