

NATIONAL SECURITY & FOREIGN POLICY

NOT SECONDARY BUT CENTRAL

SECURING GENDER IN THE MAINSTREAM

OVERVIEW FROM NEW AMERICA

Inclusivity theory – the idea that the best outcomes derive from environments that are not only diverse, but in which diverse perspectives are empowered to drive decision-making – has gained broad currency in corporate and civil society contexts.

A body of research has grown up around how gender inclusivity can improve peacebuilding and peacekeeping operations – and how gender-differentiated impacts drive both positive and negative foreign policy outcomes. We see this, for instance, in the correlations identified between rising bride prices and rising extremism, and between the prevalence of gender-based violence and a society’s likelihood of experiencing mass violence and atrocities. Given the prominence of concerns with extremism and mass violence in American foreign policy, these would seem to be key insights that would drive how US policy is formulated at home, and how – and with whom – it is carried out around the world. They are not secondary, or forms of special-interest pleading, but rather a central aspect of how violence, brutality and instability come to hold sway.

Sixteen years ago this month an effort to give this insight the force of international law and practice culminated in the United Nations Security Council’s unanimous adoption of [Resolution 1325](#), asserting the importance of women’s “equal participation and full involvement in all efforts for the maintenance and promotion of peace and security, and the need to increase their role in decision-making with regard to conflict prevention and resolution.” Resolution 1325, for the U.S. and most other states, marked the largest national commitment to an agenda that began to emerge at the 1995 Beijing Fourth World Conference on Women. A community of researchers and advocates has developed under the banner of “women, peace and security” to delve deeper into the theory and practice of gender inclusivity. The term “gender mainstreaming” has become standard in the field to describe the practice of inclusivity not just in who makes policy, but in what policy is made, and how it is made.

New America’s Better Life Lab and New Models of Policy Change Project combined our experience in national security policy, gender theory, and cross-sectoral collaboration to look at whether and how inclusivity is shaping American national security policy. Our project, Not Secondary But Central, has partnered with the Center for a New American Security, the Chicago Council on International Affairs, and the Texas National Security Network to carry out ground-breaking polling of the general public and elites on their views of the relationship between gender and national security policy. We commissioned POLITICO FOCUS for the in-depth interviews reported on here in order to gain a deeper understanding of how policymakers perceive the interrelated challenges and incentives they face.

As the report here makes clear, U.S. policymakers are theoretically committed to formal gender equality and convinced by inclusivity theory, but are completely unaware of – and resistant to – its gender theory parallels. Scholars of conflict have identified several pathways through which gender differences at the societal level

can have major, and often unanticipated, impacts on policies. Experiential studies have shown that post-conflict agreements negotiated with women's participation last longer than those negotiated by men alone. In development, for example, it is well-documented that schools without clean, safe restroom facilities will be less successful in convincing parents to enroll daughters – although restrooms might seem a minor consideration in areas where no schools currently exist.

Some respondents understood implicitly that failing to understand how a given policy impacts different communities and identities has clear and negative implications for how American policy is formulated and conducted. But given that the vast majority did not, this report also contains perspectives that will concern those who care about effective, inclusive U.S. foreign policy as well as those who want to see a workplace where gender is not perceived as a barrier to success.

We believe, however, that the report offers several reasons for optimism, and clear pointers for the road ahead. First, respondents saw concrete improvements in both the U.S. policymaking process and actual policy outcomes as women come to the table in greater numbers, and as gender concerns are named and prioritized more explicitly. Second, the central difficulties respondents identified – from lack of awareness of research that would support gender mainstreaming to resistance from members of the dominant culture – are familiar and well-studied in the research literature. We aren't, in other words, confronting new and baffling problems, but ones which we can address and which are being addressed in other fields of American and global life.

As gender mainstreaming is perceived less as special pleading from an advocacy community, and more as one aspect of smart 21st century decision-making strategy – and as more men and women enter the national security workforce conversant with the strategy – the attitudes described in this report could recede. The alternative, however, is that U.S. policymaking will continue to be by, for, and about the perspectives of less than half the world it targets, and the constituents to whom it is democratically responsible.

About New America

New America is committed to renewing American politics, prosperity, and purpose in the Digital Age. We generate big ideas, bridge the gap between technology and policy, and curate broad public conversation. We combine the best of a policy research institute, technology laboratory, public forum, media platform, and a venture capital fund for ideas. We are a distinctive community of thinkers, writers, researchers, technologists, and community activists who believe deeply in the possibility of American renewal.

About Not Secondary But Central

New America's Not Secondary But Central Project seeks to illuminate – through journalism and original research – the crucial linkage between gender and security, and why policymakers often overlook it. The project is a partnership of New America's Better Life Lab, Global Gender Parity Initiative and New Models of Policy Change project, and is funded by The Compton Foundation. It is directed by Elizabeth Weingarten who, with colleagues Heather Hurlburt and Chayenne Polimedio, bring experience in media, government and international organizations to the work. Learn more and view the project's other research [here](#).

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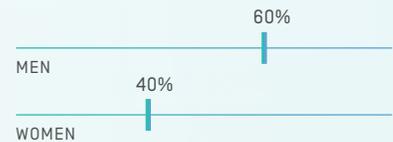
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ABOUT THE RESEARCH

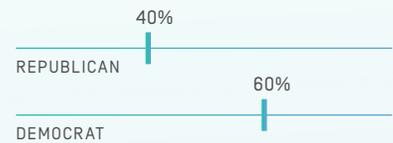
New America commissioned POLITICO FOCUS to conduct research among US national security policymakers and influencers. The study aimed to understand perceptions around gender, particularly gender mainstreaming and the inclusive security agenda, in national security and foreign policymaking.

POLITICO FOCUS leverages a design-thinking approach to qualitative research. Our method is rooted in ethnography, anthropology and psychology, allowing organizations to gain better insight into what makes influencers tick. We conducted one-on-one, hour-long, in-depth interviews with 12 highly-targeted national security and foreign policymakers and influencers. This method allows us to reveal influencer perceptions, as well as better understand the motivations and driving forces behind those perceptions.

GENDER BREAKDOWN



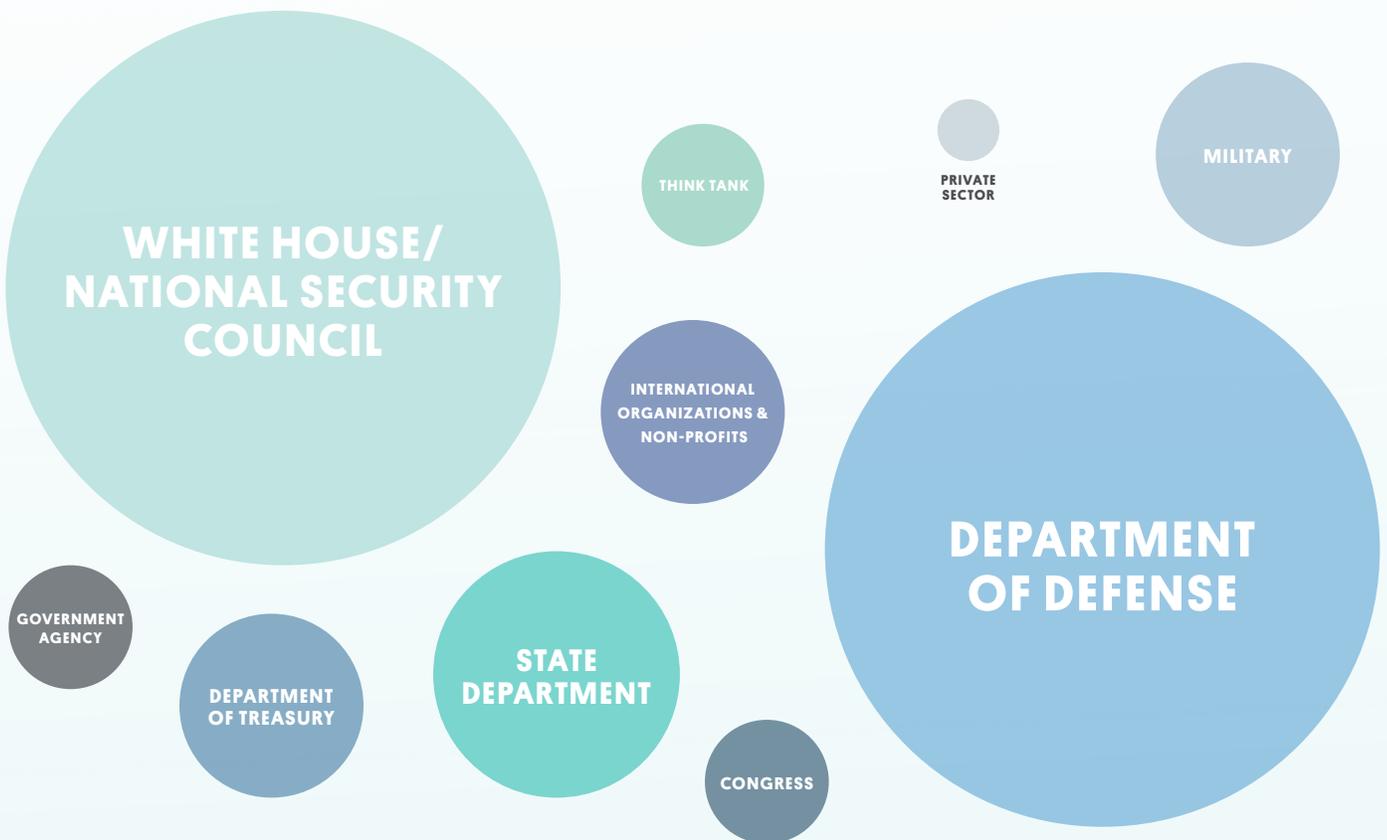
POLITICAL BREAKDOWN



ABOUT THE PARTICIPANTS

POLITICO FOCUS conducted in-depth interviews with 12 hand-selected participants for this study, including policymakers, coordinators, implementers and influencers with a vast and diverse range of experiences across the national security and foreign policy apparatus. This includes high-ranking officials within the Departments of State, Treasury and Defense, the White House and National Security Council, the military and Congress as well as private sector and non-profit organizations. By design, each participant had experience in at least two policymaking organizations within the U.S. government.

We sought diversity in professional experience and political orientation, as well as a representative sample of men and women. According to New America research, women currently make up slightly less than a third of national security officeholders at and above Assistant Secretary level – a proportion that has increased significantly in the past two decades. The positions, organizations and titles included here represent the entire careers of participants to date.



- White House/National Security Council – 24%
- Department of Defense – 24%
- State Department – 11%
- Department of Treasury – 8%
- Congress – 5%
- Military – 8%
- International Organizations & Non-Profits – 8%
- Government Agency – 3%
- Think Tank – 5%
- Private Sector – 5%

PARTICIPANT RANGE OF EXPERIENCE

White House & National Security Council	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Deputy National Security Advisor • Deputy Assistant to the President • Senior Advisor to National Security Advisor • Director, Defense Personnel, Readiness & Partnerships • Director, Defense Policy and Strategy • Director, International Economics • Director, Iraq • Director, Legislative Affairs • Director, Homeland Security Council
Department of Defense	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Special Assistant to the Secretary of Defense • Advisor to DoD Assistant Secretary, Security Policy, Peace Keeping Efforts in the Middle East and Africa • Iraq Country Director • Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Secretary of Defense • Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Secretary of Defense • Senior Policy Advisor, Office of Secretary of Defense • Chief of Staff to Assistant Secretary of Defense • Chief of Staff, Office of Special Operations • Senior Fellow, National Defense University
State Department	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Under Secretary of State • Ambassador • Foreign Affairs Officer • Director, Bureau of Democracy, Human Rights & Labor
Department of Treasury	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Secretary of Treasury • Deputy Secretary of Treasury • Deputy Assistant Secretary of Treasury
Congress	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Director, House Homeland Security Committee • Legislative Aide, Senate Foreign Relations Committee
Military	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Major General, Army • Officer, Army • Lieutenant, Navy
International Organizations & Non-Profits	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategic Advisor, International Security Assistance Force • Analyst, United Nations • Research Associate, Centre for Humanitarian Dialogue
Government Agency	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Conflict Management Specialist, USAID
Think Tank	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Economist, Rand Corporation • Assistant Director, Council on Foreign Relations
Private Sector	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Senior Associate, Jones Group International • Associate, Albright Group

WHAT WE LEARNED

This study identified an embedded assumption among policymakers and influencers, regardless of gender, that bringing more women into the national security and foreign policy community will lead to improved policy outcomes – with a significant minority believing that making gender irrelevant in policy formulation was the desired outcome. We found a significant gender gap in views on how well the project of formal equality for women and men in U.S. policymaking is proceeding. Across generational and political lines, we found that policymakers were overwhelmingly unaware of the role gender differences play in shaping policy outcomes, and of the theoretical and practical tools gender offers to help improve U.S. policy outcomes in unstable societies and conflict areas.

The following report provides an in-depth look and analysis into policymakers' knowledge of gender theory, the inclusive security agenda and gender-differentiated impact data, perceptions of female actors in peacemaking and peacekeeping processes, as well as where gender is present, absent and silo-ed as policy is both formulated and implemented.

Three Broadly Defined Barriers to Inclusive Security

1

Lack of knowledge and understanding

2

Cultural and generational barriers to considering gender a policy-relevant variable

3

Persistent structural barriers to women's presence and leadership

PART ONE

GENDER THEORY, INCLUSION AND INCLUSIVITY

GENDER THEORY AS A FOREIGN LANGUAGE

This study found that policymakers lacked exposure to research on gender-differentiated policy impacts, and had little or no awareness and understanding of how gender shapes policy outcomes. Instead, attitudes about how gender impacts might play out and where they might move over time, broke down along stereotypically gendered lines.

Male policymakers and influencers typically considered a win to be a future in which society renders gender irrelevant to policymaking. Women, on the other hand, said they crave a future in which policymakers expect gender-related differences to play a role.

We asked policymakers and influencers about the theory which inspired UN Resolution 1325, which urges inclusive representation in security efforts and stresses the importance of including women in the prevention and resolution of conflicts – and about the groundbreaking UN resolution itself.

Only one of the twelve participants correctly defined the phrase “gender mainstreaming” as “looking at the impact a policy would have on men versus women.” However, they admitted it was not a term they’ve ever used and said their definition was a guess.

The rest said they had never heard the phrase. When prompted, a few hypothesized it might mean making gendered concerns more mainstream, or elevating the gender discussion to be more front and center in society.

As one respondent put it, highlighting the field’s lack of awareness, “gender mainstreaming means nothing to me, but by mainstreaming gender as an issue you’ve taken gender off the table as a barrier and that sounds great!”

Key Examples of Gender’s Role in Security Outcomes

- **The larger the gap in societal status** between men and women (this gap can be quantified by measuring barriers in access to the labor force and economic opportunities, education and health care), the more likely a society is to be involved in intra-and inter-state conflict.
- **Higher rates of violence against women** are also correlated with societal and inter-state violence.
- **Peace deals that involved women** have been shown to be more durable than peace deals negotiated without women.
- **Young men who lack the economic prospects required for marriage are more at risk for recruitment by extremist groups** – the sole surviving Mumbai attacker told his interrogators he had joined the terror organization to earn bride prices for himself and his brother.
- **Terrorist organizations take advantage of gender inequality in societies to recruit women as well;** the uptick of female suicide bombers is most apparent in societies that treat women like second-class citizens.

Sources: Hudson, V.M. and Leidl P. (2015). *The Hillary Doctrine*. New York: Columbia University Press; Hudson, V. M. (2012). *Sex and World Peace*. New York: Columbia University Press; Raghavan, S. V. and Balasubramanian, V. (2014). Evolving Role of Women in Terror Groups: Progression or Regression?. *Journal of International Women’s Studies*, 15(2), 197-211.

WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY: ‘A CONFUSING TRIAD’

Similarly, a small minority of our policymakers and influencers had any awareness or understanding of the phrase “women, peace and security,” or WPS. Those who had never heard the phrase detected a negative connotation, interpreting it as an essentialist view of distinctly female roles or qualities related to peacemaking and peacekeeping. The comments we heard made it clear that the majority of policymakers and influencers do not view gender as a relevant factor in security policy, even subconsciously, and two, they do not connect why such a correlation would be made in the first place.

Two people we spoke with, both women, associated the phrase with UN Resolution 1325. Of those two, one was in the room when the resolution was signed, “which should have been an exciting moment, but I knew the only reason I was there was to be the token woman within [my organization],” she said. The other, while stressing that 1325 provides a solid framework, said she feels it still lacks critical mass in U.S. policymaking. “Only a small percentage of women in foreign policy are even aware WPS exists,” she said. “Is it enough to get it on paper, or should we not be aiming higher than that?”

Both women were weary of the process which led to the resolution’s creation. One said the authors of the resolution “didn’t have an understanding of the people they should be talking to in the national security space who actually have the ability to get something done about this.”

The authors of UN Resolution 1325 “didn’t have an understanding of the people they should be talking to in the national security space who actually have the ability to get something done about this.”

One person noted that the words “women, peace and security” are “all linked to stability,” while suggestions from others ranged from “it sounds like a slogan for the Democrats” to “more of a development and health policy.”

A good majority of those included in the study had negative reactions upon hearing the phrase. “Immediately I think someone’s trying to make a gender specific point that I don’t view as particularly complimentary to women,” one respondent said.

Several turned the question back on the interviewer, questioning whether gender plays any role in effective security policy that leads to peaceful security. “Sounds like apples to oranges to me,” said one respondent. “Peace and security are objectives,” so adding women into the equation makes for “a confusing triad in terms of understanding.”

Several respondents – of both genders – heard the phrase “women, peace and security” and associated it with the idea that women are natural peacemakers – and not in a good way.

“I’m not a fan of those,” a female respondent said. “Women and men both play critical roles in reconciliation and peacekeeping. It’s a disservice to say women are better negotiators and peacemakers. Saying women are the more virtuous sex has a strong whiff of bullshit to it, and makes it hard to fly the gender flag when it’s truly vital.”



U.S. Army Brig. Gen. Giselle Wilz, third from left, the commander of the NATO Headquarters Sarajevo, speaks with female officers of the Turkish Land Forces during a mentoring session at Camp Butmir, Bosnia and Herzegovina, April 7, 2016. Wilz discussed cultural differences, women in the military and gave advice on how to be an effective leader.

U.S. Air Force photo by Staff Sgt. Clayton Lenhardt

SECURITY POLICYMAKERS ARE NOT ARMED WITH GENDER-DIFFERENTIATED IMPACT DATA

Research shows that planning ahead for how policies will affect women, and including local women in peacemaking, can make the difference between success and failure. “If you’re not thinking about gender in either the policy formulation or implementation process, the programs will inevitably favor men,” one person said. “If you’re not considering women and how a policy affects them, you’re missing half the idea.”

So, how are policymakers and influencers measuring gender-differentiated impacts of policies and programs? It’s simple: they aren’t. Policymakers often lacked awareness that gender-differentiated impact measurements exist, and admitted cluelessness as to where to begin looking for such data and metrics.

“Even if differentiated measures exist, it’s not a question frequently asked,” a respondent said. “It’s more assumed it’s someone else’s job to think about things like that.”

Some listed the UN, USAID, World Bank, RAND and State Department as places they might look, but for basic gender statistics, not necessarily measurements of a policy’s impact on men versus women.

“It’s difficult to break things down by gender impact,” one person said. “Human rights and aid organizations are better at this, our [national security] tools aren’t that granular. And oftentimes, you’re measuring success anecdotally when it comes to things like gender and education data.”

The idea of looking at gender-differentiated impact measurements raised, for some, a fear stemming from the unanticipated consequences of pitting segments of a community, such as gender, against one another. “It becomes a heated debate when you start talking about parsing which communities are worse off, or most negatively impacted by policy,” a respondent with background in both security and human rights said. “Subsets of a population can end up having outsized influence on policy, and when we don’t have the resources to help everyone, which is basically always, it’s a shitty job to decide who gets the food, the shelter, the protection.”

A majority of respondents made the case for doing more to identify, measure and collect key gender-differentiated impact metrics. They saw this not as the normal way of conducting national security policy, but rather perceived it as a “human rights”-style approach. While it was unclear if that sentiment is rooted in a pass-the-buck mentality or a genuine belief the national security apparatus is simply not as well positioned on human impact metrics as the development sector, one thing was clear: Policymakers cannot factor in gender-differentiated impact data if they don’t know it exists or where to find it.

When pondering what gender-differentiated impacts might include, many respondents pointed to a “clear correlation between stability and inclusion.” Notably, no one could cite specific metrics supporting this correlation.

WHEN GENDER IS — AND ISN'T — A CONSIDERATION

Participants described broad agreement on the hierarchy of factors taken into consideration when formulating policy ranging from economics to politics. Notably absent in the list influencing policy decisions was gender.

“National security policymakers will say gender should be a consideration, but in reality, gender ends up at the bottom of the pile, if it comes up at all,” one respondent said. As a result, another added that, “progress here would be proactively saying ‘gender isn’t relevant here’ instead of always being forced to make the case it is relevant.”

Decisionmakers had no trouble naming policy issues where gender was never considered – but disagreed on whether this was a good thing, or whether it came about as a result of serious analysis, or just habit. Policy issues including arms treaties, missile defense, weapons defense, economics and trade were cited as topics policymakers would never look at through a gender lens. Why? “The consequence of policy is often the same for men and women,” one respondent said. “Hearing myself say that gives me pause. I have no idea what that conclusion is actually based on — am I just regurgitating the company line?”

One respondent had a different take: “Programs will always have different impacts on men and women. I can make a case for gender’s relevance to everything I work on, but it’s another question if I’m actually doing anything about it. The make or break is having a woman at the decision-making table who asks, ‘what about women?’ A table of only men will never ask that question.”

Demonstrating this very point, a male respondent told us, “I really don’t think about gender when considering policy and never with implementation of policy. The only time I think of gender grouped together with diversity is when we’re going into a meeting, it’s important to demonstrate that balance. Going in with all guys isn’t cool anymore... When Clinton wins and picks Michèle Flournoy [as National Security Advisor], I hope she doesn’t pick an all-women cast.”

“I really don’t think about gender when considering policy and never with implementation of policy,” one respondent told us. “The only time I think of gender grouped together with diversity is when we’re going into a meeting, it’s important to demonstrate that balance. Going in with all guys isn’t cool anymore...”

The defense arm of the government is unilaterally viewed by interagency policymakers and influencers as the most likely to have a male-dominated decision-making table and the least likely policymaking organization to consider gender as a relevant factor.

“It’s a stretch to say DoD is ever first to raise gender as a policy factor,” a respondent said. “The ad-hoc process looks more like this: when an issue arises with a very obvious gender component, senior leaders may task someone to focus on gender through the lens of that particular policy.”

Policy issues respondents categorized as having a “very obvious gender component” include sex trafficking, sex violence, sex slaves in ISIS, women in combat and refugee camps.

Not all respondents felt it was necessarily a net negative for policymakers to think of it in terms of policy issues meriting gender considerations versus those that do not.

“A lot of government work is copy and paste, so getting gender as a policy consideration into the bloodstream is the best possible thing you can do,” one respondent said. “For that reason, every time gender becomes an important consideration in policy formulation and execution, I consider it a win.”



U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton holds a bilateral meeting with Israeli Defense Minister Ehud Barak at the U.S. Department of State in Washington, D.C., on June 23, 2010. State Department photo.

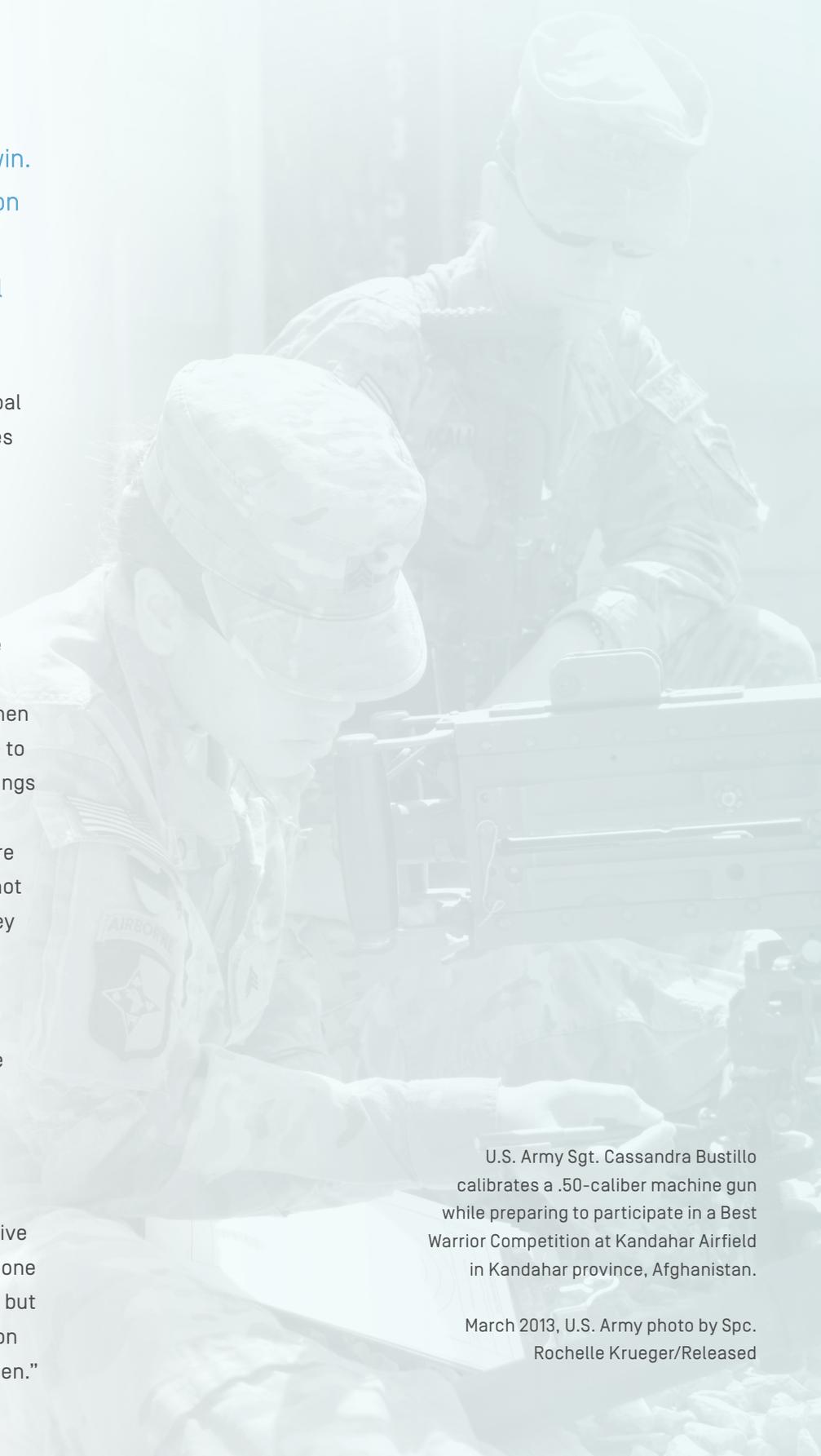
THE DANGER IN SILO-ING GENDER

Not everyone agreed with the notion that getting the topic of gender impacts to the table is a win. Policymakers described frustration with efforts to label an individual or team as a one-stop shop for all gender-related policy issues.

The Department of State's Office of Global Women's Issues was cited multiple times as the perfect example of the danger in silo-ing gender. "They are not very well respected in the State Department or interagency," one respondent said. "It's not specific to them, it's more so that it's such a niche office focused on more contained issues so they start to sound like broken records. Everyone knows when they raise their hand what they're going to say. They're not usually invited to meetings so they have to fight for access on their own. And when they are invited, it's more because of a check-the-box PR move, not because anyone wants to hear what they have to say."

However, respondents failed to identify other models that provided for effective representation of gender-differentiated perspectives.

"There's a difference between being a champion for gender and being supportive of gender issues," one person said. "No one disagrees gender is an important issue, but what are they actually doing to champion it? And this goes for both men and women."



U.S. Army Sgt. Cassandra Bustillo calibrates a .50-caliber machine gun while preparing to participate in a Best Warrior Competition at Kandahar Airfield in Kandahar province, Afghanistan.

March 2013, U.S. Army photo by Spc. Rochelle Krueger/Released



U.S. Navy Hospital Corpsman 2nd Class Jessica Gomez, from Carey, Idaho, cares for an injured child in a triage at the Tribhuvan International Airport in Kathmandu, Nepal, May 12, 2015.

U.S. Marine Corps photo by Lance Cpl. Mandaline Hatch/Released

A few respondents made explicit a tension many seemed to feel around who should be at the table in the decision-making process. “Getting people in the room with the power to make change is important, but as soon as you bring in the ‘gender person’ they aren’t seen as a change maker,” one person said.

The national security apparatus seems not to have taken on board the idea, increasingly popular in the private sector, that diversity — of gender, age, race, background, life experiences and more — is greater than checking a box. “There’s a weird belief in DC that this is the most meritocratic city, where gender and race aren’t an issue, but instead [it’s about] who’s the most qualified for the job,” one longtime policymaker explained. “There’s a feeling that national security trumps all — you don’t want to take a chance with life or death issues. So instead, too often you have huge decisions being made by a few who haven’t experienced the issue first hand or have no ability to relate or even understand what’s happening on the ground — that’s what has to change.”

PART TWO

GENDER REPRESENTATION: A WORK IN PROGRESS

INCLUSIVE REPRESENTATION: ‘UNIQUELY AMERICAN’?

While policymakers struggled to connect gender perspectives with policy outcomes, they did see women at the table in Washington as important to formulating more effective policy. Frequently during our interviews, conversations turned away from the unfamiliar ground of gender-differentiated outcomes back to the challenges of formal and practical equality inside the Washington policy community.

That is not to say that respondents were generally satisfied with women’s representation in policymaking circles. They saw barriers as plentiful and often not tangible, particularly the mindset that gender is either not much of a problem, or one best solved not by mainstreaming it but making it go away. Respondents who identified this mindset tended to perceive it as generational in nature – in other words, something that was more prevalent among older rather than younger leaders.

“It’s not important to have proportional representation, but it’s imperative that all groups within the larger population be represented.”

At the same time, respondents identified a range of structural reasons for the slowness of women to gain equal status within the national security apparatus.

The obvious scapegoat cited as a barrier to inclusivity was “older generations” or more specifically, “a pervasive mindset of old, white men.” One senior policymaker – who saw his mindset as a plus, not a barrier – exemplified this perspective to us:

“In my 40-plus years in Washington, I’ve never felt there was a gender gap or inequality of people operating on policy matters. The question at the policy table is are they informed, do they bring good recommendations and it doesn’t matter what they look like.”

Some saw the lack of inclusivity as a system problem, not just a people problem. It’s easy to say things will change as older generations graduate out of the system and a more inclusive, younger generation takes over, respondents said. However, that logic does not take into account, for example, the way DoD and military culture shape leaders.

“The people with the most options leave the [military] system because they can, so you’re left with those most responsive and loyal to the system,” one respondent said. “Today’s leaders – who don’t think anything’s broken in the way it works today – are shaping tomorrow’s leaders.”

One respondent put it more bluntly: “Think about it: whatever the [military] recruitment policy is today, through a process of subtraction, whoever’s left after 25 years will be our military leaders and four-star generals.”

The vast majority of respondents stressed a desire to define inclusivity in national security and foreign policy more broadly than gender alone, by including age, religion, race, ethnicity and experience. “It’s not important to have proportional representation, but it’s imperative that all groups within the larger population be represented,” one respondent said.

There was interagency acknowledgement that DoD is at least “looking hard at diversity” issues, with several respondents citing its Force of the Future Initiative, which aims to modernize recruitment, development and retention of service members and civilian employees, as a step in the right direction. Not everyone shared that sentiment, however.

“DoD’s Force of the Future Initiative had serious kickback from the service chiefs — they used the tried-and true excuse that it would reduce force readiness,” one respondent said. “DoD is known for not loving change, and a negative impact on readiness is its favorite scapegoat.”

This person went on to explain that opening combat to women had received similar pushback, and said it’s the go-to excuse for any initiative or program aimed at furthering the inclusive security agenda. “Saying, whether or not they have any actual evidence, that a policy or program is going to have a detrimental impact on force readiness is the trump card at DoD,” one person said.

The challenge DoD faces in achieving inclusivity is the struggle between two commonplace arguments: recognition that “we can’t only be concerned [about] our recruiting policies impacting force readiness,” versus the view that “we also can’t run social experiments to create our military.”

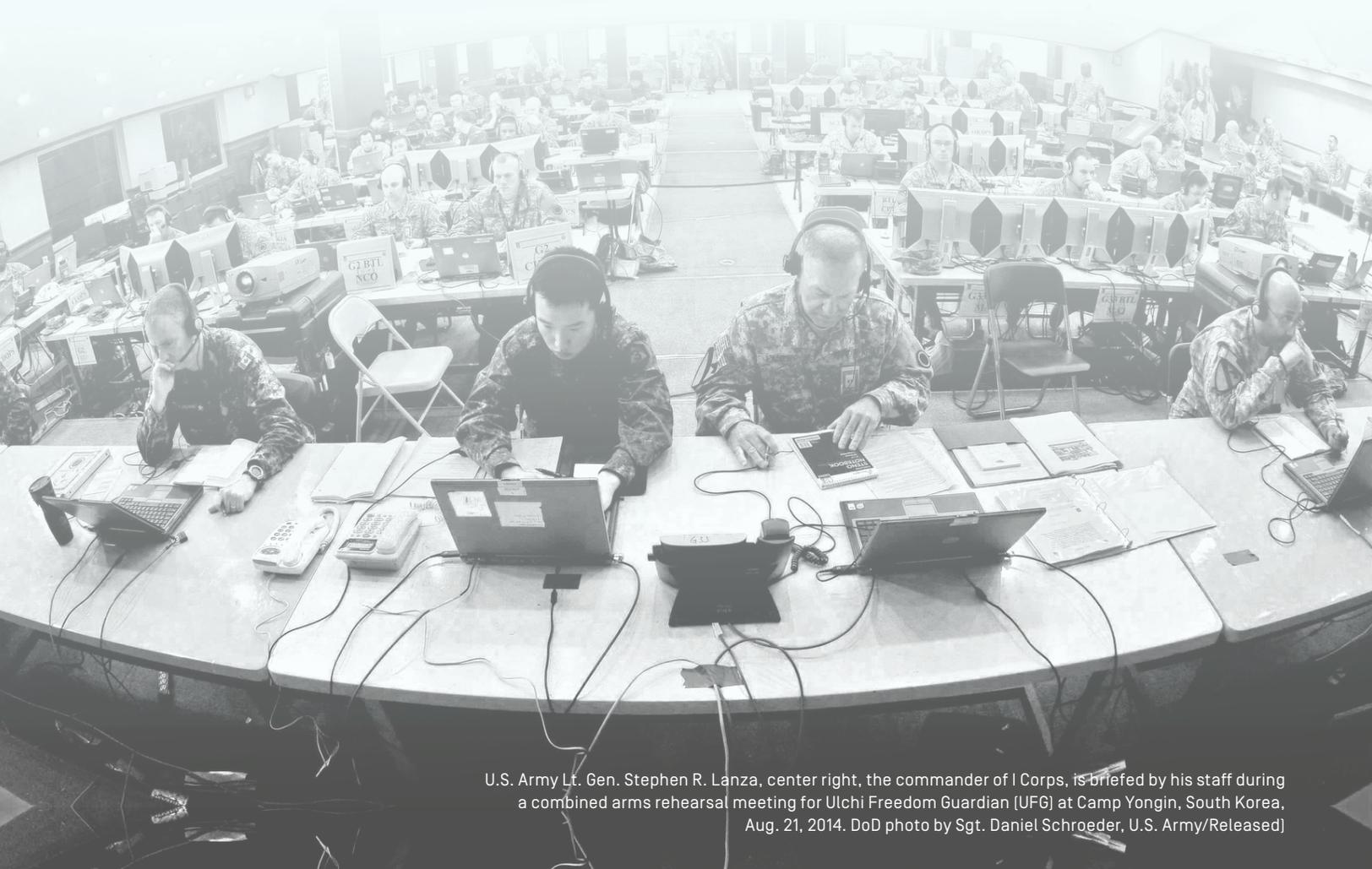
Several policymakers we spoke with noted that inclusivity is always weighed against other factors such as the need to “pull together the best security forces possible in the shortest period of time,” as well as other priorities in the policymaking process.

“It comes down to prioritization,” one person said. “You have to prioritize all requirements of a policy and some important and worthy things will have to get de-prioritized. The resources expended and effort spent on building an inclusive security force is simply outweighed by other priorities.”

While both men and women recognized gender’s low rank in the list of priorities, female respondents were less likely to accept that positioning, and spoke of a desire to “fix the problem.”

“Inclusivity in national security is a term that strikes me as almost uniquely American, this desire to have diversity. Is it important? Yes. Ideal? Sure. Achievable? No.”

“Diversity at DoD is unintentionally getting worse post-9/11,” one respondent said. “Vets get preference in hiring, and vets are mostly white men. But no one is going to suggest repealing our Hire Our Vets Act. Which means that a white, male vet is going to get the job over a more qualified female without military experience.”



U.S. Army Lt. Gen. Stephen R. Lanza, center right, the commander of I Corps, is briefed by his staff during a combined arms rehearsal meeting for Ulchi Freedom Guardian (UFG) at Camp Yongin, South Korea, Aug. 21, 2014. DoD photo by Sgt. Daniel Schroeder, U.S. Army/Released

CAN'T MIND THE GENDER GAP IF YOU DON'T SEE IT

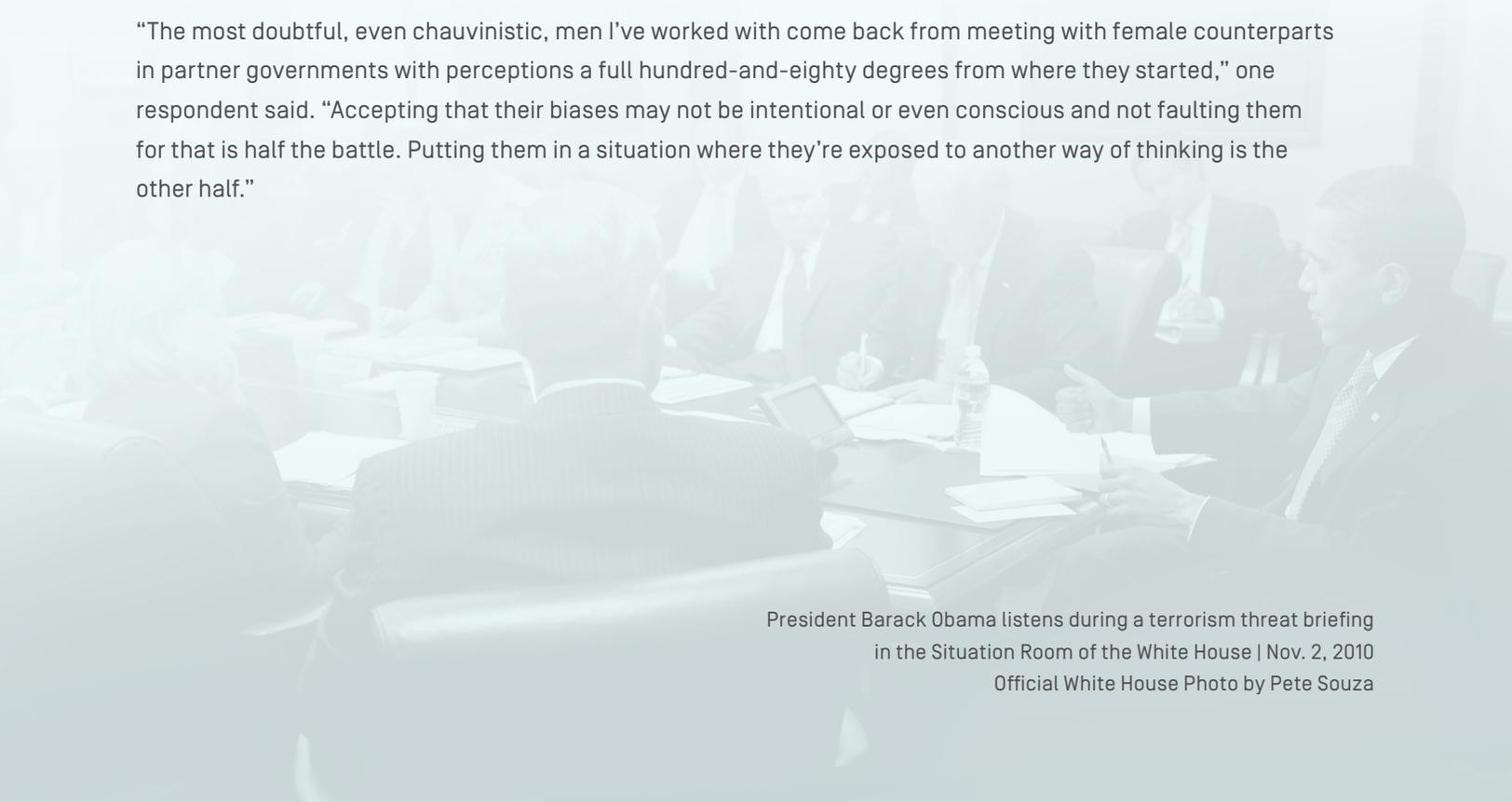
A number of men we spoke with, on the contrary, insisted on their predisposition to “see the person, not the gender” of their national security peers from the policy decision-making table to combat situations. They correlated this with personal experiences such as “growing up with a working mother as an example” or “always being surrounded by strong, competent women professionally.”

Interestingly, those who specifically cited positive, first-hand experiences with working women early in their lives or careers were more likely to proudly claim to be “gender blind,” as several men put it. Those who recognized the existence of a gender gap in policymaking considerations and showed higher awareness of gender inequalities, writ large, were less likely to reference “strong women” in their lives.

Women, as well as men with human rights backgrounds, were not only more aware of the gap or absence of gender’s role in policymaking, but also identified concrete workarounds for getting it to the table. “I eventually realized if I don’t point out [my] colleagues’ biases against women in leadership roles, no one else will,” a female respondent said. For example, “asking ‘are you criticizing Hillary because of her job performance or because she’s female?’”

The men with humanitarian or development experience under their belts found that requiring men to meet with female counterparts overseas proved invaluable. It wasn’t clear if there is an equivalent benefit to meeting with female counterparts at home, but only overseas counterparts were explicitly called out.

“The most doubtful, even chauvinistic, men I’ve worked with come back from meeting with female counterparts in partner governments with perceptions a full hundred-and-eighty degrees from where they started,” one respondent said. “Accepting that their biases may not be intentional or even conscious and not faulting them for that is half the battle. Putting them in a situation where they’re exposed to another way of thinking is the other half.”

A photograph showing President Barack Obama seated at a long table in a meeting room, surrounded by other officials. He is looking towards the right side of the frame, listening intently. The room is dimly lit, with papers and water bottles on the table.

President Barack Obama listens during a terrorism threat briefing
in the Situation Room of the White House | Nov. 2, 2010
Official White House Photo by Pete Souza

SEEING IS BELIEVING, RIGHT?

Many women reported structural and systemic barriers – namely the lack of family and maternity policies – getting in the way of increased female participation and leadership, and significant feelings of fatalism about the prospect for change.

Poor, or nonexistent, policies on maternity and paternity, paid parental leave and social services for working parents, “unilaterally un-levels the playing field for women,” one woman said.

There’s simply no architecture in place, they felt, to support expecting or existing working parents. At DoD, “civilian women join at a higher rate than men but leave at a higher rate because of the shitty family policies,” one respondent said. Notably, no one interviewed pointed to DoD’s recent changes to its family policies.*

Once women got on this topic they tended, unprompted, to list off the women leaders they’d worked with over the years, seemingly in an effort to make the case that it was possible to climb the national security and foreign policy ladder as a woman. Each time, our respondent realized as she talked that the women above her were often unmarried, almost uniformly without children, or had somehow sacrificed their personal lives in the process of gaining a successful career.

“You can’t talk about maternity leave in the context of the National Security Council. You either don’t take the job or you don’t get pregnant.”

“We market security to men by making it out to be this hard force,” one woman said. “It’s a self-fulfilling prophecy in that it tends to dissuade women from considering a role in the space and ultimately does us a massive disservice.”

That massive disservice has implications both tangible – such as increasing the number of women at the table when policy decisions are made – and intangible – such as a serving as the impetus for a shift in a cultural mindset as well as in considering gender-differentiated policy impacts.

“There are a lot of women in foreign policy who have been very skilled and diplomatic — look at [Samantha] Power, [Madeleine] Albright, [Condoleezza] Condi Rice, [Hillary] Clinton, [Susan] Rice. But we haven’t had any female chiefs of the joint chiefs of staff, or a female SecDef. Having a practical example of more women leaders would go a long way to improving societal perceptions. Seeing is believing, right?”

*Secretary of Defense Ashton Carter has recently tried to rectify this reality, and announced a series of policy changes intended to support military families in January 2016. These policies included longer paid maternity and paternity leaves and an expansion of options for child care and family planning.

PERCEPTIONS OF FEMALE ACTORS

Finally, our interviews made it clear that some perceptions and expectations of women in national security have changed more dramatically than others in recent decades. While all interviewees said they view women “as useful as men in conflict situations,” two important nuances arose.

First, this line of questioning surfaced the starkest differences between Republicans and Democrats, in an otherwise consistent-across-party-lines study. Republicans interviewed expressed less of a desire to see women in combat roles than Democrats did, and attributed that to a self-described “protectiveness, not malice” over not wanting to see women in harm’s way. Democrats, as well as Republicans with combat experience, were more likely to shrug off the concept of women in combat as anything but a natural and long-overdue shift in policy.

The role women play in both childbearing and rearing was an issue male respondents, particularly Republicans, said they grappled with. “The hard thing for women is having a child, having to take time off to raise that child,” one said. “This is a quandary to me because you have a kid because you want to bring on the next generation. While I feel a woman, obviously, has a professional role to play, but on the other hand having a mother there to raise that child in the formative years is so important. The way our society is set up, women only have so much time to take off before getting back to work, so then kids are left in the hands of [workers at] daycares — the greatest gift you can give a kid is more of you.”

“I have a proclivity to not wanting to see a woman carrying a weapon in a conflict zone. I see women as an asset within intelligence and structure of engaging a combat issue, but I don’t want to see them captured or killed... But I do think women are as qualified as men.”

– REPUBLICAN

“I’m far more interested in a person in military uniform’s competence than in their gender identity. None of the sky-is-falling predictions have happened since opening combat to women and gays which only helps the inclusivity argument.”

– DEMOCRAT

Second, distinct differences arose when policymakers and influencers – regardless of gender or political affiliation – were pressed to describe their definition of “conflict roles.”

“There’s been a shift in mindset the past few years from war equaling boots on the ground to war also meaning rebuilding, winning hearts and mind and developing post-conflict strategies,” one respondent explained. The former tends to generate images of men, while the latter is where people – consciously or subconsciously – feel

more comfortable placing a woman's role in conflict. The notion that women are better suited to some roles than others, based on perceived and stereotypical skill sets, is neither novel nor exclusive to the national security and foreign policy arena. But its persistence here, as it comes under challenge in other areas of American life, is noteworthy.

All interviewees listed off conflict situation roles and responsibilities in which a female would be better suited than her male counterparts. Leading roles in prosecuting or ending conflict – combat or negotiation – were notably lacking.

When asked to consider women's role in conflict situations, respondents toggled between considering cultural realities of societies, and offering stereotypical views of gender difference:

“Women are better at affecting attitudes in villages and devising effective messaging.”

“Who better to liaise with women than women to galvanize support?”

“Women are more likely to think of different priorities for implementation because they have better balance.”

“Women are more helpful in engaging women in local communities because they can more easily relate to one another – they can relate to shared experiences, like child birth – and they're less combative.”

PART THREE

LOOKING AHEAD



RECOMMENDATIONS + OPPORTUNITIES

The disconnect between gender and security policy exists on multiple fronts: it's a split that transcends ideological, generational and gender divides, and one that exists across both cultural norms and formal policy. Strengthening the connection between gender and national security and foreign policy – on paper and in practice – requires action from groups that impact American policymaking and cultural norms. Below are suggested next steps for three influential communities: American policymakers, advocacy organizations and journalists.

Policy makers:

Build assessment metrics that include gender differentiation.

Whether or not policymakers consider gender differentiated impacts when formulating policy often depends on how they quantitatively define policy success. For instance, if policymakers see increased women's labor force participation as key to stability in a given country, they'll be more likely to think at the outset about how to achieve that goal – and measure it afterward. When assessment metrics include gender-focused indicators that we know are connected to overall objectives, policymakers can both improve policy design and increase effectiveness simultaneously. As with other aspects of working in unstable societies, these metrics will be best if determined in consultation with the affected communities themselves – providing another opportunity to empower women.

Encourage officials, especially men, to meet with female leaders overseas. One respondent's comments suggested that government agencies tasked with formulating national security and foreign policy could create more formal opportunities to introduce colleagues to different ways of thinking and perspectives. Leaders in government and the military should go out of their way to ensure their teams see and hear firsthand how gender dynamics play out in affected societies, and how government and community leaders' actions bring dry UN text to life — and improve policy outcomes.

Ensure department leadership and policy planners are conversant in the research and practice of inclusivity theory and gender mainstreaming. Changing the practices of bureaucracy can be a long-term endeavor. Ensuring that strategists in these prestigious and influential roles see data about the effects of considering gender, and communicate that data within agencies and to the public, will speed up the process.

THREE INFLUENTIAL COMMUNITIES

1

POLICYMAKERS

2

ADVOCACY ORGANIZATIONS

3

JOURNALISTS

Advocacy:

Illuminate both perceived and real data gaps. Survey policymakers and influencers to identify what kind of gender-differentiated impact data would be most valuable to their work, and what pathways will provide it most effectively. If the data already exists through resources like Data2X and the Womanstats Project, connect them to it. Determine where it should live and whose responsibility it should be to gather and update it. Don't neglect to ensure that the training of future policymakers – in the U.S. and overseas – includes state-of-the-art research.

Define the jargon. Produce a vocabulary toolkit for journalists and policymakers on when and how key phrases such as “inclusive security agenda” and “gender mainstreaming” could be used. It could also include general tips for reporting on gender and security, common pitfalls for reporters to avoid and suggested sources (a representative sample of perspectives, genders, races, ages, etc.).

Media:

Ask unexpected questions. During interviews on national security and foreign policy, ask policymakers whether they are considering gender-differentiated impacts of key legislation and strategy. Questions are powerful idea-planters, and can be a simple tool to encourage more thinking on this subject.

Seek out new angles. The connections already identified between gender and security offer fresh stories and views of international affairs that are largely untold. The role of women and women's organizations in peace talks and post-conflict reconstruction, the link between bride prices to rising extremism are just two examples that are prime for reporting, as well as consideration of how these blind spots affect policy.



Secretary of Defense Ash Carter answers questions during a Worldwide Troop Talk at the Pentagon in Washington, D.C., Sept. 21, 2016. DoD photo by U.S. Air Force Tech. Sgt. Brigitte N. Brantley

CONCLUSION

As the threats to our security become more complicated, policymakers will face increasing pressure to conjure new approaches to prevent and mitigate their impact. Gender is a lens that can sharpen and clarify the way forward – enabling us to take smarter steps towards more effective policy outcomes here and abroad.

This report identifies how comprehensively the U.S. national security establishment is neglecting that lens – despite the existence of strong and growing data in support of its usefulness and the rise of a generation of policymakers, both male and female, who have seen its effects on the ground, from development policy to peace talks to combat.

To them, the relationship between gender equality and national security is clear. That awareness, and the progress that has been made in diversifying the U.S. policymaking process, offer an opportunity in the years ahead – to shift from gender-blind to gender-sight, and gain smarter and stronger policy frameworks in some of our most challenging arenas.

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