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Intersecting Commitments: The Responsibility to Protect and the Women Peace and Security Agenda

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Introduction

The acknowledgement of gender issues through the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda marked a watershed moment for women's rights. Despite this, the Responsibility to Protect (R2P) framework remains gender-blind. I argue that R2P and the WPS agenda share overlapping commitments and mutually beneficial and reinforcing protection mandates. Through three intersecting commitments – prevention and early warning systems, gender protection in peacekeeping, and women's participation in post-conflict reconstruction – careful alignment between R2P and the WPS agenda could overcome this silence and move towards achieving more sustainable security.

The Responsibility to Protect and Women Peace and Security

Systematic human rights atrocities perpetrated against individuals based on their ethnicity, gender, and race have framed contemporary political discourses. With the international community's inability to collectively respond to prevent mass atrocities and other severe humanitarian emergencies, former United Nations (UN) Secretary-General Kofi Annan spearheaded the challenge to create a norm permitting states to intervene in another sovereign state in the event of 'gross and systematic violations of human rights that affect every precept of our common humanity'. Spurred on by failures of the international community to prevent genocides in Rwanda (1994) and Srebrenica (1995), the International Commission on Intervention and State Sovereignty (ICISS) was established in September 2000 to address how and when the international

community should act to prevent genocide, war crimes, ethnic cleansing and crimes against humanity. The report entitled "The Responsibility to Protect" (R2P) was released in December 2001. The unanimous adoption of R2P at the World Summit in 2005 established its prominence as a normative framework within the international community. The use of R2P as rhetorical backdrop to the Libyan intervention in 2011 via UNSC Resolutions 1970 and 1973 and the inaction in responding to the crisis in Syria demonstrates the prevalence of R2P in international discourse. Furthermore, R2P is interwoven with existing international principles, obligations, and peacebuilding initiatives. UN Secretary-General Ban Ki Moon asserts that R2P rests upon three interrelated, central pillars – responsibilities of the state to protect its population from mass atrocities; international capacity building to ensure states meet their protection responsibilities and prevent mass atrocities; and collective and timely responses through diplomatic, humanitarian and political means with coercive military action as a last resort.

Female United Nations police officers of the United Nations Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT). 29/Nov/2007. UN Photo/Martine Perret. www.unmultimedia.org/photo/ Female United Nations police officers of the United Nations Mission in Timor-Leste (UNMIT). Image by UN photo via Flickr.

The Women, Peace and Security (WPS) agenda gained traction on the international peace and security platform following the adoption of UN Security Council Resolution 1325 in October 2000. The WPS agenda is the most comprehensive articulation of women's rights and gender issues in international peace and security. It establishes a nexus between conflict prevention and women's rights, highlighting the relationship between gender inequality and conflict. Resulting from the Fourth World Conference on Women in 1995 in Beijing, and the pivotal Beijing Platform for Action which named

'Women and Armed Conflict' as one of twelve areas of critical concern, the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security was formed to advocate a UNSC Resolution focused on women's unique contribution and experiences of conflict. Through lobbying and advocacy, the NGO Working Group played a vital role in drafting the resolution and through UN Resolution 1325 successfully complicated the popular narratives that stereotyped women as either victims or inclusive peacebuilders. UN Resolution 1325 directs policymakers to consider *all* of women's experiences in conflict and links women's rights to international peace and security. The adoption of an additional seven resolutions builds upon 1325 and make up the WPS agenda. It rests upon a four-pillar mandate; prevention of violence and derogation of rights; protection from violence; participation in peacebuilding and post-conflict reconstruction; and relief and recovery. Laura Shepherd and Jacqui True broaden 'relief and recovery', to include identifying the structural social, political and economic conditions required for sustainable and lasting peace. Specifically the WPS agenda addresses sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in conflict, measures to ensure women's participation in decision-making processes and post-conflict programs, gender mainstreaming in UN activities and peacekeeping operations, and gender-sensitive prevention frameworks. The WPS agenda provides basis for international engagement with gender issues. With R2P, the WPS shares a commitment to improve human security and revealing and preventing women's human rights abuses through international engagement. Disappointingly, despite both frameworks emerging sharing similar underpinnings, R2P and its community continue to fail to address gender issues encompassed within the WPS agenda.

R2P did not embrace the central messages of Resolution 1325 nor were points of synergies explored where there was a lack of dialogue and

acknowledgement towards gender issues. From the outset, gender was excluded from the original formulation of R2P with only one of the 12 commissioners being a woman and only seven of 2000 sources consulted including gender. Women within the original R2P document were framed in terms of vulnerable populations in need of protection. 'Women' were mentioned three times only in reference to 'rape and sexual violence', which was mentioned seven times, where SGBV falls under crimes against humanity, war crimes and ethnic cleansing. No reference was made of women being active participants and agents in conflict prevention, protection and post-conflict reconstruction. This is despite the transformative possibilities of including aspects of the WPS agenda. R2P disregards WPS as a paradigm for conflict prevention and its centrality to peace and security. Here, as discussed below, three common intersecting commitments could overcome this disconnect.

Intersecting Commitments

- *Prevention and early warning systems*

The inclusion of gender issues into existing early-warning frameworks and systems may illuminate potential and/or existing R2P situations. Studying macro- and micro-level changes to women's lives reveals the escalation of violence and derogation of individual rights in hyper-masculinised and militarised societies. Gender-sensitive indicators include average levels of female education, impunity towards SGBV, increased kidnappings, sex work, female heads of households and domestic violence. Moreover, gender-sensitive indicators are not synonymous with women-sensitive indicators, but can monitor aggression and militarisation within a society, such as the persecution of men that do not take up arms. UN Women implemented several

context-specific programs that have resulted in a comprehensive how-to guide of 85 gender-sensitive indicators that provide a holistic early warning system. Furthermore, through empirical analysis Sara Davies and Jacqui True found strong connections between systemic gender inequality and discrimination and the use of SGBV in conflict *and* non-conflict settings.

Despite the benefits of including gender-sensitive indicators, gaps in women's participation in early-warning initiatives have not been overcome. The UN Office of the Special Adviser on the Prevention of Genocide and the Responsibility to Protect have not addressed the role of gender inequality or gendered violence in early warning systems. A recent framework of analysis on the prevention of R2P crimes continues to situate women in the narrative of 'vulnerable population' with children and the elderly, and in regards to sexual violence and reproductive rights. This is despite, as Davies and True argue, systemic and structural gender inequality is a potential early warning factor for preventing mass SGBV.

Since gender inequality increases the likelihood of R2P crimes any strategy of prevention must address gender norms that oppress and marginalise women. Gender-sensitive indicators highlight structural political, economic and social inequalities that maintain gender inequality in a given society that impacts post-conflict reconstruction and conflict protection.

- *Gender-sensitive Protection in Peacekeeping Operations*

The protection pillar of WPS stresses the full involvement and participation of women in the maintenance and promotion of international peace and security. This includes gender mainstreaming in all peacekeeping missions and the addition of gender units and advisers. Providing an official female presence in

conflict areas, refugee and Internally Displaced Persons (IDPs) camps is essential to improve access and support for local women to communicate in an official capacity. Women can approach each other more easily in female-only settings where women may be prohibited to talk to male strangers. Moreover, SGBV is more likely to be reported between women. However, as of February 2016, only 3.34 per cent of military and 9 per cent of police were female. Although there is at least one female in every peacekeeping force, the number varies from 1 woman out of 17 deployed in the UN mission in Afghanistan to 799 women out of 17,453 deployed in the UN-African Union Mission in Darfur. Of 105,315 deployed peacekeepers, women only comprise 4.05 per cent. Although numbers have improved since the adoption of UN Resolution 1325, increases have been marginal and reflect the low number of women included in UN peace building efforts.

Furthermore, implementation of gender-sensitive protection needs to move beyond the 'add women and stir' policy. Rather, WPS knowledge needs to be utilised in peacekeeping operations and wider UN peacebuilding efforts. For instance, the assumption that men are heads of households and therefore assistance being distributed to mainly men does not reflect post-conflict realities. Women are often widowed during and after conflict and adopt non-traditional roles such as heads of households. Since post-conflict programs and assistance does not recognise this, women are forced to take drastic measures to support their family and may take part in exploitive aspects of peacekeeping economies, like the sex industry. The misconception could be countered through gender units, gender-awareness training on more than an ad hoc basis and extensive comprehension of WPS.

- *Women's participation in post-conflict reconstruction.*

The post-conflict phase is complex with many overlaps where the WPS agenda would assist states and the international community in post-conflict responsibilities. However, here I will focus on women's participation in peace processes. Women's involvement in peace processes is mentioned in *every* resolution of the WPS agenda. Evidence suggests that the inclusion of women at the peace table as witnesses, signatories, negotiators and mediators makes it 35 per cent more likely a peace agreement will last. Nevertheless, women's quality participation in official capacities remains insufficient. Women and gender provisions have slowly started to be incorporated into peace agreements with a textual increase since the passing of Resolution 1325.

However, by essentialising women as mothers, caregivers and victims, women are excluded from peace negotiations where, ironically, the cessation of hostilities is reliant on those who took up arms. I am not arguing that women are better peacemakers, but that their participation is vital to ensure that their experiences of conflict are acknowledged. Around the world, women lobby for participation to ensure their needs and security concerns are addressed. In Somalia, the Sixth Clan was formed in response to the five traditional Somali clans failure to include women in negotiating teams. Asha Hagi Elmi became the representative of the Sixth Clan in 2000 and in peace talks in 2002, becoming the first female signatory to a peace agreement in 2004. Peace processes must include women as more than lip service to inclusivity.

Conflict transition provides a chance to create a more equal society by transforming the gendered relationships and identities that contributed to the production of violence. Women's participation is essential to represent half the population during peace negotiations, to ensure explicit inclusion of women's rights and gender provisions, and could have major implications for

women's social, political and economic status, and involvement in wider post-conflict initiatives. It is imperative that women are involved during that critical post-conflict transition to be enabled to affect positive changes.

Conclusion

Despite these areas of common engagement, R2P remains silent towards analysis and discourse surrounding the WPS platform. Both frameworks emerged at similar times and share central tenets of prevention, participation and protection, however women's involvement in R2P has been grossly deficient. I have briefly demonstrated here, and examine in depth elsewhere, three areas of common engagement between R2P and the WPS agenda. I identify three common intersecting commitments – prevention and early warning frameworks, protection and gender-sensitive peacekeeping, and women's participation in peace processes. Implementing gender-sensitive policies, legislations and programs will highlight the different lived experiences of men and women and the insecurities that arise during conflict and post-conflict reconstruction. R2P has much to gain from the WPS agenda and vice versa, where alliance with R2P and its community could aid the WPS agenda in addressing major gaps in its implementation. Alignment, both practical and normative, could provide an inclusive and holistic protection platform and encourage sustainable peace.

Sarah Hewitt is a PhD candidate at Monash University, Australia with the Monash Gender, Peace and Security Centre. Her article, 'Overcoming the Gender gap: The Possibilities of Alignment between the Responsibility to Protect and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda', was recently published in the Global Responsibility to Protect Journal. Sarah has also posted on Protection Gateway.

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