

**INTRODUCTION**

# THE ROLE OF WOMEN AND GENDER IN CONFLICTS

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The Ministry of Defence's Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos (the Spanish Institute of Strategic Studies) has been publishing reports into various aspects of defence since 1978. These reports have addressed military strategy, aspects of national and international security, international conflicts, documents relating to international resolutions and the outlook for peace in various parts of the world.

In this paper, the IEEE will be examining a different field. We shall analyse and highlight the conditions in which women suffer the consequences of war. We shall also be examining the role of women in the Armed Forces, their military careers, their professional opportunities at present, and their roles in NATO and other European Union countries, particularly Spain. These matters are a relatively new field as far as these studies are concerned, but are of the utmost importance at the present time.

This paper is one of those documents, books and films that allow us to reflect on the condition and status of women in areas where there are conflicts, wars, refugee camps, displaced persons fleeing from the horrors around them, and the customs and practices that relegate women to a position of absolute inferiority compared to men, even going so far as to deny them the right to an education.

These situations are quite alien to countries with democratic traditions, where the principle of equality between men and women is recognised in law, and is policed and enforced when breached, making this an everyday reality. In other countries that have achieved democracy more recently, the principle of equality in law and living conditions for women are changing and have become objectives that are being openly pursued.

The studies in these pages have been written by people whose backgrounds demonstrate their knowledge of and research into these matters. They know the areas they are talking about, and their expertise is amply proven. Today, we can see the conditions in which women live in areas of conflict on television and in newspapers and magazines. However, these are, in general, fleeting images and often only partial, given the difficulties in the areas where they are taking place; they cannot therefore capture the full reality of what is happening or, most importantly, the consequences thereof.

The studies in this paper therefore focus on getting to the heart of these problems, understanding the statistics and describing the circumstances and atmosphere in which they take place. Reading these accounts carefully, particularly those relating to the poor conditions for women in some areas and how they are mistreated, may make us feel sad and pained and may even lead us to ask ourselves, living in our democracies, how it is possible that these

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things are happening; that they are known about and yet we are not capable of stopping them.

In this paper we will look at the different roles played by women based on their cultures and practices and the customs of the societies in which they live. This leads us to the importance of the presence of women in the Armed Forces, as it is easier for women to understand the needs of other women and to serve as mediators in conflicts.

United Nations Resolution 1325, approved by the Security Council in October 2000, represents a landmark in the problems addressed in this paper. It reaffirms the role that women play in preventing and resolving conflicts and in consolidating peace; it underlines the importance of women participating equally in maintaining peace and security; it encourages an increase in the presence of women at all levels of decision making relating to preventing and managing conflicts, increasing their role and contribution on the ground in all United Nations operations. It also highlights the responsibility of all states to bring an end to the impunity of those involved in sexual violence, rape and other abuses during armed conflicts, and to bring them to trial. It further asks us to provide the training required to protect women, including providing information on HIV/AIDS.

The first chapter, by the director of the University of Granada Women's Study Institute, Nuria Romo Avilés, and the University of Granada professor of Constitutional Law, M.<sup>a</sup> Concepción Pérez Villalobos, is entitled "Equality and Gender. Basic concepts for application in the area of security and defence". This analyses the development of the concept of gender, from its earliest legal definitions, and the development of women's rights. It examines the various currents that have resulted in inequality between men and women, coming right up to the 20th century, highlighting the resolutions, agreements and international conferences that underpin the principles of equality. They then examine the use and significance of the much-discussed term "gender", which today has become so widely used. Gender-based violence continues to exist, and is highlighted by the authors. Official figures show the high number of deaths resulting from such violence - even in Spain - something we hear a lot about it in the media and which continues to be a serious social and political problem.

The authors argue that gender-based violence reaches extraordinary levels during conflicts and wars, even though this has only recently been recognised. Equality of rights for men and women only began to be recognised following the creation of the United Nations, which has done much to promote the rights of women. This includes the Convention on the Elimination of all Forms of Violence against Women, approved by the General Assembly in 1979. The

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authors detail the rights contained in the International Covenant on Economic, Civil, Political, Cultural and Social Rights.

A number of international conferences organised by the United Nations have discussed violence against women, highlighting the lengths to which this has gone and showing that it still continues, detailing the degrading treatment women receive in many countries.

The second chapter, "Integrating the perspective of gender into analysis of armed conflicts and safety", was written by Beatriz Frieyro de Lara, professor of Contemporary History at the University of Granada, and Margarita Robles Carrillo, associate professor of International Public Law and International Relations at the University of Granada. This chapter examines the situation of women in armed conflicts. It once again highlights the aforementioned United Nations Resolution 1325.

This study is an exhaustive review of the role of women and the changes wrought by wars and army operations. Whilst the majority of victims in combat up to the First World War were combatants, today most casualties are civilian.

The authors examine conflicts in countries including Sierra Leone, Guatemala, Iraq, Afghanistan, Sudan, Angola and Liberia in depth, describing what happened to women in the cities, displaced persons camps and refugee areas. The authors also examine how today's combatants intermingle with women and children. Rape, sexual abuse, forced prostitution and female mutilation frequently go unreported because of fear of reprisals, or due to a fear of shame in the community. The study also examines the case of Japan during the Second World War, when thousands of young women were forced to be sex slaves for the Imperial Japanese Army in what were called "Comfort Stations".

The authors examine the situation in countries such as Burma and Pakistan, and discuss reports into and commissions examining violence in some South American countries, such as Guatemala and Paraguay. They also analyse the situation in both Bosnia and Rwanda, through the reports of Amnesty International and Human Rights Watch.

They further extend their study by examining gender in the international security model, using the latest theories that gender equality means fewer military actions by States to resolve international conflicts, although this is not universally accepted.

The Second World War showed us the behaviour of the Soviet army, for example, in Berlin. Neither of course can we forget the conditions in

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concentration camps for women and children, obliged to live and work in subhuman conditions, before being slaughtered in the gas chambers. The evidence of atrocities against Jewish people in the Second World War has been brought to us by the dramatic stories of survivors, and we have been able to see where these events took place, and cinema has exposed us to this cruellest of realities. Numerous studies and narratives have revealed even more about the genocide and horrors in Germany following the opening up of the archives of the former Soviet Union.

The third chapter of this Paper, "Women, NATO and the European Union" by Colonel Gil Ruiz, focuses on the role of women in the Armed Forces and in conflicts and wars, as well as analysing and drawing conclusions concerning the consequences of the presence and involvement of women.

The author finds that questions of gender are today clearly recognised in the military sphere, particularly in military operations. There have been a number of stages in the integration of women within NATO. The first phase began with debates as to the function of women in the Alliance armed forces whilst the second, following Resolution 1325, began with consideration of gender in peace keeping. The third was the major step forward resulting from application of the aforementioned Resolution and the fourth was the November 2010 Lisbon Summit, which confirmed NATO's commitment to improving the inclusion of gender issues in its policies and missions.

Prior to the United Nations Resolution, NATO had already analysed issues relating to the incorporation of women into military careers at a number of international conferences, assessing their contribution in areas of military conflict and in military interventions. However, as already stated, approval of the Resolution was definitive and it was immediately implemented throughout NATO's structures.

Colonel Gil Ruiz looks at changes to the number of women in the military under NATO command, plans to increase this participation and the progress made so far; however, this does not yet seem to be sufficient.

With regard to the commitments that the European Union has acquired in this area, the agreements state the need to increase female representation at all levels of command, to increase dialogue with local and international women's groups, to give special protection to women and children in conflict zones and to promote gender issues in the Common Security and Defence Policy. In summary, the EU has made efforts to incorporate the United Nations Resolution into the CSDP, but we cannot regard what has been achieved as being either satisfactory or sufficient.

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The fourth chapter in this Paper is "The female soldier in the armed forces" by Pilar Gallardo Rodríguez, a captain and psychologist in MADOC's Research and Lessons Learnt Subsection. This chapter examines the role of women in Spain's Armed Forces, particularly from the 1990s onwards when women began to play a more significant role. The author offers interesting comparisons with the role of women in other countries, including Germany, Austria, Switzerland, Italy, France and the UK. The author describes how legislation and regulations have changed over recent decades, opening up Spain's Armed Forces to women, and how restrictions have disappeared and their scope for action has increased as well as examining the reasons why these reforms were considered necessary.

Incorporating women into the various military specialities has been very positive, as has been demonstrated in studies, although participation rates remain low and some fields remain closed. This study finds that women have broken through many barriers to their careers in the armed forces, and that their participation will probably continue to increase.

The study encourages a continuing increase in the participation of women, with women attaining the highest level of responsibility in the near future, given their capabilities - their skills as mediators in conflicts and their ability to understand the situation of millions of women suffering in conflicts and wars.

The conclusion of this work is that the value of women should be exploited more in Spain's Armed Forces, until they are fully regarded as normal colleagues, rather than exceptions among senior military commanders.

The "Gender in military operations" chapter by General Gil Ruiz focuses on specific experiences with gender politics in Afghanistan. The author is an expert in this field, and argues that the position of women in Afghanistan is the worst in the world. In Afghanistan, expressions such as "women's rights" are totally alien and are imported from abroad; even following approval of the Constitution in 2004, the current Government and Parliament has resisted equality for women and female development, and has avoided questions relating to improving quality of life for women. Despite the 2004 Constitution prohibiting all forms of discrimination, a number of its other provisions contradict this prohibition. Nevertheless, the Afghan Government has now developed a number of plans to achieve or improve gender equality, backed by the international community.

The international forces deployed in Afghanistan are receiving special training and making real efforts to contact women without provoking rejection by their communities or families. The situation in Afghanistan is very complicated as the new Constitution sits alongside Islamic law, and traditions play a very

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important role. Human Rights Commissions and the United Nations' special programmes for gender issues in the country are faced with rural communities that scarcely have access to information, and where ancestral customs provide resistance to any efforts to change the position of women and girls, who are treated as objects to be exchanged, subjected to the marriages arranged by their families and exposed to all kinds of violence.

The work of the international community and ISAF's (International Security Assistance Force) Female Engagement Teams (FETs), specially trained to help change the situation, to understand the most pressing needs of women in the country and to help them obtain justice, requires specialist knowledge. This chapter explains the important role that they are playing in a situation that is difficult to change and which has already cost many lives, but which the international community cannot simply abandon to its fate.

The chapter "The education of women in Afghanistan" was written by Humaira Haqmal a professor and researcher at Kabul University's Law and Political Sciences Faculty. The author focuses on understanding the factors that impede women from accessing education, presenting the results obtained by various national and international bodies so that they might continue with their efforts to extend education to all women, enabling them to be involved in the progress of their country. Whilst the study focuses on Kabul province, it constantly refers to other parts of the country, examining developments in female education throughout the 20th century. During this period, there were times when this was regarded as important and efforts were made to get women into education by opening schools and education centres and training female teachers for them. However, at other times this process was reversed, with schools being closed and women returning to the home, receiving no education and dedicating their lives to their homes and children, always under the command of men.

In the author's opinion, education is the key question for the position of women in the country today. The first problem is the lack of safety for women, as just going to school may in itself be a risk. The traditions and culture that relegates women to an inferior place may also be more influential than any plans or programmes, more so even than the 2004 Constitution and its prohibition on discrimination.

Professor Humaira Haqmal is right to insist that the international community should understand the situation of women in Afghanistan today, and should not abandon them to their fate. Her work, and that of her assistants, reveals the situation today, and the great difficulties there will be in overcoming obstacles that women in the western world are not aware of. We are very lucky that there are people out there reminding us about the situation of women in Afghanistan,

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living among them and who are putting enormous effort and commitment into helping them.

In "Women in armed conflicts and wars", the charity worker Pilar Estébanez describes the situation for women in war zones and conflicts, and how they are left to their own devices to maintain their homes and children. Women and children are often the major victims of wars in many countries, according to the author. She also explains how rape has been used as a weapon and form of aggression in confrontations in Sierra Leona, Rwanda, Liberia, Congo and the former-Yugoslavia. In her study she also looks at illnesses and their consequences for women, and the added problems of being the head of the family.

The author studies aspects such as maternity in adolescents and rape and its psychological consequences, in countries such as Afghanistan, Iraq, Haiti, Chad, Somalia, Liberia and Sierra Leona. She also examines data provided by the World Health Organisation in relation to sexual abuse, the spread of HIV/AIDS in Africa, and UNICEF estimates of the use of children as soldiers. The author quotes FAO data on hunger and food scarcity that is truly shocking, and also reminds us of the situation in Haiti following the earthquake, where very little reconstruction has been done.

Pilar Estébanez's chapter exposes us to a terrible reality, using data, figures and specific case studies to present the situation in countries that she knows well, having worked in most of them; her descriptions are of exceptional value. This chapter is worth reading and re-reading in order to thoroughly understand everything that she is describing. Our gratitude to these charity workers will always be scant reward for the hardships of their work and the help that they provide, often in extremely difficult conditions.

I have left thanking General Ballesteros for asking me to write the Introduction to this Paper to the end. I have only had a minor role compared to the authors of the chapters. But their work has opened my eyes to many aspects of social and cultural issues, human rights, international politics and the actions of Armed Forces in situations of war and conflict. I hope that it will do so for many others too. In particular, their work helps us to appreciate the value of the tasks performed by the international community and Spain's Armed Forces and Ministry of Defence in these areas.

This Paper has been made possible by the coordination work of Blanca Palacián de Inza, who revised all of the texts, and encouraged us to carry on, despite the difficulties of some of the authors with their day-to-day work, geographical distances and the problems of preparing chapters with extensive bibliographies and up-to-date information.

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The authors have done an excellent job that deserves my appreciation and gratitude. I must also recognise their efforts, research and, in some cases, work in places that are very distant - not just physically, but also in terms of culture, traditions and customs - from our stable countries, with our constitutions and laws establishing equality between men and women, and the lack of armed conflicts. I would like to thank all of them for their contributions to this Paper, published by the Spanish Ministry of Defence's Instituto Español de Estudios Estratégicos.

A while ago I met a young man in the United States who had been violently dragged out of school - together with other boys from his class - and taken to a military training camp when Afghanistan was occupied by the Soviets. Incredibly, he escaped and managed to make it to the Pakistan border, from where, thanks to the Red Cross, he managed to get to the United States and begin a new life. His story was incredible. It would have made a very moving film, and I understood why today he felt so proud to be an American citizen.

For the first time, a judge has passed a sentence for the crime of recruiting children to fight in armed conflicts; the judge was Adrian Fulford at the International Criminal Court in the Hague, passing sentence for offences in the Congo in 2000-2002. This gives us hope that such crimes will be prosecuted in future, and that the sentences will show that the international community is committed to fighting this problem.

The 2011 Nobel Peace Prize was awarded to three women: Liberian President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf, her compatriot and peace activist Leymah Gbowee and the Yemeni Tawakkul Karman. The chairman of the Nobel Committee declared that the awards were "for their non-violent struggle for the safety of women and for women's rights to full participation in peace-building work".

These examples give us cause for hope that the lives of women and children in areas of conflict can be improved.

## CHAPTER ONE

# EQUALITY AND GENDER. BASIC CONCEPTS FOR APPLICATION IN THE FIELDS OF SECURITY AND DEFENCE<sup>(1)</sup>

*M<sup>a</sup> Concepción Pérez Villalobos*  
*Nuria Romo Avilés*

### ABSTRACT

Gender is one of the main structuring factors in human society, differentiating men from women and turning these differences into unequal hierarchical relationships. The concept of gender has been widely used in social sciences over recent decades in questioning established wisdom and recovering people and spaces ignored by history, usually related to women. The purpose of this is to demonstrate that "biology is not destiny", and that the socio-symbolic identities assigned to women in their relationships with men, and the organisation of life in society, being cultural, are variable and can therefore be changed. If we look at the reality for women in Spain, we would have to say that, despite formal equality, real inequality continues to exist. The mechanisms maintaining this inequality are very subtle and manifest themselves through issues such as gender violence and gender inequality in health.

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<sup>(1)</sup> The first four epigraphs have been edited by Professor Romo Avilés. The following epigraphs were edited by Professor Pérez Villalobos.