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CSSF Women, Peace and Security Helpdesk

# Women, Peace and Security in a National Security Context: Tensions and Risks

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# Section B: Task Content

## Summary

Through a literature mapping exercise, this paper examines how gender and national security are and can be linked. It focuses specifically on the utility of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda for the United Kingdom's (UK) national security orientation and argues that paying attention to gender issues is important for a holistic understanding of peace and security. Yet, drawing on the literature, this exercise demonstrates that there are tensions inherent in defining 'national security', thus problematising the link between gender and national security.

To illustrate some of these tensions and risks, the paper examines the UK's involvement in Afghanistan and its commitments to Ukraine, two conflict-affected high priority contexts for the UK. While the literature on the UK's role in Afghanistan as well as the implementation of the WPS agenda as a vector for gender/security is vast and diverse, a dominant thread centres on failures. These include superficial engagement of the WPS agenda, as well as instrumentalisation of the gender/security link that does not accord Afghan women agency and has not produced sustainable peace in over two decades. Lessons from Afghanistan can help to inform the approach to Ukraine where the importance of bringing a gender lens to the nature of the conflict is observable.

Although there is a lack of consensus within the international relations scholarship on the meaning of national security, the UK has nevertheless prioritised tackling transnational challenges such as global health risks, cybersecurity, serious and organised crime, and climate change. While the grey literature suggests that there is scope to integrate these areas of concerns within the WPS agenda, and thus link gender more explicitly to national security, this integration has not yet happened in any substantive way. The effectiveness of this linkage in supporting gender equality and delivering peace, however, is contingent on a conception of national security premised on human security. This report concludes with potential recommendations for supporting the greater integration of WPS within the national security orientation of the UK.

## Methodological Note

The scope and depth of this paper is limited. In exploring the linkages made between national security (broadly defined) and gender in the context of the WPS agenda, the paper undertakes a qualitative desk-based mapping of literature. An interpretive document analysis has allowed the researcher to draw out the multiple possibilities of a gendered approach to national security through the use of two illustrative case examples, and the potential risks of making the linkages between WPS and national security. Afghanistan has been an area of focus for the UK's national security priority for almost two decades, with mixed results in terms of the implications for the UK's national security, especially in light of eventual withdrawal. Recently, Ukraine has also become another area of priority; Russia's aggression in Ukraine directly challenges the rules-based order that the UK relies on for its security. Thus, support for Ukraine through the war and in its aftermath constitutes an essential UK contribution to a safer multilateral order.

# Findings and Analysis

## Introduction

This paper explores the UK's national security orientation – particularly as it relates to tackling conflict, stability and threats overseas – and examines where and how the WPS agenda sits within this. Through a literature mapping, it synthesises the ways which national security creates openings (and risks) for the consideration of gender perspectives.

According to Heidi Hudson, security relates to the “human condition” which “binds together all processes and levels” (H. Hudson, 2005, 161). She further agrees with Buzan (1991: 363) that states that “attempt to treat security as if it was confined to any single level or any single sector invite serious distortions of understanding” (Buzan, 1991, 365 cited in H. Hudson, 2005). Consequently, security is capable of promoting a range of values beyond those that are militarised, which is traditionally how national security has been understood. In this understanding, there is a possibility that UK practices of the WPS agenda may also promote its national security.

Through an expansive notion of security, it is even possible to promote “national interests” according to Basu (2016). Basu argues that states have used their commitments to the WPS agenda to further their own national interests abroad. She notes “policy interests have been manifested in particular practices in relation to the [Security] Council's work” (Basu, 2016, 272). One of the examples she draws on is Canada, whose championing of Responsibility to Protect, human security and gender equality initiatives align well with aspirations of the WPS agenda (Basu, 2016, 272). This is certainly also the case with the UK where the latest UK WPS National Action Plan (NAP) states that the WPS agenda and promotion of global gender equality “is a key priority for the Government” and that “it is in the UK's national interest” because “empowering women and girls ... improves peace and stability, economic growth, and poverty reduction” (HMG, 2018, 1).

From the foregoing, the alignment of gender politics and national security at the highest levels challenges the idea that gender perspectives reside outside of high politics areas. Moreover, situating gender within an expansive understanding of security can be advantageous to understanding technologies of war in very specific ways (e.g., that rape is used as a tactic of war – Mackenzie, 2010).<sup>1</sup>

Yet, the implications of this linkage can be contingent on who is making the linkage and how. Even in the context of the WPS agenda, which brings together gender perspectives and security concerns, the results have been mixed for a variety of reasons. There is still a tendency to relegate the WPS agenda outside of a holistic security framework that has, among other things, undermined its institutionalisation. Moreover, even a positive and broad conception of national security often differs in practice, especially amongst states who have been institutionalised with a traditional understanding of security (e.g., narrowly focused on issues relating to the abilities of a government to defend state territory, usually through military means, as well its citizens, institutions and the economy).

Albrecht and Barnes (2008) define national security practice or policy as “a government's perception of threats to the security of the state and its population and its responses to these threats” (Albrecht

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<sup>1</sup> This is not uncontentious however (see Mason, 2013; Kirby, 2015; Meger, 2016).

and Barnes, 2008, 1). How these threats are interpreted often has an impact on responses, with implications for how gender is considered. Analysts like Kelly (2022) have further argued that despite its many opportunities, the WPS agenda “focuses on a narrow conception of security concerned with armed conflict, which therefore does not include the structural inequalities leading to particular vulnerabilities, other forms of violence such as crime or new forms such as cyberattacks” (Kelly, 2022, 4). Consequently, although the WPS agenda brings gender and security together, there are important limitations.

It is in this context that feminists and women's rights activists have critiqued states like the UK, particularly around the instrumentalisation of gender in security, and particularly the securitisation of WPS objectives to further goals of traditional security. For example, within the broader WPS architecture, it is often acknowledged that the UK shows leadership. This is perhaps most obvious in the creation of the UK Preventing Sexual Violence Initiative (PSVI) which draws attention to sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV), including that experienced by men and boys in conflict-affected areas. PSVI has been praised for developing a best practice guide for investigating sexual violence in conflict, deploying appropriate expertise to deal with this specific form of insecurity and training military and other personnel (see Kirby, 2015).

Yet, in this same analysis of PSVI, Kirby (2015) argues that the architecture within which this initiative rests serves to illustrate military hierarchy while simply repeating existing UK commitments. Moreover, in reinforcing the ‘rape as a weapon of war’ narrative, other expressions of gender-based violence (GBV) can become minimised. According to Kirby (2015), such minimisation occurs because “a certain narrow interpretation of gender violence—as exceptional, extreme and largely conflict-specific” does not allow for alternative understandings of GBV (Kirby, 2015, 463). Within the WPS space, this overt focus on conflict-related sexual violence (CRSV), as Meger (2016) has noted, leads to a ‘fetishization’ which actually undermines efforts towards tackling sexual violence itself. Additionally, resources towards this component also come at the expense of other WPS priorities and pillars.

Similarly, through examining the practices of UK allies such as the United States, Mason (2013) demonstrates how the focus on GBV helps to ‘gender wash’ the national interests of the United States and privileges militarisation as a response to security violations. She notes that “women’s rights and gender issues are mobilized in ... rhetoric as a common sense and moral obligation for war” (Mason, 2013, 63). In this context, feminists have critiqued this particular use of linking gender to security as “a new mobilization of historically embedded colonial practice and rhetorics of male superiority and white supremacy; of female vulnerability, inadequacy, and inferiority; and of subjugation of oppressed masculinities of men of color” (Mohanty, Pratt and Riley, 2008, 3).

Instrumentalisation of sexual violence in particular does not allow for the integration of gender perspectives across wider domains of security, including at home. The assessment that follows thus provides the space to reflect on potential entry points, despite the inherent challenges of prioritising gender within the UK’s national security approach.

## UK National Security

In 2021, the UK articulated a national security orientation that reinforced its historical priorities, while also acknowledging new objectives as it departed the European Union (EU). The ‘Global Britain in a Competitive Age: The Integrated Review of Security, Defence, Development and Foreign Policy’ (HMG 2021) (Integrated Review – IR) emphasises the UK’s commitments to promoting crisis prevention and peacebuilding, as well as stabilisation in conflict-affected areas (HMG, 2021). Moreover, it identifies transnational challenges such as climate change, serious and organised crime,

cybersecurity, terrorism and global health risks that can impede the UK's national security priorities within a transnational context, affecting its ability to bounce back while also multiplying other insecurities. Security in this context is conceived not only as a set of practices but also as a core value within an ever-volatile international system.

The range of challenges identified, particularly non-traditional security challenges, suggests that, in principle, the UK values the post-Cold War conception of human security. This challenges the tendency to think of national security only in terms of state security, and it was first described in the United Nations Development Programme's Human Development Report of 1994 as "comprehensive, context-specific and prevention-oriented" in order to "strengthen the protection and empowerment of all people" (UN Trust Fund for Human Security, 2018, 2). In short, human security is people centred. While it does not replace state security, in the context of the UK it is intended to "complement and build on it" (JSP 985, 2021, 1).

Paying attention to gender dynamics, which are a central organising force of social relations in crisis and conflict settings, can be essential to meeting the UK's national security obligations and implementing a human security-oriented approach. A recent JSP report (985) makes a strong case for the use or inclusion of human security as the main approach to UK national security, noting:

*The HS [human security] approach considers how structural factors [defined as the broader political, economic, social and organisational environments that structure the context in which risk production occurs] affect populations through cultural, social and gender dynamics and will be relevant to operations across the integrated operating framework. A HS approach will enhance our [MoD] ability to work across government, better enabling the UK to shape the discourse on the security of human beings on the global stage and achieve its National Security Objectives. (JSP 985, 2021, 2)*

As noted in the JSP 985, a human security approach can help to better understand conflict dynamics and drivers, engender greater coherence across all security institutions and demonstrate leadership and best practice from the UK (JSP 985, 2021, 15). Yet, while gender dynamics and tools for including gender perspectives are important to this human security framing, the role of the WPS agenda is limited. WPS in this present conception is only made relevant with respect to CRSV, narrowing the remit of the gender/security link.

Moreover, this conception of human security does not challenge militarism and militarisation, which can jeopardise the effectiveness of crisis prevention, stabilisation and peacebuilding. The instrumental links between WPS and national security objectives have been critiqued by feminist scholars such as Shepherd (2016), who argues that the deployment of WPS by the UK, among others, ends up making 'war safe for women' rather than preventing conflict – a foundational ambition of the WPS agenda. In this context, the gender/security link is not positive.

Beyond conventional security aims, the UK's IR, including its interpretation by the Ministry of Defence (MoD), also acknowledges that tackling new transnational challenges should be a priority for UK national security practices (see MoD, 2021). Climate change mitigation especially is identified as essential to human and national security. As a risk in its own right, gaps in climate change responses also have a multiplier effect on other types of insecurities, especially in conflict-affected areas, increasing the vulnerability and exposure of women and girls in particular to physical violence (see Smith, Olosky and Fernández, 2021). In the Horn of Africa, for example, climate change impacts such as extreme droughts have intensified gender expectations and roles, resulting in men often fighting to survive, and women being relegated to typical caring duties. Simultaneously, these harsh conditions can disrupt existing hierarchical gender dynamics, making it difficult for men to fulfil

stereotypical roles as breadwinners because resources are scarce and livelihoods non-existent. In this context, GBV in the domestic sphere has also increased.

In many Western countries, there is a tendency to convey a near 'pristine' national identity internally to justify and prioritise external practices. This means, for example, that for the UK, gender/security considerations via the WPS agenda mostly apply to the work of the Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office (FCDO) and MoD in Afghanistan, but have not been addressed domestically via the Home Office despite all bodies being tasked with the promotion of national security. This reinforces Mohanty, Pratt and Riley's criticisms about the colonial practices of 'national security' (Mohanty, Pratt and Riley, 2008).

Moreover, according to Achilleos-Sarll (2018), there is a risk of gender being siloed within the UK national security approach, remaining a priority only for 'outward facing' contexts rather than domestic security concerns. This is arguably the case regarding the UK's migration and asylum policy, which has been criticised for its absence of concern and care around sexual violence in immigration detention centres (Black Women's Rape Action Project and Women Against Rape, 2015) despite a specific interest in eliminating sexual violence for women in crisis or fragile situations. Instrumentalisation – or as Mason (2013) refers to it, 'gender washing' – undermines the overall objectives of the UK's national security since gender perspectives within national security are not addressed coherently.

Regarding dealing with broader transnational challenges, policy and literature have only recently articulated the integration of WPS beyond traditional areas. A similar pattern can be observed in UK policy. While the IR acknowledges the impacts of climate change, only three years before, the UK NAP did not. Cohn and Duncanson (2020) note that while the case may have been made not to consider climate issues in the initial United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325), the current environment no longer allows for this exclusion (see also Kronsell, 2019).

Understanding how gender perspectives sit within the political economy of the transnational challenges now prioritised by the UK will be an important area for further investigation. Kirby, Wright and Swaine (2022) highlight that countries similar to the UK are already considering these issues. For example, Ireland replicates its external WPS commitments internally by providing "care to asylum seekers, refugees and migrants arriving in Ireland who have experienced conflict, and sexual and gender-based violence" (Stone and Parke, 2016, 18). The United States commits to ensuring that gender perspectives are integrated into climate mitigation practices. These two examples also signal best practices that the UK can easily adopt across its national security orientation (Kirby, Wright and Swaine, 2022).

Overall, it is clear that for the UK, national security has transcended a traditional understanding of state security emphasising militarism. This is evidenced by the consideration of new transnational challenges, which brings together domestic and international risks or challenges. At the same time, the practice of national security is not always consistent with its newer conception. This then raises critical questions about the value of linking gender and national security. To explore this concern in concrete terms, the case of Afghanistan is explored in the following section.

## **Gender in the UK's National Security Approach: A Reflection on Afghanistan**

The invasion of Afghanistan by the United States and allied forces, including the UK, has provided a unique setting for exercising the UK's national security objectives, particularly around conflict stabilisation, support for security sector reform, peacebuilding and counterterrorism. It has also been

an important site for the UK's implementation of the WPS agenda over the last two decades. Yet, the recent withdrawal from Afghanistan would suggest that neither national security goals nor the goals of the WPS agenda have been realised, constituting an overall failure.

The UK's former Prime Minister argued that the invasion of Afghanistan was not just about interests but also values (Blair, 2006). In taking this view, the Taliban was positioned as dangerous to progressive values, with the ill-treatment of women being referenced as a specific driver of the UK's invasion (Blair, 2001). The invasion of Afghanistan then, in part, explicitly linked the promotion of gender equality to the UK's national security, taking the view proffered by Hudson et al. (2008) that paying attention to women's security had implications for national security. Hudson et al. (2008) further argued that there was a "positive relationship between the physical security of women and three measures of state security<sup>2</sup> and peacefulness" and that "the physical security of women is a better predictor of state security and peacefulness" ((Hudson et al., 2008). While this sort of essentialist linkage has been heavily criticised by feminist scholars, this underlying assumption was at play in the UK's approach to Afghanistan.

The interpretation of the UK invasion of Afghanistan from this angle projects the UK as a global security actor invested in national and global peace and security. On the basis of this conceptual linkage, Afghanistan has been an important testing ground for the UK's approach to and practice of the WPS agenda. This is reinforced by the fact that all of the UK's WPS NAP have, so far, featured Afghanistan as a focus country for the UK's national security. As part of the security sector support deployed by the EU, the UK contributed to supporting the inclusion of more women in rule of law institutions like the police, and in parallel, as part of the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) coalition, it trained the police to be a counterinsurgency force in the War on Terror (see Ansorg and Haastrup, 2018).

Although UNSCR1325 had already been adopted at the time of Afghan invasion, it was excluded as a basis for invasion (Duncanson and Farr, 2019). Instead, claims to protecting women's human rights as a basis of invasion served as a superficial strategic frame. This type of strategic framing can lead to short term gains such as gaining support for the invasion and justifying programmatic focus on SGBV. However, it is also problematic because in Afghanistan it instrumentalised women's rights to justify further militarisation, even when this made these women, ultimately, unsafe (Ahmad, 2022). Given the high costs of invasion then, this deployment of women's rights in the context of national security has been seen by some scholars as another manifestation of Western imperial hegemony within international politics (see, e.g., Russo, 2006; Bahri, 2014). Such a perception does not build trust in sites that the UK relies on for its national security.

Duncanson and Farr (2019) further argue that the UK's emphasis on civil and political rights within its WPS approach in Afghanistan (consistent with the British leadership discourse and the individualism of Western approaches) risks undermining Afghan women's agency to determine the priorities of their own security. Furthermore, in the approach to Afghanistan, women were often treated as a monolithic vulnerable group. A less instrumental approach on the part of the UK and allies that focused on Afghan women's perspectives could have rendered support more effective. Moreover, the instrumentalisation of women's rights for counterinsurgency did not allow for the sort

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<sup>2</sup> First is a general measure of state peacefulness which includes 24 indicators, including external conflicts, civil conflicts and military expenditures. The second is a general measure of the degree of a state's behaviour in light of international norms measured by adherence to international treaties. The third measure is about relations with neighbours based on the assumption that masculinised domination is manifested in relations with neighbouring states.

of investment that solely supported the building of a strong Afghan women's movement that could mobilise to hold the Taliban and Western interveners to account.

The impact of an overt focus on interventions that prioritise counterterrorism also meant that UK and allies often neglected transnational risks to security, such as climate change. According to Giessmann and Hamm (2021), Afghanistan is besieged by the impacts of climate change such as drought and extreme temperatures, flash floods and landslides. This in turn impacts on the ability of about 80 per cent of its population to participate in subsistence agriculture and further drives violent conflict over scarce resources (Giessmann and Hamm, 2021). Moreover, water shortages have made opium poppies more fruitful to grow than grains, facilitating serious and organised crime via a thriving narcotics-based economy. Despite this climate change-conflict-crime nexus being apparent in literature (see Felbab-Brown, 2017), its broader implications remain unaddressed by the UK government, including in the context of UK WPS implementation, in Afghanistan.

## Gender as a Value of Security: Supporting Effective Security Assistance for Ukraine

Existing commitments to the WPS agenda allow the UK to undertake important gender analysis and deliver more effective security assistance as part of its broader national security approach. Further, it can enable learning from previous mistakes. Russia's invasion of Ukraine provides an important opportunity to leverage those lessons.

The importance of gender perspectives in the UK's approach to tackling war and insecurity in Ukraine has been outlined by civil society observers. According to a report published three months after Russia's invasion in 2022, there is a disproportionate impact on women and other marginalised groups (NGO Working Group, 2022). Ukraine has "large numbers of older women, women and girls with disabilities, internally displaced women and girls, women-headed households, stateless women and girls, and women living with HIV" (NGO Working Group, 2022). Further, Russia's disinformation campaigns which have been identified as threats to the UK national security have targeted LGBTQ+ and women.

The gendered nature of insecurity in Ukraine is sensitive, meaning that taking direction from Ukrainian civil society organisations who focus on gender and have an intimate knowledge of the context is essential. A report by the Atlantic Council notes that these types of organisations in Ukraine have been critical to supporting at risk groups and providing insights that inform humanitarian and military assistance (Fleser, 2022, 12). Despite their significance for ameliorating the conditions of those most affected by conflict, these organisations are often overstretched due to "supply chain delays, insufficient resources and capacity to meet demand" (Fleser, 2022). This should be considered ahead of any engagement to minimise disruptions to their day-to-day work.

The UK is in a unique position to honour its national security priorities by addressing women's gendered vulnerabilities in this war. Certainly, it can leverage some of its existing expertise around CRSV. There are reports of Russian soldiers using sexual violence against Ukrainian civilians despite the Kremlin's denials. But this is of course not the only means of GBV. One of the key tactics of conflict used by Russia is to deliberately identify and use "gender fault lines through hybrid warfare". For example, following the bombing of a hospital, depictions of women who lacked access to maternity care was deemed fictional, with Russia claiming photographs were staged. This sort of misinformation in the wake of physical violence that rendered new mothers vulnerable is designed to upend cohesion within the population (Fleser, 2022).

Beyond issues of GBV and to move away from the stereotype of women only as vulnerable, however, it is important to recognise women as actors of change with varied experiences (Manoilenjo, 2022). The UK has championed women's participation as part of its strategy for delivering humanitarianism (see Harris, 2022). In Ukraine, considering the needs of all citizens should include engaging women mediators who have been noticeably absent from the limited occasions where there have been negotiations. Despite literature suggesting the importance of women's participation in formal and informal peace processes (Council on Foreign Relations, n.d.), this has not been integrated into the discourse of peace and security in Ukraine, when compared to demands for the restoration of territorial integrity. O'Reilly et al (2015) argue that including women in peace processes supports justice by ensuring "human security, transitional justice, and democratic developments" (cited in Fleser, 2022). In effect, Fleser's argument is that the inclusion of women in decision-making about national security issues can result in justice outcomes. The UK's WPS approach has especially emphasised strengths in promoting the inclusion of women in decision-making and as part of peace processes in line with the participation pillar of UNSCR 1325. Advocating for women's inclusion would thus be consistent with the UK's WPS approach.

Despite the possibilities in Ukraine, the links between gender and (national) security are not linear. Arguably, a stable Ukraine that has inclusive security institutions and practices creates a stable and democratic ally for the UK and engenders peace in a rules-based international order. The 'UK Government's Approach to Stabilisation' (HMG, 2019) clarifies this position, specifying that the promotion of a rules-based order is a national security objective (HMG, 2019, 7). Support from the UK thus helps Ukraine's national security directly, helps to promote the rules-based order and thus responds directly to UK national security objectives. Importantly, UK national security in this scenario reflects global interconnectedness and the promotion of liberal values as the goal of national security in itself. Overall, and as many others have argued, a strengthened democracy can help safeguard the UK's strategic interests and promote growth in a way that is compatible with the UK's interests individually and as a member of NATO and the international community (see Lee, 2018). Yet, as the case of Afghanistan demonstrates, linking national security to issues of gender without prioritising the perspectives of those most harmed by gender inequalities can be a risk to gender justice.

## Risks

Drawing on the existing literature, some of these risks are elaborated in this section.

In principle, the WPS agenda can further UK national interests, including in security, by strengthening global political stability; reducing the risk of threats; and enhancing its reputation, credibility and soft power, within a particular conception of national security. In practice, however, it can also **risk the instrumentalisation of feminist aspirations through implementation of WPS**, by articulating gender equality as a means of achieving national security. The literature shows clear tensions between the normative aims of the WPS agenda and how national security is often practiced, despite conceptions of security that may accommodate the integration of gender with national security.

Solely focusing on gender as support to women, thereby **confirming the male/female binary**, "is insufficient for mapping out the variety of vulnerabilities that flow from sexuality, ethnic identity, and socio-economic class (among other factors) and that are expressed in part through gender identity" (Shepherd, 2016, 252). In Afghanistan, for instance, while the WPS agenda has been successful in mainstreaming the notion that war is gendered, it may **risk promoting the notion that there is a homogenous feminine experience of war** if the diverse identities and experiences of women (and indeed other gender identities) are not fully considered.

Further, approaching UK national security as only a matter of self-interest, thus leading to instrumentalisation of the WPS agenda, would be detrimental overall to the UK's security ambitions and trust with partners. This has been evident in the case of countering violent extremism (CVE). CVE has in practice tended to emphasise the protection of states, including through militarisation. Many states then, including the UK, have sought to align their primary interests in CVE with the WPS agenda. At the global level, this happened with UNSCR 2242, which piggy backs on the call for increased women's participation in global security by calling for such an increase in the CVE domain as well. **CVE is itself highly masculinised, often requiring a return to state-centric understandings of security, which means that its linkage to gender through WPS can undermine inclusion, women's rights and, ultimately, a holistic security.** For instance, Möller-Loswick (2017) notes how CVE efforts by the United States to prevent humanitarian aid from reaching 'terrorists' led to deprivation for civilians. Such deprivation can undermine efforts towards peace and security.

Some scholars have also critiqued the WPS normative and policy framework for legitimising Western interventionist policies (Aroussi, 2017). In a sense, this already confirms the challenges of linking gender to national security. The use of strategic essentialism compromises on basic feminist ideas on how the consideration of gender should seek to illuminate on the nature of security. Importantly, this process of essentialism tends to situate other places as sites of conflict and in need of gender interventions often through overt and covert militarised intervention. This is what has justified the focus on contexts like Afghanistan, Somalia and Syria. Yet, by **ignoring other sites of conflict and other insecurities (such as Northern Ireland), the UK risks credibility as a gender/security actor by disregarding protection of its own citizens.**

Indeed, the **lack of consideration of the domestic dimension in previous UK WPS NAPs stands at odds with the ways in which national security is deployed as both domestic and international.** Paying attention to the domestic, however, would require a change in the UK's approach to arms transfers, and migration and refugees (Kirby, Wright and Swaine, 2022). Similarly, actions such as the UK's opting out of the Istanbul Convention section on the protection of migrant women, including those without UK citizenship, is harmful to the perception that the UK is serious about gender in security contexts. Without action in these areas, **the UK risks being seen to use the WPS agenda to launder its image abroad, while actively undermining its own values.**

## Conclusions

Feminist scholars have largely tended to avoid direct links between a state's practice of national security and the attainment of gender equality or women's rights. This reticence is guided by concerns around co-optation and instrumentalisation. Yet, a cursory appraisal of the security environment suggests the importance of gender considerations in how national security is understood, designed and practiced. At the very least, a gender-informed security perspective helps to focus on the "practices of agents and provides a basis for exploring contextually dependent insecurities and securities" (Hoogensen and Stuvøy, 2006, 207).

It is worth noting that despite two decades of the WPS agenda, a lot of investment and some important interventions, the agenda is not yet fully integrated into the global security architecture of which the UK is an important part. In parallel, this literature review strongly suggests that the integration of the WPS agenda as a priority within UK domestic national security is essential.

As a permanent member of the UNSC and penholder of the WPS agenda, the UK is well placed to promote a vision of international security that aligns well with the aspirations of the WPS community of practice. Its relationship with like-minded member states gives it a unique advantage to champion

the importance of gender perspectives within conceptions of international security, as demonstrated through its close working relationship with South Africa supporting the adoption of the tenth UNSCR on WPS (HMG, 2019).

Promoting WPS can be integral to connecting and strengthening international security institutions so that security is inclusive throughout the world. Aside from the UN itself, the European Union (Haastrup, Guerrina and Wright, 2019), NATO (Wright, 2016) and the African Union (Haastrup, 2021) have gone as far as creating high level roles to champion the WPS agenda within their institutions and in their foreign and security policy work. Yet, this prioritisation of gender, however, should avoid instrumentalisation, particularly one that perceives women as victims and lacking agency. A more nuanced understanding of women as individuals in their own societies with a range of identities when experiencing and responding to armed conflict can help to develop a deeper understanding of conflict affected contexts, which is often obscured by stereotypes. Additionally, prioritising gender within security institutions also allows decision makers to reflect on the implications of these mainly male dominated spaces.

In reference to stabilisation especially, thinking outside the box is essential. Regarding Afghanistan, national security understood narrowly as state security has arguably been permissive of misogyny and brutality (Duncanson and Farr, 2019, 562). A view of stabilisation that simply prioritises ceasefire or places dominant focus on reproducing state institutions 'as is' is bound to fail in achieving sustainable peace because it will reproduce the same hierarchies that have always existed and neglect gender concerns. Engagement through a gender lens can help to identify opportunities for change that ultimately decrease structural as well as physical violence.

It is clear that the UK's national security values demand responses to contemporary transnational challenges such as climate change (see also Arora-Jonsson, 2011). Whereas there remains limited attention to these areas from a WPS lens, the development of the UK's new NAP and the implementation of the IR provide timely opportunities for the explicit consideration of gender in the responses to climate change, as well as global health emergencies beyond reproductive health.

Overall, the literature has tended to elide the connections between national security, in the traditional sense, and gender. This is in part due to the perception that gender justice itself is secondary to the instrumentalisation of gender (and WPS) for national security purposes. Rather, such use of gender often justifies militarisation causing harm in other countries and in the long term without many clear benefits to the UK. At the same time, emerging literature suggests that where transnational security challenges are taken seriously, they open the space up for including gender perspectives. This is because they require responses that cannot be confined to the self-interests of the UK alone; they demand security cooperation and a focus on gender as a value of national security.

## Recommendations

### Undertake gender analysis of all efforts towards national security

The use of gender analysis by UK security apparatuses is not new, yet there is a lack of consistency in its application across all UK national security activities at home and abroad. Donnelly (2021) develops a model for gender analysis that is useful for actors for whom such practice is not intuitive. This model, like most feminist analysis, calls for the analyst not only to interrogate the differentiated impacts of policy/action/practice on men and women but also to interrogate how the dynamics of masculinities and femininities impact on the issue area, including within UK government. Gender champions and gender focal points could work together to undertake such rapid analysis. Alternatively, such interrogations might be best conducted by external actors or critical friends of the

UK security apparatuses rather than security actors themselves. Consistency across the whole security apparatus helps to ensure that interventions are more coherent and that gender issues are built into design and decision-making from the outset.

### Consolidate and elevate the role of Gender Champion within NSC

Currently, there are several roles with responsibility for promoting gender equality within the UK's national security architecture. This includes the UK Special Envoy for Gender Equality, MoD Gender Champion and the Prime Minister's Special Representative on Preventing Sexual Violence in Conflict, as well as a Gender Champion for the National Security Council (NSC), based in the secretariat. Yet, this does not provide sufficient accountability for a gender/security link within the UK's domestic and international national security decision-making. Embedding gender within national security requires institutionalisation and authority. UK government could amalgamate these fragmented roles into a singular NSC WPS Champion role and consider elevating this to a ministerial/ambassadorial level. Different models for this already exist. For example, in the United States, President Biden's Gender Security Council is tasked with integrating gender both in domestic and foreign policy development and implementation, while Canada created the first ambassador for WPS who has a whole of government mandate.<sup>3</sup>

### Integrate the domestic and international in WPS

While human security considers national security in both the domestic and the international sense, the UK's approach to the WPS agenda is mainly outward facing despite previous acknowledgment that UK WPS implementation "should complement UK policy at home, as well as its work on transnational issues" (HMG, 2014, 2). Where the UK's PSVI responds to CRSV, there is no such framework to tackle sexual violence at home, a violation of the human security of UK residents. There are some examples to draw from internationally. The Republic of Ireland addresses insecurity in Northern Ireland within its WPS NAP simultaneously as a domestic and international issue. It acknowledges the role of women in the peace process and ongoing peacebuilding, which is seen as essential to Irish national security. Canada has a similar focus, acknowledging conditions of conflict within Canada and has thus retooled its WPS agenda for use at home and abroad, especially around the issue of GBV. This means that the implementation of its NAP is not only the responsibility of traditional foreign policy departments. In a similar way, the UK can consider supporting the integration of the WPS agenda at home. One example noted is to abandon detention practices that re-traumatise pregnant women and survivors of GBV, in its bid to reduce overall migration (see Holvikivi and Reeves, 2020).

### Prioritise WPS in responses to transnational security challenges

There is an opportunity to ensure that WPS integrates transnational challenges, thus facilitating a clearer link between gender and national security. However, the most recent UK NAP identifies transnational challenges as "countering violent extremism, migration, modern slavery, female genital mutilation and child, early and forced marriage". This understanding leans into the assumption that security threats come from outside of the UK's own national identity conceptions. Moreover, it does not align with the transnational challenges identified by the IR. Aligning the meaning of these challenges across all security agencies will be an important step to articulating the UK's key national security priorities. Moreover, this identification can help to better design accountability mechanisms. While some opportunities for integrating WPS and transnational challenges beyond climate change

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<sup>3</sup> WPS ambassador provides advice to the ministers of the following ministries: Crown-Indigenous Relations; Foreign Affairs; Immigration, Refugees and Citizenship; Indigenous Services; International Development Minister of Justice; National Defence; Public Safety and Emergency Preparedness; Women and Gender Equality.

have been identified in some of the recent literature on WPS, this literature is nascent and further research is required to identify tangible entry points. Based on what exists, some suggestions include:

1. Addressing the disproportionate impact of cybercrimes on women, girls and other sexual and gender minorities as means towards cybersecurity.
2. Paying attention to women's participation in organised crime to get a fuller understanding of this domain itself. These roles are varied, including women as active participants; as survivors of organised crime enterprises like sexual trafficking; but also as victims of broader deadly violence (Europol, 2021) that is a result of all forms of organised crime which may include increased sexual violence targeting women and girls.

Understanding how women and other marginalised populations are positioned in the context of serious and organised crime will provide a better understanding of the dynamics at play. Importantly, as a start, the UK can contribute expertise to tackling sexual violence in another domain based on best practices from the conflict context. Conversely, the UK could also learn from this context so that what works does not further instrumentalise women's rights. Together, and in these new domains, it is possible that the confluence of national security and gender work together to meet the UK's national security objectives in a manner that is reflective of the feminist aspirations of WPS.

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