



## **POLICY ROUNDTABLE:**

# **How Gender Affects Conflict and Security**

*October 27, 2020*

This policy roundtable looks at the role of gender and gendered analysis in conflict and security. The authors highlight ways in which gender intersects with political violence and security policy. As the chair observes, the analysis, “defies efforts to make gender a problem of ideology or an issue best relegated to the human resources department.”

## **Table of Contents**

1. “Gender and Security Analysis Is Ready for Prime Time. Are Policymakers?” By Heather Hurlburt
2. “Women and Rebel Legitimacy,” By Hilary Matfess and Robert U. Nagel
3. “Women and War Crimes: Finding Accountability for Female Perpetrators,” By Jessica Trisko Darden and Izabela Steflja
4. “Gendering Recruitment into Violent Organizations: Lessons for Counter-Terrorism Operations,” By Amira Jadoon
5. “UN Security Council Resolution 1325: An Imperfect Catalyst for Important Reform,” By Bethany L. McGann

# 1. Gender and Security Analysis Is Ready for Prime Time. Are Policymakers?

*Heather Hurlburt*

It has been 20 years since the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on women, peace, and security in October 2000. In that time, the security policy of the United States has undergone a series of rapid shifts — first toward an emphasis on counter-terrorism and counter-insurgency priorities, and then a slow readjustment toward great-power conflict and internal sources of insecurity.

Over that same period, the security establishment reached new, though uneven, levels of openness to women and LGBT people. Data suggests, however, that these gains have stagnated or eroded over the last four years, particularly in government.<sup>1</sup>

The period of intense concern with counter-terrorism in U.S. security policymaking produced great creativity in terrorism theorizing and analysis. Likewise, the fight for gender representation in the U.S. security establishment spawned a growing literature that explores how gender — both as a variable and a lens — can be incorporated into security policymaking. The four articles in this roundtable document the usefulness of gender analysis in the hands of the social scientist or policymaker. However, they also reflect continuing frustration with the fact that gender analysis remains largely unknown.

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<sup>1</sup> Summarized in Alexandra Stark and Heather Hurlburt, “Four Data Trends in Gender, Diversity and Security That You Should Know About,” *New America*, March 30, 2020, <https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/reports/four-data-trends-gender-diversity-and-security-you-should-know-about/>.

Across the policymaking community, gender analysis is viewed as arcane. In a field that remains significantly male, it is practiced overwhelmingly by women.

Popular culture finds the question of gender and security leadership gripping. Whether they are producing stories about female Kurdish fighters or debating whether female leaders performed better against the novel coronavirus, media outlets regularly highlight gender issues in security contexts.<sup>2</sup> Scholarly consideration of these and other pressing security issues has exploded. A small sampling of relevant publications in 2020 would include careful analyses of women leaders and conflict, as well as new research exploring women's role in the protest movements that are reshaping global security concerns.<sup>3</sup> Graduate programs report high demand for coursework and events on gender and security themes. At the same time, however, surveys and reporting from professors suggest that the students and researchers delving into gender topics are self-selecting — and overwhelmingly female.<sup>4</sup> The Fletcher School of Law and Diplomacy, Johns Hopkins

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<sup>2</sup> For example, Sarah Lazarus, “Women. Life. Freedom. Female Fighters of Kurdistan,” *CNN*, Jan. 27, 2019 <https://www.cnn.com/2019/01/27/homepage2/kurdish-female-fighters/index.html>; Jennifer M. Piscopo and Kendall Funk, “Are Women Leaders Better at Fighting the Coronavirus?,” *Washington Post*, Aug. 26, 2020, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/politics/2020/08/26/are-female-leaders-better-fighting-covid-19/>.

<sup>3</sup> Madison Schramm and Alexandra Stark, “Peacemakers or Iron Ladies? A Cross-National Study of Gender and International Conflict,” *Security Studies* 29, no. 3 (2020): 515–48, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2020.1763450>; Erica Chenoweth, *Women's Participation and the Fate of Non-Violent Campaigns: A Report on the Women in Resistance (WiRe) Dataset* (Broomfield, CO: One Earth Future Foundation, October 2019), [https://oefresearch.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/Womens\\_Participation\\_Nonviolent\\_Campaigns\\_Digital.pdf](https://oefresearch.org/sites/default/files/documents/publications/Womens_Participation_Nonviolent_Campaigns_Digital.pdf).

<sup>4</sup> Elizabeth Weingarten, Heather Hurlburt and Elena Souris, *From the Classroom to the Capitol: A Missing National Security Gender Link?* (Washington, DC: New America, 2018),

School of Advanced International Studies, and many other graduate programs have beefed up their gender analysis coursework in recent years, but none require it for degree completion. While individual scholars are doing cutting-edge work in think tanks, no institution has integrated its gender scholars into security research programming.

The public's ephemeral fascination and the attention of academics has not translated into consistent gendered security analysis by government officials — or even awareness of the existence of gender analysis. It remains entirely possible — and perhaps still career-enhancing — to go all the way from a graduate degree in international relations, through mid-career education and leadership training at a U.S. government agency, and on to a cozy endowed chair or program director position at a think tank without ever sitting through a lecture, much less an actual course of study, on what a gender lens is or how it assists policymaking. As a male security policymaker told *New America* in 2016, “I really don’t think about gender when considering policy and never with implementation of policy.”<sup>5</sup> In 2018, a *New America* interview project asked 14 senior security policymakers, anonymously, to list factors that affected policymaking.<sup>6</sup> None mentioned gender. The overwhelming majority were unfamiliar with UN Resolution 1325, the women, peace, and security agenda, or the concept of a “gender lens.”

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<https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/policy-papers/classroom-capitol-missing-national-security-gender-link/>.

<sup>5</sup> Heather Hurlburt and Elizabeth Weingarten, *Not Secondary But Central: Perceptions of Gender Diversity in National Security* (Washington, DC: New America, 2016), <https://www.newamerica.org/better-life-lab/policy-papers/not-secondary-central/>.

<sup>6</sup> Heather Hurlburt, Elizabeth Weingarten, and Elena Souris, “National Security: What We Talk About When We Talk About Gender,” *New America*, Dec. 11, 2018, <https://www.newamerica.org/political-reform/reports/national-security-what-we-talk-about-when-we-talk-about-gender/>.

For a time, it seemed that the intellectual approaches of gender and gender-informed scholarship in the academy and the international policy establishments were inching toward each other.<sup>7</sup> Over the past few years, however, the idea of gender as a cultural construct, distinct from or not purely defined by biology, has been sucked into domestic American cultural polarization. As a result, its use in international settings has become politically fraught. Under the Trump administration, the United States has taken steps to reshape or limit the use of the word “gender” in international fora.<sup>8</sup> This development makes it harder for U.S. officials to seek out and absorb theoretical approaches to the topic and eliminated one avenue through which policymakers previously encountered the body of work. New America’s 2018 survey, for example, found that all respondents who did believe gender should influence policymaking had experience working with the United Nations.<sup>9</sup> In addition, the U.S. government’s turn away from peacekeeping, counter-terrorism, and countering violent extremism may result in de-emphasizing the fields where the value of gendered analysis is increasingly recognized by analysts.

This roundtable highlights the richness of what gendered analysis has to offer — a wealth of information and perspectives that defies efforts to make gender a problem of ideology or an issue best relegated to the human resources department.

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<sup>7</sup> This includes NATO command and Canada. Stefanie Von Hlatky and Thomas Hughes, “NATO’s Gender Turn: From Policies to Operations,” *Centre for International and Defence Policy*, Winter 2018, [https://www.queensu.ca/cidp/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca/cidpwww/files/files/Winter18\\_PB\\_VonHlatky-Hughes.pdf](https://www.queensu.ca/cidp/sites/webpublish.queensu.ca/cidpwww/files/files/Winter18_PB_VonHlatky-Hughes.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> See, for example, Julian Borger, “Trump Administration Wants to Remove ‘Gender’ from Human Rights Documents,” *The Guardian*, Oct. 24, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/oct/24/trump-administration-gender-transgender-united-nations>.

<sup>9</sup> Hurlburt et al., “National Security.”

In “Women and Rebel Legitimacy,” Hilary Matfess and Robert Nagel marshal evidence for the gender lens as an X-ray that reveals underlying truths about armed insurgencies. Women’s presence and portrayal can help legitimize or intensify the effect of violence by armed groups and sharpens boundaries between a group and its enemies. Matfess and Nagel argue that “women’s participation in rebel groups and the violence perpetrated against women by rebel groups both emerge from and reflect the groups’ ideological commitment.” Ignoring the role of women in armed groups “limits the understanding of actors and conflicts and therefore limits governments’ capacities to manage them.”

“Women and War Crimes: Finding Accountability for Female Perpetrators” spotlights a different sector where women are absent: the court of international law, where women appear as perpetrators brought to justice for their roles in committing war crimes and crimes against humanity. Jessica Trisko Darden and Izabela Steflja assess the history of international post-conflict justice, concluding that in the past, “international tribunals either failed to take women seriously as war criminals or ignored the ways in which their gender affected their culpability.” They document how female defendants have successfully used gender stereotypes to limit assessments of their culpability, as well as the comprehensive failure of investigators to catalog and document criminal acts committed by women.

In “Gendering Recruitment into Violent Organizations: Lessons for Counter-Terrorism Operations,” Amira Jadoon maps a rise in women’s recruitment into violent extremist movements across geographies and ideologies. She notes that analytic and policy frameworks are not keeping pace with this trend. “The perception of women as solely victims of terrorism,” she writes, “is tenacious and one that the United States needs to move past.” She identifies research trends suggesting a trajectory for extremist organizations — the use of women may grow as an organization matures and adapts —

and identifies commonalities across ideological categories of violent actors, as well as significant differences that may be predictive of what movements will involve women and how.

Bethany McGann argues that the gender initiatives of the last 20 years, specifically those surrounding UN Resolution 1325 and the women, peace, and security agenda, have failed “to disrupt the fundamental assumption that security is the domain of men.” She suggests that “add women and stir” approaches need to be replaced by more complex theorizing that explores gender as one aspect of overlapping identities in conflict situations — a method she connects to the construct of intersectionality developed by theorist Kimberlé Crenshaw that has become popular in activist and academic thought.

McGann explicitly emphasizes a concern raised by all four essays: The data yielded by gender lenses is inconsistent with the reductionist, stereotypical, or simplified views of gender roles that remain pervasive in popular discourse. Activists as well as analysts such as McGann have begun to question whether the women, peace, and security lens is sufficient for the complex and cross-cutting identities of the contemporary world.

However, the problem of “thin” gender analysis is not yet the biggest challenge facing the field. The essays in this roundtable describe a discipline where serious consideration for gender and gender diversity has not begun to take hold. Jadoon, as well as Trisko Darden and Steflja, describe whole subfields where gender-informed analysis and policymaking remain entirely absent. In Jadoon’s words: “Despite mounting evidence that terrorist and insurgent groups recruit women to boost their long-term endurance and short-term effectiveness, women’s association with political violence is still viewed by many as an aberration.”

Taken together, the essays offer an analytical matrix for examining how gender constructs affect conflict — and how policymakers should expect actors, both state and nonstate, to use gender to achieve their ends. Actors exploit traditional gender roles to make civil society groups feel vulnerable through rape, forced pregnancy, and other acts of violence intended to erase communal identities and violate cultural taboos. They hold up traditional gender norms to make favored groups feel safe and, in Jadoon’s words, “deepen groups’ links with the communities within their territory.” They also subvert traditional norms as a source of power or to provoke feelings of vulnerability in opponents.

As Matfess and Nagel note, conflict actors are now well aware of gender’s attention-getting potential when dealing with Western media and governments. Both internally and for outside eyes, conflict actors use gender to frame and define a conflict. These papers clearly indicate that if the ability to anticipate and respond to the “thick” use of gender by other actors doesn’t spread into the mainstream of U.S. security policymaking, outcomes will suffer. Policymakers will fail to understand and counter opponents’ sources of strength, from recruitment to legitimation; analysts will miss trends in how they organize and fight; and authorities will continue recent decades’ disappointing record of holding perpetrators accountable.

Readers will note that the dilemmas presented in this roundtable — analyzing the intentions of insurgent groups, the capabilities of states, and the culpability of individuals — are not new. Trisko Darden and Steflja draw a straight line from the Nuremberg trials, where relatively few women were prosecuted, to today. The use of women as motivational forces and community stores of value, as laid out by Matfess and Nagel, goes back to Helen of Troy. That this work is being written and read represents progress for the field. Real progress, however, will come when these topics are treated in security roundtables,

not gender roundtables, and consumed by experts and policymakers from across the security community.

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## 2. Women and Rebel Legitimacy

*Hilary Matfess and Robert U. Nagel*

A popular propaganda poster in support of the South-West Africa People’s Organization, a rebel group that fought for Namibian independence between the 1960s and 1990, features a young woman with a gun and a baby strapped to her back.<sup>10</sup> Though the juxtaposition of motherhood and militancy may seem incongruous, a burgeoning literature on women’s presence in armed organizations demonstrates that across rebel groups, countries, and contexts, women often play important roles.<sup>11</sup> Two independent research projects found that women participated in nearly half of all armed groups — and occupied leadership roles in more than a quarter of them — suggesting that women’s participation in combat and support positions are an important aspect of how rebel groups function.<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> For more information about this image see, “Solidarity with SWAPO and the People of Namibia,” by Namibia Support Committee, London, United Kingdom, 1975, *African Activist Archive*, <https://africanactivist.msu.edu/image.php?objectid=210-809-1618>.

<sup>11</sup> Reed Wood and Jakana L. Thomas, “Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women’s Participation in Violent Rebellion,” *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 1 (2017): 31–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022343316675025>; Jakana L. Thomas and Kanisha D. Bond, “Women’s Participation in Violent Political Organizations,” *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 3 (2015): 488–506, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000313>; Alexis Henshaw, “Where Women Rebel: Patterns of Women’s Participation in Armed Rebel Groups 1990–2008,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18, no. 1 (2016): 39–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2015.1007729>; Alexis Henshaw, “Why Women Rebel: Greed, Grievance, and Women in Armed Rebel Groups,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* 1, no. 3 (2016): 204–19, <https://doi.org/10.1093/jogss/ogwo08>; Meredith Loken, “‘Both Needed and Threatened’: Armed Mothers in Militant Visuals,” *Security Dialogue* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0967010620903237>.

<sup>12</sup> Wood and Thomas’s Women in Armed Rebellion Dataset (WARD) shows that women served as combatants in 41 percent of armed groups from 1979 to 2009. Henshaw, using a global sample of 72 armed groups and taking a broader approach to female participation to include noncombat roles in the

Women’s participation in rebel groups and the violence perpetrated against women by rebel groups both emerge from and reflect the groups’ ideological commitment. Women’s inclusion thus affects how domestic and international audiences including civilians, governments, and international organizations perceive the activities of specific armed groups.

### **Images of Women and Women’s Participation as Legitimizing Force**

Despite participating as combatants in more than 40 percent of rebel groups, women’s presence in front-line operations is often portrayed in sensationalist and essentialist manners that obscure the politics underlying women’s political violence.<sup>13</sup> Violent women are portrayed as gender-bending “monsters,” innocent “mothers,” or sexually deviant “whores.”<sup>14</sup>

In other instances, including women in their ranks can help the rebels project an image of modern gender egalitarianism and concern with “softer” issues in addition to military

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organization, notes that 58 percent of groups from 1990 to 2008 benefited from women’s participation and that in more than a quarter of rebel groups, women rose to positions of leadership.

<sup>13</sup> Brigitte Nacos, “The Portrayal of Female Terrorists in the Media: Similar Framing Patterns in the News Coverage of Women in Politics and in Terrorism,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 28, no. 5 (2005): 435–51, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100500180352>.

<sup>14</sup> Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, *Mothers, Monsters, Whores: Women’s Violence in Global Politics* (London: Zed Books, 2007).

tactics. Such an image helps appeal to hearts and minds domestically and abroad.<sup>15</sup> A thorough review of women in rebel propaganda finds that images of sympathetic but armed women have been leveraged to “humanize” rebel groups.<sup>16</sup> Meredith Loken argues that “militant groups use *maternal women’s violence* to authorize rebellion,” allowing the group to demonstrate the direness of the situation (i.e., even women are taking up arms — there must truly be a crisis) while also playing to civilian sympathies (i.e., these are not deviant women — they are mothers fighting for a better future for their children).<sup>17</sup> Maternal anger is a familiar frame, often used by women to legitimize their political demands. Women have used their identities as mothers to make political demands ranging from accountability for disappeared loved ones (such as the Plaza de Mayo protests in Argentina) to pushing for public health and safety legislation (like Mothers Against Drunk Driving in the United States).<sup>18</sup>

Not all armed groups are able to leverage women’s participation to demonstrate concern with civilian well-being or commitment to a politically egalitarian movement. Female rebels who attempt to “prove themselves” through displays of particularly brutal violence clash with gendered expectations and ideas of acceptable female behavior that view women as inherently peaceful.<sup>19</sup> In these cases, women’s participation does not help the

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<sup>15</sup> Loken, “Both Needed and Threatened”; Devorah Manekin and Reed M. Wood, “Framing the Narrative: Female Fighters, External Audience Attitudes, and Transnational Support for Armed Rebellions,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* (2020), <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022002720912823>.

<sup>16</sup> Loken, “Both Needed and Threatened.”

<sup>17</sup> Loken, “Both Needed and Threatened,” 2 (emphasis in the original).

<sup>18</sup> Thank you to Dara Cohen for making this point about the global prevalence of maternal anger as a platform for political action.

<sup>19</sup> Chris Coulter, *Bush Wives and Girl Soldiers: Women’s Lives Through War and Peace in Sierra Leone* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2009); Miranda Alison, *Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-National Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2009), 137.

armed group’s legitimacy but arguably hurts it — the group is perceived as unnatural and incomprehensible. On the other hand, for rebels seeking to cultivate an atmosphere of pervasive insecurity, using women in attacks may be a means of doubling the impact of their violence — leveraging not only the direct impact of the attack but also the shock of the perpetrator’s identity.<sup>20</sup>

Further, superficial newspaper coverage, for example, of the “badass” Kurdish female fighters who fought against the Islamic State in Syria, divorces these women’s contributions from the broader political and historical context of the conflict.<sup>21</sup> In the case of the coverage of Kurdish female fighters, some have accused Kurdish leaders of “exploiting these women for [public relations] purposes — in an attempt to win over western public opinion” as part of a savvy public relations effort.<sup>22</sup> On the other hand, the coverage of women in rebel groups can also be used to demonstrate the “otherness” and brutality of these organizations. This type of coverage can also be attributed to an Orientalist bent to Western media, which often sensationalizes non-Western women.<sup>23</sup>

Audiences’ interpretation of women in rebel groups may depend on the ideology or reputation of the armed group. Groups with ideologies that revolve around aspirations of

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<sup>20</sup> Jason Warner and Hilary Matfess, *Exploding Stereotypes: The Unexpected Operational and Demographic Characteristics of Boko Haram’s Suicide Bombers* (West Point, NY: Combating Terrorism Center at West Point, 2017).

<sup>21</sup> Dilar Dirik, “Western Fascination With ‘Badass’ Kurdish Women,” *Al Jazeera*, Oct. 29, 2014, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/2014/10/western-fascination-with-badas-2014102112410527736.html>.

<sup>22</sup> Dirik, “Western Fascination With ‘Badass’ Kurdish Women.”

<sup>23</sup> Alice Martini, “Making Women Terrorists Into ‘Jihadi Brides’: An Analysis of Media Narratives on Women Joining ISIS,” *Critical Studies on Terrorism* 11, no. 3 (2018): 458–77, <https://doi.org/10.1080/17539153.2018.1448204>.

egalitarianism and a transformation of the social, political, and economic order may benefit from highlighting women's contributions through the media and propaganda. Reed Wood notes that Marxist-Leninist groups are especially likely to employ and highlight women in combat both because of their political commitment to gender equality and "their goal of dismantling traditional social hierarchies and replacing them with a starkly different form of revolutionary order."<sup>24</sup>

Underlining how context and objectives shape if and how armed groups benefit from women's participation, a survey experiment conducted among Haitians by Dara Kay Cohen and Danielle F. Jung found that women's presence in gangs *does not* increase support for gang violence among the population. Conversely, the presence of female gang members increases the likelihood that civilians will report gang activity to the police. Female gang members were viewed with derision and seen as arrogant and deviant individuals by the general population.<sup>25</sup> In contrast, Wood found that the presence of female combatants in a hypothetical self-determinist South Asian rebel group resulted in a statistically significant increase in Americans' support for that rebel group's activities. He also found that the presence of female combatants increases the likelihood that a rebel group will receive external support.<sup>26</sup>

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<sup>24</sup> Reed M. Wood, *Female Fighters: Why Rebel Groups Recruit Women for War* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2019), 53-4.

<sup>25</sup> Dara Kay Cohen and Danielle F. Jung, "Does Membership Matter? How Armed Group Composition Influences Public Support," *Squarespace*, July 18, 2018, [https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55af94boe4bocc8a396f8c40/t/5b4fbd222b6a2853e2b7dac5/1531952420154/CJ\\_Gangs.pdf](https://static1.squarespace.com/static/55af94boe4bocc8a396f8c40/t/5b4fbd222b6a2853e2b7dac5/1531952420154/CJ_Gangs.pdf).

<sup>26</sup> Wood, *Female Fighters*.

These findings, which appear contradictory, allude to the importance of *norm congruence* between the armed group's broader political objectives and its strategic involvement of women. Previous work identified the role of women as an important marker of rebel group ideology and their construction of an "ideal society." Survey experiments suggest that women's presence in rebel ranks is only a boon to a rebel group's reputation if it is in line with their political objectives and their broader relationship to the community.<sup>27</sup> In contrast to revisionist or revolutionary groups, armed groups with more modest political aims may need to employ women in traditional roles or obscure the nature of women's contributions to the group.<sup>28</sup> Armed groups that lack a coherent ideological program, like criminal gangs or groups with ideologies that do not emphasize gender egalitarianism, may not be able to leverage women's participation to increase group legitimacy because women's participation does not correspond to the group's organizational objectives.

These findings have three implications that are worthy of further study. First, the differences between audiences — e.g., domestic or international, private citizens, government officials, or members of nongovernmental organizations — affect how these audiences interpret groups' actions. Second, the broader objectives of the rebels may shape perceptions of female group members by those outside of the organization. Third, the medium through which audiences are exposed to these groups and their female members impact how the audiences view the groups and their members. Direct interaction with female combatants may have a different impact than secondary accounts relayed through news coverage or rebel propaganda. These surveys suggest that there

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<sup>27</sup> Valentine M. Moghadam, *Identity Politics and Women Cultural Reassertions and Feminisms in International Perspective* (Boulder, CO: Westview Press, 1994), 48.

<sup>28</sup> Moghadam, *Identity Politics*; Hilary Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups*, (Washington, DC: United States Institute of Peace, 2020).

may be important differences in the determinants of domestic and international audiences.

## Violence Against Women as a Message

The ways in which armed groups treat women illustrate the degree of organizational capacity for restraint,<sup>29</sup> cohesion within fighting units,<sup>30</sup> ties to local communities,<sup>31</sup> and structural integrity of the organizations.<sup>32</sup> Women are a symbolically important demographic that can help armed groups define the community that they are fighting for.

Fighting parties may target some women for the same reason they seek to “protect” others. Men (and women) frequently perceive women as symbolic representatives of their community, ethnicity, or nationality. Hence, both governments and rebel groups — especially if they have strong ties to local communities — might claim to protect women in order to burnish their own legitimacy. However, invoking women’s supposed need for protection simultaneously makes it more likely the other side will attack them. It renders women as the strategic “center of gravity” and ties a government’s legitimacy to its ability to serve as a protector.<sup>33</sup> As Laura Sjoberg and Jessica Peet put it, “[W]ars are fought for

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<sup>29</sup> Amelia Hoover Green, “The Commander’s Dilemma: Creating and Controlling Armed Group Violence,” *Journal of Peace Research* 53, no. 5 (2016): 619–32, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022343316653645>.

<sup>30</sup> Dara Kay Cohen, *Rape During Civil War* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2016).

<sup>31</sup> Phoebe Grace Donnelly, “Wedded to Warfare: Forced Marriage in Rebel Groups” (Ph.D. diss., Tufts University, 2019).

<sup>32</sup> Robert U. Nagel and Austin C. Doctor, “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Rebel Group Fragmentation,” *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 64, no. 7-8 (2020): 1226–53, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022002719899443>.

<sup>33</sup> Iris Marion Young, “The Logic of Masculinist Protection: Reflections on the Current Security State,” *Signs: Journal of Women in Culture and Society* 29, no. 11 (2003): 1–25, <https://doi.org/10.1093/0195175344.003.0002>.

‘our’ or ‘innocent’ women and fought on the bodies and lives of ‘their’ women.’<sup>34</sup> This reality, together with the feminization of “civilian” as a concept, has placed women at a particularly high risk of targeting in war.<sup>35</sup>

The “repertoire of violence” that rebels engage in against women (whether deployed strategically or spontaneously) constitutes an important aspect of conflict dynamics.<sup>36</sup> Additionally, rebel groups have been able to exploit the threat of sexual violence against women to advance their position vis-a-vis the government. For example, Séverine Autesserre recounts how a militia group in the Democratic Republic of Congo in 2010 purposefully perpetrated rapes knowing it would draw international attention and enable the group to commence negotiations with the government.<sup>37</sup> Governments need and want to project strength. A crucial part of projecting strength is protecting groups deemed

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<sup>34</sup> Laura Sjoberg and Jessica Peet, “A(nother) Dark Side of the Protection Racket: Targeting Women in Wars,” *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13, no. 2 (2011): 163–82, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2011.560751>.

<sup>35</sup> Of course, not all groups engage in violence targeting women or civilians in general. For more on what contributes to this variation, see, Amelia Hoover Green, *The Commander’s Dilemma: Violence and Restraint in Wartime* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2018).

<sup>36</sup> Francisco Gutiérrez-Sanín and Elisabeth Jean Wood, “What Should We Mean by ‘Pattern of Political Violence’? Repertoire, Targeting, Frequency, and Technique,” *Perspectives on Politics* 15, no. 1 (2017): 20–41, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S1537592716004114>; Mara Revkin and Elisabeth Jean Wood, “The Islamic State’s Pattern of Sexual Violence: Ideology and Institutions, Policies and Practices,” *Journal of Global Security Studies* (forthcoming), <https://dx.doi.org/10.2139/ssrn.3654558>; Elisabeth Jean Wood, “Rape as a Practice of War: Toward a Typology of Political Violence,” *Politics & Society* 46, no. 4 (2018): 513–37, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0270322320218773710>; Hilary Matfess, “Part and Parcel? Examining Al Shabaab and Boko Haram’s Violence Targeting Civilians and Violence Targeting Women,” *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* (Published online, June 4, 2020): 1–19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2020.1759262>.

<sup>37</sup> Séverine Autesserre, “Dangerous Tales: Dominant Narratives on the Congo and Their Unintended Consequences,” *African Affairs* 111, no. 443 (2012): 202–22, <https://doi.org/10.1093/afraf/adro80>.

vulnerable, i.e., *women and children*.<sup>38</sup> In line with this, Robert U. Nagel found that when rebel perpetration of sexual violence is public knowledge, the state's reputation and legitimacy as protector is threatened, and there is a greater likelihood of mediation.<sup>39</sup> Governments are more likely to accept mediation to end the costly conflict under such circumstances.

Similarly, groups that seek to instill fear in a certain segment of the population may use targeted violence against women to accomplish this end. Consider, for example, the abduction of the Chibok girls in 2014 (which led to the popular #BringBackOurGirls campaign), which was then followed by a surge in female suicide bombings by Boko Haram (often perpetrated by teenaged or younger girls).<sup>40</sup> The plight of the Chibok girls remains a concern of the international community and has also featured prominently in Boko Haram's propaganda. In an oft-cited video, Abubakar Shekau, the group's leader, promised that he would "sell" the kidnapped girls in the market, as was his right under his interpretation of the Quran.<sup>41</sup> While coverage of this video and the abduction more generally has focused on the violation of the girls' human rights, it also represents an instance in which women's bodies were the medium through which an armed group broadcast its message.

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<sup>38</sup> Cynthia Enloe, *Maneuvers: The International Politics of Militarizing Women's Lives* (Berkeley, CA: University of California Press, 2000).

<sup>39</sup> Robert Ulrich Nagel, "Talking to the Shameless?: Sexual Violence and Mediation in Intrastate Conflicts," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 63, no. 8 (2019): 1832–59, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022002718824642>.

<sup>40</sup> Warner and Matfess, *Exploding Stereotypes*.

<sup>41</sup> Aminu Abubakar and Josh Levs, "'I Will Sell Them,' Boko Haram Leader Says of Kidnapped Nigerian Girls," *CNN*, May 6, 2014, <https://www.cnn.com/2014/05/05/world/africa/nigeria-abducted-girls/index.html>.

## Violence Against Women and Organizational Cohesion

Violence against women also has implications for intra-rebel dynamics. A substantive body of research suggests that rape (overwhelmingly committed by men against women) is a means by which rebels bind themselves to one another.<sup>42</sup> Much of this literature emphasizes that this feature is not a concerted strategy of rebel groups but rather a spontaneous outgrowth of conflict and group dynamics. The experience of sharing in a shameful and/or taboo practice such as gang rape strengthens solidarity among the rebels, who would otherwise be only loosely tied to one another.<sup>43</sup> This is particularly relevant when fighters are forcibly recruited because the shared act and boasting afterward creates lasting bonds between perpetrators.<sup>44</sup> Sexual violence is underpinned by a logic of combatants needing to demonstrate their masculinity through sexualized brutality against feminized others.<sup>45</sup>

In other cases, rebel groups use marriage as a means of either fostering group loyalty or cultivating ties to the community.<sup>46</sup> Valerie Hudson and Hilary Matfess note that armed

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<sup>42</sup> Dara Kay Cohen, “Explaining Rape During Civil War: Cross-National Evidence (1980–2009),” *American Political Science Review* 107, no. 3 (2013): 461–77, <https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055413000221>; Dara Kay Cohen, “The Ties That Bind: How Armed Groups Use Violence to Socialize Fighters,” *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 5 (2017): 701–14, <https://doi.org/10.1177/02F0022343317713559>.

<sup>43</sup> Rebecca Littman and Elizabeth Levy Paluck, “The Cycle of Violence: Understanding Individual Participation in Collective Violence,” *Political Psychology* 36, no. 1 (2015): 79–99, <https://doi.org/10.1111/pops.12239>.

<sup>44</sup> Cohen, “Explaining Rape During Civil War”; Cohen, *Rape During Civil War*.

<sup>45</sup> Cohen, “The Ties That Bind.”

<sup>46</sup> Donnelly, “Wedded to Warfare”; Valerie Hudson and Hilary Matfess, “In Plain Sight: The Neglected Linkage Between Brideprice and Violent Conflict,” *International Security* 42, no. 1 (2017): 7–40, [https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC\\_a\\_00289](https://doi.org/10.1162/ISEC_a_00289).

groups use grievances over “bride-price” inflation and marriage markets to recruit young men.<sup>47</sup> Phoebe Donnelly’s work suggests that the need for either internal or external ties shapes the marriage practices of rebel groups. She argues that the Lord’s Resistance Army’s practice of abduction of women and girls into their ranks is a means of cultivating internal loyalty, whereas al-Shabaab’s brokering of marriages between militants and women in the community is a means of embedding the group locally.<sup>48</sup>

However, cohesion-building efforts that are based on policies or practices of sexual violence are limited and can present unanticipated challenges for the group’s overall organizational integrity. Robert U. Nagel and Austin C. Doctor argue that the cohesion-building effects are confined to the members of the fighting unit that participate in and/or observe the sexual violence.<sup>49</sup> Perpetrators form bonds of loyalty to their fellow fighters but not to the organization at large.<sup>50</sup> Rebel lieutenants who want to break away from the main group require loyal fighting units to conduct basic military operations. They are more likely to risk the potentially dangerous exit from the organization when they know that their subordinate units are cohesive and will follow them. According to Nagel and Doctor, rebel groups are more likely to fragment following acts of sexual violence.<sup>51</sup> These unintended consequences for groups’ structural integrity support the notion that sexual violence frequently emerges as a bottom-up process out of the social dynamics of the group.<sup>52</sup>

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<sup>47</sup> Hudson and Matfess, “In Plain Sight.”

<sup>48</sup> Donnelly, “Wedded to Warfare.”

<sup>49</sup> Nagel and Doctor, “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Rebel Group Fragmentation.”

<sup>50</sup> Edward A. Shils and Morris Janowitz, “Cohesion and Disintegration in the Wehrmacht in World War II,” *The Public Opinion Quarterly* 12, no. 2 (1948): 280–315, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/2745268>.

<sup>51</sup> Nagel and Doctor, “Conflict-Related Sexual Violence and Rebel Group Fragmentation.”

<sup>52</sup> Cohen, *Rape During Civil War*; Wood, “Rape as a Practice of War.”

The violence that rebel groups deploy against women — both strategically and incidentally — plays a vital role in promoting group cohesion and shaping the rebels' relationship with the community. Paying attention to the different types of sexual violence can help us understand armed groups' interests and strategies. Subsequently, a more nuanced understanding of rebel groups' violence against women can help governments develop effective countermeasures.

## Conclusions and Policy Implications

The role of women within and the treatment of women by nonstate armed groups is an underappreciated driver of groups' reputations. Rebel reputation and legitimacy affect conflict dynamics and may have relevance in the postwar period. For example, Reed Wood's research suggests rebel groups with female members may have a higher degree of domestic and international legitimacy in the post-conflict period. These groups are better positioned to successfully transition from a rebel group to a political party.<sup>53</sup> Furthermore, violence against women by rebel groups can serve as a message to multiple audiences and as a means of developing solidarity within armed groups.

These findings also have implications for how governments can act to counter rebel groups — specifically, by meaningfully engaging women in national security endeavors. Policymakers can learn from rebels' successful leveraging of women's participation to improve their reputation and bolster state legitimacy. Sabrina Karim's 2019 study found

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<sup>53</sup> Wood, *Female Fighters*; Mimmi Söderberg Kovacs, "From Rebellion to Politics: The Transformation of Rebel Groups to Political Parties in Civil War Peace Processes" (Ph.D. diss., Institutionen för freds-och konfliktforskning, 2007).

that bringing citizens into contact with female security officers improved civilian confidence and trust in those forces, increasing the proportion of respondents who considered the forces to be restrained and unlikely to abuse civilians.<sup>54</sup> Incorporating women into policing and security operations — in addition to mainstreaming gender-sensitive approaches to conflict analysis and programming — makes these endeavors more effective.

In ignoring women’s participation, conflict analysis overlooks an important window into how rebels seek legitimacy within their communities and the ways in which rebels organize themselves. As the conflicting outcomes of different surveys demonstrate, there is much to be learned about the conditions under which women’s participation in armed groups is a boon to organizations’ reputations and cohesion. Additional research could help policymakers gain a more nuanced understanding of nonstate actors’ relationships with the local community and assist with efforts to construct effective counternarratives. Both of these endeavors are central to designing and implementing counter-insurgency and counter-terrorism operations.

This essay demonstrates the pitfalls of thin interpretations of gender mainstreaming. Narrowly focusing on women’s protection or participation in peace processes leads to programs that are merely “counting women.” Such efforts have entrenched gendered stereotypes characterizing women as inherently peaceful or in need of protection rather than considering women’s experiences an important subject of analysis. Ignoring

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<sup>54</sup> Sabrina Karim, “Restoring Confidence in Post-Conflict Security Sectors: Survey Evidence from Liberia on Female Ratio Balancing Reforms,” *British Journal of Political Science* 49, no. 3 (2019): 799–821,

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0007123417000035>.

women's agency and diverse roles in conflict limits the understanding of actors and conflicts and therefore limits governments' capacities to manage them.

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### 3. Women and War Crimes:

## Finding Accountability for Female Perpetrators

*Jessica Trisko Darden and Izabela Steflja*

Women war criminals go unnoticed because their participation in exceptional wartime violence challenges deeply held assumptions about war and about women. Despite their participation in conflicts around the world, women have historically been enshrined as innocent civilians in both policy and the popular imagination.<sup>55</sup> This tendency has been reinforced by the passage of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which states that women and children are the vast majority of those adversely affected by armed conflict.<sup>56</sup> By grouping women with children — boys and girls under the age of 18 who are generally protected from prosecution for war-related crimes under international law — such statements, though undoubtedly true, neglect the fact that women have played key roles in perpetrating war crimes and crimes against humanity. Evidence of women’s war crimes can be seen in the Holocaust, the wars in former Yugoslavia, and the Rwandan genocide, as well as more recent episodes of heinous violence connected to the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL). Few of these women have been brought to justice.

Recognizing this persistent blind spot can inform domestic and international legal responses to the pressing challenge posed by the Islamic State. Thousands of women joined ISIL and contributed to terrorism and war crimes, including genocide and ethnic

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<sup>55</sup> Charli Carpenter, *Innocent Women and Children: Gender, Norms and the Protection of Civilians* (New York: Ashgate, 2006); Jessica Trisko Darden, Alexis Henshaw, and Ora Szekeley, *Insurgent Women: Female Combatants in Civil Wars* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019).

<sup>56</sup> United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1325, Oct. 31, 2000, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1325(2000)).

cleansing. In the past, postwar international tribunals either failed to take women seriously as war criminals or ignored the ways in which their gender affected their culpability vis-a-vis other perpetrators. Similarly, current efforts to address the crimes of female ISIL members have swung wildly from labeling all women as “victims” of ISIL to sentencing female members to death simply for joining a terrorist group. This article contextualizes these challenges within the precedents established by previous war crimes prosecutions. We conclude that post-conflict justice efforts should acknowledge the multiple ways that women can support and engage in war crimes while also creating mechanisms to assess each individual’s relative culpability — regardless of gender — and pursue prosecutions accordingly.

## Women and War Crimes Tribunals

The International Military Tribunal at Nuremberg (1945 to 1946) set a precedent of reduced accountability for women by determining that clerks, secretaries, and other similar staff in the Nazi government were not threats to postwar German society. Women, who were concentrated in such low-level positions, were assumed not to be a risk even though one-third of German women were actively engaged in the Nazi party.<sup>57</sup> As a result, relatively few Nazi women were ever prosecuted for war crimes even though roughly 500,000 women participated in the Nazi occupation of Eastern Europe.<sup>58</sup> In the first decade after the war — the high point of Nazi war crimes prosecutions — only 26 women were sentenced to death in Germany and Austria.<sup>59</sup> Defendants in West German trials

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<sup>57</sup> Wendy Lower, *Hitler’s Furies: German Women in the Nazi Killing Fields* (New York: Mariner Books, 2014),

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<sup>58</sup> Lower, *Hitler’s Furies*, 38.

<sup>59</sup> Lower, *Hitler’s Furies*, 169.

included Hilde Wernicke and Helene Wiecezorek, who were sentenced to death for poisoning mentally disabled patients as nurses in the Nazi euthanasia program.<sup>60</sup> Many more were acquitted of similar crimes.<sup>61</sup>

War crimes investigations continue, but the recent progress seen in holding former Nazi women accountable highlights the risk of pursuing justice too late. Erna Wallisch, listed by the Simon Wiesenthal Center as the seventh most important at-large Nazi war criminal, was discovered living in a comfortable apartment in Vienna in 2007.<sup>62</sup> She died before an investigation into her crimes at the Majdanek death camp was completed. In 2015, 260,000 counts of accessory to murder were brought against a 91-year-old German woman for her role in the Auschwitz-Birkenau death camp as a telegraph operator.<sup>63</sup> The gender of these alleged perpetrators enabled them to live their entire lives without being held accountable for their crimes.

More recent war crimes tribunals fared only slightly better in holding women war criminals to account. Biljana Plavšić, former co-president of Republika Srpska (one of the two constituent parts of Bosnia and Herzegovina), was the only woman prosecuted for war crimes by the International Criminal Tribunal for the former Yugoslavia between 1993

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<sup>60</sup> C. F. Rüter and D. W. de Mildt, *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen: Band 20* [Justice and Nazi Crimes: Volume 20] (Amsterdam: Amsterdam University Press, 2013), Case Nr. 003, <https://www.expostfacto.nl/junsv/ncot/brdeng/defo1.html>.

<sup>61</sup> Rüter and Mildt, *Justiz und NS-Verbrechen*, Case Nr. 587, <https://www.expostfacto.nl/junsv/ncot/brdeng/defo1.html>.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Leidig, “Elderly Woman is Wanted Nazi War Criminal,” *Telegraph*, Oct. 22, 2007, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/1566994/Elderly-woman-is-wanted-Nazi-war-criminal.html>.

<sup>63</sup> Associated Press, “German Woman Aged 91 Charged Over Nazi Death Camp Allegations,” *The Guardian*, Sept. 21, 2015, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/sep/21/german-woman-charged-nazi-allegations-auschwitz-death-camp>.

and 2017. As a member of the Supreme Command of the Armed Forces of Republika Srpska, Plavšić worked alongside co-president Radovan Karadžić and army commander Ratko Mladić in directing the murder of approximately 50,000 Bosnian Muslims and Croats. Plavšić was indicted by the tribunal on nine counts, including: genocide; complicity to commit genocide; persecution on political, racial, and religious grounds; extermination; deportation; inhumane acts; wilful killing; murder as a crime against humanity; and murder as a violation of the laws of war.<sup>64</sup>

Before her trial began in 2002, Plavšić agreed to plead guilty to one count of persecution on political, racial, and religious grounds for the ethnic cleansing of non-Serbs. During the trial, Plavšić's legal team presented her as a contrite, matronly figure who was excluded from many of the high-level decisions made by her male peers. Despite her status as co-president, the court accepted that Plavšić “was not in the very first rank of the leadership” of Republika Srpska and its armed forces.<sup>65</sup> The tribunal sentenced Plavšić to 11 years in a Swedish prison. She was released for good behavior after serving two-thirds of her sentence.

The International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda (1994 to 2015) also had a single female defendant: Pauline Nyiramasuhuko, Rwanda's former minister of family and women's development. During the Rwandan genocide, Nyiramasuhuko played a central role in the regime's extermination plan by directing the *Interahamwe* militia in Butare province and managing a roadblock with the assistance of her son, Arsène Shalom Ntahobali. Using a loud speaker to incite killings of Tutsi men and the rape and murder of Tutsi women,

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<sup>64</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor v. Plavšić, Case No. IT-00-40-I, “Indictment,” April 3, 2000, <https://www.icty.org/x/cases/plavsic/ind/en/pla-ii000407e.pdf>.

<sup>65</sup> International Criminal Tribunal for the Former Yugoslavia, Prosecutor v. Plavšić, Case No. IT-00-39&40/I-S, “Sentencing Judgement,” Feb. 27, 2003, <https://www.icty.org/x/cases/plavsic/tjug/en/pla-tj030227e.pdf>.

Nyiramasuhuko traveled throughout Butare to ensure that local government offices were abiding with the government's genocidal plan.<sup>66</sup> After her arrest in Kenya, she was prosecuted in a group trial with five male co-defendants.

Like Plavšić, Nyiramasuhuko's legal team portrayed her as a pious woman, a caring mother, and a defender of Rwanda's women and families. However, the court did not accept her lawyers' attempt to distance Nyiramasuhuko from the other government officials held responsible for the genocide.<sup>67</sup> As a result, Nyiramasuhuko is thus far the *only* woman convicted by an international tribunal for genocide and for rape as a crime against humanity. She received a life sentence, which was later reduced to 47 years, and is currently in prison in Senegal.

These cases reflect an international consensus that women war criminals are worth holding to account only when: 1) They are high-ranking government officials; and 2) they have directed others to commit war crimes and/or crimes against humanity. This consensus, based largely on the Nuremberg trials, excludes accountability for the thousands of lower-ranking women who have perpetrated war crimes. Instead, domestic courts are left with the responsibility of investigating and prosecuting these perpetrators, often with far fewer resources and in a highly politicized and highly gendered postwar environment.

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<sup>66</sup> Yvonne Leggat-Smith, *Rwanda: Not So Innocent: When Women Become Killers* (London: African Rights, 1995); Peter Landesman, "A Woman's Work," *New York Times Magazine*, Sept. 15, 2002, <https://www.nytimes.com/2002/09/15/magazine/a-woman-s-work.html>.

<sup>67</sup> United Nations, International Criminal Tribunal for Rwanda, Prosecutor v. Nyiramashuhuko et al., Case No. ICTR-98-42-T, "Summary of Judgement and Sentence," June 24, 2011, <https://jrad.irmct.org/view.htm?r=237541&s=->.

Lower-ranking female perpetrators are often spared from facing justice for their crimes because they are perceived as victims of patriarchal political ideologies and practices. For example, Nazism in Germany constrained women's identities to the private sphere: A woman's role was birthing and raising racially pure children.<sup>68</sup> Traditionalist ideals also guided the political ideologies of Serb nationalism and Hutu extremism in the 1990s.<sup>69</sup> The chauvinistic nature of Serb nationalism reduced women's roles to "mothers of the nation."<sup>70</sup> Similarly, the Hutu Ten Commandments, which provided the ideological foundation for the Rwandan genocide, held up Hutu women as ideal wives and mothers.<sup>71</sup> It extolled Hutu women to be vigilant and ensure that their husbands, brothers, and sons avoid all relations with Tutsi women. As a result of such ideologies, female perpetrators in highly gendered societies often have complex identities as victims, victimizers, and occasionally both. However, having to navigate through these distinctions and assess degrees of relative culpability should not preclude courts from pursuing justice on behalf of victims.

## Women in the Islamic State: Victims and Victimiziers

The challenge of identifying and prosecuting lower-ranking women war criminals is especially relevant when considering women's extensive participation in ISIL. By June

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<sup>68</sup> Irene Guenther, *Nazi Chic: Fashioning Women in the Third Reich* (New York: Berg, 2004).

<sup>69</sup> On political discourses that glorify tradition, family, and differences between the sexes rather than women's emancipation and equality, see also, Valentine M. Moghadam "Gender and Revolutionary Transformation: Iran 1979 and East Central Europe 1989," *Gender and Society* 9, no. 3 (June 1995): 328-58, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/190059>.

<sup>70</sup> Wendy Bracewell, "Women, Motherhood, and Contemporary Serbian Nationalism," *Women's Studies International Forum* 19, no. 1-2 (1996): 25-33, [https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395\(95\)00061-5](https://doi.org/10.1016/0277-5395(95)00061-5).

<sup>71</sup> Hassan Ngeze, "Appeal to the Conscience of the Hutu," *Kangura*, Dec. 6, 1990.

2018, at least 13,500 foreign women and children from at least 51 countries were living in ISIL-held territory in Syria and Iraq.<sup>72</sup> These women and their Syrian and Iraqi counterparts contributed to the Islamic State's financing, recruiting, and online propaganda. As was the case in Nazi-occupied Europe, women in ISIL were permitted (and sometimes required) to work as nurses, doctors, teachers, and bureaucratic administrators in ISIL-occupied areas. Some policed other women on behalf of ISIL and committed acts of violence as part of the Islamic State's religious police or *hisbah*. Emerging evidence, including women's own narratives about their time in ISIL, suggests that some women were directly involved in the group's crimes against humanity, including the use of torture and the persecution and enslavement of members of Iraq's Yazidi minority group.<sup>73</sup>

Similar to Nazism in interwar Germany, Serb nationalism in the 1990s, and Hutu extremist ideology during the genocide in Rwanda, ISIL expected women to express their ideological commitment to the group through traditional gendered social roles. Some women answered the call to populate the caliphate: Joana Cook and Gina Vale contend that up to 60 percent of the foreign national minors associated with ISIL were born in Iraq and Syria.<sup>74</sup> Women played an essential role in the upbringing of "Cubs of the Caliphate," male children trained as fighters and suicide bombers and who featured

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<sup>72</sup> Joana Cook and Gina Vale, "From Daesh to 'Diaspora' II: The Challenges Posed by Women and Minors After the Fall of the Caliphate," *CTC Sentinel* 12, no. 6 (July 2019): 30, <https://ctc.usma.edu/app/uploads/2019/07/CTC-SENTINEL-062019.pdf>.

<sup>73</sup> See, for instance, "Women of ISIL: Life Inside the Caliphate," *Al Jazeera: Witness*, 47:29, Sept. 26, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/programmes/witness/2019/09/women-isil-life-caliphate-190923094413989.html>.

<sup>74</sup> Cook and Vale, "From Daesh to 'Diaspora' II."

heavily in the group’s propaganda.<sup>75</sup> As Vale notes, “an [ISIL] pamphlet, entitled ‘Sister’s Role in Jihad,’ advise[d] mothers to read bedtime stories of fighters and martyrs; to encourage target practice through archery and play with toy guns; and to educate them in the correct targets for violence.”<sup>76</sup>

Assessing the agency of women in ISIL and their roles in the group’s violence has proved difficult. Women in ISIL can be seen as victims of the group’s patriarchal structure, which places its female members in the role of subservient women upholding traditional gendered family roles. English-language reporting often frames these women as manipulated, controlled, or otherwise lacking choices. In many stories, young women in ISIL are characterized as seduced, preyed upon, and held against their will.<sup>77</sup> Hoda Muthana, who in November 2014 traveled from Alabama to join ISIL at the age of 20, described herself as “brainwashed” and “young and ignorant” following her surrender to Kurdish forces four years later.<sup>78</sup> However, such narratives erase women’s agency in joining ISIL and their ideological commitment to the group. Furthermore, these depictions contrast starkly with women’s own accounts of their reasons for joining ISIL and their public ideological statements. One analysis of the social media activity of 17 Western female Islamic State recruits found that while women were driven by a gendered

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<sup>75</sup> Mia Bloom with John Horgan, *Small Arms: Children and Terrorism* (Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 2019).

<sup>76</sup> Gina Vale, “Women in Islamic State: From Caliphate to Camps,” *ICCT Policy Brief*, October 2019, <https://icct.nl/wp-content/uploads/2019/10/Women-in-Islamic-State-From-Caliphate-to-Camps.pdf>.

<sup>77</sup> Laura Sjoberg, “Jihadi Brides and Female Volunteers: Reading the Islamic State’s War to See Gender and Agency in Conflict Dynamics,” *Conflict Management and Peace Science* 35, no. 3 (2018): 299, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0738894217695050>.

<sup>78</sup> Martin Chulov and Bethan McKernan, “Hoda Muthana ‘Deeply Regrets’ Joining Isis and Wants to Return Home,” *The Guardian*, Feb. 17, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2019/feb/17/us-woman-hoda-muthana-deeply-regrets-joining-isis-and-wants-return-home>.

religious ideology to join the group, feelings of isolation and disaffection — also experienced by foreign male recruits — were at play.<sup>79</sup>

Despite its patriarchal structure, ISIL itself did not deny women agency or devalue their ideological commitment. As ISIL's hold on territory collapsed, a number of reports suggested that women were taking up arms, though the actual participation of women in armed combat on behalf of the Islamic State remains disputed.<sup>80</sup> Even after the caliphate's collapse, many women remain committed to ISIL's ideology, as demonstrated in a July 2019 video where women and children briefly raised ISIL's black flag in a Kurdish-run camp in Syria.<sup>81</sup> Female ISIL detainees in Syria have leveled death threats against women who have disavowed ISIL and committed acts of violence including stabbing camp guards and murdering an Azerbaijani teenager and a pregnant Indonesian

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<sup>79</sup> Meredith Loken and Anna Zelenz, "Explaining Extremism: Western Women in Daesh," *European Journal of International Security* 3, no. 1 (2018): 45–68, <https://doi.org/10.1017/eis.2017.13>.

<sup>80</sup> Charlie Winter and Devorah Margolin, "The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female Combatants and the Islamic State," *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 7 (August 2017): 23–8, <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-mujahidat-dilemma-female-combatants-and-the-islamic-state/>; Daveed Gartenstein-Ross, Vivian Hagerty, and Logan Macnair, "The Emigrant Sisters Return: The Growing Role of the Islamic State's Women," *War on the Rocks*, April 2, 2018, <https://warontherocks.com/2018/04/the-emigrant-sisters-return-the-growing-role-of-the-islamic-states-women/>.

<sup>81</sup> Richard Hall, "Isis Flag Raised at Syrian Camp Holding Jihadi Families," *Independent*, July 17, 2019, <https://www.independent.co.uk/news/world/middle-east/isis-syria-flag-children-families-terror-islamic-state-camp-a9006566.html>.

woman.<sup>82</sup> These actions suggest that some female ISIL members stand ready to use violence in defense of the group and its ideology.<sup>83</sup>

In some instances, women in ISIL were both direct victims of violence and perpetrators. The case of Samantha Elhassani, a white American woman from Indiana, illustrates the difficulty of assigning women to a single category. Raised as a Jehovah's Witness, Elhassani asserts that she never adhered to ISIL's ideology even though she traveled to Syria with her husband and children to join the group. Instead, she argues that her husband manipulated her and that she lived under the constant threat of violence by him and ISIL enforcers. Media reports on Elhassani reflect her narrative, referring to her as "An American Mom Who Lives Under ISIS Rule" and "The American Woman Forced to Join ISIS."<sup>84</sup> However, Elhassani allowed her eldest son to be trained in firearms, used in ISIL propaganda videos threatening President Donald Trump, and armed with a suicide belt. Elhassani and her husband also purchased Iraqi Yazidi children as slaves, and she has admitted to preparing the two girls to be raped by her husband.<sup>85</sup>

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<sup>82</sup> "Pregnant Indonesian Reportedly Tortured and Murdered in Syria Camp for ISIS Supporters," *The National*, Aug. 1, 2019, <https://www.thenational.ae/world/mena/pregnant-indonesian-reportedly-tortured-and-murdered-in-syria-camp-for-isis-supporters-1.893297>.

<sup>83</sup> Louisa Loveluck and Souad Mekhennet, "At a Sprawling Tent Camp in Syria, ISIS Women Impose a Brutal Rule," *Washington Post*, Sept. 3, 2019, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/at-a-sprawling-tent-camp-in-syria-isis-women-impose-a-brutal-rule/2019/09/03/3fcdfd14-c4ea-11e9-8bf7-cde2d9e09055\\_story.html](https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/at-a-sprawling-tent-camp-in-syria-isis-women-impose-a-brutal-rule/2019/09/03/3fcdfd14-c4ea-11e9-8bf7-cde2d9e09055_story.html).

<sup>84</sup> See also, Sarah Childress, "American Mom Charged with Aiding Terrorists After Living Under ISIS," *PBS Frontline*, Aug. 23, 2018, <https://www.pbs.org/wgbh/frontline/article/american-mom-charged-with-aiding-terrorists-after-living-under-isis/>.

<sup>85</sup> David Wroe, "Yazidi Former Slaves Emerge from the Islamic State and Want to Tell Their Stories," *Sydney Morning Herald*, March 28, 2019, <https://www.smh.com.au/world/middle-east/yazidi-former-slaves-emerge-from-the-islamic-state-and-want-to-tell-their-20190328-p518da.html>.

After surrendering to Kurdish forces in Syria following the death of her husband in late 2017, Elhassani was indicted by an Indiana grand jury for “conspiring with, and aiding and abetting, her husband and brother-in-law to provide material support for [the Islamic State].”<sup>86</sup> Elhassani initially pleaded “not guilty” and her lawyers argued that she was a victim of “domestic violence and patriarchal abuse.”<sup>87</sup> By positioning herself as a victim, Elhassani attempted to divert attention away from her role as a victimizer. In advance of her January 2020 trial, she pleaded guilty to a single count of financing terrorism and remains in prison while awaiting sentencing.<sup>88</sup> The potential direct victimization of Elhassani by her husband is different from her indirect victimization by ISIL’s highly gendered ideology. Courts dealing with ISIL-related crimes need to weigh these different types of victimhood experienced by some female perpetrators.

## Pursuing Justice After ISIL

The diversity of women’s experiences in ISIL and the sheer number of countries that ISIL members originated from greatly complicates the pursuit of justice. The international community remains divided over how to best address ISIL’s crimes as most countries pursue a mix of three options: 1) trials in local (Iraqi or Syrian) courts; 2) repatriation and prosecution in domestic courts; and/or 3) advocacy for an international justice process.

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<sup>86</sup> United States of America v. Elhassani, No. 2:18-cr-33, ECF No. 23, District Court, N.D. Indiana, Aug. 22, 2018, <https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/7511339/united-states-v-elhassani/>.

<sup>87</sup> Grant Morgan, “Evidence Issues Persist in Case of Indiana Woman Accused of Aiding ISIS,” *Chicago Tribune*, Nov. 6, 2019, <https://www.chicagotribune.com/suburbs/post-tribune/ct-ptb-evidence-issues-persist-st-1107-20191107-tk4a2e6rtzhphcylyq53hr764a-story.html>.

<sup>88</sup> Plea Agreement, United States of America v. Elhassani, No. 2:19-cr-00159, ECF No. 2, District Court, N.D. Indiana, Nov. 25, 2019, <https://www.courtlistener.com/docket/7511339/united-states-v-elhassani/>.

The approach adopted by a particular country is influenced by its proximity to the conflict, the resources at its disposal, and perceived threats to its national security.

The countries that suffered the most from ISIL took swift action against the group's female members. In Iraq, courts sentenced more than 40 foreign women to death and dozens more to life in prison with little to no legal or consular representation in May 2018.<sup>89</sup> Under Iraqi law, individuals who support a terrorist organization can be sentenced to death even if they did not personally commit acts of terrorism or murder. Some women received death sentences for illegally crossing the Iraqi border because, as a judge noted, "they didn't come for tourism."<sup>90</sup> Human Rights Watch criticized Iraq's approach for ignoring women's individual circumstances and producing "unjust outcomes."<sup>91</sup>

Germany, which claims universal jurisdiction for genocide, war crimes, and crimes against humanity and can therefore prosecute crimes committed beyond its borders, has taken a prominent role in prosecuting women in ISIL. A 32-year-old convert to Islam, identified according to German law only as Sabine S., was sentenced to five years in prison in July 2019 for membership in a foreign terrorist organization.<sup>92</sup> While a member of ISIL, she

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<sup>89</sup> Martin Chulov and Nadia al-Faour, "'They Deserve No Mercy': Iraq Deals Briskly with Accused 'Women of Isis,'" *The Guardian*, May 22, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/may/22/they-deserve-no-mercy-iraq-deals-briskly-with-accused-women-of-isis>.

<sup>90</sup> Sophia Jones and Christina Asquith, "Iraq Is Tempting Fate by Punishing Women," *Foreign Policy*, Oct. 25, 2018, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2018/10/25/iraq-is-tempting-fate-by-punishing-women/>.

<sup>91</sup> "Iraq: Change Approach to Foreign Women, Children in ISIS-Linked Trials," *Human Rights Watch*, June 21, 2018, <https://www.hrw.org/news/2018/06/21/iraq-change-approach-foreign-women-children-isis-linked-trials#>.

<sup>92</sup> German law prevents the full identification of defendants. Jorg Luyken, "Germany Convicts First 'Isil Bride' in Precedent-setting Case," *Telegraph*, July 5, 2019, <https://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/2019/07/05/germany-convicts-first-isil-bride-precedent-setting-case/>.

received weapons training and ran two propaganda blogs intended to recruit new members. In April 2019, the trial of a 27-year-old German woman identified as Jennifer W. began in Munich. She faces charges of war crimes, murder, and membership in a foreign terrorist organization, with a maximum potential sentence of life in prison.<sup>93</sup> Jennifer W. had been deported by Turkish authorities to Germany after spending almost a year and a half as an ISIL member. While planning her return to Syria, she admitted to an undercover German security services agent that she was part of ISIL's *hisbah* in the Iraqi cities of Fallujah and Mosul and took part in armed patrols. Jennifer W.'s murder charge stems from her role in the death of a 5-year-old enslaved Yazidi girl purchased by her and her husband in 2015. Her Iraqi husband was also extradited from Greece to Germany to face related charges.<sup>94</sup>

As these examples show, domestic prosecutions can face a range of challenges. While some countries are able to pursue prosecutions based on an individual's membership in ISIL, some were slow in listing ISIL as a foreign terrorist organization or banning their nationals from traveling to ISIL-held territory, making prosecution for early ISIL adherents more difficult than for latecomers. Domestic justice systems may also have ingrained gender disparities. In the United States, there has been a notable gender gap in terrorism sentencing: Audrey Alexander and Rebecca Turkington report that the average period of incarceration for women sentenced for ISIL-related crimes is 5.8 years, while the average period for men is 13.8 years.<sup>95</sup>

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<sup>93</sup> Melissa Edy, "German Woman Goes on Trial in Death of 5-Year-Old Girl Held as ISIS Slave," *New York Times*, April 9, 2019, <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/04/09/world/europe/germany-isis-trial.html>.

<sup>94</sup> "Man Accused of Letting Slave Girl Die Extradited to Germany," AP, Oct. 11, 2019, <https://apnews.com/fa55762d89bf469bb19ecacfoadab64b>.

<sup>95</sup> Audrey Alexander and Rebecca Turkington, "Treatment of Terrorists: How Does Gender Affect Justice?," *CTC Sentinel* 11, no. 8 (September 2018): 25, <https://ctc.usma.edu/treatment-terrorists-gender-affect-justice/>.

Denationalization or expatriation has emerged as an alternative to domestic prosecution for some countries. The United Kingdom and Australia are attempting to quickly strip dual nationals of their citizenship, foisting the responsibility for their prosecution onto another country. Shamima Begum, who left east London as a 15-year-old in February 2015 to join ISIL, was stripped of her U.K. citizenship in March 2019 on the basis that she has a right to claim Bangladeshi citizenship through her parents. Zehra Duman, who was born in Australia, was stripped of her Australian citizenship because she acted in the service of a declared terrorist organization.<sup>96</sup> Duman has since been sentenced to three years in prison in Turkey, where she also holds citizenship, for serving as a social media propagandist and recruiting for ISIL. In a case still before U.S. federal court, Hoda Muthana's U.S. passport was revoked in 2016 based on her father's status as a Yemeni diplomat to the United Nations at the time of her birth. Critics have condemned denationalization as a racist policy as it can only be applied to citizens who are the children of immigrants or immigrants themselves.<sup>97</sup> It also typically draws in countries with fewer diplomatic and judicial resources to deal with the problem of repatriating and prosecuting ISIL members.

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<sup>96</sup> Tita Smith and Kylie Stevens, "Australia's First ISIS Bride is Jailed in Turkey After She Fled Syrian Refugee Camp with Her Two Children," *Daily Mail*, Sept. 24, 2020, <https://www.theguardian.com/australia-news/2020/jun/09/woman-stripped-of-australian-citizenship-over-alleged-isis-role-launches-bid-to-overturn-law>.

<sup>97</sup> Azeezah Kanji, "Denationalisation: A Punishment Reserved for Muslims," *Al Jazeera*, Jan. 10, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/opinion/denationalisation-punishment-reserved-muslims-190109164026878.html>.

Partly in response to these concerns, some states — including the Netherlands and Sweden — have called for an international court to address the crimes of ISIL.<sup>98</sup> An international justice process would have several benefits including: 1) ensuring that the process meets international legal requirements and obligations; 2) placing ISIL detainees in the custody of an internationally recognized entity; 3) avoiding the one-size-fits-all sentencing approach demonstrated in Iraq; and, 4) working around the ongoing conflict in Syria. It would also put a spotlight on ISIL's victims. However, the justice an international tribunal could offer ISIL's victims would be removed from their daily lives and local contexts. It would also be constrained by questions of legitimacy and politicization that plague international legal bodies. Given the International Criminal Court's decision in April 2015 that it lacked both territorial and personal jurisdiction to open preliminary investigations into ISIL's crimes, this approach would require the creation of an entirely new international tribunal.<sup>99</sup> Any tribunal that is convened is likely to replicate the problems of past tribunals, including ignoring the contributions of women to the group's crimes.

The limited history of war crimes prosecutions of women suggests that women will continue to fall through the cracks in the current patchwork legal system for addressing ISIL's crimes. While prosecuting women for membership in ISIL or for financing terrorism may be expedient, this approach does not address the full range of crimes that female ISIL members participated in — including slavery and torture — some of which

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<sup>98</sup> "Sweden to Host Meeting on International Tribunal to Investigate Isis Fighters," *The Local Sweden*, May 16, 2019, <https://www.thelocal.se/20190516/sweden-to-host-meeting-on-international-tribunal-for-isis-fighters>.

<sup>99</sup> Fatou Bensouda, "Statement of the Prosecutor of the International Criminal Court, Fatou Bensouda, On the Alleged Crimes Committed by ISIS," *International Criminal Court, Office of the Prosecutor*, April 8, 2015, <https://www.icc-cpi.int/Pages/item.aspx?name=otp-stat-08-04-2015-1>.

can be prosecuted as war crimes under universal jurisdiction. Countries with the ability to pursue war crimes prosecutions under universal jurisdiction — as is the case in many countries that fielded ISIL members including Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Denmark, France, Germany, the Netherlands, and the United Kingdom — have the moral and legal responsibility to consider prosecuting women who commit war crimes alongside men.

The current approach to ISIL prosecutions also fails to grapple with the reality that women's culpability may differ from men's because of the highly gendered context in which the crimes took place. A more systematic approach to the documentation of women's involvement in the group, the collection of evidence, and the full extent of the group's war crimes and crimes against humanity is needed. Women's roles in perpetrating horrendous crimes should not be dismissed as they have been in the past.

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**Note:** *This essay is adapted from the authors' book, Women as War Criminals: Gender, Agency, and Justice (Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2020).*



## 4. Gendering Recruitment into Violent Organizations: Lessons for Counter-Terrorism Operations

*Amira Jadoon*

Violent organizations require a diverse base of supporters willing to engage in violence or facilitate nonviolent activities. Some of these organizations recruit women to exploit outdated perceptions of violence as a male-centric phenomenon and gain tactical advantages over their adversaries. A host of factors determine the demand and supply of female participants in violent and nonviolent capacities. The demand for female recruits is often driven by organizations' operational imperatives. Women expand and diversify armed groups' human capital, contributing to fundraising, recruitment, or the conduct of violence. This enables organizations to achieve their short- and long-term goals.<sup>100</sup> Women are recruited through appeals to their personal grievances, ideological leanings, or socioeconomic needs.

The role of female participants in rebel groups is often neglected or overlooked. This is largely due to the fact that stereotypical views of women emphasizing their place as victims of terrorism continue to dominate discourse. Responding to the national security threats of the 21st century requires discarding obsolete characterizations and devising security policies that account for the gendered dimensions of radicalization and recruitment.

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<sup>100</sup> Martha Crenshaw, "Theories of Terrorism: Instrumental and Organizational Approaches," in *Inside Terrorist Organizations*, ed. David C Rapoport (New York: Columbia University Press, 1988), 13–31; Kevin Siqueira, "Political and Militant Wings within Dissident Movements and Organizations," *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 49, no. 2 (2005): 218–36, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022002704272865>.

## Why Do We Need a Gender-Specific Approach?

Deviating slightly in its focus from prior strategies, the 2018 *National Strategy for Counterterrorism* emphasized the need to supplement America's well-established counter-terrorism architecture with a robust preventive architecture that impedes radicalization and recruitment. Prevention of radicalization and recruitment usually entails a suite of interrelated policy prescriptions and actions such as delegitimizing extremist ideologies via strategic communications, blocking online recruitment platforms, and reintegrating individuals into mainstream society.<sup>101</sup>

Accounting for the gender component in violent organizations' human capital and recruitment strategies is essential to prevent radicalization for three key reasons. First, unless preventive efforts address how armed groups diversify their human capital, the U.S. government runs the risk of neglecting important segments of the intended target audience and, as a result, wasting resources and compromising policy outcomes. Further attention needs to be paid to violent extremist organizations' processes of recruiting women as well as the specific circumstances that make their recruitment more likely.

Second, tracking developments in women's interaction with violence can provide insights about how groups may adapt their strategies and tactics in the future, especially in the face of counter-terrorism efforts. For example, addressing how groups that do not typically use female combatants do so out of necessity can shed light on how groups may respond to intensified counter-terrorism operations.

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<sup>101</sup> The White House, *National Security for Counterterrorism of the United States of America*, October 2018, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2018/10/NSCT.pdf>.

Finally, overlooking gender-specific factors and outcomes can have spillover effects in other realms, including but not limited to repatriation and prosecution of female perpetrators (as discussed in the Jessica Trisko Darden and Izabela Steflja piece in this collection), and building partner countries' capacity to adequately deal with terrorism and insurgency. In short, obsolete notions about women's recruitment into violence result in ineffectual national security policies that are riddled with perilous security gaps.

### **What We Know About Women's Recruitment in Violent Organizations**

Despite mounting evidence that terrorist and insurgent groups recruit women to boost their long-term endurance and short-term effectiveness, women's association with political violence is still viewed as an aberration. Violent groups have successfully exploited this outdated view to skirt security measures and garner massive publicity. One tangible outcome of this has been the upsurge in the use of female suicide bombers by both secular and religious terror networks.<sup>102</sup>

Yet suicide bombings are not the only way that women contribute to armed groups. Several studies indicate that women are recruited into a range of noncombatant and combatant roles in an ideologically diverse universe of groups that includes the Tamil Tigers, the Kurdistan Workers' Party, and the Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan.<sup>103</sup> While it is

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<sup>102</sup> Mia Bloom, *Bombshell: Women and Terrorism* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011); Jason Warner, Ellen Chapin, and Hilary Matfess, "Suicide Squads: The Logic of Linked Suicide Bombings," *Security Studies* 28, no. 1 (2019): 25–57, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09636412.2018.1508632>.

<sup>103</sup> Alexis Leanna Henshaw, "Where Women Rebel: Patterns of Women's Participation in Armed Rebel Groups 1990–2008," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 18, no. 1 (January 2, 2016): 39–60, <https://doi.org/10.1080/14616742.2015.1007729>; Miranda Alison, "Women as Agents of Political Violence: Gendering Security," *Security Dialogue* 35, no. 4 (2004): 447–63,

important to understand the spectrum of roles women assume within armed groups, the discussion below pertains to individual and organizational factors that determine how women enter armed groups. In particular, it discusses trends specific to Islamist groups.

### *Motivations and Demographics*

Research shows that women usually join armed groups voluntarily. The underlying causes emerge as an amalgamation of individual motivations, organizational attributes, and broader environmental factors. Just as men join armed groups for a variety of reasons, researchers have found a wide range of motivations for women including personal grievances,<sup>104</sup> religious and political ideological commitments,<sup>105</sup> or socioeconomic needs.<sup>106</sup>

Overall, women's motivations to join extremist organizations are likely to be context dependent. Depending on the specific conflict and organization, Mia Bloom identifies several key drivers of women's involvement in terrorist groups (not necessarily mutually exclusive), which she calls the "four R's plus one": revenge, redemption, relationships,

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<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0967010604049522>; Bloom, *Bombshell*; Victor Asal and Amira Jadoon, "When Women Fight: Unemployment, Territorial Control and the Prevalence of Female Combatants in Insurgent Organizations," *Dynamics of Asymmetric Conflict* (2019): 1–24, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0967010604049522>.

<sup>104</sup> Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, eds., *Women, Gender, and Terrorism* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

<sup>105</sup> Reed M. Wood and Jakana L. Thomas, "Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women's Participation in Violent Rebellion," *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no. 1 (2017): 31–46, <https://doi.org/10.1177%2F0022343316675025>.

<sup>106</sup> Miranda Alison, "Cogs in the Wheel? Women in the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam," *Civil Wars* 6, no. 4 (2003): 37–54, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1369824042000221367>.

respect, and rape.<sup>107</sup> For example, while some female suicide attackers in the Israeli-Palestinian context were motivated by revenge,<sup>108</sup> those affiliated with Sri Lanka's Tamil Tigers sought to revolt against repressive state policies.<sup>109</sup> Similarly, analyses of American and Australian female jihadists indicate that there is no discernable profile of a Western female jihadist.<sup>110</sup> The emerging consensus is that women generally radicalize for the same reasons that men do.<sup>111</sup> It is perilous to rely on any stereotyped assumptions about why women join radical groups.<sup>112</sup>

A recent study by Rachel Yon and Daniel Milton examines gender-specific demographic and radicalization metrics among 1,867 radicalized individuals within the United States between 1948 and 2016.<sup>113</sup> They find that at least 10 percent of the cases consisted of

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<sup>107</sup> Bloom, *Bombshell*.

<sup>108</sup> Karen Jacques and Paul J. Taylor, "Male and Female Suicide Bombers: Different Sexes, Different Reasons?" *Studies in Conflict and Terrorism* 31, no. 4 (2008): 304-26, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100801925695>.

<sup>109</sup> Miranda Alison, *Women and Political Violence: Female Combatants in Ethno-National Conflict* (London: Routledge, 2009).

<sup>110</sup> Audrey Alexander, *Cruel Intentions: Female Jihadists in America* (Washington, DC: Program on Extremism, The George Washington University, 2016), <https://extremism.gwu.edu/sites/g/files/zaxdzs2191/f/downloads/Female%20Jihadists%20in%20America.pdf>; Michele Grossman, Susan Carland, Hussein Tahiri, and Andrew Zammit, *The Roles of Women in Supporting and Opposing Violent Extremism: Understanding Gender and Terrorism in Contemporary Australia* (Melbourne: Alfred Deakin Institute for Citizenship and Globalisation, 2018).

<sup>111</sup> Haras Rafiq and Nikita Malik, *Caliphettes: Women and the Appeal of Islamic State*, (London: Quilliam Foundation, 2015).

<sup>112</sup> Caron E. Gentry and Laura Sjoberg, "The Gendering of Women's Terrorism," in *Women, Gender, and Terrorism*, ed. Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011), 57-82.

<sup>113</sup> Rachel Yon and Daniel Milton, "Simply Small Men? Examining Differences Between Females and Males Radicalized in the United States," *Women & Criminal Justice* 29, no. 4-5 (2019): 188-203,

females who participated in Islamist, far-right or far-left, and single-issue groups. Dissecting the data by gender and group ideology, the far-right and far-left categories had the highest percentage of female members at 22 percent and 15 percent, respectively. Their analysis also uncovered significant differences in marital status, where only 33 percent of women fell into the “single” category, compared to 53 percent of men. Marital differences were the most pronounced in Islamist and far-right groups. There are also important differences by education: Women tended to have higher levels of college or vocational schooling compared to men. Across all groups, less than 1 percent of women had any prior military experience. In terms of participation in violent attacks, 60 percent of men took part in planning or directing an attack, whereas the percentage for women was at 40 percent, with the most pronounced differences within Islamist groups.

Overall, this first cut at understanding how the characteristics of violent group members differ by gender is instructive. It suggests that gender differences intersect with organizational traits such as a group’s ideological orientation.

### *Organizational and Environmental Factors*

Many studies show that certain ideologies are more likely to attract female recruits. In their analysis of 166 violent groups in Africa, Jakana L. Thomas and Kanisha D. Bond show that women’s participation is higher for groups with gender-inclusive ideologies.<sup>114</sup> Wood and Thomas extend this line of research further by examining how ideology affects

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<https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2018.1543067>.

<sup>114</sup> Jakana L. Thomas and Kanisha D. Bond, “Women’s Participation in Violent Political Organizations,” *American Political Science Review* 109, no. 3 (August 2015): 488–506,

<https://doi.org/10.1017/S0003055415000313>.

groups' proclivity to recruit women into *combatant* roles.<sup>115</sup> Examining a sample of 211 rebel organizations, they find that leftist ideologies, which generally tend to attract female recruits, are also more likely to employ women in combat roles. Prominent examples include the Central American Sandinista and Zapatista movements. Their analysis finds the opposite effect for Islamist groups, which suggests that women engaging in *jihād* predominantly serve in supportive roles. As individual case studies show, however, Islamist groups may call upon female combatants when it is deemed necessary for group survival.

Moving beyond ideology, other organizational characteristics can play a role in violent organizations' use of women on the frontlines. Angela Dalton and Victor Asal's analysis of 395 terrorist organizations around the world indicates that larger and older organizations are more likely to attract female combatants.<sup>116</sup> Insurgent groups that control territory, as my research indicates, are also more likely to recruit female combatants — for two key reasons.<sup>117</sup> First, women can deepen groups' links with the communities within their territory. Second, recruiting women as fighters can boost groups' heightened operational needs to physically protect their home base. From a gender-specific counter-terrorism perspective, this highlights the need to be attentive to a group's age and operational needs, which can increase its inclination to diversify its human capital.

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<sup>115</sup>Reed M. Wood and Jakana L. Thomas, "Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women's Participation in Violent Rebellion," *Journal of Peace Research* 54, no.1 (2017): 31-46, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0022343316675025>.

<sup>116</sup> Angela Dalton and Victor Asal, "Is it Ideology or Desperation: Why Do Organizations Deploy Women in Violent Terrorist Attacks?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 34, no. 10 (2011): 802-19, <https://doi.org/10.1080/1057610X.2011.604833>.

<sup>117</sup> Asal and Jadoon, "When Women Fight."

As stated above, women's radicalization and recruitment is usually the result of an interaction between their personal motivations and their broader socioeconomic and political environments. A burgeoning line of investigation explores how the broader social and economic environment within states affects women's likelihood to join extremist organizations. While poor socioeconomic conditions may contribute to men's radicalization and recruitment as much as they do to women's, the effects are likely augmented by gender since conditions across the world do not affect men and women equally. For example, men generally tend to earn more than women and are more likely to own assets, whereas women are overrepresented in low-paying jobs.<sup>118</sup> Such gender inequalities have implications for all political and socioeconomic factors that affect the lives of women, including their recruitment into violent extremist organizations.

Relatedly, several studies suggest that women are more likely to participate in violent groups in repressive societies where they are deprived of freedom, political empowerment, and social equality.<sup>119</sup> Studies also provide evidence that higher levels of women's social rights reduce female participation in armed violence.<sup>120</sup> My recent coauthored research suggests that higher levels of unemployment within the female labor force can significantly increase the likelihood that violent organizations recruit female

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<sup>118</sup> Esteban Ortiz-Ospina and Max Roser, "Economic Inequality by Gender," *Our World in Data* (2018), <https://ourworldindata.org/economic-inequality-by-gender>.

<sup>119</sup> Farhana Ali, "Rocking the Cradle to Rocking the World: The Role of Muslim Female Fighters," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 8, no. 1 (2006): 21–35, <https://vc.bridgew.edu/jiws/vol8/iss1/2>; Anat Berko and Edna Erez, "Gender, Palestinian Women, and Terrorism: Women's Liberation or Oppression?" *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 6 (2007): 493–519, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100701329550>.

<sup>120</sup> Chandra Bhadra, Ava Darshan Shrestha, and Rita Thapa, "On the Edge: The Impact of the Insurgency on Nepali Women," in *The Impact of Armed Conflicts on Women in South Asia*, eds. Ava Darshan Shrestha and Rita Thapa (New Delhi: Manohar Publishers & Distributors, 2007).

combatants.<sup>121</sup> A lack of economic opportunities for women can lower the opportunity cost of joining a violent group, and make them more tolerant of the costs associated with membership in that group. This line of research emphasizes the impact of social and political settings on human choices, including the willingness of women to pick up arms or support violent organizations.

### *Trends in Women's Recruitment into Jihadist Groups*

More recently, important developments in women's *jihad* in Islamist groups have drawn widespread attention, especially with the emergence of the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL), which attracted unprecedented levels of female support.<sup>122</sup> Aligned with the broader literature on women's varied motivations to join armed groups, women joined the Islamic State due to personal grievances, a sense of isolation, commitment to supporting the caliphate, or a desire to seek adventure.<sup>123</sup> As discussed below, the potential of jihadist groups to cooperate (or compete) and the global nature of transnational networks such as ISIL means that trends in one region can trigger changes in another.<sup>124</sup>

Women's contributions to *jihad* have generally been linked to domestic roles as mothers,

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<sup>121</sup> Asal and Jadoon, "When Women Fight"; Eileen MacDonald, *Shoot the Women First* (New York: Random House, 1991).

<sup>122</sup> Anita Perešin, "Why Women From the West Are Joining ISIS," *International Annals of Criminology* 56, no. 1-2 (2018): 32-42, <https://doi.org/10.1017/cri.2018.19>.

<sup>123</sup> Joana Cook and Gina Vale, *From Daesh to 'Diaspora': Tracing the Women and Minors of Islamic State* (London: ICSR, 2018), <https://icsr.info/wp-content/uploads/2018/07/ICSR-Report-From-Daesh-to-%E2%80%98Diaspora%E2%80%99-Tracing-the-Women-and-Minors-of-Islamic-State.pdf>.

<sup>124</sup> Tricia Bacon, *Why Terrorist Groups Form International Alliances* (Philadelphia, PA: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2018); Assaf Moghadam, *Nexus of Global Jihad: Understanding Cooperation Among Terrorist Actors* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2017).

wives, and sisters and in fulfilling essential support roles such as fundraising and disseminating the message of the organization.<sup>125</sup> While organizations affiliated with al-Qaeda have largely adhered to a gender-specific interpretation of female *jihad*,<sup>126</sup> organizations like ISIL have shown more flexibility when the exigencies of the group's survival have demanded it. ISIL's significant territorial losses in Iraq and Syria necessitated the mobilization of all Muslims to participate in active *jihad*, including women.<sup>127</sup> ISIL's behavior aligns with the findings of prior research that shows how organizations may employ women as innovative actors when subjected to intensified security and counter-terrorism measures.<sup>128</sup>

The proclivity of terrorist organizations to learn and adapt, combined with the global nature of transnational terrorist groups, means that changing tactics in one region can influence tactics in another. The Islamic State's shift in its attitude toward female combatants has likely shaped trends in female militancy elsewhere, especially where its global affiliates or women inspired by its propaganda are located. For example, the April

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<sup>125</sup> R. Kim Cragin and Sara A. Daly, *Women as Terrorists: Mothers, Recruiters, and Martyrs* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009).

<sup>126</sup> Katharina Von Knop, "The Female Jihad: Al Qaeda's Women," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 30, no. 5 (April 17, 2007): 397-414, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100701258585>.

<sup>127</sup> Ruth Gan, Loo Seng Neo, Jeffery Chin, and Majeed Khader, "Change is the Only Constant: The Evolving Role of Women in the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria (ISIS)," *Women & Criminal Justice* 29, no. 4-5 (2019): 204-20, <https://doi.org/10.1080/08974454.2018.1547674>; Charlie Winter, "ISIS, Women and Jihad: Breaking With Convention," *Tony Blair Institute for Global Change*, Sept. 13, 2018, <https://institute.global/policy/isis-women-and-jihad-breaking-convention>; Charlie Winter and Devorah Margolin, "The Mujahidat Dilemma: Female Combatants and the Islamic State," *CTC Sentinel* 10, no. 7 (2017): 25-30, <https://ctc.usma.edu/the-mujahidat-dilemma-female-combatants-and-the-islamic-state/>.

<sup>128</sup> See also, Karla J. Cunningham, "Cross-Regional Trends in Female Terrorism," *Studies in Conflict & Terrorism* 26, no. 3 (2003): 171-95, <https://doi.org/10.1080/10576100390211419>.

2019 Sri Lanka suicide attacks claimed by the Islamic State that killed about 359 people included a female suicide attacker.<sup>129</sup> In December 2016, Indonesian law enforcement arrested 27-year-old Dian Yulia Novi, who had committed to being a martyr for ISIL, on suspicion of plotting a suicide attack on the presidential palace in Indonesia.<sup>130</sup> Such examples and broader trends of women's participation in active *jihad* highlight the necessity to broaden the gender component in the framework for preventing radicalization.

Emerging trends in Southeast Asian female militancy are of growing concern. An examination of recent data on female participation in militant groups illustrates the evolving gendered dimensions of radicalization and recruitment. My coauthored research on the arrests of female militants across the Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia indicates that the total number of female participants in militant groups who were captured or killed steadily increased between 2014 and 2018. The majority (60 to 80 percent) consisted of women affiliated with the Islamic State.<sup>131</sup> The trends in Southeast Asia coincide with shifts in ISIL's rhetoric toward women's *jihad*. The group transitioned from forbidding women to participate in combat to calling upon them to engage in

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<sup>129</sup> Siobhan O'Grady, "The Sri Lankan Attackers Were 'Well-Educated.' Suicide bombers Tend To Be, Experts Say," *Washington Post*, April 24, 2019, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/2019/04/24/sri-lankan-attackers-were-well-educated-suicide-bombers-tend-be-experts-say/>.

<sup>130</sup> Charlie Campbell, "ISIS Suicide Bomber Dian Yulia Novi Talks Jihad," *Time*, March 3, 2017, <https://time.com/4689714/indonesia-isis-terrorism-jihad-extremism-dian-yulia-novi-fpi/>.

<sup>131</sup> Amira Jadoon, Julie Lodoen, Charmaine Willis, and Nakissa Jahanbani, "Breaking the Glass Ceiling? Female Participation in Militant Organizations in Islamic State Affiliates in Southeast Asia," *Terrorism and Political Violence* (forthcoming).

defensive combat in 2016 and asking them to actively engage in *jihad* for the caliphate by late 2017.<sup>132</sup>

ISIL's proactive recruitment of women into *jihad* has impacted not only its global affiliates and supporters, but also other groups operating in the same ideological sphere. The Tehrik-e-Taliban Pakistan, for example, released a propaganda publication in 2017 that openly solicited female participation in the group's operational activities for the first time in its history.<sup>133</sup> Despite espousing extremely conservative views toward women, the group has not shied away from the occasional use of female suicide attackers.<sup>134</sup> These trends are comparable to how groups in other ideological categories, such as left-leaning organizations, have a proclivity to recruit women.<sup>135</sup> They may also be linked to Muslim women's pursuit of more autonomy and liberation via participation in revolutionary movements.<sup>136</sup>

The recruitment of women into *jihad* extends to the Western world. The number of Australian women known to have participated in terrorist activity in Syria, Iraq, or within

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<sup>132</sup> Winter, "ISIS, Women and Jihad."

<sup>133</sup> Amira Jadoon and Sara Mahmood, "Militant Rivalries Extend to Female Recruitment in Pakistan," *Combating Terrorism Center*, Sept. 14, 2017, <https://ctc.usma.edu/ctc-perspectives-militant-rivalries-extend-to-female-recruitment-in-pakistan/>.

<sup>134</sup> Asad Hashim, "Several Killed in Twin Attacks in Pakistan's Dera Ismail Khan," *Al Jazeera*, July 21, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2019/07/killed-twin-attacks-pakistan-dera-ismail-khan-190721063358029.html>.

<sup>135</sup> Wood and Thomas, "Women on the Frontline: Rebel Group Ideology and Women's Participation in Violent Rebellion."

<sup>136</sup> Valentine Moghadam, ed., *Gender and National Identity: Women and Politics in Muslim Societies* (London: Zed Books, 1994).

Australia was estimated to be around 40 in 2015.<sup>137</sup> Between 2014 and 2018, at least 33 different plots across France, Belgium, Denmark, Germany, and the United Kingdom involved female jihadists.<sup>138</sup> Jihadists' recruitment of Western women has also touched the American landscape, which has seen a marked increase in the number of legal cases with female involvement.<sup>139</sup> A study of 25 jihadist American women between 2011 and 2016 uncovered links to a range of groups, including ISIL, al-Shabaab, the Taliban, and al-Qaeda, where women's activities included plotting attacks, traveling overseas, and/or disseminating propaganda.

Across all these cases, social media platforms emerge as a common operational space where women can support the jihadists' cause. Digital technologies not only allow jihadist groups to access potential female recruits and appeal to their personal or political and religious views. They also provide opportunities for women to engage in activities in novel fashions. Increases in women's recruitment via online platforms may also be symptomatic of jihadist groups' reliance on lone actors and autonomous cells.

### *Beyond Jihadist Groups*

While these examples largely relate to violent Islamist groups, women's participation in violent organizations extends to far-right and far-left groups as well. The case of Beate Zschäpe serves as an illustrative example. Zschäpe was a former female member of a neo-Nazi terrorist cell sentenced to life in prison in July 2018 for multiple murders, bombings,

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<sup>137</sup> Grossman, et al., *The Roles of Women*.

<sup>138</sup> Robin Simcox, "The 2016 French Female Attack Cell: A Case Study," *CTC Sentinel* 11, no. 6 (2018): 21-5, <https://ctc.usma.edu/2016-french-female-attack-cell-case-study/>.

<sup>139</sup> Alexander, *Cruel Intentions*.

and robberies.<sup>140</sup> A variety of right-wing extremist organizations ranging from neo-Nazi groups to the Ku Klux Klan have been known to recruit women.<sup>141</sup> The World Church of the Creator, a white nationalist group in the United States and overseas, has established several chapters specifically for women.<sup>142</sup> In their book, *Gender and the Radical and Extreme Right*, Cynthia Miller-Idriss and Hilary Pilkington argue that the growing appeal of far-right organizations to women may be rooted in the groups' increasingly moderate views on gender and sexuality, an attempt to appeal to a wider audience, and a reduced stigma for women joining such movements.<sup>143</sup> These examples demonstrate the active participation and recruitment of women along the entire spectrum of violent extremist organizations.

## Moving Forward

The research highlighted here provides abundant evidence that violent organizations actively recruit women. Furthermore, women often join by choice — which means that prevention efforts must be designed with women in mind. The perception of women as solely victims of terrorism (rather than autonomous actors who contribute to terrorist groups' objectives) is tenacious and one that the United States needs to move past

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<sup>140</sup> Philip Oltermann, "German Neo-Nazi Beate Zschäpe Sentenced to Life for NSU Murders," *The Guardian*, July 11, 2018, <https://www.theguardian.com/world/2018/jul/11/german-neo-nazi-beate-zschape-gets-life-for-nsu-murders>.

<sup>141</sup> Paola Bacchetta and Margaret Power, *Right-wing Women: From Conservatives to Extremists Around the World* (New York: Routledge, 2013).

<sup>142</sup> George Michael, "RAHOWA! A History of the World Church of the Creator," *Terrorism and Political Violence* 18, no. 4 (2006): 561–83, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09546550600880633>.

<sup>143</sup> Cynthia Miller-Idriss and Hilary Pilkington, ed., *Gender and the Radical Extreme Right: Mechanisms of Transmission and the Role of Educational Interventions* (New York: Routledge, 2018).

quickly if it wishes to understand the evolution and trajectories of terrorism and political violence. To help prevent and reduce political violence and terrorism, policymakers need to incorporate insights about *how* and *when* women are recruited, and account for organizational and environmental factors that facilitate women's recruitment. Preventive policy responses should tackle specific ideologies of leftist or Islamist groups that not only appeal to women's motivations to join violent organizations but also shape the roles they play.

Within the national security and counter-terrorism realm, a wide variety of actors including community leaders, non-governmental organizations, and private sector actors can leverage a more gender-specific understanding of women's engagement with political violence. Given the central roles played by women in supporting current and future generations of fighters, recruitment of other women,<sup>144</sup> their increased operational space via online platforms as well as their roles in combat, linking preventive measures to a gender-sensitive analysis is critical to the success of future counter-terrorism efforts.

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<sup>144</sup> R. Kim Cragin and Sara A. Daly, *Women as Terrorists: Mothers, Recruiters, and Martyrs* (Santa Barbara, CA: ABC-CLIO, 2009); Laura Sjoberg and Caron E. Gentry, eds., *Women, Gender, and Terrorism* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2011).

## 5. UN Security Council Resolution 1325: An Imperfect Catalyst for Important Reform

*Bethany L. McGann*

Adopted in 2000, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) was one of the first global initiatives to intentionally create space for women in security policy, both as a target demographic in implementation and as a source of critical input. In spirit, the resolution represented a collective effort to better understand and address the particularities of the female experience of conflict and recognize the contributions women can make in its resolution and prevention.<sup>145</sup>

Over the course of the last 20 years, however, it has become clear that the implementation of UNSCR 1325 has fallen short at best and reified problematic elite, corrupt, and violent dynamics at worst. Rather than meaningfully engaging women and mainstreaming gendered considerations into every step of the policy process, state policies adopted in compliance with UNSCR 1325 have created parallel processes, checkbox exercises, and institutional enclaves that specialists have dubbed a “pink ghetto” of “women’s issues.”<sup>146</sup> By adding women’s issues to the security agenda — rather than redefining security as a whole — the policy initiative neglects to disrupt the fundamental assumption that security is the domain of men.

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<sup>145</sup> United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1325, Oct. 31, 2000, [https://undocs.org/S/RES/1325\(2000\)](https://undocs.org/S/RES/1325(2000)).

<sup>146</sup> Andrea Nachtigall, “Embedded Feminism,” *Peripherie* 133 (2014): 90–3,

<https://doi.org/10.3224%2Fperipherie.v34i133.22464>.

Part of the reason for this stalled progress is that women's inclusion is largely undertaken without systematic assessment of where and how policy intersects and interacts with the other identities that define women — their roles as mothers, widows, childless, elders, youth, adherents to a certain religion, members of an ethnic group, socioeconomic status, and so forth.<sup>147</sup> Much of the work done on mainstream gender in policy processes and programming rests on one core assumption: Including more women leads to better outcomes for women specifically and for all stakeholders generally. This “add women and stir” truism is not only easily disproven, but also obscures the difficulties of meaningfully engaging women in security policy. Treating women as consultants towards resolving security challenges, rather than participant stakeholders with their own equities in the perpetuation of conflict, renders them a policy pass-through rather than active agents in their own right.

A vast body of literature reveals the diverse contributions women make to political violence, conflict, rebellion, insurgency, and radicalization. This literature provides a fierce counterpoint to the archetype of the passive, peaceful woman.<sup>148</sup> Women can be conflict entrepreneurs; viciously conventional combatants in warfare; individuals who

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<sup>147</sup> Although discussion of intersectionality as a useful framework for public policy and international development is present in academic environments and publications, its inclusion in development practitioner discourses is nascent. The Gender & Development Network highlighted the utility of intersectionality in 2017. See, “Intersectionality: Reflections from the Gender & Development Network,” *Gender & Development Network*, November 2017, <https://gadnetwork.org/gadn-resources/2017/11/20/intersectionality-reflections-from-the-gender-development-network>.

<sup>148</sup> See, Hilary Matfess, *Brokers of Legitimacy: Women in Community-Based Armed Groups* (Washington, DC: RESOLVE Network, 2020), <https://doi.org/10.37805/cbags2020.1>, for examples from the rich literature contesting the framing of women as inherently peaceful and others uncovering the multitude of roles women play as conflict actors and/or agents legitimizing acts of violence.

take advantage of an exclusively “inclusive” peace process;<sup>149</sup> or agents who manipulate prosecutorial perception of the gender norms that both oppress and protect them.<sup>150</sup> Failing to acknowledge and address women’s intersecting identities and the substantive impact that the diversity of women’s experiences can have on conflict and post-conflict institutional function will result in the long-term failure of policy interventions cast with the best of intention. Furthermore, a unidimensional approach to women’s inclusion puts the United States at a strategic disadvantage vis-a-vis a number of nonstate adversaries.<sup>151</sup>

This essay examines how gender factors into policymaking in the era of UNSCR 1325: through its use as a moral argument to justify state strategy, through the incorporation of women into decision-making platforms and institutions, and through the unintended consequences of one-dimensional inclusion — a phenomenon in which elite women leverage efforts aimed at numeric inclusion to reinforce existing elite power structures. As such thinly conceptualized endeavors at inclusion fail to deliver, greater focus on *intersectionality*<sup>152</sup> — overlapping and intersecting identities that define the needs, and

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<sup>149</sup> Kathleen Kuehnast of the United States Institute of Peace remarked to the author on how thinly representative processes can create the illusion of inclusivity while reinscribing pre-existing social and gender orders.

<sup>150</sup> As discussed in the Trisko Darden and Steflja contribution to this piece.

<sup>151</sup> Robin Wright, “Turkey, Syria, the Kurds, and Trump’s Abandonment of Foreign Policy,” *The New Yorker*, Oct. 28, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2019/10/28/turkey-syria-the-kurds-and-trumps-abandonment-of-foreign-policy>.

<sup>152</sup> Kimberle Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex: A Black Feminist Critique of Antidiscrimination Doctrine, Feminist Theory and Antiracist Politics,” *University of Chicago Legal Forum* 1, article 8 (1989): 139–67.

<https://chicagounbound.uchicago.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?referer=&httpsredir=1&article=1052&context=ucfl>

intentions of individuals — offers a path forward to more impactful women, peace, and security policy formation.<sup>153</sup>

## Gender, Morality, and Strategy: Impacts on Process and Product

The term intersectionality was coined from critical race theory three decades ago by Kimberlé Crenshaw.<sup>154</sup> According to Crenshaw, intersectionality calls for the intentional acknowledgement and awareness in policy formation and implementation of the numerous identities women hold in addition to their gender. Intersectionality also demands recognition of how these different identities shape women’s lived experiences and the impact of policy on their lives. Despite the availability and utility of the intersectionality framework, policy affiliates continue to focus on questions like “where are the women?” without devoting as much energy to understanding “which women are where,”<sup>155</sup> or how the heterogeneity of women’s interests matters for policy design and implementation.

This flat approach to gender and women’s inclusion can be described as “embedded feminism,”<sup>156</sup> defined by Krista Hunt as an “incorporation of feminist discourses and

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<sup>153</sup> Kip Whittington, “The Color of Diplomacy: A U.S. Diplomat on Race and the Foreign Service,” *War on the Rocks*, July 30, 2020, <https://warontherocks.com/2020/07/the-color-of-diplomacy-reflections-from-a-u-s-diplomat-on-race-in-america-and-its-effect-on-the-foreign-service/>.

<sup>154</sup> Crenshaw, “Demarginalizing the Intersection of Race and Sex.”

<sup>155</sup> Helen Kinsella, “Feminism,” in *The Globalization of World Politics: An Introduction to International Relations*, ed. John Baylis (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2020), 148.

<sup>156</sup> Laura Fitzpatrick, “The New Sexism,” *Time*, March 16, 2020, <http://content.time.com/time/nation/article/0,8599,1972425,00.html>.

feminist activities in political projects that claim to serve the interests of women [but ultimately subordinate actualization of women's interests]."<sup>157</sup> It is particularly consequential when deployed in national and international security settings. "Women," as an undifferentiated category, can be used to justify action on their behalf, absent consultation.<sup>158</sup> Consider the deliberate leveraging of gender narratives to justify military interventionism in the early years of the war in Afghanistan. As Nancy Jabbra notes:

The Bush administration and the American media, drawing upon well-worn traditions of representation, contrasted American women and Muslim/Middle Eastern women, American and Middle Eastern male sexuality, and the moral qualities (good versus evil) of American and Middle Eastern people. They used those contrasts to explain 9/11 and legitimize war in Afghanistan and Iraq. 9/11 was simply explained through a contrast between American innocence and Muslim savagery. For Afghanistan, the predominant trope was liberating Afghan women from the Taliban, or white men rescuing brown women from brown men, a story at least as old as the British Raj.<sup>159</sup>

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<sup>157</sup> Penny Griffin, "Review of Krista Hunt and Kim Rygiel, eds, *(En)Gendering the War on Terror: War Stories and Camouflaged Politics*," *Capital & Class* 32, no. 1 (March 2008): 142-5,

<https://doi.org/10.1177%2F030981680809400113>.

<sup>158</sup> Jessica Lindvert, "A World Apart: Swedish and Australian Gender Equality Policy," *NORA – Nordic Journal of Feminist and Gender Research* 10, no. 2 (2010): 99-107,

<https://doi.org/10.1080/080387402760262195>.

<sup>159</sup> Nancy W. Jabbra, "Women, Words and War: Explaining 9/11 and Justifying U.S. Military Action in Afghanistan and Iraq," *Journal of International Women's Studies* 8, no. 1 (November 2006): 236-55,

<https://vc.bridgew.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1362&context=jiws>.

In this context, women are turned into gender role objects, a geostrategic point of interest, and an interest worthy of deploying the might of the American war machine to “secure.” The differences between the interests and experiences of individual women are erased by such an approach. The result is that women are worthy of a massive military endeavor — but do not warrant a careful analysis.

A similar logic was at play in the intervention against the Islamic State of Iraq and the Levant (ISIL) in 2014. Kurdish women were valorized for serving on the front lines in the battle against ISIL.<sup>160</sup> At the same time, the plight of Yazidi women enslaved by the terrorist organization inspired calls for action through military intervention.<sup>161</sup> This narrative sublimated both a rhetorical shaming of men — in this case state and multilateral actors with erstwhile masculine and pro-interventionist foreign policy approaches — unwilling to engage in a conflict where women are fighting on the front lines with men. The narrative also echoed Afghanistan, a call to save female victims of misogynistic violence. Both moral drivers for intervention framed women as weak, and hesitation to enter conflict was made to appear emasculating. Ultimately, despite

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<sup>160</sup> Valorization included more and less obvious elements of objectification. This is a curious mix within the U.S. domestic media, given the divergent perspectives and narratives around the femininity of women pursuing combat military occupational specialties in the U.S. military. Benedetta Argentieri, “These Female Kurdish Soldiers Wear Their Femininity with Pride,” *Quartz*, July 30, 2015, <https://qz.com/467159/these-female-kurdish-soldiers-wear-their-femininity-with-pride/>; Jessica Trisko Darden, Alexis Henshaw, and Ora Szekeley, *Insurgent Women: Female Combatants in Civil Wars* (Washington, DC: Georgetown University Press, 2019).

<sup>161</sup> United Nations Human Rights, Office of the High Commissioner, “Iraq: ‘Immediate Action Needed to Protect Human Rights of Yazidis in Grave Danger’ – UN Experts,” Aug. 12, 2014, <https://www.ohchr.org/en/NewsEvents/Pages/DisplayNews.aspx?NewsID=14936>; Samar El-Masri, “Prosecuting ISIS for the Sexual Slavery of the Yazidi Women and Girls,” *The International Journal of Human Rights* 22, no. 8 (2018): 1047–66, <https://doi.org/10.1080/13642987.2018.1495195>.

leveraging women's rights as justification for counterterrorism and intervention, the women of Afghanistan are struggling for substantive inclusion in the peace process.<sup>162</sup>

These examples suggest that women were ultimately not included in the evaluation of the outcomes of American policies and interventions. This is despite the fact that the inclusion of women and purported support for pro-women outcomes constituted a considerable portion of the public articulation and moral justification for security policy. The approach to leveraging gender produces a disconnect between the supposed goals of inclusion and outcome measures and has the potential to undermine the receptiveness of stakeholders needed for the success of the women, peace, and security agenda overall.

### **Steps Forward and Back: Locating Women/Gender in “Feminist Foreign Policy” and “Inclusive” Politics**

In 2014, Sweden became the first country to establish a “feminist” foreign policy framework.<sup>163</sup> It was followed by Canada in 2017,<sup>164</sup> and Mexico, the most recent adoptee, in 2020.<sup>165</sup> As a new frontier in the gender-and-national security (or “gendering national security”) journey, these feminist foreign policies demand examination.

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<sup>162</sup> Jane Ferguson, “Peace Talks, the Taliban, and Afghan Women’s Uncertain Future,” *The New Yorker*, Dec. 19, 2019, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/dispatch/peace-talks-the-taliban-and-afghan-womens-uncertain-future>.

<sup>163</sup> Government Offices of Sweden, “Sweden’s Feminist Foreign Policy – Examples from Three Years of Implementation,” Oct. 30, 2017, <https://www.government.se/information-material/2017/10/swedens-feminist-foreign-policy--examples-from-three-years-of-implementation/>.

<sup>164</sup> Centre for Feminist Foreign Policy (CFFP), “Feminist Foreign Policy,” <https://centreforfeministforeignpolicy.org/feminist-foreign-policy>.

<sup>165</sup> CFFP, “Feminist Foreign Policy.”

In articulating the contributions women make to peacebuilding — or how a women-focused policy agenda will lead to less aggressive, militarized, or oppressive and exclusionary outcomes — both the Canadian and Scandinavian frameworks are undergirded by the enduring narrative of women as inherently peaceful, conciliatory, and exclusively community-oriented. This implies that women’s interests are uniform, and consistent with the “common good.” The feminist agendas are largely concerned with traditional interventions in women’s lived experiences: sexual and gender-based violence, reproductive and maternal health, education, and so forth. Seeking to address challenges in these areas is an admirable, necessary goal. However, there is not just a conceptual glass ceiling governing our understanding of a woman’s place in policy and the place of women’s issues on the national security agenda. Rather, the endeavor itself resembles a glass doll house — a prettier rendering of the pink ghettos that maintains much of the same intellectual architecture of previous, failed approaches to gender-informed policymaking.

The effort to promote feminist foreign policy unintentionally lionizes an archetypical femininity that plays into essentialist gender tropes, erases the diversity of women’s lived experiences within existing foreign policies, and provides little evidence as to how it is substantively better than a traditionally masculine foreign policy approach when it comes to meeting complex 21st century threats.

These dynamics can also be found within state bodies and processes focused on domestic issues. Pursuing an agenda that promotes shallow, stereotyped conceptions of women’s roles in peace and security processes has the potential to reinforce problematic systems of power, however well-meaning the original intent. Thin conceptions of gender inclusion obscure how empowered (or elite) women can take advantage of identity-neutral

institutions and policies for their own benefit, rather than moving to substantively change the livelihoods of marginalized women or the governance challenges that necessitated the policy in the first place.

In Iraq, implementing the internationally endorsed quota system provided an opportunity for political elites to further capture the state apparatus while generating political capital and positive perception from external actors.<sup>166</sup> In considering post-conflict Rwanda, Jennie E. Burnet notes that “the increased political participation of women ... represents a paradox in the short-term: as their participation has increased, women’s ability to influence policymaking has decreased.”<sup>167</sup> Despite high levels of women’s participation,<sup>168</sup> Rwanda has all the markings of a predatory, authoritarian regime.<sup>169</sup> Given these examples, the assumption that women’s inclusion changes the outcomes or nature of a policy process or governance system is sorely tested.

The post-conflict dynamics in the Autonomous Region of Bougainville, Papua New Guinea, illuminate the peril of pursuing parity in the place of substance, while simultaneously illustrating the ease with which this thin approach to gendered and

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<sup>166</sup> Isobel Coleman, “Are Quotas for Women in Politics a Good Idea,” *The Atlantic*, Jan. 11, 2012, <https://www.theatlantic.com/international/archive/2012/01/are-quotas-for-women-in-politics-a-good-idea/251237/>.

<sup>167</sup> Jennie E. Burnet, “Gender Balance and the Meanings of Women in Governance in Post-Genocide Rwanda,” *Anthropology Faculty Publications* (2008), [https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=anthro\\_facpub](https://scholarworks.gsu.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=1001&context=anthro_facpub).

<sup>168</sup> Burnet, “Gender Balance.”

<sup>169</sup> Rodney Muhumuza, “25 Years After Genocide, Rwanda’s Kagame is Praised, Feared,” AP, April 9, 2019, <https://apnews.com/a97d40a146284383a717aa2ec42eb39b>.

inclusive policy satisfies the metrics and indicators of progress.<sup>170</sup> In 2010, Bougainville was in the lead-up to its third election following a devastating internal conflict. Election monitors were dispatched to conduct qualitative assessments of the impact of the newly instituted quota system on women's political participation.<sup>171</sup> Though the peace convention of 2001 created space for women in government,<sup>172</sup> and there had been progress in increasing the number of women involved in governance, civil society and non-government organization practitioners feared that the next cycle would see an overall decrease in women's political participation. Why? UNSCR 1325 makes no requirements of the types of women included in the representative sample, or how to practically change the processes of decision-making to prevent backsliding or proactively enforce changes in the post-conflict social order. Upon entering political service, the women of Bougainville encountered a systematic stripping of substantive power and the siloing of their political activities and speech into areas consistent with "women's" interests.<sup>173</sup> In this and many other cases, progress via rhetorical or parity-based inclusion often masquerades as a step forward, when it has the practical result of serving as a well-intentioned obstacle to substantive women's inclusion.

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<sup>170</sup> Zipporah Musau, "African Women in Politics: Miles to Go Before Parity is Achieved," *Africa Renewal*, April 8, 2019, <https://www.un.org/africarenewal/magazine/april-2019-july-2019/african-women-politics-miles-go-parity-achieved>.

<sup>171</sup> The author of this piece was a member of one of the teams deployed to Buka Town (main city) to interview female politicians, U.N. staff, and other members of civil society to assess the health of women's political participation and impact of related policies implemented in the post-conflict peace agreement.

<sup>172</sup> "Bougainville Peace Agreement," Aug. 30, 2001, [http://www.abg.gov.pg/uploads/documents/BOUGAINVILLE\\_PEACE\\_AGREEMENT\\_2001.pdf](http://www.abg.gov.pg/uploads/documents/BOUGAINVILLE_PEACE_AGREEMENT_2001.pdf).

<sup>173</sup> Jenn Galandy, "Why Can't a Woman Be Defence Minister for a Change?" *Apolitical*, Oct. 3, 2019, [https://apolitical.co/en/solution\\_article/why-cant-a-woman-be-defence-minister-for-a-change](https://apolitical.co/en/solution_article/why-cant-a-woman-be-defence-minister-for-a-change).

Ironically, terrorist groups and other nonstate actors have occasionally been more adept than U.S. policymakers at leveraging women's contributions to advance their objectives.<sup>174</sup> One need only acknowledge the ease with which groups like ISIL and far-right extremists leverage relative deprivation to convince women that they could either transgress social norms or be the upholders of an ideal archetypal womanhood through their participation. In the Islamic State, women served as morality police and enforcers of the group's interpretation of appropriate gender roles.<sup>175</sup> Western countries — from France to the United States, Australia, and the United Kingdom — have seen women identify with far-right ethnonationalist movements defending normative conceptions of women's natural freedom and economic autonomy (the tenets of liberal feminism) but reclassified into a racial, religious archetype.<sup>176</sup>

In order to combat these threats, policy personnel need to be literate in the complex, intersecting identities that shape individual responses. They should be aware of the implications of intersectional identities for policy formulation and implementation. Most importantly, they need to be conscious of the social contexts they seek to change. Otherwise, they risk compromising the comparative advantages women can bring to the

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<sup>174</sup> Leanne Erdberg Steadman, "What Policymakers Can Learn About Gender from Terrorists," *United States Institute of Peace*, Nov. 18, 2019, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2019/11/what-policymakers-can-learn-about-gender-terrorists>.

<sup>175</sup> "Women Under ISIL: The Torturers," *Al Jazeera*, Nov. 27, 2019, <https://www.aljazeera.com/indepth/features/women-isil-torturers-191124095032690.html>.

<sup>176</sup> Angelique Chrisafis, Kate Connolly, and Angela Giuffrida, "From Le Pen to Alice Weidel: How the European Far-Right Set Its Sights on Women," *The Guardian*, Jan. 29, 2019, <https://www.theguardian.com/lifeandstyle/2019/jan/29/from-le-pen-to-alice-weidel-how-the-european-far-right-set-its-sights-on-women>.

security conversation by sidelining their core concerns and potentially driving them into the arms of adversaries.

## Conclusion

Despite the deep-rooted procedural and conceptual challenges laid out above, UNSCR 1325's call to implement inclusive and representative policy is a core security priority. Where decision-makers neglect marginalized women or ignore their lived experiences and equities, nefarious actors, spoilers, and competitors are effectively harnessing women's grievances and undermining peace and security endeavors at home and abroad. Course correction requires an end to rewarding political speech and rejecting agendas that exist more on paper than in reality. It is imperative that policymakers and practitioners internalize the lessons of inclusion and commit to intersectionality toward progressing both the women peace and security agenda and the feminist foreign policy project.

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