This article points to the contradiction inherent to the connection made to the Security Council Resolution 1325 by the North Atlantic Treaty Organisation, a military alliance. It was written to prompt a discussion among women of the ‘Women against NATO’ e-group list, a network of women in NATO member-states contributing to the No-to-NATO movement. The author suggests that the framing of 1325, especially matters it failed to include, left the Resolution hostage to co-optation by militarist states and military institutions for military purposes. This article explores four major contradictions in Resolution 1325, in antimilitarist feminist activism, and suggests some questions we might now want to ask ourselves in our efforts to transcend them.
Feminist antimilitarists in a host of countries and contexts are struggling with the contradictions inherent in UNSCR 1325 of 31 October 2000 on Women, Peace and Security. It was ‘our’ achievement. It was ‘our’ project and ‘our’ success. Yet the more energetically we push for its implementation, the more we see its limitations. Worse, we realise how it can be used for ends quite contrary to those we intended. In this respect, NATO is a thought-provoking case. More than that, it’s an enraged example of how a good feminist work can be manipulated by a patriarchal and militarist institution.

UNSCR 1325 is a Feminist Achievement

When I say Resolution 1325 was ‘our’ achievement, it may well be the only Security Council resolution for which the groundwork, the diplomacy and lobbying, the drafting and redrafting, was almost entirely the work of civil society and non-governmental organisations. Certainly, it was the first resolution in which the actors were almost all women. I have written about this elsewhere.1

Passing the Resolution involved the Security Council in a two-day debate. It was the first time since the foundation of the UN that this August body, the pinnacle of the UN structure, had devoted an entire session to debating women’s issues.2 That this happened was due to the brave and persistent efforts of women from many countries. The Resolution was achieved by a wide, unnamed, ad hoc transnational network of women in local and international NGOs. They were joined by women from member state governments, several UN departments and agencies and academic feminists from universities. It entailed co-operation between women very differently positioned in relation to structures of power, and differently located in relation to wars. It was an informal, unnamed but a highly productive alliance that came together for this specific project. It involved the skilled handling of complicated mechanisms of power at the UN, in which they encountered resistance from many sources, including reluctant individuals and governments, and the inertia of institutional processes.

Among the international NGOs involved were Amnesty International, International Alert, the Hague Appeal for Peace, the Women’s Commission for Refugee Women and Children, the International Peace Research Association, the Women’s Caucus for Gender Justice and most importantly, the Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom (WILPF). Not all of these organisations, nor their key women activists, would call themselves feminist although many would call them such. But the work they did in conceiving, drafting and chasing this Resolution through the UN system was certainly a feminist work. It was, ostensibly, feminist Felicity Hill at WILPF’s New York office who did a great deal of the leg work. She and WILPF were at the heart of this transnational advocacy network, and it is significant that today, she is deeply distressed and angered by what Resolution 1325 has become in practice.3

The Resolution’s content is brief and its intention is easily grasped.4 The preamble acknowledges both the specific effect of armed conflict on women and women’s role in preventing and resolving conflict. It is set in the context of the Security Council’s responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security. It has eighteen brief points covering three main themes. One is protection, including the recognition of women’s rights, a clearer understanding of gender-specific needs in times of war, the protection of women and girls from gender-based violence particularly rape and other forms of sexual abuse, and an end to impunity in these crimes. A second theme is participation. Women’s work for peace must be recognised, they must be included in decision making at all levels in national and regional institutions, including significant posts in the UN itself, in mechanisms for the prevention and management of conflict, and in negotiations for peace. A third theme is the insertion of a gender perspective in UN peace keeping operations (PKOs), and in measures of disarmament, demobilisation and reintegration after war (DDR).
NATO and The Woman Question

The big challenge lies in getting the new instrument implemented, getting governments to commit to it and translating it into action for peace making initiatives and peace-keeping operations. That task has engaged many women and women’s organisations in a great deal of sustained efforts from that day to this. They had to ‘get their hands dirty’, negotiating not only with member governments but also with state militaries, for they are the ones who ‘man’ the aforesaid ‘peace keeping operations’. Who else but they, can ensure that women’s concerns are addressed by the UN ‘blue beret’ units who work among the distressed populations in conflict and post-conflict situations?

Up to a point, implementing Resolution 1325 could mean relatively unproblematic and even creative encounters with the ‘civil-military’ functionaries of relatively benign state armies like those of the Netherlands, a country which sees its army more as a peace keeping force rather than a war-fighting army. However, many of the armies of Western Europe (and increasingly of Eastern Europe and even further afield) are marshalled within, and often commanded by the structures of the North Atlantic Alliance, by NATO. In our No-to-NATO movement we have developed a strong, sustained and carefully argued critique of the Alliance. It may speak the dainty language of ‘security’, but its actions show that it is an ambitious, expansionist and belligerent war-machine, primarily serving the economic and strategic interests of the more powerful among its member states.

NATO has adopted Resolution 1325 with an energy that could easily pass for enthusiasm. A glance at its website will show 47 documents relating to the topic. A multi-media exhibition has been mounted about NATO’s contributions to the implementation of the Resolution (September 2010). There are pleasing photos of young women in army fatigues carrying babies, waving to children. NATO even celebrates International Women’s Day. Apparently standing shoulder to shoulder with the women’s movement, Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen asked, on 8 March 2010, “Would a world in which women enjoyed rights equal to those of men be safer and more stable? It is difficult to say, but ultimately a lasting peace in many of the world’s most troubled areas may depend upon the answer.”

The Alliance was, it is true, rather slow off the mark at first in grasping the merits of Resolution 1325. They made their first move in 2007, seven years after it came into effect, and in doing so, they addressed action on ‘women, peace and security (WPS)’ from the start, as a joint policy initiative between NATO and the Euro-Atlantic Partnership Council. In other words the 28 NATO member states didn’t put a go on it alone. They decided, on their own reasons, to include the 22 ‘Partnership for Peace’ states. Otherwise, this would not be, they said, “a true partnership policy on an issue of global interest.” They set up an informal ‘ad hoc group’ to make progress on the matter. It was the following summer, 2008, that the North Atlantic Council ‘tasked’ the NATO Strategic Command to provide guidance on implementing Resolution 1325. In other words, this was the point when the big political boys asked the big military boys to put their minds on women. The result was a Bi-Strategic Command guidelines to be ‘taken forward’ by the NATO civil and military authorities. All these member and ‘partner’ nations were urged to adopt National Action Plans on the Resolution. The Alliance envisioned Resolution 1325 policy on WPS as ‘an integral part of NATO’s corporate identity, in the way it plans and conducts its everyday business, and the way it organises its civilian and military structures’. It should also be fully integrated into ‘all aspects of NATO-led operations’ (my emphasis).

However, even now, things have not moved fast enough. In early 2009 when the 60th NATO Summit meeting took place in Strasbourg-Kehl, all they could say was that NATO was ‘actively engaged with its partners in supporting’ the implementation of Resolution 1325, and they hoped to have a comprehensive set of measures in eighteen months’ time, specifically in 2010. Some nations prompted action, and two reports were written. In June 2010, the Defence Ministers of all the nations contributing to ISAF in Afghanistan and KFOR in Kosovo endorsed action on Resolution 1325 in time for the Lisbon Summit.
on November 19-21, 2010. Simultaneously, the Resolution 1325 policy was extended even beyond the Partnership for Peace (PfP) Program of NATO, to the additional states known as ‘Contact Countries’ and those countries participating in the Mediterranean Dialogue and the Istanbul Cooperation Initiative.13

By now, a number of the NATO Committees had the implementation of Resolution 1325 as part of their program agenda. The lead committee on this gender business is the important Political and Partnerships Committee. Significantly, the Operations Policy Committee is also involved, integrating WPS into the context of NATO missions and operations. On the soldiering side, NATO’s Committee on Women in the Armed Forces was converted in the summer of 2009 into a Committee on Gender Perspectives, and an Office on Gender Perspectives was established in the International Military Staff. Clearly, NATO was being thorough. It was making a serious effort to ‘mainstream’ gender, or more precisely WPS awareness, throughout its structures and activities. And indeed, it described mainstreaming as the first of the five strategies comprising its ‘pragmatic approach’ to implementation. The other four were co-operation with international organisations;14 operations (most importantly Afghanistan); education and training; and public diplomacy, mobilizing the media to tell the world how much NATO is doing on WPS.

So how were they actually conceptualising the NATO contribution to UNSCR 1325? In January 2010, NATO joined in the celebrations of the tenth anniversary of the passing of the Resolution. To mark the occasion, Secretary General Anders Fogh Rasmussen gave a speech at the European Commission on ‘Empowering Women in Peace and Security’.15 He spoke of “the ongoing victimisation of women in conflict situations and the marginalisation of women in matters of peace building” as having a profound impact on global security, and being one of ‘the key security issues of our time’. By now NATO was well up to speed, and he was therefore able to say that “NATO has heard this call and that our military
authorities have developed guidelines for the integration of gender issues in all NATO planning and operations.” He mentioned a strict ‘Code of Behaviour’ for all NATO military personnel, a significantly increased proportion of women on NATO’s political staff, and he added, “we have studied carefully the significance of gender issues to the success of our operation in Afghanistan.”¹⁶

There are two areas of NATO activity in which response to Resolution 1325 should be examined more closely. Both were mentioned by the Secretary General in his 10th anniversary speech. One is about women soldiers, and the other is in operations. Women in the military forces of nation states come under NATO command. NATO’s stated aim is to increase the proportion of women in the military. The Secretary General noted that the percentage of women in the armed forces of member states ranges widely from as low as three percent in some states to as many as 18 percent in others. On accounting for the shortfall of armed service women in some countries, he tactfully mentioned the member countries’ military traditions. The recruitment of more women had to be ‘gradual’ he acknowledged, but needs to be consciously tackled.

In respect to operations, Afghanistan is particularly interesting. The Secretary General mentioned today’s presence of high-level gender advisers in International Security Assistance Force (ISAF) Headquarters in Kabul, and gender experts employed in Provincial Reconstruction Teams. He noted that the US Marine Corps had begun fielding all-women military units in the most troubled provinces, with ‘highly positive results’. ISAF was having difficulty recruiting all the gender specialists, female interpreters and women soldiers they believe they need. But according to him, the WPS policy in place had already “allowed us to improve our mission effectiveness, our protection of the civilian population, and the protection of our own forces. It has also allowed us to reach out more effectively to the entire Afghan population.”

Dr. Stefanie Babst, acting NATO Assistant Secretary is the ‘chief’ senior woman for NATO. A week or so before the Lisbon Summit in November 2010, she addressed a NATO conference held in Talinn, Estonia, on Women, Peace and Security: the Afghan View. She stated that “as a result of our engagement in Afghanistan, we have moved from an organisation talking about how to deliver Resolution 1325, to one that is actually implementing it” (her emphasis).¹⁷

So what kind of things does ISAF do on WPS in Afghanistan? They provide gender awareness training to the civilian and military teams before these are deployed on operations. They teach soldiers gender-sensitivity and why it matters to take a different approach when searching an Afghan woman or man, or why male ISAF personnel should avoid looking at an Afghan woman in the face. The gender experts in the field advise commanders on the needs of women local communities when it comes to providing access to aid and services. Some NATO nations deploy Female Engagement Teams (FETs) in southern Afghanistan who are trained to enable dialogue with local women. They have female soldiers who can conduct searches on Afghan women at checkpoints ‘without causing offence,’ and female military doctors and nurses to run clinics for women. ISAF helps train women police, security and even army personnel, some of whom have become instructors in turn. They trained Khatool Mohammadzai, the country’s ‘first ever’ female paratrooper. Babst wrote of this achievement, “Anyone who knows anything about Afghanistan realises what a historic step that is. It is a real indication of the change for the better that we are seeing in Afghanistan.” If more girls are going to school, more women are setting up businesses, more are getting the health care they need and more getting elected to Parliament, this is (she implied) thanks to the NATO operation. Babst
concluded that UNSCR 1325 in action is where it really matters most.

Contradictions in Resolution 1325

As feminist antimilitarists, as women of the No-to-NATO movement, how should we respond to the integration by NATO of Resolution 1325? After all, the instrument was universally welcomed by women. Its objectives were irrefutably sound which is, to draw attention to the impact of armed conflict specifically its impact on women. Such anticipated impact is for women to be recognised not as mere victims but as actors, capable of contributing to the ending of war and to achieving peace and redefining security. One can imagine that the United Nations Security Council might see NATO as an exemplary institution, implementing the resolution in pretty much the manner desired - and desired not only by the UN (we suppose), but by the women who drafted the Resolution and pressed the Security Council to pass it. Many of the measures NATO are introducing in Afghanistan, as described above, are in the circumstances, desirable. Given that ISAF is present in Afghanistan, we can only be glad if NATO personnel, prompted by Resolution 1325, behave respectfully towards women and try not to make their lives any worse than its current state. If Afghan women are to be searched at checkpoints, it is certainly more desirable that they should be handled by women than men. Yet, how can we who oppose NATO, who deplore its very existence and its war in Afghanistan – welcome its espousal of ‘our’ Resolution 1325? Especially when that war was legitimised by those who launched it, in part, by its potential for liberating women from fundamentalist oppression.

I would suggest that there are at least four elements in the contradiction that is now anguishing many feminist antimilitarists, not the least, ourselves in the No-to-NATO movement.

The most obvious and fundamental is the perennial ‘equality’ dilemma in feminism. At many moments in the history of the women’s movement, a divergence has surfaced between women who call for ‘equality’ and those who assert ‘difference’. Those who stress ‘equality’ believe that equal treatment of women is simple justice. Those who stress ‘difference’ believe equality is too easily interpreted as ‘equality’ with men in a men’s world. They call for a transformative change in gender power relations and a valorisation of women and the feminine. Yet in turn (and herein lies the contradiction), the positive assertion of difference can become an undesirable entrenchment of complementation in gender relations, trapping us in the gender dichotomy. The divergence between ‘equality’ and ‘difference’ strategies becomes seriously divisive when the equality demanded by women concerns access to roles that self-evidently enhance patriarchal, capitalist, nationalist or militarist power. Serving in the armed forces is an acutely troubling case in point.

It should be noted that Resolution 1325 does not in fact call for more women in armies. It urges, in rather careful terms, an expansion of “the role and contribution of women in United Nations field-based operations, and especially among military observers, civilian police, human rights and humanitarian personnel.” In promoting a higher proportion of women in militaries, NATO is not actually ‘implementing 1325’. The feminisation of soldiering (at least in my interpretation), is part of NATO’s thrust to modernise and professionalise contributing national armies. It has picked up the ball of gender equality thrown into play by feminists and is running with it for its own objectives. What can we do as feminists in such a situation? We have surely to emphasise that equality is a matter of justice, and in a just and inclusive society, women should not be debarred on account of their gender from doing anything they want to do. Just as ethnic minorities should not be debarred from police force for instance. But we must simultaneously critique and seek to dismantle all the power relations that deform and subvert not only justice in employment, but also the quality of human life and relationships – including those of militarism. It’s unimaginable that the struggle for equality can be pursued, anywhere or ever, except hand in hand with an unrelenting struggle for transformative change in gender and other power relations.

The second contradiction I believe goes like this: NATO is a militarist organisation but the intention of Resolution 1325 is anti-militarist.
Yet its wording and provisions leave it co-optable by militarism. In fact, back in 2000 in New York, the ink was scarcely dry on the document before quite a lot of the feminist women involved were voicing self-criticism about their failure to frame the 1325 measures with a strong statement about ending militarism, militarisation and war itself. They were advised by those close to the UN system, and indeed informed by common sense, that the Security Council would not accept any insistence from the women on the resolution - a sharp critique of militarism, militarisation and the pursuit of war policies by member states. That is indeed why the women originators of the Resolution censored themselves. All the same, the UN was created to put an end to war. The Security Council’s primary responsibility, under the Charter is the maintenance of international peace and security. Some of the women now wondered, “should we not have called the Security Council’s bluff?” Four years later, Carol Cohn neatly summarised the effect of their failure to engage in struggle with the Security Council on this issue. She wrote, Protecting women in war, and insisting that they have an equal right to participate in the processes and negotiations that end particular wars, both leave war itself in place... [1325 is not] an intervention that tries either to prevent war, or to contest the legitimacy of the systems that produce war - that is, ‘to put an end to war’. In this sense, it fits comfortably into the already extant concepts and discursive practices of the Security Council, where the dominant paradigm holds a world made up of states that ‘defend’ state security through military means...Letting (some) women into decision-making positions seems a small price to pay for leaving the war system essentially undisturbed.

The third contradiction is inherent in the several interpretations to which the word ‘security’ lends itself. Women have been at pains for a decade or more now to redefine ‘security’. We readily adopted the critique of military conceptions of security by those who began to speak and write of ‘human security’. Then, in the concept of ‘women’s security,’ we gave ‘human security’ gender specificity. This was, for feminists, the meaning of the word in the title of the Resolution: Women, Peace and Security. The ideal of ‘security’ can however too readily be manipulated by an organisation such as NATO, that however it
describes security in words, manifests it in action as meaning the militarisation of society and a readiness to fight wars.

Fourth, and finally, some of the women who were involved in the movement to achieve Resolution 1325 were self-critical afterwards on the grounds that they had failed at any point to express an explicit critique of men, masculinity and patriarchy in relation to militarism, militarisation and war. The Resolution said nothing about the male-dominant gender order in which we all live, the supremacy of men in political and military systems, the affinity of military values with hegemonic masculine values, and the overwhelming statistical preponderance of men in actual acts of violence against both men and women, whether in peace or war. As Carol Cohn puts it, to have the effect we desire as feminists, the women transnational activists in this story would have to address “the pernicious, pervasive complexities of the gender regimes that undergird not only individual wars but the entire war system.”25 (I argue that we should go further and recognise gender power relations as a predisposing, and thus causal, factor in militarisation and war.26)

The fact is that, just as the UN cannot criticise the USA, capitalism and militarisation, so it is quite unable to make any critique of masculinities. Sandra Whitworth would later write in her post-1325 study of UN peace keeping, “There is…no discussion within UN documents of militarism or militarised masculinities or, for that matter, of masculinities more generally” (Whitworth 2004:137). It may be beyond the bounds of reason to imagine the Security Council taking the step (albeit logical) from deploring the rape of women in war to pointing the finger at men’s perennial propensity for violence and specifically for sexual violence against women. Yet, this silence on men, masculinity and the male-dominant gender order has vitiated Resolution 1325. In the absence of a strong statement against the ‘co-production’ of hegemonic masculinity and militarism, it becomes little more than an aspiration on the one hand, to make war a bit safer for women, on the other, to alert the powers-that-be to the resource women can be in helping them do their job. The Resolution is left hostage to co-optation by militarist states and military institutions for military purposes.

Questions to Ask Ourselves

Some things we might usefully discuss in the context of No-to-NATO and the Women-against-NATO network now could be:27

Has the Resolution become ‘reified’, even ‘deified’? It is as if nothing had been said before about women, peace and security. The Women’s International League for Peace and Freedom have been arguing this case since 1915 and feminist antimilitarism, as an analysis, had already far outstripped this formulation of women’s (and men’s) relationship to war by the early 1980s.28

- How much of the Resolution is actually intended to create political space for women to express opinions and take assertive action on every war/security issue in every country, at every moment, including military expenditures (which have been relentlessly growing since 2000) and ‘international’ military missions which continue today as the ‘no-fly-zone’ operation unloads Tomahawk missiles on Libya? It has rarely been used as such a lever. Instead the 1325 agenda has shrunk into protecting women war victims and obligingly remembering to use the resource women represent for peace.
- Should we be more pro-active in contesting the way the feminist agenda has been recuperated by armies justifying the recruitment of more women to the military in reference to Resolution 1325?
- Should we be pressing harder for something Resolution1325 didn’t mention, ensuring that post-war moments bring the redistribution of power and resources in several dimensions – wealth, land ownership, economic opportunity, minority rights etc. (all of which of course affect women) and the dismantling of male supremacy, decommissioning masculinity while disarming combatants?
- Should we be concerned about the way ‘doing gender’ (mainstreaming) in the implementation of Resolution 1325 has become a ‘soft’, ill-defined and easy-option activity in the institutions, to
which very often unskilled, unknowledgeable
(in more crucial aspects) women and men, often
interns, or people who already have other more
pressing tasks, are appointed as practitioners,
consultants or advisers? This not only makes
‘doing gender’ non-feminist and therefore, non-
transformational. It leaves it even technically
deficient.

• Were we wrong from the start to place so
much reliance on the United Nations, and
in particular on the (almost universally) male
Security Council? Every time we rousingly cite
Resolution 1325 we are acting as cheer leaders
for a body that doesn’t deserve it. Its increasing
closeness to NATO is surely evidence that the
UN is not a mechanism for peace and security
as women (and other antimilitarist activists
such as No-to-NATO) define those things.
Is it a waste of time to put our energies into
the UN? On the other hand, can we afford to
neglect doing so?

• As feminist antimilitarist women, do we need
to step up more boldly and make ourselves
heard raising tough questions about the part
played by gender power relations in militarism,
militarisation, foreign and military policy and
war fighting, including the way an institution
like NATO functions? Should we grasp
the political responsibilities that come with
‘participation’ in ‘women, peace and security’?
If so, how and where?

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Endnotes:
3. Personal communication.
been produced by the United Nations Development Fund for Women, see ‘Security Council Resolution 1325 Annotated and Explained’ at <www.
5. See the website <www.peacewomen.org>.
6. Dudink, Stefan ‘The unheroic men of a moral nation: masculinity and nation in modern Dutch history’ in Cockburn, C and Dubravka Zarkov,
7. See <http://www.no-to-nato.org>, site in process of development.
10. ‘Comprehensive report on the NATO/EAPC policy on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 on women, peace and security and related
11. See <http://www.no-to-nato.org>, site in process of development.
12. See <http://www.no-to-nato.org>, site in process of development. They were (1) a comprehensive report with recommendations on
mainstreaming UNSC 1325 in NATO-led operations and missions; and (2) a comprehensive report with recommendations on the NATO/EAPC
policy on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and related Resolutions.
13. By now, besides, NATO and other governmental and international institutions were obliged to take account of subsequent UNSC Resolutions
14. Naming specifically the United Nations, the European Union, the Organization for Security and Cooperation in Europe, the Organization for
Economic Cooperation and Development and the International Committee of the Red Cross.
16. See <http://www.no-to-nato.org>, site in process of development. They were (1) a comprehensive report with recommendations on mainstreaming UNSCR 1325 in NATO-led operations and missions; and (2) a comprehensive report with recommendations on the NATO/EAPC policy on the implementation of UNSCR 1325 and related Resolutions.


20. Felicity Hill, personal communication.


22. My research on movements to end war suggests that a particular contribution by women is, noting the continuation of violence against women into ‘peacetime’, to redefine what peace means. See Cockburn, Cynthia (forthcoming) Antimilitarism: Political and Gender Dynamics of Peace Movements. Palgrave Macmillan (forthcoming 2012).


27. These questions are derived from a recent exchange of e-mails with Felicity Hill – to whom I am indebted for a much more informed and ‘close in’ view of the trajectory of Resolution 1325 than my own experience affords. However, the way they are formulated here is my own ‘take’ on the subject, and Felicity should not be held accountable for any errors.