

Why Women? It's Equality Stupid

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Here is a startling fact: There is still no country in the world today in which women are equal to men.

It is true, however, that 2011 was a banner year for women. For the first-time ever, the Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to three women—Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, Leymah Gbowee of the Liberian women's peace movement, and Tawakkol Karman, a human rights activist in Yemen—for their work on women's rights and peace activism. Earlier in the year, the International Monetary Fund appointed France's former finance minister, Christine Lagarde, as its first female head. To-date, women have achieved the highest level of political office in countries as diverse as Liberia, Pakistan, Brazil, Bangladesh, Costa Rica, and Thailand.¹

Yet these advances cannot obscure the fact that complete equality eludes women globally, particularly with regard to matters of international peace and security. Unfortunately, something that female child soldiers and female heads-of-state have in common is their experience with gender inequality. Gender inequality exists wherever women, compared with men, have fewer political, social, and economic rights, have less access to and control of resources, and have less decision-making power. There is no place in the world where

women and girls do not experience some form of inequality, whether it takes the form of sexual violence, or social or legal barriers that prevent them from participating fully in public life.

Here is another fact: policy-makers are starting to realize that equality makes a difference not only to individual women but also to global peace and security on the whole. In December 2011, U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton presented the first-ever U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security, which aspires to implement UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (UN 1325), which was passed in October 2000. UN 1325 is a landmark resolution that recognizes women's roles in the international peace and security arena. It advances women's participation in decision-making at all levels of peace processes and peace operations, it promotes security-sector reform, conflict prevention, and the protection of women and children in armed conflict, among many other things. At the heart of UN 1325 is the understanding that peace and equality between men and women are inextricably linked.²

The announcement of the U.S. National Action Plan for UN 1325 is good news for U.S. foreign policy, but it is only a first step. Policy-makers' understand-

ing of how individual security—especially women's security—affects international peace and security is at best limited. One of the most persistent obstacles to implementing UN 1325 has been the call for "evidence" that women's security is a matter of international security. Notably, it has been asserted that there is no evidence that women should be included in decision-making on matters of international peace and security at all. At first glance, the "evidence" question is disheartening and discriminatory. If Washington policy-makers replaced the word "women" with any other minority group, they would quickly see how discriminatory the evidence question is.

If it is the case that those in Washington circles are really saying, "We think this is important, but we are not sure why, we need to understand this issue better," then it is an easy fix: women have made strides in the last thirty years that provide plenty of credible data to show that the link between gender inequality and state failures is real and pressing. It is time to think again about the top myths that plague the debate about women and international security. Here are five myths we can do without.

Myth #1: We Have No Evidence that Gender Equality Matters to International Security.

Not True.

We now know, from a large body of qualitative and quantitative evidence, that gender inequality plays a role in state failures, either related to interstate conflict or the weakening of the rule of law. Empirical studies by scholars, such as Valerie Hudson, Mary Caprioli and others,³ show that greater inequality between men and women is related to an increase in interstate violence and the initiation of

the use of force in international disputes.

One has only to look briefly at Hudson's Bare Branches—a chilling account of the security implications of India and China's surplus male population—to get a glimpse of what is at stake. India and China are home to almost 40 percent of the world's population, and they are countries where gender inequality is reflected in the widespread practice of female infanticide, which creates a surplus male population. That male surplus population is poised to wreak havoc. In the past twenty years, China's crime rate has almost doubled. A recent study on the relationship between the increased crime rate and the increase in the male population has linked the two phenomena: the rise in human trafficking and prostitution are strongly linked to the increased imbalance in the male-to-female ratio within the population.⁴ In India, another country with a huge male surplus, provincial crime rates and sex ratios are also strongly connected.⁵ The Economist put it this way: "Throughout history, young men have been responsible for the vast preponderance of crime and violence—especially single men in countries where status and social acceptance depend on being married and having children, as it does in China and India."⁶ Hudson writes that "the very possibility of full and meaningful democracy, of peace within and between nations may be tied to the status of women in society...."

Myth #2: Peace Agreements End Conflict, Period—It's Not Important That They Include Women.

Wrong.

Contrary to prevailing opinion, peace agreements do not necessarily end in peace. Roughly 50 percent of peace agreements fail within a decade, unleashing more violence and increasing the fragmen-

ration of armed actors.⁷ Independently, the World Bank estimates that there is a 50 percent chance that a peace process will fail, and the stakes are even higher when natural resources are at play.⁸ The UN estimates that in Africa, the failure rate may be as high as 60 percent.⁹ We also know that since 1992, women have signed only 2 percent of peace agreements, and only 3 percent of agreements have included a female peace negotiator.¹⁰ This means that an overwhelming 97 percent of peace agreements are negotiated only by men—and typically they are men with guns negotiating with men with guns. It is widely observed that armed actors who negotiate peace terms are primarily interested in preserving their own interests, not the interests of the civilian population who have been the targets of violence and human rights abuses during a conflict. The fifty-fifty success rate of peace negotiations to date is dismal. In this context, the best evidence that women can make a difference is the failure of current efforts to stop war—efforts made nearly entirely by men. The case of Angola provides a snapshot of what this means on the ground. Women were completely missing from the peace negotiations that led to the Lusaka Protocol in 1994. The exclusion of women from the peace table meant that issues such as sexual violence, human trafficking, abuses by government and rebel security forces, demining, girls' education, and healthcare were not even discussed. By the time the peace process failed in 1998, Angolan civil society had come to view the process as serving the interests of only the warring parties.¹¹

The fact is that international security is a male-dominated sector. Many practitioners have documented the obstacles that women face in reaching the peace table.¹² There are very few women involved at the highest levels of security decision-making. There is also a lack of training for

senior leadership on the gendered dimensions of conflict. This means that whether senior leaders are men or women, they are ill-equipped to competently address basic human rights issues of interest to both men and women, once they are involved in negotiations.

With so many failures, it is time to examine who is at the table and to ask whether they are adequately prepared for the job. New strategies to improve the chances of a durable peace can include both the increased representation of women in peace negotiations and increased and regular training on the gendered dimensions of conflict for senior leadership—both men and women—who get tapped to lead negotiations.

Myth #3: Including Women at the Peace Table is a Western Agenda

Think Again.

The push to include women in peace processes and conflict resolution is rooted in women's social justice movements worldwide. The Women, Peace and Security agenda, put forward by UN 1325, was brought to the international stage by women living in conflict zones and working to end the violence there.¹³ Women's organizations from Sierra Leone, Guatemala, Somalia, Tanzania, and Namibia laid the groundwork for policy debates at the highest levels of the international system that addressed the marginalization of women in peace-building and reconstruction.¹⁴ UNIFEM, with the assistance of women's organizations around the world, documented and publicized the fact that women's traditional under-representation in decision-making has extended into the internal hierarchy of international institutions responsible for monitoring and implementing peace processes—where, incidentally, none of the UN special repre-

sentatives or envoys appointed to areas of conflict were women.¹⁵

Myth #4: An Equal Number of Female and Male Soldiers in Peace Operations Means There is Gender Equality

Not Really.

Women warriors are ancient history—literally. Even Homer wrote about women who waged war and ruled as men do. While the inclusion of women in peace operations is important and has a significant positive impact on the effectiveness of an operation overall, simply increasing the number of women in operations neither automatically translates into gender-equitable policy, nor does it enhance operational effectiveness.

Experience has shown that female capability has proved an important factor in stabilizing conflict areas. India, Bangladesh, Namibia, and Nigeria have all deployed female police contingents as part of peacekeeping operations, and experience has shown that these female police are able to respond more effectively to sexual violence, and are perceived as more accessible to and able to build confidence within the local population.¹⁶ However, field studies have also shown that mixed-teams (teams comprising male and female soldiers) out-perform female-only teams. According to a 2009 study by the Swedish Defense Research Agency on operational effectiveness and the implementation of UN 1325 in Afghanistan, mixed-teams were more effective in gathering information, were viewed as more credible, and enhanced force protection because they could speak to men, women, boys, and girls in the population, which resulted in a more nuanced understanding of their area of operation. Lieutenant Commander Ella van den Heuvel, former Gender Advisor at ISAF Joint Command pointed out that

“... from a practical point of view ... if you have four military women in your detachment, you can maybe form one female engagement team (a women-only team), but you can form four mixed teams if you don't use female-only teams. And what do you think is more effective—patrolling an area with one female-only team where you engage with women or patrolling in four areas where you can engage women, men, boys and girls?”¹⁷

To be truly effective and fulfill mission mandates, both men and women in peace operations need to be trained to understand how conflict affects women, men, boys, and girls differently, and what the different security realities are for every sector of the population. Brigadier Karl Engelbrektsson, Force Commander of the Nordic Battlegroup for the Swedish Genderforce, has remarked that “understanding the role of women is important when building stability in an area.... [I]f women are the daily bread winners and provide food and water for their families, patrolling the areas where women work will increase security and allow them to continue [to work]. This is a tactical assessment.... Creating conditions for a functioning everyday-life is vital from a security perspective. It provides the basis for stability.”¹⁸

Myth #5: We Know What the Problem Is, But We Do Not Have Solutions False.

We have credible data that show when attention and resources are put toward reducing inequalities between men and women, we can achieve substantial improvements in people's lives and in security interests in general. More than thirty years of international development programming demonstrates that when gender equality is applied to social, economic, political, or even infrastructure projects and programs, it results in more effective and sustainable

development. Numerous studies by the World Bank and other institutions show that societies flourish when women actively participate in their economies and public life, because women reinvest some 80 to 90 percent of their income into communities and family, compared with less than 40 percent reinvested by men. Furthermore, extensive research in the fields of health and economics has shown that equality benefits everyone, not just the already privileged.¹⁹ The past several decades of peace negotiations in various conflicts have also shown that ensuring the inclusion of civil society, especially women's organizations, has strengthened peace agreements. In the words of Geir Sjoberg, Advisor for Peace and Reconciliation at the Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, “Without women's participation, there is less likelihood that a peace agreement will take adequate account of women's interests and needs. If a peace agreement is deficient in this respect, it will be more difficult to ensure that it has the broad support of civil society in the implementation phase, and the chances of the agreement breaking down is greater.”²⁰

Looking for more solutions? The UN Security Council has already proposed credible policy solutions to the problem of inequality in international peace and security matters via UN 1325. More than thirty-three countries and several regional bodies, including the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe (OSCE), the African Union (AU), and the Economic Community of West African states (ECOWAS), have already developed and adopted their own action plans to implement UN 1325, and more than 40 percent of UN Security Council resolutions passed under Chapter VII of the UN Charter now include a reference to women, gender, or UN 1325.²¹ In short, the solutions can be found in the regular consultation and inclusion of women at all deci-

sion-making levels, and in the deliberate, systematic consideration of the different security needs, priorities, and experiences of men and women in conflict.

This may be easier said than done, but the evidence is clear: ignoring gender inequality as a factor in international peace and security comes at a high cost—more violence and insecurity, and less peace. We need to develop a nuanced understanding of equality—it is not just a numbers game. Policy-makers take note: When the “why women?” question turns up, the bottom-line is, “It's equality, stupid!”

ENDNOTES

¹ “The 2011 Global Women's Progress Report,” Newsweek, September 26, 2011, p27-29.

² Anwarul K. Chowdhury, “Double Fast-Track Indicators for Turning the 1325 Promise into Reality,” Paper presented at the United States Institute for Peace Working Group Meeting Implementing UN 1325, Lessons and Experiences a Decade On (Washington, DC: United States Institute for Peace, July 27, 2010) <http://www.usip.org/newsroom/multimedia/video-gallery/session-ii-women-peace-and-security-fulfilling-the-vision-1325> accessed 2/14/12. Ambassador Chowdhury wrote that, “the Security Council expressed for the first time in its history of 55 years its conceptual acceptance that peace is inextricably linked with equality between women and men and affirmed the equal access and full participation of women in power structures and their full involvement in all efforts for peace and security...”

³ See, for example, Mary Caprioli and Peter F. Trumbore, “Human Rights Rogues in Interstate Disputes 1980–2001,” *Journal of Peace Research*, March 2006, Vol. 43:131–48. Caprioli and Trumbore (2006) find that states with lower levels of gender equality are more likely to be the aggressors and to initiate the use of force in interstate disputes (confirmed by Sobek, Abouharb, and Ingram, 2006). Valerie Hudson, Mary

Caprioli, Bonnie Ballif-Spanvill, Rose McDermott, and Chad F. Emmert, "The Heart of the Matter: The Security of Women and the Security of States," *International Security*, Vol. 33, No. 3: 7-45. Hudson, Caprioli, Baniff-Spanvill, McDermott, and Emmert (2009) find that states with higher levels of violence against women are also less peaceful internationally, less compliant with international norms, and less likely to have good relations with neighboring states, and that violence against women is a better predictor of these outcomes than level of democracy or level of wealth. Caprioli and Boyer (2001) find that severity of violence used in an international conflict decreases with greater levels of domestic gender equality. [Mary Caprioli and Mark A. Boyer, "Gender, Violence, and International Crisis," *Journal of Conflict Resolution*, 45: 503-518.]

⁴ Lena Edlund, Hongjin Li, Junjian Yi and Junsen Zhang, "Sex ratios and crime: Evidence from China's one-child policy", *Institute for the Study of Labour*, Bonn. Discussion Paper 3214.

⁵ "Add Sugar and Spice," *The Economist*, April 7, 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/18530101> (accessed November 1, 2011).

⁶ "The War on Baby Girls," *The Economist*, March 2011, <http://www.economist.com/node/15636231> (accessed November 1, 2011).

⁷ See Roy Licklider, "The Consequences of Negotiated Settlements in Civil Wars 1945-93" in *American Political Science Review*, 1995, Vol 89, No 3: 681-90. "Research undertaken by Roy Licklider over the period 1945 to 1993 suggests that over the period of 1945-1993 about half of all peace agreements fail in the first five years after they have been signed." African Post-Conflict Reconstruction Policy Framework, NEPAD Secretariat, Governance, Peace and Security Programme, June 2005, p3. <http://www.africanreview.org/docs/conflict/PCR%20Policy%20Framework.pdf> accessed 2/14/12.

⁸ "World Bank Study Says 50-50 Chance of Failure", *Washington Post*, November 26, 2002.

⁹ United Nations UNDG/ECHA Working Group, Report on Transition issues, February 2004, p14. See also NEPAD Secretariat, Governance, Peace and Security Program, "African Post-Conflict Reconstruction Policy Framework," June 2005, p3.

¹⁰ UNIFEM, "Women's Participation in Peace Negotiations," 2010.

¹¹ Don Steinberg, *Women and War*, USIP 2010, 115-130.

Mediation is Not Just a Job for Men," *The Center for Humanitarian Dialogue*, October 2005. <http://www.hcdcentre.org/files/Wel%20the%20Women.pdf> (accessed December 12, 2011). See also Jolyan Shoemaker and Camille Pampall Conway, "Women in UN Peace Operations: Increasing Leadership Opportunities," *Women in International Security and Georgetown University*, July 2008. http://cisw.org/files/publication/110713_wisw_PeaceOpsFinal.pdf (accessed December 12, 2011).

¹³ After holding an Avria Formula meeting with NGOs and an open debate, the Council passed Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security on October 31, 2000. The Avria Formula meeting on October 23, 2000, prior to the open session of the Security Council on Women, Peace and Security gave representatives of women's NGOs from Sierra Leone, Guatemala, Somalia, and Tanzania a chance to explain their work, demonstrate their competence, and submit their recommendations on a large number of issues. Extracts from Policy Hill, "NGO perspectives: NGOs and the Security Council," In NGOs as Partners: Assessing the Impact, Recognising the Potential, 2002.

¹⁴ Sarann Naraghi-Anderjini, *Women Building Peace: What They Do, Why It Matters*, Lynne Rienner Publishers, Boulder, 2007.

¹⁵ Richard Strickland and Nata Duvvury, "Gender Equity and Peacebuilding, From Rhetoric to Reality: Finding the Way," A Discussion Paper, International Center for Research on Women, 2003, p11.

¹⁶ See for example, "Gender Mainstreaming in Peacekeeping Operations, Liberia 2003-2009", Best Practices Report, "United Nations Mission in Liberia (UNMIL) and the United Nations Office of the Gender Advisor (OGA), 2010; Fapohunda Tinuke M., "Integrating Women and Gender Issues in Peace Development," *International Journal of Peace and Development Studies*, July 2011, Vol. 2 (6): 162-70; Gender and Peace Support Operations: Opportunities and Challenges to Improve Practices, International Alert, October 2001, 10; Ryan Marks and Tara Denham, "A Roundtable on Police Gendarmerie Women in Peace Operations," Pearson Peacekeeping Center, November 2006.

¹⁷ In-person interview with LCDR Ella van den Heuvel, former Gender Advisor ISAF Joint Command, Kabul, on June 2-10, 2011, at the Swedish Armed Forces International Training Center, and email interview on September 9, 2011.

¹⁸ "Resolution 1325 increases efficiency," Karl Englebretson, *Swedish Armed Forces, in Good and Bad Examples: Lessons Learned from Working with UN*

Resolution 1325 in International Missions, Uppsala, Sweden, GenderForce, 2007, 29.

¹⁹ See Richard Wilkinson and Kate Pickett, *The Spirit Level: Why Greater Equality Makes Societies Stronger*, Bloomsbury Press, New York, 2009, for a comprehensive look at the effects of global and domestic inequalities in health care and the economy and why equality, not growth, should be policy-makers' focus.

²⁰ Implementing Negotiated Agreements: The Challenge for Intra-state Peace, ed Mtek Boltjes, TMC Asser Press: The Hague Netherlands, 2007, 19.

²¹ See Resolution Watch for the most recent statistics on UN Security Council Resolutions, http://www.peacewomen.org/security_council_monitor/resolution-watch/statistics (accessed November 1, 2011).