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CRITICAL PERSPECTIVES ARTICLE

1325 at 25: What Is a Battered Tool Good For?

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In an early conversation on the relevance of United Nations Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325, the resolution is described by Carol Cohn as presenting "an important tool to all of us who seek the empowerment of women and sustainable peace, and who believe that the two are interconnected," and by Sheri Gibbings as a "tool to justify military occupation on behalf of 'liberating' women" (Cohn, Kinsella, and Gibbings 2004, 138–9). Both prospects have been borne out in the 25 years of the implementation of, and rhetoric relating to, UNSCR 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda that emerged from the landmark resolution. There is substantive documentation of, and scholarship on, the implementation of the agenda (see, for example, Coomaraswamy 2015; Davies and True 2019). It is evident from this literature that the realization of feminist peace, which propelled civil society advocacy for the passage of UNSCR 1325, has not been the only driving factor behind this implementation. In practice, the WPS resolutions have been employed by a range of actors for varying purposes.

This essay focuses on the ways in which UNSCR 1325 has been used by multiple stakeholders for advancing their own interests alongside the implementation of the WPS agenda. For instance, member states campaigning for a nonpermanent seat on the Security Council have showcased their commitment to the agenda to strengthen their case for election. In a number of instances, as funds became available for implementation, international and national nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) used the WPS language to take advantage of these resources for their work even at the risk of local concerns being overshadowed by donor-driven agendas. Importantly, the choices made by these actors — state and non-state — have shaped the evolution of the WPS agenda as well as contributed to its failures. The instrumental implementation of the agenda in Afghanistan, and the subsequent withdrawal of all but few representatives of the international community, is a case in point. These aspects of WPS implementation are usually presented as a critique, and rightly so. Relying on the imagery of

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the resolution as a tool, this essay highlights the spectrum of motivations that have animated the engagement of member states and NGOs with the WPS resolutions. It points out that the prioritization of actors' own interests is to be expected, and attention to these motivations can help develop a more nuanced understanding of the evolution of the WPS agenda.

The remaining discussion is divided into three parts. The first section introduces the notion of UNSCR 1325 as a tool. Section two offers an illustrative exposition of the ways in which the Resolution has been used as a tool by governments and NGOs. Based on this, the third and concluding section contends that the WPS agenda has moved forward not only in spite of these interests but because of them too. Over the last 25 years, UNSCR 1325 as a tool has been battered due to the push and pull over its many interpretations, and its repeated use and misuse by multiple actors. The optimism that marked the passage of the resolution in 2000 has given way to concerns regarding its inability to bring about meaningful and lasting change in the peace and security domain. Yet, UNSCR 1325 and its sister WPS resolutions continue to be relevant as irrevocable policy instruments that can be used to advance feminist visions of peace in an increasingly hostile global political environment.

1325 as a Tool

As a thematic resolution of the UN Security Council, UNSCR 1325 is designed to guide the Council and, more broadly, the international community in efforts to understand the gendered implications of armed conflicts and devise relevant policy responses. Edward Luck has depicted thematic resolutions and presidential statements as "a normative compass to guide their [the Council and the UN's larger membership] exploration of new substantive territory" (Luck 2006, 131). A compass is a tool, one that provides direction. From the outset, the Council sought to delimit what this particular tool, UNSCR 1325, could do (i.e., the kind of direction it could provide to its deliberations).

In this regard, the use of the first "and" in the formal title of the resolution, "Women and peace and security" is significant. As Sievers and Daws (2014, 47–8) point out, "the Security Council intentionally included the word 'and' between 'Women' and 'peace and security' in order to link, and thereby limit, the issues relating to women to be taken up by the Council to the Council's Charter-mandated responsibility for the maintenance of international *peace and security*" (emphasis in original). The addition of women, thus, was not intended to stir up transformative approaches to the understanding of peace and security in the Council. As Otto has pointed out, referring to Audre Lorde's famous words, feminist advocacy for WPS "could be dismissed as a futile attempt to employ the 'master's tools' to dismantle the 'master's house'" (2009, 239).

Civil society actors and UN member states have, however, invoked and implemented the WPS agenda in ways that go well beyond the terms that the Council sought to dictate to the international community. UN agencies have also been creative in their interpretation. Over time, WPS advocates were able to push the Council's own thinking on the agenda forward as well. For instance,

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UNSCR 1889 calls upon member states to, among other actions, provide support for "better socio-economic conditions, through education, income generating activities, access to basic services..." for women and girls in post-conflict situations (UNSC 2009). From a feminist perspective, this provision makes sense. But it also takes the Security Council into policy arenas that traditionally fall within the mandate of the General Assembly and the Economic and Social Council, as contended by some member states in WPS open debates. This broadening of the agenda adds further utility to WPS policy instruments in specific contexts, making these more effective in weaving sustainable peace but also — alternatively or simultaneously — cutting open more dimensions of vulnerable post-conflict societies to outside interventions, both national and international.

Felicity Ruby, former Director of the Women's International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF) in New York, who advocated for the passage of UNSCR 1325, notes that the resolution has "served as a tool for its advocates" in the following ways: "as a key, an action tool, an educational tool, and a shaming tool" (2014, 176). As a key, the resolution opened doors for women to participate in peace negotiations and policymaking; advocates used it as an action tool to call for implementation of relevant provisions; as an educational tool, UNSCR 1325 created awareness about the ways in which peace and security issues are gendered; finally, as a "shaming tool," it could be employed to hold governments accountable for member states' commitments that are set out in the resolution (Ruby 2014, 176–7). These practices have been well-documented in WPS scholarship. This essay focuses instead on further uses of the resolution by relevant actors.

A Tool for Governments and NGOs

In principle, UNSCR 1325 is valuable for all UN member states as it can facilitate the maintenance of international peace and security. As Anwarul Chowdhury, Permanent Representative of Bangladesh to the United Nations and President of the Security Council in March 2000, stated on International Women's Day in 2000, "peace [is] inextricably linked with equality between women and men" (UNSC 2000). This has also been borne out in evidence-based research demonstrating, for instance, "a robust correlation between peace agreements signed by female delegates and durable peace" (Krause, Krause, and Bränfors 2018).

Instead of these goals, however, member states' engagement has more often been driven by their own interests. This was evident even in the advocacy for the passage of UNSCR 1325. As has been pointed out in existing research on these efforts, members of the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security that led the advocacy "divided" the Permanent Missions of the UNSC member states between them and organized personal meetings that were strategically planned after careful consideration of the respective states' interests.

Prioritization of these interests has been evident at the time of implementation as well. The most well-known instance is the strategic use of UNSCR 1325 by the US in Afghanistan. Following the terrorist attacks in New York and Washington, DC in 2001, WILPF USA and Code Pink called upon the US to factor

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the WPS agenda into their response to the perpetrators. However, the global war on terror, as it was initially developed, had no space for the provisions of UNSCR 1325 (Cohn and Enloe 2003, 1202–3). Later, when support for the military intervention in Afghanistan began to wane, the resolution was used to garner legitimacy by the US. Then, in 2019, when the US was negotiating its withdrawal with Taliban, the wife of the US negotiator made clear: "It's time for Afghan feminists to put their shoulders to the wheel and start doing what women everywhere have had to do when they wanted their rights: fight for them" (Benard 2019, cited in Goetz 2020, xxiii). Since the rhetoric of women's liberation and empowerment had become such an integral part of the US-led intervention, this turnaround was particularly jarring.

The US, however, is not the only member state to use UNSCR 1325, when required, for its foreign policy goals (see Basu 2016, 264). Across the spectrum, member states have engaged with the WPS agenda to signal their commitment to progressive gender norms without necessarily or fully implementing the provisions. This has been especially evident, as noted earlier, in the rhetoric employed by candidates for nonpermanent seats on the UN Security Council (on Australia, for instance, see Shepherd and True 2014, 259). The slim brochure for India's campaign in 2020, for its 2021–2 tenure on the Council, included a photo of its all-female formed police unit that was deployed as part of the UN Mission in Liberia (Government of India 2020).

At the domestic level, over the last 25 years more than 50% of UN member states have adopted national action plans (NAPs) for the implementation of UNSCR 1325. However, it is notable, as discussed in a 2020 study, that "a large percentage of NAPs fail to allocate a specific budget for WPS activities" (Hamilton, Naam, and Shepherd 2020, 13). When funds are not set aside for the implementation of an NAP, it is worth considering the purpose served by its adoption. The motivation may vary from signaling international commitments to, often in the case of countries emerging from conflicts, seeking funds from donors.

UNSCR 1325 can also be used as a tool for representation. Japan has "come to embrace Resolution 1325 [including through its NAPS] in an attempt to identify itself as one of the powerful liberal democracies" (Motoyama 2018, 40). The "outward-oriented" NAPs of Chile, Argentina, Paraguay, and Brazil have also been "motivated by the desire of national political elites to maintain the image of the region as a 'zone of peace'" (Drumond and Rebelo 2020, 470). In other words, more often than not governments' engagement with UNSCR 1325 have not been primarily driven by feminist goals.

For civil society actors working on issues relating to women and armed conflicts, UNSCR 1325 was a welcome addition to their toolbox. It helped advance the advocacy and "relief and recovery" work of civil society actors that had much longer histories of addressing the needs and concerns of women (primarily) in conflict-affected areas. Indeed, the passage of the WPS resolutions itself is testament to persistent civil society advocacy.

The WPS agenda, however, also brought with it dominant interpretations of what gendered perspectives on armed conflicts and peace processes entailed and, relatedly, which issues were to be given attention and resources. Vasuki

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Nesiah (2012) discusses these developments as part of growing global policy consideration toward women in conflict and crisis contexts. She characterizes this as "International Conflict Feminism (ICF), the holy grail of which remains 1325" (Nesiah 2012, 140). International NGOs have used the language of UNSCR 1325 to frame international and national policy agendas. Across the world, local gendered experiences of conflict were given meaning and understood through this emerging vocabulary. These power dynamics have also played out within specific geographic contexts, whereby individuals and NGOs that are better-versed with ICF have managed to use UNSCR 1325 to build their profile and to raise funds for their work.

Yet when such initiatives do not take account of multiple voices, especially those not powerful enough to be heard, the resolution also becomes a tool to construct and/or ossify hierarchies within the civil society (on Nepal and Sri Lanka, see Whetstone and K.C. 2023, 117). In these ways, UNSCR 1325 works not only as the four kinds of tools identified by Ruby (2014), it also becomes an instrument for domination and marginalization within the civil society.

Conclusion: What Is UNSCR 1325 Good For?

In their overview of UNSCR 1325, Kirby and Shepherd write that "feminist peace was a project, an ethos, resolution 1325 a tool" (2024, 12). Taking note of its many failures over the years, they urge their readers to "forget WPS" and embrace the fractures within the agenda and the plurality of feminist peace (Kirby and Shepherd 2024, 180). The different motivations of relevant actors, outlined here, are productive and symptomatic of these fractures. It is not simply that actors have multiple understandings of feminist peace, but also that some states and NGOs engage with UNSCR 1325 for reasons other than realization of feminist peace. These include particular foreign policy interests or generation of resources for institutional survival. This observation will come as no surprise to WPS advocates, who have sought to find common ground with partners for whom such interests are more important than developing and implementing gender-sensitive responses to peace and security concerns. The WPS agenda has gained significance because it has managed to be meaningful to actors in these multiple ways.

The problem is, as feminist observers have noted, that the project of feminist peace has also been undermined over time. Certainly, there has been some progress in recognizing and addressing the specific experiences of women and girls during conflicts and peace processes. The annual reports of the UN Secretary General, among others, highlight positive advancements while taking note of the many challenges in implementation (see, for instance, UNSC 2024). A more fundamental concern with the trajectory of WPS was captured by Cora Weiss (2011), when she famously proclaimed that UNSCR 1325 was not aimed to "make war safe for women." For many feminists then, the problem is also that the tool has lost its pacifist edge. It has been blunted through its use in addressing "women's issues" without challenging structural issues such as militarism, misogyny, and racism.

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Feminist peace advocates have not been naïve about these developments. Felicity Hill and Edith Ballantyne of WILPF noted as early as 2007 that "more effort needs to be put into *WILPF using [UNSCR] 1325 rather than [UNSCR] 1325 using WILPF*" (cited in Basu 2009, 190; emphasis in original). In the context of WPS implementation in South Asia, lawyer and human rights activist Hina Jilani writes: "it is our own initiatives and movement building in the region that gives us our energy and provides more solace than the UN... Let us build on 1325. Whatever you have on hand you use to your advantage. But it cannot be the center of our focus" (cited in Manchanda, 2017, xxviii).

It is therefore evident, in the 25th anniversary year of UNSCR 1325, that the WPS resolutions have been battered and blunted through their many uses and dominant interpretations. Feminist peace advocates may find that other tools, including community-based initiatives, national legislation, and issue-based transnational advocacy, are more effective. But it is also pertinent that the WPS resolutions are the main policy instrument that bring gender perspectives into the mandate of the highest international decision-making body on matters of peace and security. As such, for all that can be gained from this association (for example, attention, resources, and legitimacy), UNSCR 1325 will retain its significance as a tool for feminist peace advocates, as well as a host of other state and non-state actors.

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