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# **Celebrating and Interrogating Women and National Security**

Susan Harris Rimmer and Sue Thompson  
Editors

As we push for progress on issues of gender equity in 2018, can we claim that women in national security and gender perspectives on security are finally being taken as seriously as they deserve? What does the future research agenda for security studies look like when designed by women or aimed at gender-responsive defence policy? While much can still be done, a landmark conference held in Canberra in 2017 indicates that gender perspectives on security are beginning to be taken seriously by sections of some national governments, academia, the private sector and the media. And, this research journal's landmark special edition on Women and National Security showcases a promising research agenda that can celebrate inclusion and also interrogate the need for further structural change.

In early April 2017, there was a conference focusing on Women and National Security in Canberra. More than 335 participants attended the conference that represented the first national conversation of its kind about the importance of enhancing women's participation and leadership in national security-related policy and decision-making, implementation and practice.

Led by Marina Tsirbas for the National Security College at the Australian National University (ANU), the event attempted to bring together the national security communities in government, private sector, academia, the diplomatic corps and NGOs here and overseas. Fifty-one speakers included the Defence Minister, Opposition Foreign Affairs spokesperson, the then Chief of the Defence Force and the Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, as well as international delegates. They discussed women as actors and receivers of national security in the defence and security context, the gender based peace dividend, and government and private sector priorities in the context of the Defence White Paper, Cyber Security Strategy, academic security studies and foreign policy.

Participants pondered the problems of how to increase female participation in decision-making and leadership in national security fields across public policy, the armed forces, the private sector and academic spheres. They examined women's portrayals in the media and the barriers still present for

many women in the security sector. Discussion flowed on why gender perspectives on national security policy matter for future successes in security fields. Senior panels from the public and private sectors and across disciplines shared experiences, insights and best practice research and strategies on this ever increasingly important field of research, policymaking and practice. Some of these speakers and insights animate the increased International Women's Day 2018 focus for the security and foreign affairs blogs *The Strategist* for the Australian Strategic Policy Institute (for the second year)<sup>1</sup> and *The Interpreter* for the Lowy Institute.<sup>2</sup>

Of course, the presence of keynote speaker Senator the Hon. Marise Payne, Minister for Defence sharpened the conversation, as the first woman in this role. This is significant not only in Australia but in the region, especially in conjunction with Julie Bishop, Australia's first female Foreign Minister. Notably, Minister Payne was part of the inaugural Female Leaders Panel at the Shangri-La Dialogue in June 2018.

At one point, Ms Frances Adamson, the first female Secretary of the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade asked all the women in the QT Ballroom who were the first women to hold their job to raise their hand. At least a third of the room of roughly 300 delegates responded.

One of the most notable 'first women' to speak was Ms Habiba Sarabi, Deputy Chair to High Peace Council and Senior Advisor on Women to the Chief Executive of Islamic Republic of Afghanistan. She spoke on the importance of women as policy-makers and enablers in peace and security, and the implementation of the United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in the context of Afghanistan. This is Australia's longest war, a war that included serious public commitments on our part to protecting women's rights.

In February 2018, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani called for the Taliban to join peace talks, offering to treat the insurgent group as a legitimate political party 'without preconditions'.<sup>3</sup> Ms Sarabi discussed the targeting of women in the town of Kunduz, northern Afghanistan, by the Taliban since 2015 as a precursor of what might come to pass in any such deal. In a methodical campaign, the Taliban drove out of Kunduz any organisation or individual working to protect and support women, and hounded any woman with a public profile. The women of Afghanistan have much to consider in their quest for peace, and the discussion led to the idea that Australian policy

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<sup>1</sup> Australian Strategic Policy Institute, *The Strategist*, <[www.aspistrategist.org.au/dinkus/wps-2018/](http://www.aspistrategist.org.au/dinkus/wps-2018/)>.

<sup>2</sup> Lowy Institute, *The Interpreter*, <[www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/weekend-catch-international-women-day-tariffs-timor-leste-and-more](http://www.lowyinstitute.org/the-interpreter/weekend-catch-international-women-day-tariffs-timor-leste-and-more)>.

<sup>3</sup> Susan E. Rice, 'Tell the Truth About Our Longest War', *The New York Times*, 14 March 2018, <[www.nytimes.com/2018/03/14/opinion/afghanistan-longest-war.html](http://www.nytimes.com/2018/03/14/opinion/afghanistan-longest-war.html)> [Accessed 15 March 2018].

towards Afghanistan should be more informed by women's direct and diverse voices.

There was significant emphasis on the inclusion of women in the national security sphere and the ADF in particular, supported by Minister Payne and Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin AC, then Chief of the Defence Force. Some of the gaps identified were strategies to ensure equal participation of women in the fields of cyber security, defence industry and intelligence. There was an interesting assessment of media portrayals of senior women in national security, and their impact. The 'business' case for inclusion was thoroughly explored. The Minister stated: 'For the Australian Defence Force, addressing equality is about improving both our capability and our operational effectiveness.'

But the conference went further than inclusion, to consider more structural reasons why a focus on gender in the field of national security is crucial in terms of both intrinsic merit and capability. Professor Valerie Hudson, George H.W. Bush Chair, Texas A&M University, and author of *Sex and World Peace* was the key academic speaker, giving a wide array of data to demonstrate the proposition that "the very best predictor of a state's peacefulness is not its level of wealth, its level of democracy, or its ethno-religious identity ... it is how well its women are treated".

Hudson and others led discussion of deepening the community of female security scholars, and taking a more structural gender perspective on many issues, including what mainstreaming of gender and gender considerations in foreign and security policy might look like.

Women's representation and leadership in security-related academic fields were discussed by a panel of academics from the ANU and University of Queensland (UQ). Discussion covered a broad range of issues from structural inequalities in universities to the under-representation of women in security-related disciplines. The panel discussed efforts underway in universities to address the barriers women academic often face during their careers as well as solutions to the problems of structural biases in academic publishing and hiring practices.

The ANU has now created a specialised training course at the National Security College. The ANU course ran for the first time in September 2017 as a part of the NSC's professional development program. The inaugural course investigated gender issues from a broad range of security issues such as foreign policy, defence, terrorism, cyber security, national interests, and national security decision-making. There is a new Canberra-based network of women in security and defence. There is also a small but vibrant Australian community of civil society organisations focused on peace and disarmament, such as the Women's International League of Peace and Freedom Australia, the Nobel Prize-winning International Campaign to

Abolish Nuclear Weapons (ICAN) and many others, linked to regional and global networks.

In this spirit of reflecting these vibrant contemporary debates, the leading Australian journal on the future of national security, *Security Challenges*, has commissioned a Special Issue on Women and National Security. The collection of articles, speeches and commentaries reveal that women and national security is a broad and complex topic that affects security issues at every level. It captures commentary from Minister Payne, Shadow Minister Penny Wong, then Chief of Defence Biskin, Major Lee Hayward and Professor Hudson, as well as research articles from established and emerging scholars in the field.

Like the conference, the Special Issue examines the landmark UN Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women Peace and Security (WPS), adopted in 2000, which acknowledged that men and women experience conflict differently, and that women are critical security actors. Since 2000, there have been seven additional resolutions from the UN Security Council seeking to support and expand the provisions of UNSCR 1325. Countries are encouraged to devise a National Action Plan to implement the resolutions.<sup>4</sup>

Australia's National Action Plan is coming to the end of its first cycle in 2018, and receiving considerable civil society attention.<sup>5</sup> Minister Payne notes this robust interaction in her reprinted speech in our collection:

Women, Peace and Security is a community, a state and a global issue. Its implementation is a whole-of-government priority, and a whole of society undertaking.

She stresses further that her government is committed to the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda and that her department in particular has seventeen areas of responsibility under Australia's National Action Plan. Minister Payne's speech highlights some of the successful strategies that have been implemented under the plan, such as the ADF's appointment of a Senior Gender Adviser to the New Security Force Assistance mission in Afghanistan and the development of Australia's first Gender Advisor Training

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<sup>4</sup> The text of the resolutions can be found here: Security Council Report, <[www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/search.php?IncludeBlogs=10&limit=15&tag=%22Security%20Council%20Resolutions%22+AND+%22Women%20Peace%20and%20Security%22&ctype=Women,%20Peace%20and%20Security&rtype=Security%20Council%20Resolutions&cbtype=women-peace-and-security](http://www.securitycouncilreport.org/un-documents/search.php?IncludeBlogs=10&limit=15&tag=%22Security%20Council%20Resolutions%22+AND+%22Women%20Peace%20and%20Security%22&ctype=Women,%20Peace%20and%20Security&rtype=Security%20Council%20Resolutions&cbtype=women-peace-and-security)> [Accessed 10 March 2018].

<sup>5</sup> See further Australian National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security 2012–2018, <[www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/international-forums/australian-national-action-plan-women-peace-and-security-2012-2018](http://www.pmc.gov.au/office-women/international-forums/australian-national-action-plan-women-peace-and-security-2012-2018)> [Accessed 15 June 2018].

Course. Her speech also takes the opportunity to announce the establishment at ADFA of the Minister for Defence WPS Visiting Fellowship.<sup>6</sup>

Air Chief Marshal Binskin's reprinted speech also addresses the work the ADF has been doing to implement the principles outlined in UNSCR 1325. He highlights two contemporary tactical level experiences that have enhanced the ADF's operations: one from the use of female engagement teams in combat operations in Afghanistan and the other from engaging with women on the ground in the aftermath of Cyclone Winston in Fiji. He uses these examples to stress that only when a gender perspective is implemented at all levels will the defence forces be able to maximise their effectiveness.

Susan Hutchinson's contribution to the special edition also focuses on operational effectiveness in the ADF and other militaries. Entitled, 'Leading the operationalisation of Women Peace and Security in the ADF', she tackles the problem of trying to bring together practical outcomes from the broad WPS agenda. Hutchinson draws largely on the Australian experience and, like Air Chief Binskin and Minister Payne, notes in particular the efforts that the ADF have made to the implementation of WPS in their operations. However, she expands on this and points out that in the Australian context, the WPS agenda is largely externally focused, and the ADF provides minimal contribution to UN peacekeeping—a key element of the WPS agenda. Furthermore, the author stresses the importance of implementing a gendered approach in all aspects of the operational cycle: pre-planning, planning, conduct and transition. By employing a gendered approach, Hutchinson states:

the ADF and other militaries will improve their operational effectiveness and supporting international peace and security as well as enhancing the safety, security and human rights of women in accordance with international obligations as well as the values and national policy of successive Australian governments.

Professor Hudson compares this vibrant policy community and debate in Australia with the disappointing situation in the United States, where the administration appears unconcerned with the WPS agenda. Since the resignation of their Ambassador for Global Women's Issues well over a year ago, there has not been a replacement and the Office of Global Women's Issues (OGWI) will no longer report to the Secretary of State, but rather an Undersecretary. The OGWI was threatened with massive funding cuts, until a public outcry halted the process. Hudson points out that the only positive note coming out of Washington currently is that Congress passed the

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<sup>6</sup> Announcement available at: Department of Defence, <[www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-releases/minister-defence-announces-new-visiting-fellowship](http://www.minister.defence.gov.au/minister/marise-payne/media-releases/minister-defence-announces-new-visiting-fellowship)> [Accessed 20 April 2017]. Angeline Lewis was announced as the first Fellow on 8 March 2018.

Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017 that mandates a quadrennial Women, Peace and Security Strategy be produced by the government with bi-annual follow-up reports. Nevertheless, Hudson praises Australian efforts in the WPS space and welcomes the publication of this special issue.

From an emphasis on leadership and governance to perspectives from the grassroots, Laura J. Shepherd and Anuradha Mundkur document what grass roots participation really means in a research article entitled: 'Civil Society Participation in Women, Peace and Security Governance: Lessons from Australia'. These authors examine current engagements between civil society and government around the WPS agenda, using Australia as a case study—one of the countries named in the 2015 global study on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 as evidencing best practice in civil society participation. They explore ways to enhance these interactions and stress the importance of civil society work. This work is underpinned by three principles: expertise, ownership and accountability. However, they also point out potential problems, namely drops in funding and that recommendations laid out in National Action Plan annual report cards are non-binding.

The subject of women and national security is relevant far beyond the WPS agenda. While much work has been done in this space, our authors Sofia Patel and Jacqueline Westermann provide a gender lens on current Australian Government efforts to counter violent extremism (CVE) as they consider 'Women and Islamic-State terrorism: An Assessment of How Gender Perspectives Are Integrated in Countering Violent Extremism Policy and Practices'. Their paper provides an overview of women's experiences with IS terrorism, questioning why women join IS, the roles they play within the organisation, and why gender perspectives within terrorism matter for countries such as Australia. The overriding issue in this paper is that terrorism and counter-terrorism are products of a gendered world and therefore gender issues matter in the field of CVE. Therefore, a reassessment of existing policy and practice is needed.

Pip Henty and Beth Eggleston also argue that CVE is a gendered issue. Using examples from Afghanistan, Bangladesh and Tajikistan, they stress that current initiatives often see women excluded or marginalised from the development, implementation and evaluation of these efforts in their article 'Mothers, Mercenaries and Mediators: Women Providing Answers to the Questions We Forgot to Ask'. Thus, their paper analyses the role women can play in CVE through various approaches, including the WPS agenda. They stress the positive impact women can have when they are included at various levels of CVE initiatives—from the grassroots to the formal government mechanisms—and the implications this has on approach, policy and strategies.

However, while many of our papers and speeches stress the progressive outcomes that can be achieved through increased women's participation in

security fields, major barriers still exist. Major Lee Hayward provides an expert comment on 'Increasing the Number of Senior Women in the Australian Army'. In her article, she explains that it is generally accepted in multiple national and international frameworks that increasing the number of women involved in peace and security processes is fundamental to ensuring successful outcomes, and that this includes women at all ranks of the military. Yet women's participation in the Australian Army is historically low, particularly in leadership ranks and indeed despite some efforts the number of women serving in the Australian Army over the past sixteen years has not increased significantly. The author identifies the merit-based system as problematic for achieving gender equality goals, claiming that it is highly subjective and shows unconscious bias against women. She then provides suggestions on how to overcome this through a number of measures, or bias interrupters. However, despite the positive examples highlighted from other industries, the message from this paper is that unless the Army can transform structures and change mindsets, it must question whether the current merit system provides the best outcomes for women's career advancement.

This discussion is timely as was demonstrated by the appointment of the new Chief of Defence Lieutenant General Angus Campbell AO, DSC, in April 2018. Minister Marise Payne conceded at a press conference that promoting women into the top leadership roles of Defence remained a "work-in-progress" but the current service chiefs had done a significant amount of work to bring women through the ranks and give them command experience.

I have made it my business to make sure that I meet with those people in the last few years and I'm very confident that standing not too far behind the gentleman that you see in front of us, there's an impressive cadre of women coming our way.<sup>7</sup>

There are still significant areas of debate and public practice around gender and national security that this Special Issue does not encompass but which deserve scholarly attention; notably sexual identity and security studies, alleged hyper-masculinist practices in the Special Forces, issues of inclusion in the intelligence and cybersecurity communities, feminist critiques of the new Defence Exports regime, gender analysis of Defence procurement, gendered impacts of the new Home Affairs portfolio, and many other topics we have not yet even conceptualised.

Our book reviews therefore celebrate Australian female security scholars and feminist scholars thinking about women at the table as peace

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<sup>7</sup> Press Conference with the Minister for Defence, Senator the Hon. Marise Payne, the Chief of the Defence Force, Air Chief Marshal Mark Binskin AC, and Lieutenant General Angus Campbell AO, DSC, Parliament House, Canberra, 16 April 2018. Available at <[www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/press-conference-with-the-minister-for-defence-senator-the-hon.-marise-payn](http://www.malcolmturnbull.com.au/media/press-conference-with-the-minister-for-defence-senator-the-hon.-marise-payn)>.

negotiators, builders and peacekeepers—drawing on lived experiences from conflicts and overseas deployments. Books include *Beyond the Band of Brothers: The US Military and the Myth That Women Can't Fight* by Megan Mackenzie (Cambridge University Press, 2015) and Lesley Pruitt's book, *The Women in Blue Helmets Gender, Policing, and the UN's First All-Female Peacekeeping Unit* (University of California Press, 2016) reviewed by Elise Stephenson and Dr Olivera Simić. Mackenzie's book provides important contributions to understanding women's role in combat and military culture, especially given the efforts to increase the number of women in leadership positions within national militaries. Lesley's book, too, provides valuable insight through a critique of the effects of policies translated in the field, filling the gap in the current research on women and peacekeeping.

Scholars are also thinking deeply about gendered ideas and language in practice. Lizzy Ambler reviews Laura Shepherd's text *Gender, UN Peacebuilding, and the Politics of Space: Locating Legitimacy*, part of the Oxford Studies in Gender and International Relations (Oxford University Press, 2017). Ambler finds that the book provides a stimulating analysis of UN peacebuilding interventions and the way they reproduce power relations in relation to gender, women and civil society. Shepherd draws on country-specific configurations within the current agenda of the UN Peacebuilding Commission, including references to discourse and practice in Burundi, Central African Republic, Guinea, Guinea-Bissau, Sierra Leone and Liberia. Shepherd conducted extensive interviews across various UN staff, activists and analysts involved in peacebuilding activities to provide insights into how the UN can achieve its mission of hope.

It is clear that there are many more voices and perspectives that could be celebrated in the field of national security studies, and that this diversity could bring profound benefits to our understanding of security itself. We hope this special edition can encourage further such publications. As Shadow Minister Senator the Hon. Penny Wong describes in her contribution to the Special Issue:

Much of our public discourse and visible signs of our national security efforts focus on 'hard' responses such as CCTVs, bollards, static barriers and armed guards. There is no doubt that these responses are necessary. The question is whether they are sufficient. As important as these may be, are we thinking sufficiently broadly both about security risks and the way in which we respond to them? Should we elevate our discussion of the values we seek to preserve as an open and inclusive society—equality, co-operation, tolerance and compassion?

Overall, the speeches, papers and books showcased in this special edition strongly argue that ensuring a gendered perspective on security issues can only benefit security-related policy, decision-making and practice; as well as wider issues of gender equality. These papers also reveal a rich and emerging body of research on these topics. However, while achievements

to date have been noted and celebrated, further research in security-related fields is needed to continue the foundations that have been laid by governments, grassroots organisations and researchers.

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