Gender in the Armed Forces – Lessons from Norway
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INTRODUCTION
As we are approaching the 15th anniversary of UN Security Council Resolution 1325, progress in implementing the provisions of the resolution is still slow and incoherent. It is essential, therefore, that we bring together people who have been involved in implementing the resolution in different arenas in order to share the lessons we all have identified. Identifying lessons is the first step towards actual learning and changing behavior. When it comes to UNSCR 1325, we have identified very many lessons over the past 14 years. However, some actors are more strongly represented than others, whereas lessons from other actors are scarce. Such as from militaries.

That is what I would like to talk about today - the lessons that I have learned about mainstreaming gender while working in the Norwegian Armed Forces (NAF). I no longer work at the Norwegian Armed Forces and the views presented here today are solely my own.

This talk will focus on the following:
1. The basis for my lessons - the Gender Project at the Norwegian Command and Staff College.
2. Gender in military operations. What is it and how can we report on gender issues?
3. What are the most important lessons from the Gender Project.

Hopefully, this can be a small contribution to the learning about which relevance gender and UNSCR 1325 may have in the armed forces.
A RESOURCE CENTER FOR GENDER IN THE ARMED FORCES

The Gender Project at the Norwegian Command and Staff College was established in January 2010. It was mostly staffed with five people with complementary skills and experiences. The intention behind it was to support the Armed Forces´ implementation of UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security in military operations.

The mandate specified the focus of our activities to be on military operations and not handle recruitment and retention of female personnel. The reasons for this were mainly that doing both would exceed our capacity, but also it was a strategic decision to disassociate our activities from issues associated with gender equality. Not that gender equality is irrelevant for mainstreaming gender in the armed forces, but it would involve fighting a loosing battle. Breaking closed doors open with force was not an option. For us, being smart, patient and engaging in a dialogue where we addressed the needs and suggested solutions related to military tasks and responsibilities worked better to open the many closed doors.

The main activities we focused on in the project were education, dissemination of information about UNSCR 1325 and our own activities related to the women, peace and security, and finally research.

During the project period, we produced and disseminated insight about women, peace and security in a military setting both nationally and internationally, across military and civilian arenas. Starting out with zero demand for our skills, towards the end of the project, we would give approximately 60 hours of lectures per year and still have to turn down requests. I would say, it took a long time and a lot of work to move such a slowly changing organization, but the Armed Forces seem to be accepting that gender IS relevant for military operations.

Much of the effort we undertook, sought to develop knowledge that could be passed on after the project was terminated. We did this by producing a comprehensive lecture guide for the basic officer training. We published on possibilities and limitations associated with empirical research on gender in militaries and evaluated implementation of gender perspectives in Norway´s involvement in Afghanistan.
Finally, together with external experts, we collected much of the knowledge we had built in a textbook with the title *Gender in the Armed Forces: From Theory to Practice*. The book provides a solid foundation for integrating gender perspectives in the armed forces and military operations.

**WHAT IS GENDER IN A MILITARY SETTING?**

There is a lot of confusion related to the meaning of gender and gender-related terms in the military. A common belief in the military is that gender is the same as gender equality, only focuses on women, and that both are irrelevant for the effective conduct of military operations. Needless to say, they are mostly wrong. Nevertheless, at least in the Norwegian Armed Forces, this prejudice has resulted in resistance toward efforts at mainstreaming gender in the military. In many ways, I understand this prejudice. How do you expect military personnel to understand and accept it, when both political and military leaders don´t have a very clear idea about the relevance of gender? As the PRIO researchers Torunn Tryggestad and Inger Skjelsbæk concluded in a recent article, the political rhetoric in Norway has changed from dealing with the large gender gap in the Armed Forces to focusing on gender mainstreaming as a force multiplier in military operations and means for implementing UNSCR 1325 in conflict resolution and peacekeeping efforts. In my opinion, the relevance of gender in a military setting has to do with all three; recruiting and retaining female military personnel, gender mainstreaming as a tool for military effectiveness and force protection, and of course, as a means for implementing UNSCR 1325.

I regard the term **gender** as an overarching principle for a gender perspective, gender mainstreaming, gender analysis and UNSCR 1325.

**UNSCR 1325** is an international legal framework for ensuring that women´s needs and women´s rights to participation are maintained. Since UNSCR 1325 is written for many different actors and at a strategic level, all actors involved in conflict resolution and peacekeeping efforts will have to translate the content of the resolution to practical relevance for them. This is also the case for the armed forces. For military actors, implementing the resolution may be part of the end state, such as establishing
sustainable peace and security for everyone. When military operations take place in heavily populated areas, UNSCR 1325 is almost always included in the mandate of the missions. However, in some operations, this is not the case. For example, the Norwegian air bombing in Libya.

Using a gender perspective and applying a gender analysis means asking whether women and men have different needs and roles and whether military activities affect women and men differently. For military actors, these are tools for implementing UNSCR 1325, but also for increasing the effectiveness of an operations and securing the troops. Different from the UNSCR 1325 strong focus on women, military actors include both women and men. For military actors, gender provides a tool for identifying and addressing differences between groups within the population, not only that of women and girls.

Gender mainstreaming in the armed forces means asking whether, and how, gender differences are relevant at every level and in all activities. Just like other factors, e.g. economics, politics, military, social, the relevance of gender varies. Sometimes, it is essential to how military actors handle a conflict, whereas other times it may be largely irrelevant. The point of gender mainstreaming is that military actors must always identify the meaning of gender to the operation.

GENDER IN MILITARY OPERATIONS
So far, gender has often been dismissed as a political vision of gender equality and irrelevant for the conduct of military operations by military personnel. Yet, the pressure to mainstream gender perspectives in the armed forces and military operations is increasing from the strategic level (UN, NATO, national politicians), and lessons from the ground suggest greater need for female military personnel and personnel with gender skills. Lessons from Norway suggest that successful implementation of gender perspectives on the ground requires implementation at all levels and in all the processes of military planning. So far, this has been prevented by the failure to understand the relevance of gender at the operational level of military processes and activities. As a result, a gender perspective has been inconsistently implemented and depended on the interests and skills of single individuals.
The Norwegian Armed Forces has vast experiences with evaluating the relevance of, and need for, a gender perspective in military operations through the lessons acquired by the Gender Project. The textbook *Gender in Armed Forces: From theory to practice* preserves and shares the knowledge development and lessons identified from this work.

This book develops a holistic understanding of gender in military operations by utilizing feminist and cultural theories to connect strategic level resolutions and policies to the conduct of military operations. However, as feminist perspectives and ideas of gender equality are overwhelmingly met with skepticism within military communities, the book relies on military doctrines and procedures when discussing the role a gender perspective may play in staff functions and in different types of operations. In doing so, the book aims to demonstrate how and when a gender perspective should be mainstreamed into the already existing military processes and activities.

The book develops a framework for how military actors can understand the relevance of gender to them. It shows how political and strategic documents like UNSCR 1325, and national action plans and strategic plans for implementing the resolution have implications for how military actors plan and carry out military operations.

How gender is relevant to a given operation and is integrated in the planning process will vary. However, asking whether women and men have different needs and are affected differently by the military operations is essential. The book describes the relevance of such planning in the various staff functions and illustrates the difficult dilemmas that may be encountered in this process. Sometimes such considerations locals stand in the way of military achievement. How to solve this situation will depend on many factors, but a good understanding of the choices the different consequences for women and men may be important for the military operation’s role in the conflict in the long term.

I would argue that we all have been busy arguing about why and how gender is relevant and describing this in strategic documents such as national action plans. However, before issuing more new plans, we need to assess how well our previous plans have
done. Have our efforts had an impact? Militaries have established procedures for identifying lessons learned that includes filing reports from military operations. How then, can we report on gender issues in military operations?

Based on my understanding of the relevance of gender in the armed forces and military operations, the following questions need to be addressed in order to learn about gender in military operations.

What we do internally provides opportunities and limitations for what we do in the field. Therefore, we need to ask:

1. Does the military contingent have the appropriate personnel and gender knowledge to maintain a gender perspective in the operation?
2. Are gender issues and sex-disaggregated statistics included in operational analyses and plans?

Military operations have an impact on the population. In order to understand potential gender dimensions of this impact, we need to ask:

1. How do the actions of the operation affect women differently than men?
2. How are women and men’s security addressed?
3. How are women and men’s participation addressed?

Finally, gender dimensions of the conflict and in the local population may affect our own forces. We therefore need to address the following questions:

1. How does integration of a gender perspective impact the actions or end state of the operation?
2. How does integration of a gender perspective impact force security?

LESSONS IDENTIFIED

What are the most important lessons from the Gender project at the Norwegian Command and Staff College?

First, gender sensitive strategic human resource management provides the basis for access to personnel with a variety of qualifications, such as being female or having
gender mainstreaming skills. For this to happen, the armed forces must conceptualize what gender and UNSCR 1325 means to them. Transformation in the way militaries plan and carry out their operations require a strategic plan for the intentions behind mainstreaming gender – what are the goals and how do we go about working towards these, and who are responsible for carrying it out? Only then will strategic intentions be followed up with action that may facilitate change: for example allocating money for positions related to gender, demand reporting on failures and successes, and making people accountable.

Secondly, the institutional culture in the military hampers female recruitment and retention, and prevents militaries from utilizing gender skills. In the Norwegian Armed Forces, we now have 10% female military personnel. However, few women seek leadership positions. We have two women at the general’s level today. Building a military career takes time, of course, but I see that among the students at the staff colleague today, very few pursue leadership functions. Lena Kvarving is working on her dissertation on gender mainstreaming efforts in the Norwegian Armed Forces. One of her findings suggests that the societal culture of femininity, which is so characteristic for Norway, is also descriptive of the armed forces. She notes that men’s roles as caregivers are institutionalized also in the military. For example did the commander of the air force recently take a parental leave. However, there is still an institutional military culture for determining what is cool and acceptable, and which skills that are required to achieve this status. These are values and skills associated with masculinity. As a consequence, many military women as well as men strive to acquire these values and skills and to distance themselves from what is regarded as feminine. Consequently, militaries fail to attract, maintain, utilize the variety of qualities male and female personnel may provide.

A third set of lessons relate to military operations. Cecilie Fleming’s evaluation of the use of gender expert functions (GA/GFA/Gender focal point) in Norway’s activities in Afghanistan suggests that gender expert functions are necessary, but not enough to mainstream gender in military operations. In my view, it is an important short-term solution, which is necessary as long as military personnel is largely ignorant about the obligations and opportunities associated with gender. However, assigning the responsibility to a single function relies too much on the skills of a single person and
may serve as alibi for inaction by others. Having individuals with special responsibilities for gender IS important for continuous maintenance of the competence. On the longer term, gender mainstreaming across all processes and staff functions is the best way to ensure sustainable mainstreaming of gender in military operations.

The fourth lesson deals with education and training. In short, separate learning objectives have to be developed for gender, but with clearly specified cross-cutting relevance to the other topics. This to show that gender is not just a political add-on, but has a place among other more "militant" topics. Military personnel need textbooks written for them on gender issues, not only on how to dig trenches and manage weapons. Gender must be integrated in all background material for exercises. Otherwise, it will be perceived as irrelevant and an obligation and a nuisance that takes away the attention from what militaries should REALLY be doing. In the exercise situation, it is always a dilemma associated to whether gender should be allocated separate slides/focus or be integrated with other topics. As long as gender is not well understood and mainstreamed across all staff functions, it may be necessary to give it special attention. The downside, again, of course is that placing the responsibility on one function may serve as alibi for inaction by others.

The fifth lesson deals with the role of military leadership. Military leaders are the most important actors for mainstreaming gender in the armed forces. Military leaders set the standards and educate future leaders. They hold the formal and informal power to define what is acceptable and what is not. They can demand action, enforce accountability and they have the power to destroy all other efforts. I will share a story from a military exercise where I served as part of the directing staff. I and my colleagues had taught these students throughout the different courses at the Staff college. The finale was an exercise on planning a military operation as a deployed military headquarter. The students held different staff functions, including the position as gender advisor. One of the most promising students held the position as chief of staff. Throughout the first day of the exercise, I notice very little response to my injects on gender and start asking about the gender advisor. It then became clear that chief of staff had decided to move the gender advisor to a different position and eradicate the gender expert function altogether. None of the other students had objected. I made clear that
this was unacceptable and responsibility for gender was added to the CIMIC-group. On the final day, there was a wrap up of the exercise during which the commander, the leader of the entire operation, judges the student’s performance. Jokingly, he points at one of the best students and exclaims ironically – you did so bad that you will be assigned the gender advisor position in your next post! Everyone laughed loudly. Just in one sentence, the commander had ruined everything my colleagues and I had worked so hard to achieve for an entire year. And with that, the students were sent off to become the future leaders in the Norwegian Armed Forces.

So, the final lesson is about the messenger. I cannot emphasize strongly enough how important the messenger is. Having knowledge is essential, but not enough. Controversial and new issues in a military setting have to be fronted by people who have a standing with the military personnel. In the armed forces, these are leaders who hold valued expertise from the special forces and military operations. In most cases, these are men. Most of these men do not engage in gender related issues – so far, it has been counterproductive for pursuing a military career.

This brings me back to the relevance of strategic management of human resources in the military. How militaries conduct their internal affairs is essential for how they carry out military operations. This is also true for implementing a gender perspective and UNSCR 1325.