

The ineffectiveness of UN Resolution 1325: The case of Afghanistan

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The primary objective of this paper is to analyze the effectiveness of the UN Security Council Resolution 1325 and the Women, Peace, and Security (WPS) agenda and focus more specifically on the context of Afghanistan. This paper seeks to study the failure of the WPS Agenda in a broader sense and its linkage more specifically to Afghanistan due to the growing legitimization of the Taliban regime in global politics. The paper will also take recent cases of natural disasters and study how 'human security' is doubly endangered for Afghan women during natural calamities, and the lack of humanitarian action on the same. The paper will argue that the example of Afghanistan shows that it is imperative to implement, strategise, and design the WPS agenda to suit the culture-specific context of countries in conflict. The paper will argue through examples that localising the WPS agenda rather than focusing on a rights based framework may Afghanistan Gender Index Report 2024 released by the UN. The Gender Index Report released by the UN Women in 2024 concludes an "extreme manifestation of gender inequality, creating one of the deepest empowerment deficits and widest gender gaps in the world." (Gender Index 2024: Afghanistan, 2025) while describing the condition of women in Afghanistan.

Keywords: *WPS agenda, UN resolution 1325, norms, norm diffusion, human security*

Introduction: Scope of UN Resolution 1325 and the Women, Peace and Security Agenda

The United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 was adopted in 2000 for the purpose of advancing women's participation in peace and security governance, preventing gender-based violence, protecting women's rights and safety and ensuring their needs are addressed in post-conflict relief and recovery efforts (Asante, Shepherd, 2025). The passage of the United Nations Security Resolution 1325 in 2000 was a pivotal moment for peacebuilding. The resolution signaled the significance of the involvement of women in political leadership and peacebuilding as an important prerequisite for maintaining international peace and stability (Lindsey, 2025). The UNSCR 1325 is crucial for the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda.

The WPS Agenda comprises of four pillars namely prevention, protection, participation and relief and recovery. Conflict must prevent all forms of violence against women and girls. This implies that Conflict should be avoided and ended. In conflict situations all parties must prevent all forms of violence against women and girls. Secondly, the rights and safety of women and girls must be protected. It should take into account how rights and safety of women and girls are impacted due to sexual violence. Third, all decisions related to peace and security from local levels to international forums must include women. Peace and security processes must be more inclusive. Lastly, the relief and recovery process post conflict must consider specific needs of women and girls. It focuses on involving women-led organisations in ensuring access to food, water and hygiene products during and post conflict to women vulnerable to getting access to basic amenities. Equal and meaningful participation of women must be ensured in peace and security processed. Lastly, the

rebuilding process after a conflict or crisis must acknowledge specific needs of women and girls. (UN Women, 2025).

Various scholars and practitioners attach differing significance to the goals enlisted within the WPS Agenda. Certain scholars and practitioners focus on addressing the 'security' aspect of women and girls during a conflict, others perceive the WPS Agenda as a mechanism for feminist mobilisation and lastly others situate the WPS Agenda in the broader process of peace building and improving the status of women's wellbeing in the world. (Lindsey,2025)

There have been some significant strides for the WPS agenda with the passage of UNSCR 1325 most notably more attention towards protection of women and girls during armed conflict. However, criticisms of the UNSCR 1325 range around lacunae in its implementation, application of gender binaries and mere diplomatic lip service to its goals. Governmental support for the WPS agenda has also increased with the passage of the resolution including the formulation of National Action Plans (NAPS) by different countries. (Lindsey,2025).

National Action Plans (NAPS) are domestic policy documents that state objectives for the implementation of the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda. Scholars have perceived NAPs as both a sign of success and failure of the WPS agenda. NAPs are domestic policy documents that articulate their commitments for the implementation of the women, peace and security (WPS) agenda providing insight into the WPS interests and priorities of states. NAPs have thus gained traction over the years for the ease of assessing funding and political will to drive implementation at the state level. (Asante, Shepherd, 2025).

NAPs show that there is no single vision of what the WPS agenda should aspire towards. NAPs often fall short due

to misalignment between NAP's principles and the values of patriarchal societies which cause exclusion of women from political, social and economic activities as well as due to the ambiguity regarding the social and political impact of implementation often leads critics to comment that the formulation of a NAP remains symbolic. (Newby & O'Malley, 2021).

The expansion of the WPS agenda is crucial for addressing emergent security risks for women in conflict settings. However states have often employed NAPs to advance national interests and foreign policy objectives instead of the WPS agenda. One of the most significant criticisms of NAPs has been the inability of states to determine the underlying causes of women's insecurity. (Asante, Shepherd, 2025).

While Europe and North America have significantly higher number of countries implementing NAPs significant criticism on the conception and the tendency of European states to project policy initiatives towards the Global South rather than evaluating domestic structural inequalities that impede the realisation of WPS have emerged. Overemphasis on traditional security such as focus on increasing the military participation, national security. (Newby & O'Malley, 2021). Despite the criticisms the NAP remains a key tool for localising the WPS agenda. In short, the NAP may be seen as a national level policy for implementation of international agenda. The perceived increased participation and access of civil society members as key actors in the NAP process is one of the most evident ways in which the WPS norms have trickled down as national priority in various countries.

The focus 2015 afterwards on women as security actors has not increased participation of women in the security arena. For example, in national militaries the participation of

women on an average is around 10% despite the adoption of UNSC 1325. The resolution went into considerable detail on how to mainstream gender in national security institutions. The Namibia Plan of Action stated explicitly that women's participation in peace operations, peacekeeping should be increased. Despite the declaration in most of these areas the countries of the Global North show no signs of performing better than the Global South. (Newby & O'Malley, 2021)

The most active implementation of the WPS has been at the level of civil society. Context specific examples of WPS in conditions of both war and peace emerge by observing the activity of civil society actors. It is often civil society actors that highlight the influence of religious, societal norms and customary laws as impediments to the realisation of the WPS agenda. Scholars have highlighted the use of sexualised violence to disenfranchise women and therefore scholars caution against adopting a purely statist approach while implementing the WPS agenda. (Newby & O'Malley, 2021). Thematically the UNSC Resolution is geared to guide the international community towards efforts to understand the gendered implications of armed conflicts. For civil society actors the UNSC 1325 has emerged as a tool to advocate relief and recovery work of civil society actors who have been engaged in addressing the needs and concerns of women in conflict rid areas. The passage of the WPS resolution in itself is seen as a testament to persistent civil society advocacy. (Basu,2025)

II. Impediments to the WPS Agenda

Scholars have noted however that states and civil society actors alike have used the WPS agenda for varying purposes such as advancing their own strategic interests alongside the implementation of the agenda. Most notably UN member

states campaigning for a non-permanent seat on the security council have showcased their commitment to the agenda to strengthen their case for election. Similarly civil society actors have used the WPS agenda to attract funds and to direct resources towards donor driven agendas rather than local concerns. (Basu, 2025).

Different scholars and practitioners attach significance to different goals within the WPS agenda. For some the focus is on addressing the insecurity of woman and girls in conflict, for others it is a mechanism for feminist mobilisation and finally for some it is a means to establish peace and improve women's wellbeing in the world. (Lindsey,2025). Another criticism of the WPS Agenda has been that the inclusion of LGBTQ community within the agenda has been limited. This lack of inclusion of the LGBTQ community is seen as limiting the transformative potential of the agenda. (Lindsey,2025)

Others have pointed towards the crisis towards the liberal framework of conceptualising peace itself. The liberal peace framework rests on three interdependent core tenets : democracy, human rights and globalised free market economies all of which must operate together. It assumes that all these three tenets together will naturally lead to peace. The most crucial criticism of the liberal framework is the over emphasis on state rebuilding efforts rather than revisiting the liberal paradigm of peace. Others have stated that the liberal peace framework does not fully capture the realities of the conflict ridden societies. The liberal peace framework also reinforces binaries between the local and the global; the west and the non-west; the victim and the perpetrator. Liberal peace frameworks look at conflict in a linear manner failing to capture the complex and ambiguous nature of protracted conflict. In essence it often reinforces hegemonic forces such as colonialism, masculinity and western values. (Anderson et

al., 2025). Mainstream approaches to peacebuilding efforts therefore have retained the exclusive focus on the internal and domestic dimension of governance and institutions in conflict affected societies. This has often been at the cost of negligence of local actors and dynamics of governance rooted in cultural and societal norms. The idea of security therefore has also remained largely centered around the state.

It is therefore imperative to broaden the understanding of security beyond traditional conception of security.

III. WPS Agenda: The case of Afghanistan

Following the agreement signed by the US government and the Taliban in Doha, Qatar, in February 2020, known as the Doha Deal or Doha Agreement, the US and Taliban forces ended the war, established a ceasefire, and implemented several key agreements. The United States' military withdrawal from Afghanistan in 2021 marked the conclusion of a two-decade military presence (2001-2021). Initially the WPS agenda led to greater participation of women in politics and gains made in education and healthcare between 2001 to 2021 in Afghanistan. Although Afghanistan ratified a NAP to reflect commitment to the WPS agenda the implementation remained a challenge due patriarchal nature and inter-ethnic tension of Afghan society. (True & Akbari, 2021).

The participation of women leaders during the US-Taliban peace talks resulted in targeted killing of women leaders. With this a major shift in the US approach towards Afghanistan became evident. The exclusion of the Afghan government from the peace talks by the US in the peace talks due to the Taliban's insistence was reflective of this approach (True & Akbari, 2021) During the talks the Taliban stated that women would enjoy rights to education consistent with Islamic law and Afghan culture. This view was broadly accepted by

Western states. The definition of Afghan culture or rather Taliban's definition of Afghan culture was not challenged. (True & Akbari, 2021). Further during the peace talks the ethnic diversity of Afghanistan was not captured. Another prominent criticism of the WPS agenda emerged due to the rural-urban divide. Afghan women representatives were accused of failing to represent rural gender issues. For rural women the end of the conflict carried greater significance in many areas than their rights. With the Taliban regime in power since August 2021 Afghanistan became the only country banning women's education. Further Afghanistan became a country where the UN cannot employ local women-illustrating the extent of failure of the WPS agenda on ground. (True & Akbari, 2021)

Under the Taliban 2.0 therefore Afghanistan has been witnessing an institutionalised and systematic oppression of women that has stripped them of their basic right to education, work and movement. Scholars have characterised this as a 'gender apartheid' namely a "system of governance based on laws and/or policies which imposes systematic segregation of women and men and may also have systematically exclude women from public spaces and spheres". The failure of the WPS is illustrated most prominently in the fact that despite well documented evidence of the ongoing gender apartheid in Afghanistan there is no mechanism by which to hold the Taliban accountable within Afghanistan. (Haqpal, 2025)

IV. The significance of Human Security

Traditionally the understanding of 'security' has been tied closely to the 'nation state' as such 'territorial integrity' which is a key marker of a state has led to conventionally 'threats' being understood as 'external' as originating not from within but outside the state. Realism attributes great

significance to 'rationality' guiding state behavior. Realism accords importance to infusing 'rational order' in the study of politics. (Morgenthau, 1978). However, realism is not bereft of demerits. Ken Booth identifies, realism as guiding the understanding of security being based on three elements "it has emphasized military threats and the need for strong counters; it has been status quo oriented; and it has centered on states". (Booth as cited in Wilkin, 2001) Rational theories of international relations present largely a 'reductive' account of political life. They premise their understanding of politics in the "unchanging essential properties of politics. An excessive emphasis on state power (military capabilities), anarchy (absence of any authority to impose law and order in the international arena), balance of power (alliances between states to maintain equilibrium of power) and the rigid demarcation of the international arena from that of domestic politics" falls deficient to explain the role of non-state actors, non- military threats to the state such as environmental and health care threats which includes natural disasters, pandemics. (Wilkin, 2001)

A more extensive understanding of 'security' is important- as the security of the state is not synonymous with the security of the individual. A conception of security which engages with individuals and collectivities rather than that of the state and its institutions broadens the scope of 'security' beyond mere survival. It encompasses the attributes required to lead a dignified life. (Tadjbaksh, 2014). In its broadest sense, advocates of the human security approach delineate human security as comprising of- "freedom from want - conditions that allow for, protection of basic needs quality of life, freedom from fear- protection of individuals from direct threats to safety, physical integrity and various forms of direct, indirect violence and lastly, freedom from indignity- conditions that

provide for the assurance of fundamental rights, conditions to make choices and take advantage in everyday lives". (Tadjbaksh,2014).

The concept of 'human security' centers the concept of security with that of people and communities- instead of state and its institutions. Human Security highlights that the security of the state does not translate to the security of the individual. Human Security widens the concept of 'security' in recognizing a wide range of non- traditional threats. Human Security was first laid down as a concept in the 1994 Human Development Report wherein Mahbub- Ul- Haq emphasised security can be achieved through 'development not arms'. This encapsulation laid down the comprehensive, holistic view that 'human security' envisioned. Human Security therefore is a necessary condition that must be fulfilled for an individual to access means of 'development' whether socially, educationally or economically. The central concern of human security is 'human dignity' and sustenance and stability of development gains made by an individual or a community. (Tadjbaksh,2014). Although, the concept of 'human security' was explicitly outlined in the 1994 Development Report- the roots of 'human security' as a concept can be traced back to the work done by International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) during the 19th century underlying the principle- that people should be protected from violent threats and when they are harmed or injured and that the international community has an obligation to assist them. (Martin & Owen,2013). The UNDP Report of 1994 recognizes that 'human security 'is more than the mere absence of conflict. If human development is focused towards expansion of opportunities to all- human security as a concept focuses on mitigating, controlling threats from one's immediate environment that acts as a barrier to access to basic amenities.

V. Recent Indices from Afghanistan

The recently published Afghanistan Gender Index measures the current status of women in Afghanistan against the eight sustainable development goals. UN Women and UNDP jointly developed the Women's Empowerment Index (WEI) and Global Gender Parity Index (GGPI) in 2023. These indices measure the extent to which women in different countries can access and exercise their rights and opportunities. (Gender Index 2024: Afghanistan, 2025) Most significantly from 2000-2021 the gender gap in good health has deteriorated. Limited access to data since the Taliban regime's takeover makes it even more difficult to assess the impact of the collapse of the public health system. (Gender Index 2024: Afghanistan, 2025) The overall gender restrictions on health centres, ban on education further exacerbating the lack of skilled women healthcare personnel acts as a barrier for women to access necessary healthcare. Specific health concerns of women make them more susceptible to sexual and reproductive risks. (Gender Index 2024: Afghanistan, 2025) Although there has been a decline in armed conflict related deaths across Afghanistan since 2021 the gender gap in life expectancy will widen further due to restrictions on access to basic health services for women. Increased restrictions on freedom of movement including women's access to public and private transport without a male member of the family since the Taliban came to power has also impacted women's access to health. (Gender Index 2024: Afghanistan, 2025). Similarly since 2021 progress made in school enrollment for girls between 2001-2021 has been reversed. The Taliban regime secondary schools for girls remains suspended since March 2022. Since 2021, hence religious education has been the only option available for young women.

The grave situation was illustrated most recently during an earthquake which took place in Afghanistan in September 2025. In the aftermath of a 6.0 magnitude earthquake in September 2025 in Eastern Afghanistan women were grossly neglected during the rescue operations. Women and girls accounted for more than half of the casualties in the disaster. They also accounted for 60% of those missing in the aftermath of the earthquake. (UN News, 2025) Humanitarian and rescue workers from the ground recounted that cultural norms in certain areas translated to women not wanting men to touch and local men also refusing to touch women during the rescue operations. (UN News, 2025)

This situation highlights the double endangerment that women and girls face during crises such as natural disasters and the inherent shortcomings of the international humanitarian framework to address the crisis. Lack of legitimacy, and the power to enforce as well as lack of on ground presence coupled with adherence to Taliban enforced restrictions on mobility of women make it increasingly difficult for humanitarian workers to operate in Afghanistan. The suspension of internet and cellular networks also disrupted rescue efforts. However later the Taliban officials specifically asked agencies to send more female health workers to assist female survivors. (Hadid & Akbari, 2025) Local aid workers claimed that women were airlifted during rescue operations in adherence with the Taliban's rules. Women injured in the earthquake were left unattended in many instances until female aid workers arrived. The aftermath of the earthquake highlighted the Taliban's extent of enforcement of restrictions on women while trying to garner necessary aid and support required due to the deteriorating situation.

VI. The Way Forward

There has been increasing legitimacy gained by the Taliban regime since assuming power since 2021. This needs to be challenged. A recent example of this was the protest by women journalists during the visit of the Taliban foreign minister to New Delhi and the initial exclusion of women journalists. It should be noted that the US remains the biggest aid donor in Afghanistan since the withdrawal of the US military providing approximately 3.63 billion between October 2021 and December 2024. US engagement or rather lack of engagement will continue to shape the situation in Afghanistan. Various countries have increased outreach with the Taliban. Although most such diplomatic engagements are based on pragmatic considerations this provides the Taliban a forum to put forward their strategic interests. Domestic pressure has increased in Europe to deport Afghan refugees prompting authorities to engage with the Taliban.

It is important to note that 'patriarchal bargaining' of values often takes place in diplomatic engagements wherein considerations of protection of human rights and the women, peace and security agenda assume a backseat despite multiple countries being signatories of various international agreements towards gender equality. Recent Pakistan-Afghanistan escalation since 12 October points towards the protracted nature of the conflict being far from over. It should be noted that Pakistan has earlier deported Afghan refugees. As the humanitarian crisis edges from bad to worse it is imperative for the humanitarian frameworks to prioritise the most vulnerable women and children. Strategic interests of states will likely triumph in engagements with the Taliban which leaves multilateral efforts as the most effective means for tackling the crisis. The media has gradually forgone Afghanistan and has shifted attention towards other ongoing

crises such as Gaza, Syria and Ukraine. The decreased attention has enabled the Taliban's outreach efforts.

VII. WPS Agenda: What next?

Scholars have argued that the failure of the WPS agenda in Afghanistan highlights the overt focus of the WPS resolutions on protecting women's bodies than advancing women's minds. It failed to envision women's mind as an important tool for establishing peace in a country such as Afghanistan. (Alwis, 2022.) D'Souza in her article highlights how dominant narratives on Afghanistan in global media focus on the structural constraints of lack of human rights. These narratives do not capture the ingenious ways in which Afghan women have adapted to the Taliban regime. She highlights the example of the Afghanistan Women's Chamber of Commerce and Industry (AWCCI) founded in 2017 and its active role in promoting and supporting Afghan women entrepreneurs and businesses. The AWCCI continues to be in operation and has even expanded its scope of operation into as many as 20 provinces. The number of women doing all businesses without licenses stands approximately at 52,000 to 120,000. Most of these businesses focus on handicrafts, health, agriculture and jewellery. AWCCI has assisted 12,500, micro, small and medium enterprises (MSMEs) in accessing alternate trade routes and provided support to more than 900 women-owned businesses in digital commerce and export facilitation and provided business training to more than 5,000 women through home based online initiatives. (D'Souza, 2025). D'Souza proposes small localised interventions such as women's trade facilitation desks at border crossings to reduce barriers for women traders, support and funding for trade fairs and digital literacy programmes. (D'Souza, 2025)

One of the original intentions of the WPS agenda was the inclusion of women in the peacemaking process yet the example of Afghanistan shows us that there is a disconnect between the theory and the application of the WPS agenda. Peace deals are often relational and either empower, bolster or alternatively diminish interests and status of actors. The advancement of the WPS agenda will therefore require political bargaining to bring about impactful change. The bargaining of intentions of the WPS agenda will continue to take place. It will require advocacy, global solidarity and effective maneuvering to advance the WPS agenda.

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