

DECISIVE POINT

The USAWC Press Podcast Companion Series:

Podcast Transcript

Jody Prescott “Factoring Gender into Kinetic Operations”

US military practice neither considers the gendered effects of kinetic actions in planning and executing operations nor tracks and measures them. The Department of Defense’s implementation of the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 instead focuses on the role of women in preventing armed conflict and resolving it. The implementation of the Department of Defense’s new Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response Action Plan provides an opportunity to close this gap in an operationally relevant way.

Keywords: Women, Peace, and Security (WPS), civilian harm and mitigation response (CHMR), gender, targeting, operational relevance

Read the article [here](#).

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Episode Transcript

Stephanie Crider (Host)

You’re listening to [Decisive Point](#). The views and opinions expressed in this podcast are those of the authors and are not necessarily those of the Department of the Army, the US Army War College, or any other agency of the US government.

Joining me today is Jody Prescott, a retired colonel and currently a lecturer at the University of Vermont, where he teaches courses on cybersecurity law and energy law. Prescott is the author of “[Factoring Gender into Kinetic Operations](#),” which was featured in the spring 2023 issue of *Parameters*.

Welcome back to Decisive Point, Jody. I’m glad you’re here.

Jody Prescott

Oh, thank you, Stephanie. It’s great to be back.

Host

Let’s jump right in. How does the US military currently consider gender in kinetic actions?

Prescott

As best I can determine—using open-source materials, of course—the US military does not consider gender in the application of kinetic force.

Host

Your article focuses on using (the Department of Defense’s or) DoD’s new Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response initiative as a way to include operational gender considerations into kinetic actions. Doesn’t DoD Women, Peace, and Security effort already take care of that?

<http://ssi.armywarcollege.edu/dp>

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Prescott

That’s a very fair question. The Women, Peace, and Security Program is a very important initiative and is making progress in the areas within its remit based on what I see and open-source information. However, it is largely focused on preventing armed conflict from occurring and then, failing that, building a more gender-equal peace afterwards. It is not focused really on the inclusion of gender considerations in the conduct of kinetic operations, such as targeting. Now, Stephanie, this is not a fault of the program. This is the way the law the program implements—the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017—this is the way this law was fashioned by Congress.

Now on the other hand, the Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response initiative, with its focus on not just injuries to civilians and damage to their property from kinetic operations, but, also, on the larger civilian environment—and this is actually quite new in many ways—provides an opportunity to meaningfully address gender considerations in kinetic actions, I believe, where practicable.

Host

In your article, you argue that the treatment of operational gender considerations in Joint-level and service doctrine is uneven. What do you mean by that, and could you give us some examples, please?

Prescott

Now, it’s important to keep in mind that proponents of including gender considerations in doctrine at all levels where it’s operationally relevant have been working very hard for many years to make this happen. At this point, results are still mixed.

One example of doctrine that has a decent treatment of gender considerations in its operational context is the Joint-level stability doctrine. On the other hand, doctrine that you might expect to be the most thorough in dealing with operational gender considerations—for me, this would be civil affairs doctrine—is essentially gender blind.

I mean, any given civilian population in a mission area is going to be roughly half female, right? Depending on the specific conditions off that area, women and girls could have very different human-security needs than their male family members. Stephanie, this is a bit of a paradox to me. Despite this void in civil affairs doctrine, civil affairs units on the ground have a long history of incorporating gender considerations into their work.

Host

You also argue that part of the problem with including operationally relevant gender considerations into military missions and actions is the lack of an overarching theory of the operational relevance of gender. What do you mean by that?

Prescott

I mean exactly that. What is actually the operational relevance of gender? Advocates of including gender considerations into military activities and operations often argue that it’s a moral requirement. I agree. There is a moral component to it, but how do commanders and planners operationalize that? How much gender should they do? How often? In what areas? With what troops? With what equipment? How much gender can a mission afford? If it is a moral requirement, then, theoretically, I see any resource limitations on implementing gender-aware actions in military operations as being immoral. That’s why I just don’t think that’s a very solid basis to move forward on.

My experiences and my research have led me to conclude that gender is not always relevant from the perspective of operational risk. By that, I mean risk to mission accomplishment. Now, in equipment-heavy, force-on-force engagements outside the presence of civilians—I believe that not thinking about gender in these cases poses little meaningful risk to the operation. On the other hand, in civilian-centric missions, I believe that not thinking about gender and its effects in the mission area poses significant risk to mission accomplishment.

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Host

Suppose the Civilian Harm Mitigation and Response effort were to specifically include operational gender considerations. What do you see as the three most important parts of making that work?

Prescott

Stephanie, I think the first important part is increasing the systematic gathering of robust sets of sex- and gender-disaggregated data about the operational area.

Following that, the second thing that would need to be done is you have to develop the bench of analysts and staff officers who could crunch this data and make operational sense of it. The final thing that would need to be done is to translate this analysis into staff products that the rest of the headquarters can look at and understand quickly. Now, by this, I mean going beyond typical gender analyses.

An example of this could be the (Geographic Information System or) GIS model that my research partner, Dr. Robin Lovell, and the group of students with whom we worked at the University of Vermont this last year . . . this model that we came up with, we call it “GIAC3.” Stands for gender inequality/armed conflict/climate change.

The students got to brief the commanders and the staffs of the Nordic Centre for Gender in Military Operations and the Finnish Defence Forces International Centre (FINCENT) on this model last year. And importantly, for purposes of civilian protection, FINCENT has a long track record of delivering quality instruction on the protection of civilians in its training, and I hope that US protection of civilian efforts would be able to tap into this expertise.

Host

Listeners, you can really dig into the details on this and read the genesis article at press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters. Look for volume 53, issue 1. And Jody, thank you so much for your time today. I really appreciate it.

Prescott

My pleasure, Stephanie. Thank you very much.

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