
The Women, Peace and Security Agenda: Integrating a Gendered Perspective into Security Operations

INTERVIEW WITH AMBASSADOR MARRIËT SCHUURMAN

FLETCHER FORUM: *NATO has been at the forefront of multilateral organizations in integrating the principles laid out in UNSCR 1325 (the landmark UN Resolution on Women, Peace and Security) through its Action Plans and subsequent missions. Can you elaborate on some of the reasons it is key for a military organization to incorporate a gendered perspective into its operations?*

MARRIËT SCHUURMAN: For NATO, it has been a process of trial and error but we have learned the hard way about the importance and relevance of integrating gendered perspectives in our operations and the wider field of work. We learned that it allows us to better understand the context in which we work, and the impact we have on the ground to better achieve the mission's purpose. If we miss part of the picture, we miss half of the story and cannot properly deliver on our mandate. Particularly, our operations in the Balkans and Afghanistan were the eye-openers that gender matters; that it is an analytical tool that helps us to increase our strategic awareness, to avoid doing harm, and to better deliver lasting peace.

Ambassador Marriët Schuurman is the NATO Special Representative for Women, Peace and Security. Her responsibilities in this role include facilitating gender equality in NATO's policies and activities, and to assist in the implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 and related resolutions. Prior to her current appointment, Ambassador Schuurman served as representative of the Kingdom of the Netherlands to the Former Yugoslav Republic of Macedonia, Deputy Chief of Mission and Head of Cooperation to the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands in Sudan, and Head of the Great Lakes Unit in the Sub-Saharan Africa Department, among other posts. Ambassador Schuurman holds a Master's degree in Translation Studies from the University of Amsterdam with a minor in Law.

FLETCHER FORUM: *How can NATO serve as a partner and leader in the international organization realm while incorporating a gendered lens into its operations?*

Schuurman: I think the word is *complementarity*—a very active exchange of experiences with the European Union, the United Nations, the Organization for Security and Co-operation in Europe (OSCE), as well as the African Union—and with full respect for the different kind of mandates that the different international organizations have, we must build on each other's strengths. On the operational side, NATO is very strong. Our strength comes from having a coordinated planning structure in place as well as a joint command and control system. When trying to translate principles into practice, we have a whole machinery for our risk analysis, for our planning, and for determining our actions. We must consider the kinds of troops and capacities needed as well as how important it is to have men and women, and in which functions. Finally, we need to monitor the impact and make sure that we get the necessary information to properly fulfill the mandate. We have developed a planning machinery with gender baked into the practical tools that the military structure uses in daily life. These tools integrate gender so that it is not a sidetrack but rather a part of a core system and a core planning structure.

Also, in terms of education and training, we have integrated gender into exercises and the setup of our system of Gender Advisors and Gender Focal Points throughout the whole organization, from the field level all the way to the top. I think those are our best practices that we actively share with other international institutions and we see now, for instance, the UN trying to copy some of that. But we can also learn from others. When we worked on preventing sexual and gender-based violence in conflict, we engaged with the UN—both the Department of Peacekeeping Operations (DPKO) and the Office of the Representative on Sexual Violence in Conflict—to understand the UN reporting system and to see where we fit into the global system. That is the kind of complementarity that we need to build up, where we can share expertise, experts, and best practices, and also understand our limitations as well as those of our mandates. We also need to understand where one can fill in for the other.

FLETCHER FORUM: *What challenges have you encountered in advancing your office's objectives, both internally and operationally, considering the diversity of national action plans and gender norms among member states?*

SHUURMAN: The member states of NATO, the Allies, are a bit more

culturally cohesive than if you were to take the full UN membership, for example. Basically, we have one policy and one Action Plan that not only the member states signed up to, but also our partners in the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council and six more partners around the globe, so fifty-five nations in total. We have a shared and agreed-upon agenda, so that is a starting point. I think the challenge has been in the past, when we had a period in which we had to think through how to move away from our operations out of an area that is the highest priority with the highest emergencies and urgencies on our borders and within our borders. There was a time when the reflex was, “If we are not discussing Afghanistan, then gender does not matter, so you do not have to be in the meeting; your issue is not on the agenda.” I would always say, “I do not have any issues; even if I had them, I would not discuss them here.” The challenge now is, “What does that mean in what we do—how does that translate into our collective defense, in building up our own gender capacity and awareness, but also in our partnership tools?” We talk about projecting stability to partners with whom we work in terms of how we build up their gender capacity and awareness. We discuss with them the importance of having gender-balanced forces and the importance of gender expertise to do their job better, but also about how we integrate it into regular capacity building programs that we’re building up. But, I think because of the rapidly changing security environment, there has been a gradually increased sense of urgency and awareness that gender equality is also necessary for *our* security.

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FLETCHER FORUM: *How do you address differences in attitudes toward the importance of a gendered perspective in military operations among NATO personnel and officers?*

SCHUURMAN: Between allies and partners there are obviously cultural differences, but the interesting thing about the Women, Peace and Security agenda is that, in my experience—though the size of the changes have varied—we have had many more challenges in common, so it is a great platform for practical cooperation between allies and partners. There is a lot of mutual learning—it is also not that the allies are far ahead of partners,

particularly when it comes to integrating women in the armed forces. Some of our partners would be in our top five, like Australia or New Zealand for instance. And many interesting things are going on with respect to integrating women into the armed forces in Jordan and Georgia. For instance, how do you deal with different perceptions within armed forces? That is a matter of discipline and education. It is one in which I think it is important to set NATO-wide standards on how we behave, having zero tolerance when it comes to intimidation or bullying and other unprofessional behaviors. Outside of our areas of operation, we can set standards and provide a platform for sharing best practices among allied and partner nations on how they deal with misconduct, sexual harassment, or other inappropriate

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behavior. Again, the importance is that there is an increased awareness around this kind of behavior, which is often seen as, “Boys will be boys.” These arguments are extremely detrimental for the effectiveness, unity, and cohesion of forces. It becomes a matter of operational effectiveness and excellence of forces to deal with this and also deal with problems of individuals who have the wrong ideas or perceptions. With armed forces and civilian organizations, it is becoming more a matter of modernization, orga-

nizational cultural change, and professionalization—we need to see each other as professionals. If you are a soldier, it should not matter whether you are a man or a woman; it should depend on your capabilities and you should be promoted and rewarded on the basis of your merit and contributions. It is very interesting to see that many armed forces are actively working on that now and exchanging best practices and policy tools.

FLETCHER FORUM: *On that point of having a cohesive model of what it means to integrate this aspect into NATO missions and operations—as you know, mission commanders and advisors are sent to gender sensitivity training at the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations (NCGM) in Sweden. Your predecessor was from Norway and you are from the Netherlands. Is there concern that NATO relies so heavily on the inclusive model of security put forth by northern European nations?*

SCHUURMAN: The Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations

serves as our Centre of Excellence in my department and there is a group of countries that cooperate there—including the Netherlands, Norway, Finland, and others—that provide expertise to that center. But the interesting thing, as I said before, is that with the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and gender in military operations, there is a very large coalition of countries from across the alliance and our partnership countries. It is not only Nordic countries, but also actively involves southern European countries, southeastern European countries, Baltic states, Australia, New Zealand, Japan, Georgia, Jordan, Tunisia—there is a large group of varied countries that are both pushing and leading the agenda; it is not only the usual suspects.

FLETCHER FORUM: *Have individual partnerships formed between nations to address knowledge gaps in how to best integrate a gendered perspective into their security operations, or is it more of a top-down encouragement from NATO toward the coalition to work in that direction?*

SCHUURMAN: Different nations have developed their own tools and we support that through our central tools—planning tools, guidelines, and training modules that are open for everyone to use. However, there are also nations that have developed their own instruments. Training and education exercises are key to internalizing a gendered perspective as a practical tool and some nations are much further along in integrating this into their basic education (because it is a basic tool to be able to do a gender analysis) than others, where it is limited to compulsory pre-deployment training for civilians and military. Even there, we see a disparity in the extent to which nations do pre-deployment training in the field of gender. Again, it is a matter of sharing best practices. More and more countries are looking at integrating gender as part of the standard curriculum for service members, not only in the military, but also police. There again, lessons can be shared. What we do in terms of the tools that *we* provide is to at least create a minimum standard that nations can build on and push further.

FLETCHER FORUM: *What progress have you seen in this field within NATO operations since you began your post in 2014?*

SCHUURMAN: In the past two years, we have seen some key milestones. I mentioned the planning guide as an operational tool for planners, the training package on gender for different levels which we just developed with the Nordic Centre and Allied Command Transformation in Norfolk,

but also the Military Guidelines on the Prevention of, and Response to, Conflict-Related Sexual and Gender-Based Violence were approved by the Council last year. Our allies and partner nations agreed to have a structured dialogue with civil society at the strategic level so we have our first formal institutionalized dialogue with the civil society advisory panel. I think we actually have a lot of concrete and specific deliverables and are trying to institutionalize this. I try to make gender awareness a normal thing; it should not be pinned on individuals who have “seen the light” one way or the other, be it through a negative experience through sexual harassment or a positive experience in operations. It should be a basic tool, and that is what we are trying to achieve. Through our planning cycle, our efforts are now starting to spread toward our allies so that they develop gender awareness and gender policies as basic policies and tools in their regular defense planning cycles.

“Institutionalization” has been the buzzword, but creating a structure to anchor the knowledge is not enough for people to internalize it. When we have a new situation or challenge, we start to forget and start to reinvent

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the wheel, and that is our biggest challenge. To get a change in mindset—that is, a change in culture—is in my perspective a leadership challenge. In the coming year, we are going to focus on leadership—who is committed? Who needs support and tools? What does it mean to be an inclusive leader? What is the reward in being one? To get a change in mindset, we need to engage in committed leadership that sees the benefit of diversity and gendered perspectives. That is for the years ahead. Up until now, we have focused on the practical tools that are related to operations, and now we have to internalize it and get to that mental change to adapt to the challenges of today.

FLETCHER FORUM: *Building on that, what are some of the biggest challenges and hurdles you still see in your role as Special Representative on Women, Peace and Security in terms of advancing this agenda? Do you still see a challenge in further integrating women into armed services?*

SCHUURMAN: Linking it to the leadership aspect, it is critical to establish that this is a shared endeavor and understanding, and it does not depend on me. My ambition is to make myself redundant. You want the leaders

and the layer below the leadership to endorse and take the agenda forward. I think that is the biggest challenge in a time of enormous pressure and a rapidly changing security environment. We are in emergency mode on how to address these issues in the best possible way, and that is not always the best mode in which to do strategic long-term thinking. That is a challenge for my team and me: how can we strategically pick our fights on the lowest hanging fruit to demonstrate the relevance of the Women, Peace and Security agenda, and of gender issues writ large? How do we make sure we get that on the agenda and get it done, with the hope that it will start to spread out to other policy areas? The challenge is to keep gender on the political agenda, not so much that of the military—that is an area I am not worried about at all. I think we went very far in certain institutionalizing, and there is a great deal of awareness. On the political and decision-making side, to sustain that awareness and keep it on the agenda in times of stress, is very difficult.

Obviously, integrating women into the armed services is topical in the United States, but it is important to stress that integrating gender is more than integrating women into the armed forces. It is important to lead by example, and we also know that we are more effective when we have mixed teams. Those are two very important reasons to do it. It is challenging for all our allies, and also our partner nations. We have seen very slow progress over the last fifteen years, but again, the stumbling blocks are similar and in some nations there are good practices that have demonstrated that, with targeted and smart policies, you can go fast. While we have only improved three percent on average in fifteen years, some nations have showed that they can improve two percent in one year if desired. The good thing is that there is a lot of attention on the need and there is a big push from the UN that we need more female peace-keepers—the UN committed to double its current numbers, but they can only do that if the nations provide them, and that is a matter of soul searching. Even if we have female soldiers, why are we not sending them and how do we make sure we have more of them? We must look at the countries that have been very successful at recruitment. More importantly, we must look at the retention of men and women, to see what other countries could learn, and if that would be applicable to their situation as well. Australia and the United States within the past year, and Canada recently, have been doing a lot of things, and some smaller nations as well. Germany has been successful in the past year in increasing the participation of women. Jordan has also been active in looking into how to recruit more women. It is always fascinating for me to see how many similarities we have and how many creative solutions countries like, for instance, Georgia or Armenia, come up with; to break down

stereotypes and to demonstrate that it is a matter of shared responsibilities and equal rights, and that it's a matter of effectiveness. I think there may be pockets of resistance but at the top level, there is no resistance anymore.

FLETCHER FORUM: *What do you see as the future of the Women, Peace and Security agenda? What is your hope for NATO partner organizations and political actors in the international security space in further advancing the importance of gender in policy and operations?*

SCHUURMAN: I think the future of the Women, Peace and Security agenda will be on the table for quite some time. This is a slow but unstoppable revolution. The agenda goes back to 1915 at least, when the suffragettes met in The Hague to try to stop the First World War. Some 1,100 women from twelve war-affected countries came together and took the war as a case to demonstrate the need for women to have a seat at the table and to argue for women's voting rights. The Women's International League for Peace and Freedom goes back to that date: April 28, 1915. It has been more

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..... than 100 years of work. If you look at this past year, there was a study that looked at the global implementation of UNSCR 1325 (and subsequent resolutions) over the last fifteen years. What they found was that a lot has been done in the normative framework and a lot has been done in terms of protection, particularly when it comes to preventing sexual violence. That may have not been very successful so far, but at least we have normative frameworks. This is less true when it comes to the core of the resolution, which is about participation—to ensure that men and women equally participate in decision making at all levels when it comes to conflict prevention and resolution.

The result was Resolution 2242, adopted last year—the “Back to Basics” resolution—which puts equal participation and gender equality at the core of every security strategy. This resolution is very timely for today's challenges, in particular with countering violent extremism and radicalization. Gender is very relevant there, but we still struggle to translate that into action. Nevertheless, there is a whole host of research being done on the link between gender and radicalization, both in terms of how gender is manipulated for recruitment purposes and how the active movements of men and women in local communities can make those communities resilient. Violent extremism is a clear case where we see the importance of gender, and last year's resolution tried to include some specific benchmarks

for more gender-sensitive research. We as NATO also contribute to this research; we now fund gender-sensitive research studying radicalization triggers and evidence-based policy. With the global study, the resolutions adopted last year, and the security challenges that we face today, we have proven again the relevance of the philosophy of Resolution 1325, and it has definitely given us many new rules. On October 26, 2016, I was in New York for the annual Open Debate for sixteen years of implementation [of UNSCR 1325] and it was striking that the statements, compared to previous years, were much more action-oriented. We did not just hear statements of principle, but also statements of real progress on engaging and empowering civil society and making sure women have a seat at the table. The statements were also really focused on the participation agenda and not only on the protection agenda. I am afraid we will have it on the table for quite some time, but I see much more proactive approaches from both international and national actors. I engage with other international actors—our counterparts within the EU, UN, AU, and OSCE—to make sure we don't reinvent the wheel, but instead complement each other while respecting our different mandates. In terms of joint education and training, and early warning, we still have a long way to go and a gender lens has a lot to do there. We shouldn't do that on our own but rather collectively. In terms of sharing and pooling gender expertise, which is extremely thinly spread, we use the same people within NATO, the UN, or the EU, but we do not have enough of them on the civilian or the military side. We have to collectively build up that expertise and make sure we pool it more effectively. We also need to jointly work on leadership, because it's a change process that can only occur with enduring, dedicated leadership. We have to do a better job of supporting our leaders in delivering on that. And that again is something we could do jointly to make sure we reward and foster inclusive and gender sensitive leadership.*f*