



■ NATO and UNSC Resolution 1325

LtCol. Mario Masdea

The history of the recognition of women's rights has been marked by a series of significant steps towards achievement of gender equity.

A number of these advances have been made against a dramatic or epoch-making scenario such as war or revolution, when stereotypes preventing women from achieving better social positions were abandoned in response to temporary needs. Once the emergency was over women were once more relegated to their traditional sphere of activities, but their efforts were not thwarted completely. Some of those who had shown outstanding ability continued to work in positions that had formerly been the preserve of men, and thus paved the way for other women to follow. Military organizations were no exception in this respect: step by step women gained increasing access to our working environment, once considered extremely conservative and hostile to their admission.

Nowadays female soldiers have access to almost all military specialties and are fully integrated into the military organization, except in a few specific settings such as the special forces or submarine crews. There is now a broad consensus that only in tasks relying mainly on physical strength are women likely to be outperformed by men.

Numerically, the situation differs among individual NATO Member Countries.

In some there is a long tradition of women in uniform, while in others they began to have full access to a military career less than ten years ago. In addition, some countries apply quotas for females in the Armed Forces – a system which can be seen as both a limitation and an opportunity. According to figures from the 2010 National Reports to the NATO Committee on Gender Perspectives, the percentage of women in NATO Armed Forces as a whole is about 10.6%, and it has increased in recent years. Some interesting considerations stem from the data available. First, one notes the high percentage of women in subordinate ranks in the Armed Forces of the East European countries. This is a legacy of former communist policies,



which involved large numbers of women in the military environment while at the same time impeding their rise to positions of leadership. As a result of this policy, female soldiers are now struggling to free themselves of constraints which relegated them to a secondary role during the Cold War era.

The data also indicate the extremely low percentage of female general officers in all NATO Member Countries – both those that began enrolling women years ago (e.g. the USA and UK) and those that followed suit more recently (e.g. Italy).

Although women reach a reasonable level of seniority, future trends are likely to confirm the lack of female generals.

However, analyzing data about women in leadership positions in both the political and military sectors of the Alliance, we can see a considerable difference between civilian and military personnel. Female politicians, diplomats and NATO officials have achieved or, to put it better, been allowed to achieve senior management positions more often than their military counterparts.



The obvious conclusion is that, in military organizations, restrictive rules effectively set a glass ceiling on a woman's career. We cannot overstate the importance of removing these barriers which debar women from advancement to positions of leadership, in order to ensure that an effective gender policy is in place. NATO cannot rule on Member Countries' respective Armed Forces personnel evaluation systems, but standardization is a desirable recommendation. Certain criteria for career progression affect female soldiers, particularly those who want to balance their profession with family considerations. Alongside the laws and regulations that openly affirm equal rights and opportunities, there are habits and practices that actually in many cases work against gender equity, jeopardizing all the goals achieved. These traditions need to be revisited in favour of relevant best practices – not only by NATO bodies, already strongly committed in this sense, but also by Member Countries contributing soldiers to NATO.

Some years ago the communication policy of a number of Armed Forces focused on streamlining the entry of women into the military, underlining their ability to cope with hard tasks, in harsh environmental conditions and under pressure. Now it is time to look ahead and think of how to turn female soldiers into an added value, instead of considering them to be duplications of male soldiers. There is inconsistency in this respect between the principle of ensuring that women have full access to fighting roles and the casualty statistics related to the military operations in Iraq and Afghanistan: the data show that the rate of casualties among female personnel in Afghanistan is 0.0127% of the total, and in Iraq it is even lower (source: Iraq Coalition Casualty Count <http://icasualties.org>). Considering that almost all the national forces participating in Operation Enduring Freedom have up to 7% female personnel deployed in Afghanistan, the figures pertaining to female casualties do not match the actual level of operational deployment. But here lies a dilemma. On the one hand, we have to pursue real operational use of female soldiers, even if this results in casualties and a consequent backlash from public opinion. On the other hand, we should avoid what sociologists refer to as "gender masculinization" – a duplication of roles



already performed by men. Female attack helicopter pilots, platoon commanders and EOD specialists are most welcome, but the presence of women in the Armed Forces should not be restricted to these roles. It is time to think about women as an asset making it possible to enhance the range of military commitments. A successful organization has to be able to identify the skills and strengths of its members, and use them in fostering efficiency and effectiveness. Women certainly have valuable qualities, to be acknowledged as new resources if used in a proper way.

In this perspective, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 offers a new opportunity for involving female personnel. This Resolution has been brought into application only quite recently, though it dates back to 2000; it focuses on the role of women, as both passive and active subjects, in conflicts and during post-conflict operations.

The document underlines the need to safeguard women as potential victims of conflict, expressing "concern that civilians, particularly women and children, account for the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict, including as refugees and internally displaced persons, and increasingly are targeted by combatants and armed elements, and recognizing the consequent impact this has on durable peace and reconciliation". At the same time, it considers women as major actors and identifies "the important role of women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts and in peace-building, and 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".

NATO is committed to fostering the implementation of principles enshrined in UNSCR 1325 which can increase the presence of women in the Armed Forces, and in the Defence and Security sectors in general – hence the guidelines provided by Bi-Strategic Command Directive 40-1 in 2009. The same year NATO established its Committee on Gender Perspectives and the NATO Office on Gender Perspectives, with the function of observing and promoting gender policies at political and strategic level. In addition, the recently created role of Gender Advisor marks a stepping up of NATO's efforts in this field. These advisors are currently present within KFOR and ISAF, as well as at NATO Headquarters, as part of a continuous effort to spread awareness of gender perspectives.

At every level – political, strategic, and operational – gender policies should not to be considered as a function, but as a manifestation of a mindset and an approach to operational planning that takes into account all the main questions related to the gender issue. It is fundamental to carry out gender training at operational level, and to integrate it in the nation's training programmes. Member States have to play their role in fostering policies on gender, and in early implementation of action plans which have already been approved.



NATO can achieve the interoperability of its troops only if nations provide soldiers with basic training and knowledge. In this perspective, small numbers of experts cannot be left on their own to bear the burden of gender policy implementation and development. Such policies must be reinforced by involving larger numbers of specialists in the gender sector.

UNSCR 1325 could provide the right stimulus to turn intentions into actions with a view to active involvement of female soldiers in operations, particularly in countries like Afghanistan where women's role in society has yet to be developed. The Resolution is not meant to be exclusively for women, but they must undoubtedly be considered as the chief protagonists of its implementation. In this way their role in operations can be revisited and enlarged, to match the needs of the Armed Forces with female soldiers' expectations.

In Afghanistan some initiatives have been taken, such as female patrols and female contact teams, but these appear

to be isolated activities and not part of a global plan supported by national agendas. Female soldiers wearing a veil in respect of local customs and traditions, or female medical personnel examining native women, are essentially means by which the ultimate result can be achieved – i.e. to win the hearts and minds of the Afghan people. If such experiences and actions are not set within the context of a clear policy, there is a risk of considering them as an end in themselves rather than as the means to achieve the overall goal. This process will take time, which means that we must start working on it as soon as possible by offering sound, timely analysis to the leadership and basic information to female soldiers on the ground.

In this sense the initiative taken by the Operations Division at NATO HQ in organizing a three-day Workshop on "Training in the Context of Mainstreaming UNSCR 1325 into NATO-Led Operations and Missions", hosted at the NATO Defense College from 2nd to 4th November 2011, is a step in the right direction. By promot-

ing UNSCR 1325, NATO will not only comply with a formal UN request, protecting the people mainly affected by conflicts, but will also provide all female personnel with adequate roles and with the specializations needed at operational level. Women in the Armed Forces are too valuable a resource to use in simply replicating the role of men – indeed, they could play a key role in addressing the future challenges of the Alliance.

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NDC Senior Course 119 members Col Anne Rydning, the first female Norwegian National Contingent Commander in Afghanistan (center), and LtCol Ingvild Jensrud, Chief of Staff of the Norwegian-led Provincial Reconstruction Team, with former Norwegian Minister of Defense Grete Faremo.

Photo: Norwegian Ministry of Defence