

Promoting Women's Role and Gender Equality in International Security from the Feminist Perspective: Case Study of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and Its Implementation in Afghanistan

Zilun Li^{1,a,*}

¹*Department of Government and International Affairs, Lingnan University, 8 Castle Peak Road, Tuen Mun, New Territories, Hong Kong*
a. lizilun651@gmail.com
**corresponding author*

Abstract: Historically, the field of international security has largely neglected or overlooked the consideration of gender in its theoretical frameworks and analyses. International security has traditionally focused on state-centric perspectives, military capabilities, strategic interests, and power dynamics, often disregarding the role of gender in shaping security dynamics and outcomes. In recent decades, scholars and practitioners within the field of international security have increasingly recognized the significance of gender in shaping security issues and have sought to incorporate gender perspectives into their analyses. Feminist scholars and researchers have been at the forefront of this shift, highlighting the ways in which gender shapes security practices, conflict, peace-building, and the experiences of different groups in conflict-affected areas. While the field of international security has made progress in recognizing the importance of gender, efforts are still to be made to promote a more inclusive and gender-sensitive approach to security studies, which recognizes the diverse experiences and perspectives of different genders and contributes to a more comprehensive understanding of security challenges. This paper will examine the role of women in international security from a feminist perspective, introduce the content of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and the UN's role in promoting gender equality including the implementation of the resolution and the challenges it encounters, and then discuss with Afghanistan as a case study to draw some conclusions and propose some recommendations.

Keywords: international security, feminism, gender equality, UN Resolution 1325, Afghanistan

1. Introduction

Feminist views of security challenge the traditional understanding of security as primarily concerned with military defense and national security. Feminist security scholars advocate for a more inclusive and inter-sectional approach to security, one that challenges the unequal gendered power relations, recognizes the interconnectedness of different security issues and prioritizes the needs and perspectives of marginalized communities. This includes addressing issues such as

gender-based violence, economic inequality, environmental degradation, and human rights abuses. Feminism thus set out to redefine the concept of international security, arguing that women should reclaim the rights that have been denied to them for so long and that the UN's initiatives in this regard were its driving force.

In armed conflicts around the world, women and girls are often singled out for rape and abuse, and in some cases, systematic rape is even used as a weapon of war in ethnic cleansing. These are situations that cannot be accepted in the international community, but there are countries still under patriarchal authority and stereotypes in different cultures leading to a situation where everything about armed conflict is still based on patriarchal control. The roles of men and women in an armed conflict and post-conflict situations are different, in order to achieve equitable and just outcomes in all areas, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (hereinafter referred to as "UNSCR 1325") was passed at a time when the need for the UN to directly address gender issues was becoming increasingly urgent.

UNSCR 1325 is a landmark resolution on gender equality. UNSCR 1325 has been followed by several subsequent resolutions, including resolutions 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, and 2242, which further elaborate on the themes and objectives outlined in the original resolution. Collectively, these resolutions make up the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda, which seeks to promote gender equality and women's empowerment in the context of peace and security. Although the international community has achieved some success in implementing this resolution, many problems remain. How far has the United Nations developed the role of women and promoted gender equality in international security? What problems and challenges has the UN encountered in implementing the resolutions?

2. The Feminist Perspective on International Security

Feminism in international relations focuses on the gendered nature of international relations and aims to highlight the ways in which gender shapes global politics. It emerged in the 1980s as a critique of traditional international relations theories, largely ignoring issues related to gender and women's experiences [1]. Feminism offers a critique of the masculine character of the realist tradition of security and argued that international relations are now a male domain, while women are merely auxiliaries to patriarchal politics in this domain [2]. In the 1990s, a feminist epistemic network that encompassed international relations feminists evolved through the United Nations and other international conventions, and women's rights were recognized as human rights in international law [3]. Gender is a fundamental organizing principle of global politics and women's experiences have been systematically excluded from traditional security studies, and they have made significant contributions to understanding issues such as conflict and peace-building, global governance, human rights, and development [4].

Feminist international relations have emphasized the role of women in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, as well as the concept of gender mainstreaming in global governance [5]. Gender mainstreaming is the incorporation of gender considerations into all policies and programs, as well as the acceptance of gender as a fundamental organizing factor in society. Women's war experiences and unique perspectives on peacebuilding are critical in achieving long-term peace. As a result, gender mainstreaming is critical to developing a more fair and just global governance framework.

Gender and state behaviour as dependent variables in quantitative analyses may be more effective in accomplishing the aims of promoting social equity and women's empowerment [6]. In many cases, from the Western perspective, ordinary women often appear as victims who need to be rescued, and those women in Afghanistan are one of the most typical examples which will be described and analyzed as a case study in this paper.

3. The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325

3.1. Development of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (The Application of Feminism and the UN's Role)

The UN Security Council first explored women and gender in connection to peace and security with the passing of UNSCR 1325 on “Women Peace Security” in 2000 [7]. The promotion of 1325 should be viewed as “a profoundly political project” since it is an effort by feminists along with other international activists to develop alternative notions of global security. It makes reference to two significant issues, the first one is that the resolution recognizes how armed conflict affects women and young girls differently based on their gender, and the other one is it implies that women and young girls can also play an important role in peace-building.

Feminists have made an indelible contribution to the introduction of this resolution. Firstly, it addressed the historical problem of liberal feminists, which was to increase women's representation in official bodies, so that women could also sit at the peace table and participate in political negotiations. For another, cultural feminists who believe in the existence of a “feminine nature” or a “feminine essence” and who seek to re-evaluate and redefine the attributes given to women, believe that women are crucial in preventing war and building peace [8]. This is indeed the case, the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, the principal architect and supporter of 1325, is one of numerous women's organizations that have worked for peace throughout history and in different parts of the world [9]. Last but not least, two of the resolutions are a historical response to radical feminism's concerns about violence against women and girls [10]. One demands that all parties to the war uphold international law, puts a stop to impunity, and take steps to safeguard women. The other urges the process of disarmament, demobilization, and reintegration to take into account the requirements of women and dependents.

Like Felicity Hill of the United Nations Development Fund for Women said, “1325 represents the possibility of a really radical shift in the way they (the Security Council) think about things”. The point is, Document 1325 means there is potential for a really radical shift in the way they (the Security Council) think about peace and security. Peace and security, let alone how they conduct peacekeeping operations and peace agreements, supporters of the resolution consider it to be groundbreaking. Feminist scholars, however, have had some criticism of the resolution. They argue that the concept of security in UNSCR 1325 is structured through gendered binary oppositions, namely male and female; protector and protected; international and domestic; war and peace; active and passive [11]. The conceptualization of women, both in practice and in mainstream scholarship, hinges on relegating women to the domestic and national spheres, protected by those who dominate the international political sphere, that is, male politicians and military leaders [9].

3.2. The UN's Approach to Ensuring Implementation of the Resolution

In integrating gender equality and “women's peace and security” into their work, the Department of Peace Operations and the Department of Operational Support promote gender equality and women, peace and security through a variety of approaches. Their initiatives include strengthening managerial leadership and accountability for the implementation of gender and women, peace and security mandates in UN peacekeeping operations; strengthening systems and mechanisms for monitoring progress and conducting an evidence-based analysis of progress; strengthening the capacity and knowledge of all personnel, including civilian, police, and military personnel, to contribute to the achievement of gender equality in peacekeeping operations, and enhancing the capacity and knowledge of all personnel [12]. The UN conducts evidence-based analysis of progress when progress monitoring systems and mechanisms are in place to enhance the capacity

and knowledge of all personnel, including civilian, police, and military personnel, to contribute to the achievement of gender equality in peacekeeping operations. Increased engagement and strengthened partnerships with other UN entities and partners in peacekeeping operations, both at UN Headquarters and within and outside missions. To support the achievement of results related to gender equality and women, peace and security, the UN has deployed gender advisers at all levels of peacekeeping missions to ensure that gender perspectives are integrated into all peacekeeping functions [13].

The resolution calls on all parties involved in the conflict to comply with international law, end impunity and take measures to protect women in many different regions. In the Central African Republic, the UN peacekeeping mission identified the protection needs of female ex-combatants and initiatives were undertaken to encourage women to develop skills to generate their own income, prepare them for employment and avoid taking up arms. The resolution calls for training materials on women's protection issues to be made available to countries and for increased resources to be made available for such training. In Kosovo, the UN has placed SRSG gender advisers who are mandated, among other things, to work with government agencies, civil society, women's groups and UN agencies, funds and programs that are appropriately complementary in promoting the rights of women and girls.

The resolution expresses a willingness to ensure that UN Security Council missions take gender issues into account and engage in dialogue with local and international women's groups. In South Sudan, UNMISS held sub-national and national forums for women leaders and women's organizations. At the forums, they discussed peace agreements and developed strategies on how to ensure the implementation of gender equality provisions.

3.3. Key Challenges

The revolutionary potential of UNSCR 1325 to achieve feminist peace was constrained from the outset as a framework embedded within the state-centered traditional security mechanisms of the UNSC [14]. Overall there are two key challenges facing the implementation of WPS, the problems in efficiently implementing UNSCR 1325 are expressed and affected differently by each of the thematic areas, but they are also connected.

The first challenge is that the militarism and militarization of countries have seriously affected the implementation of the WPS. Numerous female members of civil society who briefed the UNSC made the point that the existence of these weapons not only worsens the conflict but also puts women's lives in even greater danger [15]. Furthermore, the UN's direct classification of countries and political contexts as wartime or peacetime is a false dichotomy. It is also possible for some countries in peace to sell arms in order to influence security within other countries and expose women within other countries to war. In the aftermath of war, the challenges faced by women in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process are also daunting. In Angola, Congo, Sudan and South Sudan, and Uganda, African countries that have experienced war or are in the midst of war, between 20 and 30 percent of child soldiers are girls, and the experience of female combatants is often overlooked in the disarmament, demobilization and reintegration process in these countries, it is therefore important that peacekeepers not only take into account the combat experience of female combatants, but also recognize the potential risks of women's involvement in organized violence [16].

The second point is that widespread patriarchal politics have influenced and undermined the WPS agenda. Only when human rights and gender equality are viewed as an integral rather than a minor component of the WPS framework can the WPS agenda be effectively implemented. If the importance of this issue is not acknowledged, the implementation of the resolution will be undermined, leading to the continuation of a patriarchal power structure whose influence becomes

stronger to the extent that it will in turn continue to yank the progress of the WPS to the extent that the results demonstrated by the UN will become temporary. The WPS agenda's transformation into "women's issues" and its apparent disassociation from so-called high-level issues of peace and security cast doubt on UNSCR 1325's applicability to establishing lasting peace and obstruct its efficient implementation. As of December 2021, women make up 26% of national MPs worldwide. According to the UN report, women's representation in parliament is lower in conflict-affected and post-conflict countries, at 21% [13].

4. Implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in Afghanistan

4.1. Background of Afghanistan and the Role of the UN

The oppression of women and the extremely poor social and economic status of Afghan women caused worldwide alarm and led to the military intervention of international forces in Afghanistan at the end of 2001 [17]. Following the adoption of UNSCR 1325, the UN gave women's organizations in Afghanistan a tool to pressure the public, and the Taliban government to include more women in politics and decision-making by means of gender quotas, gender equality legislation, and gender institutions. Yet spring is short-lived for Afghan women. With the return of Mullah Abdul Ghani Baradar, the Taliban are once again in power in Afghanistan. In response, people expressed their fear that the Taliban had not changed and continued to beat women, musicians, artists and anyone who disagreed with them, and their fears gradually became a reality. The Taliban's return to power in Afghanistan has turned the country into one of the most extreme regressions in women's rights. There, they have issued various decrees restricting women's freedom, and the female face is even included in the Taliban's latest restrictions. The Taliban have decreed that women must wear a veil covering their entire bodies in public, banned them from government jobs, secondary education and travelling more than 45 miles without a male guardian.

Afghanistan's governmental structure, which remained mostly paralyzed and inefficient after the conflict ended, is still dominated by the conflict narrative of war, reflecting the country's continued preoccupation with the past. In this discursive environment, patriarchy, nationalism, and conventional structures restrict the chances available to women in politics.

4.2. Effects of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Advancing Gender Equality

In 2006, the Afghanistan Compact was signed at the London Conference, which reaffirmed the constitutional commitment to gender equality and non-discrimination and led to the adoption of the National Action Plan for Women in Afghanistan (NAPWA 2008-18), one of the key policy frameworks for promoting women's rights. This was followed by the launch of the Afghanistan Peace and Reintegration Programme (APRP) in 2010, which aims to create the conditions for coexistence and dialogue with the Taliban and which builds on one of the core rationales of the war: the liberation of Afghan women [18]. In the same year, Security Council UNSCR 1325 was approved, which focused on the impact of war on women and stressed the importance of women's full and equal participation in conflict resolution, peace-building, peacekeeping, humanitarian response and post-conflict reconstruction.

In promoting women's participation in political decision-making, the UN has invested more in local women's organizations working in the humanitarian response, not only by providing services but also by working to promote women's participation in decision-making. Following the Taliban takeover of Afghanistan, the UN Emergency Relief Coordinator insisted that "women humanitarian workers must be allowed to work and operate freely", a request that was subsequently reiterated in subsequent Security Council resolutions and statements. In response to this request, the

Humanitarian Country Team in Afghanistan established a Women's Advisory Group for Afghan women to provide guidance on a case-by-case basis [13]. In addition to this, regional organizations and Member States have increased their support for women's equal and meaningful participation in the peace process, and the rapid response window has so far provided targeted and flexible support to civil society organisations in Afghanistan. These UN initiatives support women's leadership and female voices and promote women's political participation.

In guaranteeing that women's rights are fulfilled, the United Nations has increased its accountability to women. In order to give legitimacy and authority to a voice representing half the population, charters should be agreed upon through broad national grassroots consultations. A women's charter is one way of bringing together and articulating the needs and demands of the national women's movement and advocating for gender equality, and it can be a useful tool for articulating women's demands and claiming their rights, to guarantee the effective implementation of gender equality. In Afghanistan, the Afghan Women's Bill of Rights was established in 2003, allowing for the effective implementation of measures [19]. In advocating for gender equality to give women equal access to resources in post-war reconstruction, the UN and donors have extended the Gender Equality Mark to all funds. With strong advocacy from Afghan women leaders and gender equality advocates, the newly established Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan (STFA) draws on experiences from other regions to promote gender equality funding. The Special Trust Fund for Afghanistan requires all entities to commit at least 15 percent of their budgets to gender equality. Since its inception, the Afghanistan Special Trust Fund has allocated over 50% of its funding to projects where gender equality is a key or significant objective [13]. The UN invests in civil society and mentoring women in order to build women's political leadership, create political awareness, and develop practical organizational skills.

4.3. Problems Encountered by the UN in Promoting Gender Equality

Although the United Nations has done much to promote gender equality and protect the human rights of women in Afghanistan, the problems remain. In situations where women human rights defenders are at imminent risk, the international community's support strategies and response mechanisms remain insufficient and inadequate, as demonstrated by the evacuation of people from Afghanistan following the Taliban takeover in August 2021. The Taliban appointed an all-male cabinet there, and 51% of the women's organizations operating in Afghanistan were forced to close [13]. In addition, those shortcomings that were revealed during the UN's implementation of WPS are also evident in Afghanistan.

The UN has its own organizational problems when it comes to implementing women's protection measures. The first is their lack of experience. When human rights defenders need urgent assistance with protection or relocation in the most dangerous situations, their national governments and international partners often do not respond adequately. In Afghanistan, many activists have been detained or harassed, and several have been killed or disappeared [13]. Secondly, in terms of addressing the practicalities of gender equality as an issue, the UN does not address those specific issues from the bottom. Security institutions keep considering gender issues as a specialized subject by relegating them to Gender Advisers or offices, and the institutions' structures continue to be dominated by men, and the focus on the gender segregation of the Taliban overlooks the more subtle forms of marginalization of women there. Women there are themselves largely conservative and unlikely to internalize foreign conceptions, especially those from Western liberal, narratives of women's rights. Those UN groups present in Afghanistan are not representative of the views of all women in Afghanistan. The marginalization or exclusion of women from post-conflict decision-making processes means that specific issues around women's vulnerability may not be adequately addressed, or addressed at all.

The militarization and patriarchy of Afghanistan have also made it difficult for the UN to implement the WPS. In Afghanistan, the Taliban is not the only cause of women's current disempowerment. Conflict-induced distinctions between women are neglected in a neat friend-enemy binary. Feminist scholarship has paid insufficient attention to the role of warlords in contemporary Afghan democracy and their relationship with some of the women at the forefront of the peace process [20]. Civil society and Afghan women's interviews also suggest that many resettlement schemes favour men by favoring military supporters over those who build peace and promote human rights and democracy.

In addition, the UN is putting women in a position of "victims" in the protection of women in Afghanistan, reinforcing the stereotype of women as a vulnerable group. The gender stereotypes on which the traditions of war are based influence the meaning of gender and the subordination of women outside of wartime [21]. In warfare, male civilians are defined as combatants, while female personnel are always considered victims, and this cannot be avoided in UN operations in Afghanistan. Not only does this bring women into inherent stereotypes and marginalize their role in political participation, it also excludes men from being victims and ignores other victims of the war.

5. Conclusion

UNSCR 1325 on Women, Peace, and Security was adopted in 2000 to highlight the impact of conflict on women and the need to involve women in peace-building and decision-making processes. However, its implementation has been slow and uneven across different countries and regions. Here are some recommendations for better implementation of UN 1325:

First, in order to increase women's participation, women must be involved in decision-making in order to include women's voices, and women's issues in national reconstruction, and the Afghan government and the international community should increase the number of women in power to participate in political decision-making. Second, incorporating gender perspectives means breaking the original power structure and social structure, incorporating equality, justice, democracy and human rights into the issues, and making ethnic equality and gender equality the goals they pursue. Third, in terms of providing resources and support, the international community should be more supportive and not compromise with dictators; quotas alone will not bring gender equality to fruition. And then, in strengthening legal frameworks, the improvement of laws is an important tool to enable the construction of democracy, and women should also actively participate in the revision of legal provisions to incorporate women's experiences and concerns into the content of laws. Last but not least, they should also address cultural barriers. As patriarchal cultural norms continue to limit women's participation in public life, including peace and security processes, the Afghan government and the international community should work to address patriarchal cultural norms that limit women's participation in public life. This includes increasing awareness and education campaigns to promote women's participation in peace and security processes.

Afghanistan is not the only place where women's human rights have regressed, hopes have been dashed, reforms have been delayed, quotas have been missed and women and girls have been subjected to continued repression and violence. In most conflict-affected countries, men hold power, women are subject to structural, UN organizations and women still need to continue their efforts to reform systems and laws, increase participation in decision-making, empower women and marginalized groups, and subvert patriarchy in order to achieve true gender equality.

References

- [1] Wibben, A. T. (2004). *Feminist international relations: Old debates and new directions*. *The Brown journal of world affairs*, 10(2), 97-114.

- [2] Sylvester, C. (1994). *Feminist theory and international relations in a postmodern era* (Vol.32). Cambridge University Press.
- [3] Weldon, S. L. (2006). *Inclusion and understanding: a collective methodology for feminist International Relations. Feminist methodologies for international relations*, 62-87.
- [4] Sylvester, C. (2002). *Feminist international relations: an unfinished journey* (No.77). Cambridge University Press.
- [5] Prügl, E. (2011). *Feminist international relations. Politics & Gender*, 7(1), 111-116.
- [6] Caprioli, M. (2004). *Feminist IR theory and quantitative methodology: A critical analysis. International Studies Review*, 6(2), 253-269.
- [7] Cohn, C. (2008). *Mainstreaming gender in UN security policy: a path to political transformation?. Global governance: Feminist perspectives*, 185-206.
- [8] Alcoff, L. (1988). *Cultural feminism versus post-structuralism: The identity crisis in feminist theory. Signs: Journal of women in culture and society*, 13(3), 405-436.
- [9] Enloe, C. (2014). *Bananas, beaches and bases: Making feminist sense of international politics*. Univ of California Press.
- [10] Kelly, L. (1987). *The continuum of sexual violence. Women, violence and social control*, 46-60.
- [11] Tickner, J. A. (1992). *Gender in international relations: Feminist perspectives on achieving global security*. Columbia University Press.
- [12] UN Women. (2022). *Facts and figures: Women, peace, and security*. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/what-we-do/peace-and-security/facts-and-figures>
- [13] United Nations (2022). *Women and peace and security: Report of the Secretary-General (S/2022/740)*, para. 50. <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N22/614/88/PDF/N2261488.pdf?OpenElement>
- [14] Kaya, Z. (2020). *Feminist peace and security in the Middle East and North Africa*. <https://oxfamlibrary.openrepository.com/bitstream/handle/10546/621055/dp-feminist-peace-security-mena-210920-en.pdf?sequence=1&isAllowed=y>
- [15] WILPF Reaching Critical Will. (2016). *Preventing Gender-Based Violence through Arms Control: Tools and Guidelines to Implement the Arms Trade Treaty and UN Programme of Action*. <https://reachingcriticalwill.org/images/documents/Publications/preventing-gbv.pdf>
- [16] Molan. (2017). *A study of the impact of UNSCR 1325 on women in UN peace operations - the case of Africa. Journal of the Armed Forces Academy*, 33(7), 44-48.
- [17] Martin, L., & Parto, S. (2021). *UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in Afghanistan. International Organizations Revisited: Agency and Pathology in a Multipolar World*, 342.
- [18] Abu-Lughod, L. (2002). *Do Muslim women really need saving? Anthropological reflections on cultural relativism and its others. American anthropologist*, 104(3), 783-790.
- [19] Tommasoli, M. (2013). *Democracy and Gender Equality*. <https://ideadev.insomnation.com/sites/default/files/publications/democracy-and-gender-equality-ZH.pdf>
- [20] Wordsworth, A. (2007). *A matter of Interests: Gender and the Politics of Presence in Afghanistan's Wolesi Jirga*. Kabul: Afghanistan Research and Evaluation Unit.
- [21] Barnett, M., & Duvall, R. (Eds.). (2004). *Power in global governance* (Vol. 98). Cambridge University Press.