Permanent Security Council Members and Resolutions on Women, Peace and Security

Dominant narratives on the passage of the landmark United Nations (UN) Security Council Resolution 1325 and subsequent developments in the 'women, peace and security' (WPS) agenda at the UN Security Council highlight the leadership of civil society organizations in these processes, particularly the role played by the NGO Working Group on Women, Peace and Security (NGOWG WPS) [1] (see *inter alia* Cockburn, 2007; Cohn, 2004; Gibbings, 2004; Hill et al, 2003; Tryggestad, 2009). Curiously, little scholarly attention has been paid to the collective role of the five member states – China, France, Russia, United Kingdom (UK) and the United States (US) – which, by virtue of their permanent seats on the Security Council, occupy a central place within this institutional context. In light of their importance, this essay highlights key trends in the engagement of the P-5 member states with the resolutions with the aim to present some insights into the dynamics within the Security Council vis-à-vis the WPS agenda.**[2]**

Institutional Context

The mandate of the Security Council – 'maintenance of international peace and security' – exemplifies the chief motivation for the establishment of the UN 'to save succeeding generations from the scourge of war' (UN, 1945). In order to ensure this, 'the veto and permanent membership were designed to transform a wartime alliance into a big power oligarchy to secure the hard-won peace that would follow' (Luck, 2008: 63). In spite of major changes in international politics including, most importantly, the end of Cold War, the P-5 have continued to dominate the Security Council due to the their status. Their continuing hold of the veto power is the most obvious reason. However, the veto has been rarely used since the end of the Cold War. It is the permanent status of the P-5 that is of crucial importance.

The ten elected members do not have a sustained institutional history in the Security Council like the five permanent members. As Kishore Mahbubani writes, 'only the P-5 members have a continuous record and memory of the Council's work over the years' (2004: 260; also see, Johnstone, 2008: 87). Further, in general, the Security Council is inclined to conduct informal and closed-door negotiations (Krisch, 2008: 136; Zaum, 2008: 164). But the P-5 take this a step further. Owing to their long-standing institutional presence, they tend to consult privately before their discussions with the rest of the Security Council. These member states also have a special relationship with the UN Secretariat, the office of the Secretary-General. (see Malone, 2004: 7; Mahbubani, 2004)

Against this backdrop, and with respect to the WPS agenda, it is important to note that during the advocacy for the realization of SCR 1325, civil society actors who led the process in many ways, remained deferential to the protocol that marks formal Security Council deliberations. For instance, they waited for Namibia (which had agreed/decided to propose SCR 1325 in the Security Council) to introduce the proposal for the resolution to other Security Council member states before approaching them because 'it was vital that Namibia did not appear to be NGO led' (Hill, 2004-05: 29-31; also see Cockburn, 2007: 146). Further, while the WPS initiative within the Council was led by Bangladesh, Jamaica and Namibia, three elected members of the Security Council, the need for a P-5 member state to support the resolution was quite clear; and, in this context, the UK mission became an important ally (Huzzard, 2003).

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As a bastion of *realpolitik*, relative power in the Security Council is not only determined through a hierarchy between states and other actors in the global sphere, or between members and non-members but also between the elected members and P-5. Thus, in this political environment, even as advocates for SCR 1325 sought to disrupt the gender-blindness of the institution, they were mindful of the hierarchies upon which the Security Council is built.

P-5 and the WPS Agenda

Of the five permanent members, the UK has been at the forefront in terms of its engagement with the WPS agenda. This began with its co-sponsorship of SCR 1325, which involved gathering support from other countries including France and the US (Greenstock, 2005). It was also the first P-5 member state to adopt an explicit National Action Plan – in 2006 – for the implementation of SCR 1325. From their statements and initiatives at the international level, it is possible to identify at least three aspects of the British presence in the Security Council on WPS matters. Firstly, it can be distinguished for its leadership. Particularly in its earlier statements at the Council, the UK is most forthcoming among the P-5 on the implementation of SCR 1325. In the year 2003, for instance, even before it had adopted the NAP, the British representative mentions the introduction of compulsory gender training for UK personnel in field operations. Secondly, the UK has worked closely with civil society initiatives including the NGOWG WPS in New York. Thirdly, the UK has supported gender initiatives in a number of conflict regions including the Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC), Iraq and Uganda. However, with the increasing engagement of the US with the WPS agenda, as discussed below, the UK appears to have stepped away from its leadership role. This is apparent in its recent statements at the Security Council, which have been less substantive in nature.

Even though, in its statement during the 2003 WPS Open Debate at the Security Council, the US noted that it 'vigorously supported' the passage of SCR 1325, the most important member state at the Council – sometimes referred to as 'P-1' –appears to have been initially reluctant in implementing the resolution (see Otto, 2006-07: 144-145, 163). Later, the decision of the US to play a more substantive role becomes evident in its 2007 Open Debate statement at the Security Council. It circulated a draft resolution to be submitted to the UN General Assembly on 'eliminating the use of rape and other forms of sexual violence as instruments to achieve military and political objectives' (see Wolff 2007). The theme is indicative of the key role that the US would subsequently play in the passage of the three WPS resolutions that focus on sexual and gender-based violence – SCRs 1820 (2008), SCR 1888 (2009) and SCR 1960 (2010). All three resolutions were adopted while it was the President of the UN Security Council[3]. The trajectory that the US has followed in relation to SCR 1325 can be placed within its broader humanitarian agenda at the Council; it has been the main sponsor of the SCRs on 'protection of civilians in armed conflict'. Further, this more recent activism on WPS is also reflected in its adoption of the US National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security in 2011.

Along with the US, France had joined the UK to support the passage of SCR 1325 in 2000. The French engagement with the WPS agenda at the Security Council also resonates with the US approach, i.e. the implementation of the WPS resolutions is linked to their broader thematic interest in the Council. France chairs the Working Group on children and armed conflict and is one of the main sponsors of the SCRs on this theme. It tends to focus on the ways in which the country has employed SCR 1325 to integrate a gender perspective into issues of children and armed conflict. In the 2007 statement, for instance, the French representative highlights the emphasis on the specific needs of girls in the Paris Guidelines on Reintegration of Children, which France had developed in conjunction with the United Nations Fund for Children.

Both China and Russia have expressed their reservations about the WPS agenda from the outset. Even as they voted to adopt SCR 1325, both 'implied that they felt the resolution went beyond the Council's institutional capacity and duplicated the General Assembly mandate' (True-Frost, 2007: 122 *fn* 15; also see, Naraghi-Anderlini, 2007). This position corresponds to the general opposition of China and Russia to increasing the scope of the Council in international responses to humanitarian crises or human rights violations (see Roberts, 2004: 146; also see, Achutan and Black, 2009). Their statements during the WPS Open Debates at the Council, for instance, are largely rhetorical and stand apart from the other three P-5 member states because there is never any mention of national commitments to the implementation of the WPS resolutions. Indeed, in its statement in the 2007 debate, Russia was against any proposal for the Council to oversee national implementations, a possibility proposed at that meeting, saying: 'we

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believe that that would simply exacerbate the problem of duplication and lack of coherence' (Rogachev 2007). China has been more receptive to this idea but sees national implementation as an issue only for countries emerging from armed conflict (Zhenmin, 2007). It has also become more amenable to the WPS agenda in recent years, certainly at the rhetorical level, and has encouraged, for instance, the role of civil society actors in the implementation of the resolutions. It even hosted a second Open Debate on WPS during its Presidency in October 2008.

Conclusion

It appears from the discussion above that the position of the P-5 member states on WPS issues corresponds to their overall participation within the Security Council. Thus, while US and France have focused on 'protection' issues in keeping with their broader thematic interests in 'protection of civilians in armed conflict' and 'children and armed conflict' respectively, China and Russia have been reluctant – and sometimes openly hostile – to the idea of the Council engaging with issues of women and armed conflict, reflecting their opposition to humanitarian interventions by the Security Council. Further, China and Russia have not made any substantive commitments towards the implementation of the resolutions and continue to challenge any 'radical' moves on part of the other Security Council member states in this regard. Yet, both have gone along with the development of the WPS agenda in the Council. This is ostensibly to avoid any unnecessary conflicts with rest of the Security Council and particularly the other P-5 member sates who are supportive of the WPS resolutions. UK and France have been the two most vocal proponents of SCR 1325. This activism seems to be part of the role that the two countries have adopted for themselves in the Council in response to their declining relative importance in world politics. Both UK and France have to work harder to justify their place in the P-5 (Mahbubani, 2004: 258; also see Greenstock, 2008: 260).

Two qualifications need to be made at this point. First, this discussion admittedly provides a partial picture since it has not accounted for other relevant aspects such as domestic factors and role of key individuals in the political dynamics of the Council. Second, the aim of this essay is not to suggest that the fate of the WPS agenda is determined wholly by the P-5. Indeed the momentum for the mobilization of the SCRs on women, peace and security owe much to its 'global constituency' led by key actors across institutional divides, and by members of the civil society in particular. However, in their legislative constitution, the WPS resolutions are part of the Security Council with its many institutional constraints, including the hierarchical set-up that gives primacy to the P-5. At the very least, the acquiescence of the five permanent member states is required for substantive action by the Council. Greater attention to politics within the Security Council can yield richer insights into the oft-noted challenges in the implementation of the WPS resolution. Thus, for instance, it is possible to see that protection issues, of interest to the US (the 'P-1' member state) as well as France, have become central to the WPS agenda even as its other aspects – most notably conflict prevention – have received much less attention. Indeed, there are other characteristics of the Security Council, its lack of transparency, legitimacy issues including concerns about non-compliance by member states and others, relationship with the UN secretariat and civil society actors, that need to be explored to gain a better understanding of the politics of SCR 1325 and its follow-up resolutions.

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[1] The working group is a coalition of non-governmental organizations (NGOs) that came together in June 2000 to advocate for the passage of SCR 1325. The six founding members of the NGOWG WPS are Amnesty International, Hague Appeal for Peace, International Alert, Women's Coalition on Gender Justice, Women's Commission on Refugee Women and Children, and Women's International League for Peace and Freedom.

[2] This essay is based on a paper presented at the Annual International Studies Association Convention held at New Orleans in February 2012.

[3] SCRs 1325 and 1889 were adopted under the presidency of Namibia and Vietnam respectively.