

Kathleen Danskin and Dana Perkins, “Women as Agents of Positive Change in Biosecurity,” *Science & Diplomacy*, Vol. 3, No. 2 (June 2014). <http://www.sciencediplomacy.org/perspective/2014/women-agents-positive-change-in-biosecurity>.

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## Women as Agents of Positive Change in Biosecurity

*Kathleen Danskin and Dana Perkins*

**W**EAPONS of mass destruction (WMD) nonproliferation efforts and biosecurity are an important part of preventing conflict and achieving international peace and security. Biological weapons proliferation and the insecurity of biological weapons–related materials constitute a multifaceted problem that requires a multifactorial solution, and gender integration can be one of these factors. Managing biological threats requires a multifaceted, holistic approach to address the full spectrum of human, animal, plant, and environmental health risks (“One Health”<sup>1</sup>); promote the development of core capacities for disease detection and response; and strengthen biosafety/biosecurity and the international norms and effective measures against bioterrorism and biological weapons. Bringing a diverse group of people to the table, including women, ensures that a range of different experiences and perspectives are heard.

The United Nations (UN) has recognized that women can play an important role in preventing and resolving conflicts and since 2000 has taken deliberate action to integrate women into the security realm. These efforts have been complemented by national plans, such as the U.S. National Action Plan (NAP) on Women, Peace, and

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Security. However, while the NAP reiterates the U.S. commitment to amplifying the critical role women can play in conflict prevention and mitigation, currently there is no particular emphasis on promoting the participation of women in the fields of arms control, disarmament, WMD nonproliferation, and biosecurity. In international biosecurity forums such as the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention (BTWC), statistics do show sustained progress toward gender-balanced participation. However, they also paint a clear picture of just how far there is to go to achieve gender integration. Correcting the current gender imbalance is a worthwhile goal first and foremost because it is a matter of justice. International security and WMD nonproliferation are issues that concern everyone, and the institutions that manage these risks need to be reflective of society as a whole. Moreover, women add important value to biosecurity forums by, for example, leveraging women's networks and building bridges across divided communities. Until women everywhere have the chance to participate equally in such forums, the international security and WMD nonproliferation fields will be missing an important voice.

Judit Körömi of Hungary provides an illustrative example of how a holistic, gender-integrated approach can positively influence efforts to advance biosecurity and biological weapons nonproliferation. As the first-ever female chair of the BTWC, Körömi aimed to "bring in more voices" to both the BTWC Meeting of Experts and the Meeting of States Parties in 2013.<sup>2</sup> This initiative resulted in an invitation to the UN Security Council 1540 Committee<sup>3</sup> to address the BTWC States Parties, the first time these groups had officially been brought together. Continuing to use a holistic, gender-integrated approach will ensure that more such connections and linkages are made, strengthening biosecurity efforts.

## **UN and U.S. Actions on Women and Security**

The Charter of the United Nations explicitly acknowledges "the equal rights of men and women,"<sup>4</sup> and the UN repeatedly has reaffirmed its commitment to this principle.<sup>5</sup> Over time, the UN has shifted from a legalistic approach to gender equality to supporting the "full and equal participation" of women as decision makers in all areas of national and international policymaking.<sup>6</sup> The UN first addressed the issue of women and security in October 2000 when it adopted United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325. The resolution "urges Member States to ensure increased representation of women at all decision-making levels in national, regional and international institutions and mechanisms for the prevention, management, and resolution of conflict."<sup>7</sup> UNSCR 1325 was hailed as groundbreaking and as a much-needed recognition of the important role that women play in security.

That was followed by a series of other Security Council resolutions dealing with women and security, such as UNSCRs 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, and 2122 (2013).<sup>8</sup> Additionally, the UN General Assembly issued Resolution 65/69 (2011) on

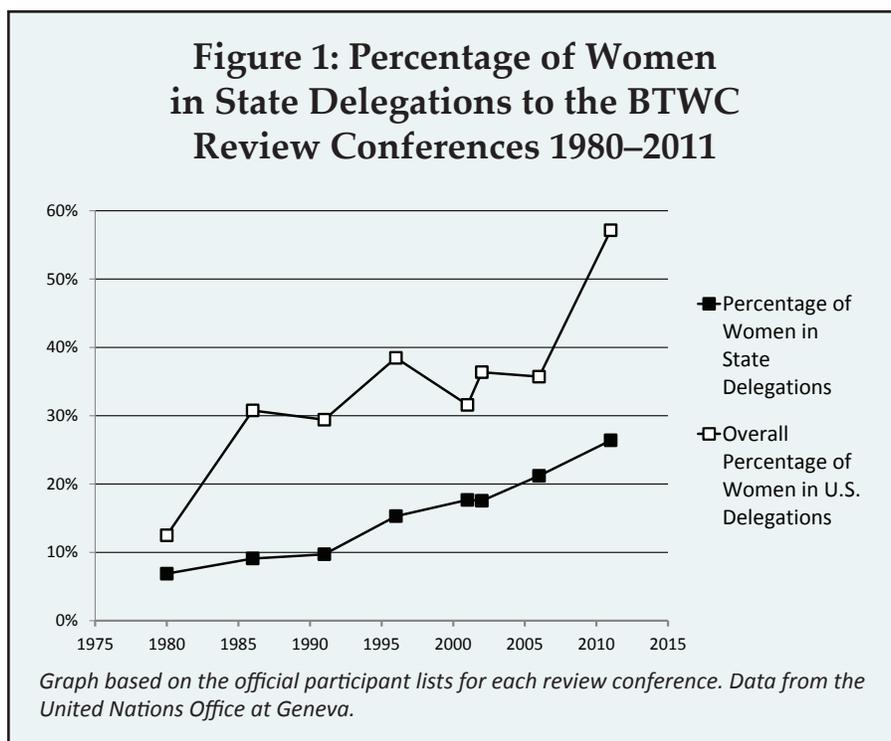
women, disarmament, nonproliferation, and arms control, encouraging “Member States, regional and subregional organizations, the UN and specialized agencies to promote the equitable representation of women in all decision-making processes with regard to matters related to disarmament, nonproliferation and arms control.”<sup>9</sup> Over time, the language of these resolutions has changed; UNSCR 1325 speaks of women’s *representation* in the peace process, while later resolutions, such as UNSCR 1889, speak of women’s *participation*. The shift shows an increased awareness of women as actors.<sup>10</sup>

Most recently, UNSCR 2122 (October 2013) provides a road map for a more systematic approach to the implementation of commitments on women, peace, and security as it “puts the onus on the Security Council, the UN, regional organizations and Member States to dismantle the barriers, create the space, and provide seats at the table for women.”<sup>11</sup>

The Security Council has encouraged UN member states to develop national strategies or national action plans to implement UNSCR 1325 and the related resolutions on women, peace, and security.<sup>12</sup> To date, thirty-seven countries around the world have produced such plans.<sup>13</sup> The NAP expresses the U.S. commitment to “integrating women’s views and perspectives fully into our diplomatic, security, and development efforts—not simply as beneficiaries, but as agents of peace, reconciliation, development, growth, and stability.”<sup>14</sup> The NAP’s goal of “gender integration” is echoed in the U.S. National Security Strategy and the 2010 Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review. “Gender integration,” as described by the NAP, involves “identifying and addressing, in all our policies and programs, gender differences and inequalities, as well as the roles of women and men. The goal of gender integration or ‘mainstreaming’ is to promote gender equality and improve programming and policy outcomes.” Both the Department of State, through its Office of Global Women’s Issues,<sup>15</sup> and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)<sup>16</sup> have developed implementation documents for the NAP.

## **Gender Integration in the U.S. Government and in the Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention**

As of May 2014, many women in the U.S. government hold leadership roles in arms control, disarmament, and WMD nonproliferation, particularly in areas addressing biosecurity. At the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services (HHS), several women hold leadership positions in biosafety and biosecurity policy; the HHS secretary and the assistant secretary for preparedness and response are both women,<sup>17</sup> as are a significant number of the personnel working on these issues. Outside of the HHS, the U.S. representative to the G8 Global Partnership Against the Spread of Weapons and Materials of Mass Destruction, the under secretary for arms control and international security (President Barack



Obama's top arms control official), and the senior director for WMD Terrorism and Threat Reduction at the National Security Council are also women.<sup>18</sup>

The prominent role played by U.S. women in biosecurity and biological weapons nonproliferation is best illustrated by the composition of the U.S. delegation to the latest BTWC Review Conference. More than half (57 percent) of the U.S. delegates to the Seventh Review Conference of the BTWC were women, as were the top two U.S. officials in attendance, then secretary of state Hillary Clinton and Ambassador Laura Kennedy.

The United States has historically been above average in terms of women's participation in the BTWC, as shown in Figure 1. At the First Review Conference, held in 1980, just 7 percent of the delegates from States Parties were women.<sup>19</sup> The United States was one of only twelve (out of sixty-one) to include a woman.<sup>20</sup> Over the course of the next six review conferences, the share of women in state delegations rose incrementally, reaching 26 percent at the Seventh Review Conference in 2011. The United States has sent a substantially higher than average number of female delegates to each review conference. The share of state delegations headed by women has risen in concert with the total number of female delegates, from zero in 1980 and 1986<sup>21</sup> to 13 percent in 2011.<sup>22</sup>

Interestingly, non-state delegations (those from nongovernmental organizations) tend to have higher percentages of women than state delegations. There are many potential explanations for this disparity; in many countries, women are not permitted to serve in the military and may even face barriers to employment in civil service. Even in developed countries where such structural barriers no longer exist, women still face a variety of less tangible obstacles while pursuing

a career in foreign policy. Recent articles have cited frequent international travel, the career arcs of many professionals, a government work culture that values face time, inadequate support for women balancing work and family responsibilities, and socially constructed gender norms among the many factors that combine to winnow out women or to shunt them toward less-ambitious career tracks.<sup>23, 24, 25</sup>

## **Proposed Actions**

The United States should take policy actions to increase the global participation of women in the fields of arms control, disarmament, WMD nonproliferation, and biosecurity; attempt to better understand and integrate gender issues across all U.S. government agencies working in the fields of biosecurity and WMD nonproliferation; and consider gender integration-specific indicators when tracking the performance of international bio-engagement programs implemented by the U.S. government worldwide. Currently, foreign assistance indicators tracking the performance of programs implemented by USAID and the Department of State include specific indicators on gender equality, women's empowerment, sexual and gender-based violence prevention and response, and women's participation in peace building. Our recommendation is that international bio-engagement programs implemented by the U.S. government likewise should include gender-specific indicators to track gender integration in these programs.

The inclusion of gender integration as a goal in bio-engagement programs and better understanding and integration of gender issues across all U.S. government agencies working in the fields of arms control, disarmament, WMD nonproliferation, and particularly in areas addressing biosecurity would serve to empower women in biosecurity. These initiatives also would illustrate further "the United States' unqualified commitment to integrating women's views and perspectives fully into our diplomatic, security, and development efforts—not simply as beneficiaries, but as agents of peace, reconciliation, development, growth, and stability," as emphasized in the NAP.

The United States should promote cooperative global action to meet the tenets of the UN General Assembly Resolution 65/69 (2011) to promote the equitable representation of women in all decision-making processes with regard to matters related to disarmament, nonproliferation, and arms control. Such U.S. action may bring about the proposed changes in biosecurity. **SD**

## **Endnotes**

1. One Health Initiative website, accessed on June 17, 2014, <http://www.onehealthinitiative.com>.

2. Judit Körömi, "Biological Weapons Convention: Meeting in 2013," BWC Implementation Support Unit, public letter, February 18, 2013, [http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/\(httpAssets\)/899D2B611B6F5564C1257B16005A94AD/\\$file/Chairman+letter+to+SPs+Feb+2013+\(with+annex\).pdf](http://www.unog.ch/80256EDD006B8954/(httpAssets)/899D2B611B6F5564C1257B16005A94AD/$file/Chairman+letter+to+SPs+Feb+2013+(with+annex).pdf).
3. UNSCR 1540 sets forth binding obligations on all states to adopt legislation to prevent the proliferation of nuclear, chemical, and biological weapons, and their means of delivery, and establish appropriate domestic controls over related materials to prevent their illicit trafficking. United Nations Resolution 1540 (2004), [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1540%20\(2004\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1540%20(2004)).
4. "Preamble," *The Charter of the United Nations* (The United Nations, 1945), <http://www.un.org/en/documents/charter/preamble.shtml>.
5. The Preamble to the UN's Universal Declaration of Human Rights (1948) also references "the equal rights of men and women" and Article 2 states that "Everyone is entitled to all the rights and freedoms set forth in this Declaration, without distinction of any kind, such as ... sex ... or other status." The UN has also adopted the Convention on the Political Rights of Women (1952) and the Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination Against Women (CEDAW, 1978), among others.
6. Mona Lena Krook and Jacqui True, "Rethinking the Life Cycles of International Norms: The United Nations and the Global Promotion of Gender Equality," *European Journal of International Relations* 18, no. 1 (2012): 103–27.
7. United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000), [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325\(2000\)](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=S/RES/1325(2000)).
8. The text of any United Nations Security Council Resolution can be looked up at <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/resolutions>.
9. United Nations General Assembly Resolution 65/69, Women, disarmament, nonproliferation and arms control (2011), [http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view\\_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/65/69](http://www.un.org/en/ga/search/view_doc.asp?symbol=A/RES/65/69).
10. Laura J. Shepherd, "Sex, Security, and Superhero(in)es: From 1325 to 1820 and Beyond," *International Feminist Journal of Politics* 13, no. 4 (2011): 504–21.
11. UN Women, "UN Security Council Adopts New Resolution, Urges Women's Full Inclusion in Peace Talks and Transitional Justice," news release, October 13, 2013, <http://www.unwomen.org/en/news/stories/2013/10/press-release-on-adoption-of-wps-resolution#sthash.jlyKxRUu.dpuf>.
12. Presidential Statements, United Nations Security Council, S/PRST/2004, S/PRST/2005/52, S/PRST/2006/42, S/PRST/2007/5, S/PRST/2007/40, S/PRST/2010/22, S/PRST/2011/20, and S/PRST/2012/23, <http://www.un.org/en/sc/documents/statements>.
13. "National Action Plans," Peace Women, Women's International League for Peace and Freedom, <http://www.peacewomen.org/pages/about-1325/national-action-plans-naps>.
14. *United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security* (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2011), [http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/email-files/US\\_National\\_Action\\_Plan\\_on\\_Women\\_Peace\\_and\\_Security.pdf](http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/email-files/US_National_Action_Plan_on_Women_Peace_and_Security.pdf).
15. *United States Department of State Implementation Plan of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security* (Washington, DC: U.S. Department of State, August 2012), <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/196726.pdf>.
16. *Making Progress: USAID Implementation of the U.S. National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security* (Washington, DC: United States Agency for International Development, December 2013), [http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID\\_WPS\\_Implementation\\_Report.pdf](http://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1866/USAID_WPS_Implementation_Report.pdf).
17. The HHS secretary is Sylvia Mathews Burwell (previously, Kathleen Sebelius). The assistant secretary for preparedness and response is Nicole Lurie, Rear Admiral, U.S. Public Health Service.
18. Ambassador Bonnie Jenkins, Under Secretary Rose Gottemoeller, and Laura Holgate, respectively.
19. The number and percentage of women delegates were calculated from the official participant lists for each review conference. For participant lists from all Biological and Toxin Weapons Convention meetings, see the BTWC Implementation Support Unit website: [http://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/\(httpPages\)/92CFF2CB73D4806DC12572BC00319612?OpenDocument](http://www.unog.ch/80256EE600585943/(httpPages)/92CFF2CB73D4806DC12572BC00319612?OpenDocument).
20. The delegation from Jamaica consisted of two delegates, both women. The Jamaican delegation was the only delegation with more than one woman.
21. Although both delegates from Jamaica were women, neither was designated as head of the delegation.
22. This includes only women who are *specifically listed* as the head of the delegation. For example, although the top two U.S. officials attending were women, neither was designated as the head of the delegation, and so the United States is not included in this count. If the heads of the delegations are extrapolated based on their titles, the percentage rises to about 21 percent.
23. Ann-Marie Slaughter, "Why Women Still Can't Have It All," *The Atlantic*, July/August 2012, <http://www.theatlantic.com/magazine/print/2012/07/why-women-still-can-8217-t-have-it-all/9020>.
24. Melissa Tyler, Emily Blizzard, and Bridget Crane, "Is International Affairs Too 'Hard' for Women? Explaining the Missing Women in Australia's International Affairs," *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 68, no. 2 (2014): 156–76.

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