

The Impact of Gender on the Study and Practice of International Security

Written by Andree-Anne Melancon

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ANDREE-ANNE MELANCON, FEB 7 2023

Paragraph 38 of the 1995 Beijing Declaration, which followed the Fourth World Conference on Women, called for governments to include a gender perspective in policies and programmes. It set the stage for ideas of gender, especially gender mainstreaming, to shape both the study and practice of international security. Two years later a definition of gender mainstreaming was adopted at the United Nations' Economic and Social Council: "the process of assessing the implications for women and men of any planned action, including legislation, policies or programmes, in all areas and at all levels [...] so that women and men benefit equally and inequality is not perpetuated." Building on this, this article will review how ideas of gender have influenced the study and practice of international security. Firstly, it will focus on contributions of feminist scholars who have shaped the study of international security by deepening the concept of security to look beyond states, broadening the scope of security, and offering some critiques of militarism. Secondly, it will explore how ideas of gender, especially through the mechanism of gender mainstreaming, shaped the practice of security by leading to the development of new agendas, increasing the participation of women in peace-building, and by (re)shaping the ways militaries operate. Through these explorations, it will be argued that ideas about gender have had a significant impact on both the study and practice of international security.

Before moving forward to explore the importance of gender in international security, it is essential to define this key concept. In short, gender refers to socially constructed characteristics; it is different from sex which refers to biological attributes. As Jill Steans (2006) argues: "gender refers not to what men and women are biologically, but to the ideological (or discursive) and material relations that exist between groups of people called 'men' and people called 'women'." With this definition in mind, the article will now turn to the ways ideas of gender have shaped the study of international security.

Gender and the Study of International Security

Feminist literature has introduced ideas of gender to the study of international security, challenging the assumption of security as being gender-neutral (Whitworth 2008, 104). This has significantly broadened the scope of the discipline and challenged key normative assumptions. It is important to acknowledge that there are multiple stands of feminist thinking. Nevertheless, as Zehra Arat (2015, 674) rightly states:

all theories that oppose the subordination of women can be called feminist, beyond this common denominator, feminisms vary in terms of what they see as the cause of women's subordination, alternatives to patriarchal society, and proposed strategies to achieve the desired change.

In other words, ideas about gender are at the core of feminist thinking. This section will explore some of the key contributions of feminist scholarship to argue that ideas about gender have significantly shaped the study of international security.

Deepening Security

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Firstly, feminists have highlighted the gender subordination of women in global politics and in the global economy – especially Marxist feminist for this latter point (Arat 2015, 676-678). In doing so, feminists shift the focus of security away from the state and argue that states are not the only thing to be secured (Tickner and Sjoberg 2021, 188). This is in stark contrast with traditional approaches to international security, including both the realist and liberal traditions, which consider states as being the main actors in international security. This move beyond (or 'below') the state as the focus or object of security is often associated with the 1994 Human Development Report which introduced the concept of 'human security':

For too long, the concept of security has been shaped by the potential conflict between states. For too long, security has been equated with the threat to a country's borders. [...] For most people today, a feeling of insecurity arises more from worries about daily lives than from the dread of a cataclysmic world event.

However, this understanding of human security is not without limitations. It focusses on individuals (literal 'humans') as a homogeneous group and only engages superficially with gender-related considerations. It is here that feminist scholars have a key impact on the study of international security by introducing the concept of a gendered lenses to ask different questions about security. As Davies et al. (2017, 1) argue: "feminist informed scholarship has deepened collective understanding of the preconditions for lasting peace and security." Broadly, ideas about gender have shaped the study of international security by asking different questions and looking beyond/below the state-centric focus of 'traditional' security.

Broadening Security

Secondly, feminists have also highlighted that security is multidimensional in addition to being multilevel, which is another way by which ideas of gender have shaped the study of security. Humans are not a homogeneous category, and neither are women. This recognition relates to another key contribution of feminist scholars: intersectionality. This concept highlights the fact that women face different oppressions and/or privileges because of their gender, race, class, etc. (Arat 2015, 679). Symington (2004) defined intersectionality as:

an analytical tool for studying, understanding, and responding to the ways in which gender intersects with identities and how these intersections contribute to unique experiences of oppression and privilege.

This concept builds on Galtung's (1969, 179) conception of 'structural violence' which recognises "(1) that individuals are different and (2) that these differences somehow are relevant for their interaction behaviour." Broadly, structural violence is synonymous with social justice and is distinct from personal/physical violence. Considering these two typologies of violence, two related typologies of peace emerge: negative and positive peace. The former is defined as the absence of physical violence whereas the latter is the absence of structural violence or the presence of social justice. Considering this, Galtung's work is of clear relevance when it comes to including ideas about gender in the study of security since he begins with the acknowledgement that individuals are different and feminists have embraced the concept of positive peace. As Kaya (2022) argues: "the feminist perspective offers a different conception of peace and security that undermines traditional assumptions and that can create a more just, lasting and equal peace." Thus, ideas about gender, structural violence, and feminism have considerably broadened the agenda of international security beyond a focus on physical violence, shaping security frameworks for peace-building (which builds 'positive' peace), going beyond peacekeeping (which focuses on 'negative' peace or the absence of physical fighting). In short, ideas about gender have shaped the study of international security by broadening the scope of the discipline beyond a focus on state security, physical violence, and highlighting the importance of intersectionality, structural violence, and positive peace.

Anti-Militarism

Thirdly, ideas of gender have shaped the study of international security by offering a stark critique of militarism. Indeed, anti-militarist feminists have challenged received notions about militaries and the role of women in war. They reject the assumption that a sign of progress for women is their increased participation in the military (Duncanson and Woodward 2016, 5). Rather, they argue that militarism in societies should be eliminated instead of being

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legitimised via the inclusion of women. This argument is based on two core pillars of the anti-militarist feminist research: (1) the recognition that militaries hold destructive power and (2) that militaries are misogynistic institutions (Duncanson 2017, 39-40).

First, militaries are masculinist and violent institutions that cannot be changed by the inclusion of women. (Duncanson and Woodward 2016, 5) Further, militaries are responsible for three interrelated forms of violence: environmental, structural, and physical (Duncanson 2017, 40). Anti-militarist feminist scholars highlight the opportunity-cost of military spending as opposed to investments in social/societal projects tackling structural violence. Importantly, anti-militarist feminists have drawn special attention to the gendered dimension of physical violence, especially gender-based (sexual) violence, as well as forced displacement (Duncanson 2017, 42-44). Second, militaries are seen as hostile places for women and discrimination means “women are never fully equal in the military” (Duncanson and Woodward 2016, 5). Misogyny is inevitable because of military training’s reliance on “the identification of an opposite, inferior, feminized Other as a means of motivating men to attain levels of fitness and aggression” (Duncanson and Woodward 2016, 5). Ultimately, anti-militarist feminist argue that political action should be the aim of women’s influence rather than military. As Duncanson (2017, 48) summarises:

the anti-militarist feminist analysis of war thus goes beyond observing its gendered impacts to argue that the gender ideology which associates masculinity with militarism, in both aggressive and protective guises, and femininity with vulnerability, is a crucial *driver* of war.

This overview of the anti-militarist feminist literature illustrates how ideas about gender, especially the questioning of assumed constructions, have shaped the study of international security and debates on the use of force and militaries more broadly. In short, this section has argued that feminist scholarship and the inclusion of gendered consideration have expanded the subject of the study of international security. The state-centric orthodoxy is challenged and key concepts of intersectionality, structural violence and positive peace are introduced to international security, broadening the scope of the discipline. Moreover, anti-militarist feminist have critiqued and challenged the institutions of militaries highlighting their misogynistic and destructive effects.

Before shifting the focus to the practice of security, it is worth looking at the intersection of study and practice. Feminist scholarship has had a significant impact on the development of the United Nation’s women’s rights framework. Arat (2015) has mapped how the evolution in feminist theories (liberal, Marxist, radical, socialist, ‘women of colour’, and post-colonial) have all informed the UN discourse and outcomes. Interestingly, she found the existence of a liberal feminist bias which might be related to its perception as being less challenging than other feminisms:

While liberal feminism treats the state as neutral and as having the potential to be an ally of women and function as a tool of change, other feminisms tend to see the state as an oppressive and masculine imagination (Arat 2015, 680).

This domination of liberal feminism ideas, which focusses on the increased participation of women in order to achieve gender equality, can be seen in the ways ideas about gender are shaping the practice of security, as will be explored below.

Gender and the Practice of International Security

Gender has impacted the practice of international security in three keys ways: the establishment of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda, the recognition of the role of women peacebuilders, and finally by (re)shaping the ways militaries operate.

New Agendas

Building on the key developments of 1995 and 1997 presented earlier, the establishment of the WPS agenda in 2000 illustrate a significant way in which gender is shaping the practice of international security. This framework came about with the unanimous adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325. This resolution is

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founded on the acknowledgement that armed conflict is having a disproportionate impact on women as well as women's under-utilised role in peace making/building processes. Indeed, the resolution states:

Reaffirming the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and stressing the importance of their equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.

The WPS agenda is based around four pillars: *participation* (of women at all levels of decision-making and in peace negotiations), *prevention* (of violence against women), *protection* (of women and girls against gender-based violence), and *relief & recovery* (measures that incorporate a gendered lens). Throughout each of these pillars, a gender perspective is encouraged/necessary. Indeed, the WPS "agenda is anchored in the principle that effective incorporation of gender perspectives and women's rights can have a meaningful and positive impact on the lives of women, men, girls, and boys on the ground" (UNSCR 1325).

The passing of such a landmark resolution would not have been possible without the inclusion of ideas about gender in the practice of international security. Moreover, the lasting impact of this resolution is not to be underestimated. Gender is significantly shaping the practice of security is the adoption of National Action Plans (NAP) for the implementation and operationalisation of the WPS agenda. As the UK Government states, its WPS NAP "provides a framework to ensure that the provisions of UNSCR 1325 and associated Resolutions are incorporated into the government's defence, diplomacy and development work, centred around 7 strategic outcomes." As of October 2022, 104 states have adopted NAPs outlining objectives and activities working towards the implementation of the four WPS pillars.

The WPS framework has evolved since 2000 and now consists of 10 UNSCRs (1325, 1820, 1888, 1889, 2106, 2122, 2242, 2493) which have significantly broadened the practice of international security. As a report from the Estonian Atlantic Treaty Association argues, these resolutions have,

widened the scope and breadth of gendered peace and security. They have changed practitioners' understanding of the subject and challenged the international community, including NATO, to pay closer attention to it.

Women Peacebuilders

A second, and related, way in which ideas of gender have shaped the practice of international security is by shining a light on the underutilised role of women in peacebuilding. For example, the Council on Foreign Relations found that "between 1992 and 2019, women constituted, on average 13 percent of negotiators, 6 percent of mediators, and 6 percent of signatories in major peace processes around the world." In 2020, no women were included in Yemen's peace process. This lack of inclusion is important because it means that the negotiated/mediated outcomes fail to account for nearly half of the countries' populations. Further, a study of the University of Edinburgh's Peace Agreement Database (PA-X) highlights that out of 1959 peace agreements signed between 1990 and 2022, only 399 (20.37%) include references to either 'women', 'girls', or 'gender'. It is important to note that 300 of these 399 agreements that include gendered considerations were signed after the passing of UNSCR 1325, showing the impact of the WPS agenda discussed in the previous section.

Broadly, the inclusion of women in peace processes is beneficial because it leads to a more comprehensive agreement by effectively broadening the agenda. For example, the Havana Talks process between the Colombian government and the FARC began with a limited inclusion of women (5% of negotiators in 2012) but this was broadened to 20% for the Colombian government and 43% for the FARC following the National Summit of Women and Peace's push to include gender in the peacebuilding process. These efforts were not in vain:

The Final Accord, adopted in 2016, has become an example of not only the role women can play during the negotiation process but also how women's rights and gender equality concerns can be explicitly included in an agreement (Joshi et al. 2022, 2).

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Further, research by Joshi et al. (2022, 2) highlights that “of the 578 stipulations, 130 (22.5 per cent) are specific measures for gender equality or mechanisms for the participation of women in the implementation process.” This case study shows that the incorporation of ideas of gender greatly impacts the practice of international security.

Critics or sceptics might think that the inclusion of ideas about gender risks overburdening already complex peace processes. However, Paffenholz et al.’s (2016) study of 40 cases did not find a single instance where the participation of women’s group had a negative impact. Further, the inclusion of women has been identified as a key aspect in the success of the peace agreement. Following the study of 181 peace agreements signed between 1989 and 2011, Laurel Stone has found that the inclusion of women leads to a 20% increase of it lasting at least two years as well as a 35% increase of it lasting 15 years. Krause et al. (2018, 1001) also found that the inclusion of female signatories leads to a “significantly higher implementation rate for provisions.” This recognised importance of women in peace processes has led to the creation of the Global Network of Women Peacebuilders in 2010 to bridge gaps between WPS policy and implementation issues in order to achieve sustainable peace through gender equality and intersectionality.

New Ways to Operate

Finally, a third way in which gender impacts the practice of security is that (re)shapes the ways militaries operate by leading to new military doctrine and the creation of new roles. For militaries, incorporating ideas about gender in the practice of international security begins with the recognition that any action/even will have a different impact on men, women, boys, and girls. This means that ‘one size fits all’ approaches are not sufficient and doctrines are needed to provide the required frameworks to include ideas of gender. In 2017, the US passed the ‘Women, Peace, and Security Act’ (P.L. 115-68) which established a legislative framework for the implementation of the WPS agenda. Building on this, the Department of Defense established a WPS Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan (SFIP) which led to a series of changes in the way the DoD operates. Changes implemented in FY2021 include hiring of dedicated WPS personnel, training 430 specialised personnel, and adopting a gender analysis framework. This illustrates that ideas about gender are changing the way the US military operates. Gender is also shaping the practice of security more broadly insofar as personnel are specifically recruited for roles addressing the inclusion of gender-related considerations. In the UK, JSP 985 is the tri-Service policy on human security (HS). It is important to note here that the UK Ministry of Defence’s framing of HS goes beyond the sectors established by the 1994 UNDP report instead referring to all aspects of the ‘human environment’, which inevitably includes gender. The doctrine states:

The integration of gender is an essential factor in creating peace and security and continues to be developed. UK Defence will align with NATO guiding principles for WPS [integration, inclusiveness, integrity], applied through external and internal elements.

Following this, JSP 985 lists nine actions for the implementation of the WPS agenda (and thus ideas about gender more broadly). Of note is the second action which calls for “incorporating gender perspectives into all planning levels and in implementation of all UK military operations.” JSP 985 also detail various HS responsibilities, includes a range of gender-specific roles such as Gender Advisors and HS Advisors, and also highlights the requirement for all pre-deployment training to include HS considerations. This illustrates that, beyond having an impact on the way actions are planned, ideas about gender are also having an organisational impact in the UK military. These two examples illustrate how ideas about gender have changed the practice of international security by leading to the development of new doctrines and roles for the military which ultimately (re)shapes the ways militaries operate.

In summary, ideas of gender have had a significant impact on the practice of security. Such considerations have allowed the WPS agenda to be created and institutionalised internationally by states and international organisations. Gendered consideration have allowed for women’s key role in peace processes to be recognised and promoted. Finally, ideas about gender have led militaries to adapt the way they operate and create new roles and doctrines to take into consideration the gendered implication of military action.

Conclusion

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On one hand, gendered considerations have shaped the field of international security by deepening and broadening the concept of security and by presenting some critiques of militarism. On the other hand, gendered consideration has led to the creation of new agendas which have allowed for women's role in peace-building to be recognised as well as influencing the ways militaries operate. Thus, it is evident that gender is important and cannot be ignored when studying and/or practicing international security. The impact of gender expands much further, but this article provides a useful starting point to the acknowledgement and inclusion of gender in the field of security.

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