

# Gendered Perspectives and Nuclear Disarmament

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LAUREN PERLIK, SEP 24 2018

Given the rapid pace of technological advancement, specifically related to weapons and related tools of destruction, disarmament, or the reduction or withdrawal of military forces and weapons, is a central tool in maintaining peace and security in the global community. The Secretary-General of the United Nations (UN) stated that “disarmament – including arms control, non-proliferation, prohibitions, restrictions, confidence-building and, where needed, elimination – is an essential tool to secure our world and our future” (Guterres 2018). More specifically, the global community has placed a great emphasis on total nuclear disarmament. Detonation of a nuclear weapon would dramatically affect the entire global community, but despite this, half of the world’s population is left out of discussions to reach total nuclear disarmament; these people are women. Including women in the conversation is essential as the process towards achieving the complete elimination of nuclear weapons is not solely black and white, but rather it is affected by a variety of factors including gendered perspectives. Gendered perspectives challenge the established security “norms” in international affairs to emphasize often overlooked impacts of nuclear detonation, embrace human security as opposed to a more traditional framework, and break down masculine norms that apply “value” to nuclear weapons.

This paper will explore the concept of total nuclear disarmament and the factors that necessitate achieving this mandate. Moreover, it will describe gendered perspectives in international relations and analyze the gendered consequences of nuclear detonation as a compounding factor for including these non-traditional viewpoints. The paper will then move on to examine the successes of gendered perspectives in previous disarmament processes. Overall, it is posited that inclusion of these non-traditional outlooks in disarmament processes produce successful results, as shown by campaigns on landmines and nuclear weapons. This is accomplished by altering the discourse around nuclear weapons through the dismantling of valued masculine norms. Therefore, it is recommended that women reach 20 – 30% representation in leadership positions in future nuclear disarmament processes; this is also known as a “critical mass” (Newton-Small 2016: 5). This will ultimately produce more overall female involvement in disarmament delegations, fulfill the Secretary-General’s goals for disarmament, and progress the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

### What is Nuclear Disarmament & Why

To begin, nuclear disarmament is the process by which there is a reduction or complete elimination of a country’s nuclear weapons; this paper will focus on the latter half of the concept. Nuclear weapons are the most dangerous weapons to exist amongst mankind, with one possessing the capability of destroying an entire city, killing millions of civilians, and risking the integrity of the natural environment along with future generations. These weapons have only been used twice during times of war but presented catastrophic consequences; after the nuclear bombings in Hiroshima and Nagasaki in Japan in 1945, 80,000 people died instantly and more than a total of 260,000 people were killed (Hall 2013). As of now, there are approximately 22,000 nuclear weapons in existence, with over 2,000 nuclear tests conducted to date (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs 2018b). As a result, complete nuclear eradication has proved to be essential to ensure global peace and security. Despite the overwhelming consequences nuclear weapons pose, some argue that complete disarmament is not feasible and will never be a viable policy concept. This is due to the fact that nuclear weapons cannot be easily eliminated as “they will continue to punctuate the course of history” (Sabadus 2009). Secondly, the anarchy that resides in the international system forces the state to consistently seek out methods of ensuring their security needs, and nuclear weapons are the ultimate way to fulfill

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this aim (Sabadus 2009). Despite critiques, it must be recognized that nuclear detonation does not abide by international laws of proportionality and use of force (Private Conversation 1, 2018). Proportionality refers to the idea that military actions should be proportionate to their expected results (Brown 1976). Use of force is limited by the UN Charter – it can only be legitimized and legal if used for self-defense or approval by the UN Security Council is given (Gardam 1993). In 1996, the International Court of Justice (ICJ) stated that “the threat or use of nuclear weapons would generally be contrary to the rules of international law applicable in armed conflict and in particular the principles and rules of humanitarian law” (Vail 2017: 842 – 843). Moreover, the UN stands by the notion that complete nuclear disarmament is necessary to ensure global security and global nuclear disarmament has been one of the oldest goals of the UN. For instance, it was the subject of the General Assembly’s first resolution in 1946 and the UN has established 26 September as the International Day for the Total Elimination of Nuclear Weapons (United Nations 2018c). The UN has consistently made efforts to reach nuclear disarmament following this resolution with the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), the Partial Test Ban Treaty (PTBT), the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty (CTBT), and lastly, the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW), which opened for signature in 2017 but has not yet entered into force (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs 2018b).

## Explaining Gendered Perspectives

In order to understand how gendered perspectives influence arms reduction, one must first understand the difference between gender and sex. Sex is the biological, physiological, and anatomical features that people are born with (Geneva Centre 2015). Gender typically refers to the social and cultural differences between female and male, as opposed to sex (ILPI and UNIDIR 2016). More specifically, gender is the socially constructed characteristics of both masculinity and femininity. Gender is learned and is therefore changeable over time as a result of the societies and cultures in which people live (Geneva Centre 2015). As these characteristics evolve, they are often associated with stereotypes – “a generalized view or preconception about the attributes or characteristics possessed, or the roles that are or should be performed, by women and men” (ILPI and UNIDIR 2016: 7). These stereotypes can often impede the opportunities both men and boys and women and girls have access to. Gender can also be extended to different analytical perspectives, which can investigate the implicit or explicit mechanisms in which gender is ingrained in social institutions, events, and actions. A gendered perspective can create new opportunities for any gender, but also can be used to expose discrimination. Gender lies on a spectrum, but in relation to this paper, the gendered perspectives within the binary will be analyzed – man and woman.

## Gendered Perspectives at Work

Security studies predominantly revolve around the perspectives of men, as they are the dominant gender represented in security negotiations and international relations overall. It has “been a man’s world” where the global community adheres to cultures of masculinity that often create and subscribe to assumptions around the language of disarmament (Private Conversation 2, 2018). As the discourse is gendered, nuclear proliferation is associated with masculine characteristics providing it with higher societal value and a symbol of status. Conversely, disarmament is seen as emasculating and thus, feminine and weak (ILPI and UNIDIR 2016). For instance, after India’s 1998 nuclear weapons tests, a Hindu nationalist leader explained that they “...had to prove that [they] were not eunuchs” (Reaching Critical Will 2018). A gendered outlook on security studies challenges these traditional concepts of international affairs to dismantle these “valued” norms in weapons discourse and help to progress towards total elimination of nuclear weapons.

To begin, women’s perspectives are often more focused on humanitarian impacts, rather than the security of the state itself. This is also known as human security, which is the securitization of the individual rather than the state (Private Conversation 3, 2018). In other words, it is about the interrelationship between the “freedom from want” and the “freedom from fear...”; positive and negative freedoms and rights as they relate to fundamental individual needs (Annan 2000: 17). This security framework implies an extension of rule-governed security instead of war-based. Additionally, these perspectives often challenge the assumed meanings of security, disarmament, and proliferation, which are often the “norms” in international affairs. These norms are those typically created by men as they predominantly dominate the field of security and disarmament. A prominent feminist scholar, Carol Cohn, observed

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United States'(US) nuclear policy-making and discovered that it was "dominated by 'technostrategic' languages based on ambiguous and contradictory axioms" (ILPI and UNIDIR 2016: 16 -17). Many views were seen as fact without evidence or justification and therefore they ignored "the emotional, the concrete, the particular, human bodies and their vulnerability, human lives, and their subjectivity – all of which are marked feminine" (ILPI and UNIDIR 2016: 16 -17). Moreover, specifically in terms of weapons of mass destruction, gendered perspectives create a focus on issues of power, inequalities, cultural expectations, divisions of labor, and family reproduction (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs 2018a). Women are also able to utilize lived experiences, such as motherhood, based on their roles and socialization in different societal contexts in order to influence their priorities, needs, and interests, which often differ from men (Williams, K. 2017). Overall, these non-traditional viewpoints provide an avenue to challenge traditional outlooks on arms reduction processes. The former Director of the International Atomic Energy Agency argues that armament policies have "been influenced by misguided ideas about masculinity and strength" (ILPI and UNIDIR 2016: 16 – 17). By moving away from these traditional masculine perspectives, it "might help to remove some of the hurdles on the road to disarmament and non-proliferation" (ILPI and UNIDIR 2016: 16 – 17).

## **Gendered Impacts of Nuclear Weapons**

Nuclear detonation dramatically affects anyone within its vicinity, but as with any subject, there are gendered consequences, thus increasing the importance of including women's voices in the nuclear disarmament processes in order to highlight these issues that may otherwise be ignored. To begin, there is a large amount of scientific evidence that demonstrates the gendered consequences of nuclear weapons as a result of Hiroshima and Nagasaki and nuclear tests by several states that followed during the Cold War. These impacts can be broken down into biological impacts and gender-specific impacts.

First off, the detonation of nuclear weapons will dramatically impact any man, woman, boy, or girl. The majority of this harm would be as a result of the instant impact of the detonation. One of these major impacts is ionizing radiation, which is radiation with a sufficient amount of energy to cause atoms or molecules to gain or lose electrons (ILPI and UNIDIR 2016). Ionizing radiation can directly destroy cells in the human body and/or cause a mutation to DNA resulting in cancer and genetic effects. Ionizing radiation disproportionately affects women, as they have 50% more high-risk body tissue in addition to metabolic differences. For instance, after studying the life-span of survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki, it was found that ionizing radiation exposure was almost twice as high for women as it was for men (ILPI and UNIDIR 2016). Additionally, ionizing radiation spans not only the lifetime of women directly affected but the children they procreate; the negative consequences are intergenerational.

Secondly, women experience gendered consequences in terms of psychological impacts, evacuation and displacement, cultural and indigenous rights, and social stigma and discrimination. The 1986 Chernobyl nuclear accident provides sufficient evidence to state that many women in most European countries reported higher levels of stress than men and there was a higher significance of mental health problems (ILPI and UNIDIR 2016). Secondly, the destruction of populated areas results in displaced peoples, which often impacts men and women differently. For instance, during crisis and conflict situations, women are more likely to experience sexual violence, possess reduced access to aid, and are less likely to self-advocate for health, housing, land, and property. In terms of cultural and indigenous rights, the gendered dimensions of weapon detonations are exemplified through the indigenous Marshallese women, who live in a matriarchal society. Within their culture, land rights are passed down from mother to child and nuclear testing during the Cold War removed this right to "exercise their cultural right as custodians of land in society" (ILPI and UNIDIR 2016: 14). Finally, the survivors of Hiroshima and Nagasaki speak of stigmatization after the nuclear detonation, stating that they were considered "contaminated," and were feared by other Japanese citizens (ILPI and UNIDIR 2016: 14). This stigmatization was experienced by both men and women, but Japanese culture intensified discrimination against women.

## **Successes**

The successes of gendered perspectives, specifically in relation to the reduction of arms, can be seen in the campaign against landmines and nuclear proliferation. Both the International Campaign to Ban Landmines (ICBL) and the International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) have successfully influenced and progressed

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disarmament, along with this securing of Nobel Peace Prizes for their efforts. Both of these campaigns had women at the helm of their leadership, providing gendered perspectives throughout the entirety of the campaigns, thus dismantling the masculine norms that attribute value to weapons.

To begin, the ICBL is a global network of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that is active in approximately 100 countries around the world (International Campaign to Ban Landmines 2018). The campaign works to rid the world of anti-personnel landmines to ultimately allow landmine survivors to lead fulfilling lives. The campaign began in 1992, voicing the concern of civil society on the diplomatic stage. This campaign was founded by a woman, Jody Williams, and both the organization and founder were awarded the Nobel Peace Prize in 1997 for bringing about the Convention on the Prohibition of the Use, Stockpiling, Production and Transfer of Anti-Personnel Mines and on their Destruction, also known as the Mine Ban Treaty (International Campaign to Ban Landmines 2018). The treaty aims to eliminate anti-personnel landmines (AP-mines) around the world and it now has 164 state parties to the treaty (United Nations 1997). ICBL created a stigma around the utilization of landmines (Private Conversation 2, 2018). For instance, the US did not sign the Mine Ban Treaty and it is one of the biggest contributors to landmine use. After the treaty went into effect, the US decreased their levels of usage. Jody Williams emphasized the stigmatization the ban brought about in her 1997 Nobel Lecture. She stated that the Mine Ban Treaty is remarkable, amazing, and historic (Williams, L. 1997). This is especially due to the fact that “landmines have been used since the U.S. Civil War, since the Crimean War” and yet, the global community was able to remove them from the arsenals of the world (Williams, J. 1997). The French Ambassador in Oslo stated that “this is historic not just because of the treaty. This is historic because, for the first time, the leaders of states have come together to answer the will of civil society” (Williams, J. 1997). Since the realization of the comprehensive ban, 162 states have accepted to “...never under any circumstances use anti-personnel mines...” (Anti-Personnel Mine Ban Convention Implementation Support Unit 2018: 4). Moreover, the successes in this treaty can also be seen through the usage and removal of landmines. Landmine usage is now extremely rare and world leaders view these weapons as unacceptable. As a result of the treaty, State Parties have destroyed over 51 million stockpiled anti-personnel mines and 34 out of 50 states that previously produced anti-personnel mines are now adhering to the treaty. In 2015, approximately 158,000 AP-mines and roughly 14,000 anti-vehicle mines were destroyed in the context of mine clearance (International Campaign to Ban Landmines 2016). Additionally, within the past 5 years, roughly 906 km<sup>2</sup> of mined areas have been cleared, with almost 1.3 million AP-mines and more than 66,000 anti-vehicle mines destroyed through clearance procedures.

Additionally, the successful influence of gendered perspectives can be seen through ICAN and the leadership over the negotiations of the Treaty of the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons (TPNW). ICAN is a coalition of NGOs amongst 100 countries in order to advocate for the adherence to and implementation of the UN Nuclear Ban Treaty (International Campaign to Abolish Nuclear Weapons 2018). At the head of this organization is Beatrice Fihn, who is the Executive Director. In 2017, the organization won the Nobel Peace Prize for their campaign to prohibit and eliminate nuclear weapons. Beatrice Fihn spoke about the influence of gendered perspectives through utilizing a humanitarian lens, stating that through emphasizing humanitarian consequences ICAN was able to break away from the narrative that nuclear detonation was solely a political issue rather than humanitarian (Mekata 2018). She emphasized this by explaining that no matter what political party one defers to, “violating the Geneva Conventions shouldn’t be something you support” (Mekata 2018). She points out that ICAN broadened the issue to “[engage] a new generation who could then connect to it” (Mekata 2018). Additionally, the President of the UN Conference to bring about the TPNW was led by the Permanent Representative of Costa Rica to the UN Office in Geneva Elayne Whyte Gómez (United Nations 2018d). This organization and Ambassador Gómez helped to influence and successfully create this historical treaty, which was the first multilateral nuclear disarmament treaty to be created in a span of 20 years (Whyte Gómez 2017). The treaty has been ratified by 10 member states and signed by 100, but has not been signed by any nuclear arms states. The TPNW was adopted in July 2017 but has not yet been entered into force (United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs 2018b). The treaty exemplifies the influence of gendered perspectives as its foundation resides in humanitarian notions and states a commitment to “supporting and strengthening the effective participation of women in nuclear disarmament” (Minor 2017). Moreover, it recognizes that “the equal, full, and effective participation of both women and men is an essential factor for the promotion and attainment of sustainable peace and security” (Minor 2017). Overall, the positive influence of gendered perspectives through women in leadership roles can be seen through the successes of disarmament of landmines and nuclear weapons.

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## Recommendations

Recognizing the necessity for the total elimination of nuclear weapons and the successes of gendered perspectives in disarmament, it is necessary to include more voices of women in the negotiating processes. During the negotiations regarding the NPTW, there was an imbalance of representation of women with only 31% of registered country delegates that were women and only 29% of publicly available statements from Member States were given by women (Minor 2017). Additionally, women only headed 15% of state delegations and 31% of delegations were comprised entirely of men. Therefore, it is recommended that there be higher numbers of women heading state delegations for future negotiations of nuclear disarmament. More specifically, 20% to 30%, as this has been identified as the critical mass for women. In other words, in sociology, critical mass means “the point at which a minority begins to change the tone and policies of the institution it has begun to integrate” (Newton-Small 2016: 5). Research shows that no matter what situation – legislative body or corporate board – if women represented less than 20% of the voices, their perspectives were overlooked (Newton-Small 2016). Conversely, between the range of 20 – 30%, gendered perspectives were heard and the outcomes drastically improved. The successes of critical mass can be seen in the 2017 representation of women in the US Senate, which was 20%. As a result, there was finally a bipartisan push for the military to improve the handling of sexual assault cases, which had been consistently been ignored in DC. Their efforts resulted in the Military Justice Improvement Act, which is still being debated on the Senate floor (Gillibrand 2018). Moreover, studies show that “a considerably higher proportion of women were included on female-headed delegations, compared to those led by a man” (Minor 2017). For instance, there was 34% female representation of delegates in female-led delegations, but in male-led delegations, this percentage drops to 26%. It must be recognized that implementing a quota-like system in nuclear weapon elimination processes may be difficult to achieve as the representation of delegates is left up to individual member states. Nonetheless, reaching a critical mass of women leading nuclear disarmament negotiations will result in more women overall involved in state delegations and the weaving of gendered perspectives into negotiations. Ultimately, this will allow the global community to progress nuclear disarmament negotiations and increase the likelihood of successfully achieving total nuclear disarmament as the increased presence of gendered perspectives will disassemble the valued masculine characteristics attributed to nuclear weapons.

Achieving a critical mass of women in future nuclear disarmament negotiations will also fulfill the aspirations expressed by the Secretary-General and the SDGs. On 24 May 2018, the Secretary-General, António Guterres, outlined his goals for disarmament at the University of Geneva. Within the speech, the Secretary-General stated that there are “strong gender dimensions” to disarmament and that “women have a leading role to play in all [the UN’s] work for global peace and security” (Guterres 2018). He recognized women’s accomplishments in arms reduction through the acquisition of Nobel Peace Prizes as a result of “achieving landmark disarmament treaties and in mobilizing general public opinion” (Guterres 2018). As a result, he asserts that women must be increasingly involved as decision-makers in all disarmament processes. Moreover, fulfilling the recommendations aforementioned will help progress towards successfully achieving the SDGs, more specifically SDG numbers 5 and 10; gender equality and reducing inequalities. SDG 5.5 states an objective to “ensure women’s full and effective participation and equal opportunities for leadership at all levels of decision-making in political, economic, and public life” (United Nations 2018a). Additionally, SDG 10.2 states an objective to achieve empowering and promoting the social, economic, and political inclusion of all, irrespective of age, sex, disability, race, ethnicity, origin, religion, or economic, or other status by 2030 (United Nations 2018b). In conclusion, through both the implementation of a critical mass of women in nuclear disarmament leadership positions and adhering to the SDGs and the goals of the Secretary-General, the world will be closer to achieving total nuclear disarmament.

## Conclusion

In the Secretary-General’s disarmament speech, he stated that “deadly weapons put us all at risk and leaders have a responsibility to minimize that risk” (Guterres 2018). Thus, total nuclear disarmament is necessary to ensure global peace and security, but this goal is only attainable if the international community provides a space for gendered perspectives from women to alter the dominant narratives in the security community. These narratives commonly embrace androcentrism, being created and embraced by men, leaving out the lived experiences and unique perspectives women often possess. These insights often emphasize humanitarian impacts, how women and gender

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are relevant in security challenges, challenge “norms” in international affairs, and break down the masculine characteristics that provide legitimacy to nuclear weapons. Furthermore, the importance of these perspectives is illuminated by the gendered consequences of a nuclear detonation, as radiation disproportionately affects women, both physically and mentally, and spans the lifetime of women directly affected, impacting their children. The success of the inclusion of these narratives in arms reduction can be seen through ICBL and the Mine Ban Treaty, along with ICAN and the TPNW. Both campaigns involved the narratives of women, challenging male-centric norms in the security dialogue through transforming security from the benefit of the state to the benefit of the individual. With these successes in mind, it is posited that gendered perspectives can greatly influence disarmament processes and, more specifically, total nuclear disarmament. Although efforts have been made to include the perspectives of women in nuclear negotiations at the UN level, there is still a lack of gender parity. Thus, it is essential to reach 20 – 30% of women in future negotiations regarding the complete elimination of nuclear weapons in states’ weapons arsenals. Moreover, studies demonstrate that having women in leadership positions in security negotiations results in more women involved overall (Minor 2017). These recommendations will not only bolster the voices of gendered perspectives in the global community but also progress the SDGs and fulfill the disarmament goals of the Secretary-General. To conclude, the inclusion of gendered perspectives in security issues is essential, as they often lead to successful disarmament processes and they may provide impetus to reach total nuclear disarmament.

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