More than twenty years after United Nations Security Council resolution (UNSCR) 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (WPS) was adopted and international organizations, states and militaries decided to implement its principles, how has the implementation progressed?

Stéfanie von Hlatky’s *Deploying Feminism* seeks to answer this central question by examining three North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) missions. Dr. von Hlatky aligns unequivocally with feminist criticism of militaries’ co-optation of WPS and looks granularly at how and why these distortions happen.

*Deploying Feminism* is not only a feminist critical study; it is also a practical work. Through fieldwork at the NATO Headquarters and with missions in Kosovo, with the Canadian-led battle group in Latvia, and in Iraq, von Hlatky looks at how WPS norms are translated at the strategic, operational and tactical levels. There, she finds that the confrontation of those norms with mission objectives and contributing nations’ military cultures led to a distortion of the WPS agenda. As she puts it succinctly in her conclusion, “the feminist principles that led to the adoption of the WPS agenda can get lost in translation when these norms are filtered through the prism of military culture which dictates a focus on operational effectiveness” (p. 154). Although this conclusion will not surprise those who have been observing the way states and international institutions are implementing the WPS—a fact von Hlatky is keenly aware of—the novelty of this monograph lies in how thoroughly the author immersed herself in NATO and military culture. Through immersive prose, she enables readers to see the realities within NATO and on the ground with the missions and the service they involve; the landscapes surrounding her as she visits the different missions; the way gender advisors and gender focal points negotiate their positions with commanders and fellow service members; and the deployed troops’ dynamics with the local populations.

*Deploying Feminism* teaches a great deal about the militarization of the WPS agenda and the operationalization of gender perspectives for the sake of mission success. But the book does not focus exclusively on WPS. It also shows how, and sometimes why, strategic intent can change when confronted with the operational picture on the ground, with cultures, and with the personalities of those responsible for carrying out the mission. Stéphanie von Hlatky clearly demonstrates how much insight critical works can offer into the current functioning of institutions. *Deploying Feminism* can serve as a starting point for anyone interested in learning more about how NATO works when preparing for operations and how those operations unfold on the ground. Its immersive and accessible prose makes it a compelling and thought-provoking read.

This is the book’s inherent strength: it raises many questions that are both rhetorical and practical. First and foremost, states and international organizations (most of them Western) have put militaries at the centre of WPS implementation, thereby opening the door to the militarization and distortion of the WPS agenda.
of the norms they were trying to pursue. Should NATO, and by proxy the militaries of its member states, be the drivers of gender equality? With the evolution of the nature of the work militaries are asked to do, which has increasingly involved stabilization and capacity building, it is not surprising that we find militaries assigned this task. However, the question of whether they are the most appropriate institutions to do the work is critical. And here, civilian–military relations become more salient. NATO Headquarters exercises rather significant oversight of the application of gender perspectives in missions, but civilian control during missions and at the national level could be improved. Stéphanie von Hlatky, by highlighting the norm distortion that occurs as soon as WPS enters military cultures, effectively underlines this problem. One thing that is not mentioned in the book, but is inherently connected to its thesis, is that militaries have yet to implement the radical culture change necessary for them to pursue WPS the way it was intended. This is essentially a civilian control issue. National Action Plans on WPS have let military cultures absorb WPS and use gender as a means toward achieving mission success, rather than letting the WPS agenda transform militaries. This leads back to the core question: should militaries be the institutions carrying this agenda? Paradoxically enough, as von Hlatky states in her conclusion, this is a point that many feminists and many military traditionalists would agree upon, but one that states have not yet grappled with.

Another challenge associated with militaries’ implementation of WPS is those militaries’ lack of diversity. Stéphanie von Hlatky repeatedly underlines that the absence of women poses not only the issue of credibility, but also that of real effectiveness in terms of the application of gender perspectives when executing a mission. The associated recommendations of deploying more women and incentivizing countries to do so through mechanisms akin to the United Nations’ Elsie Initiative are evident and compelling. However, the feasibility of implementing them remains extremely complex. In 2021, about 16.3 per cent of Canadian Armed Forces members were women, and they were concentrated in the seven following trades: human resource administrator, financial service administrator, material management technician; logistics officer, medical technician, nursing officer and cook. On average, 80 per cent of deployments require troops from the combat arms, of which women constitute about 5 per cent.¹ The Canadian Armed Forces encounter a similar issue with implementing the UN’s Elsie Initiative.² In 2021, the Canadian military had five missions in which more than 20 per cent of troops were women.³ Although von Hlatky correctly argues that the selection of missions impacts how many women have the opportunity to deploy, there might also be biases that lead to women being less likely to be selected for more dangerous missions: where women serve in the military strongly restricts the ability to deploy them. To change this situation, societies and militaries will have to do considerable work to ensure that women can envision themselves pursuing careers in non-traditional roles, and will then have to recruit and retain them. This is a point on which feminists will disagree with one another, and it circles back to the question of whether militaries are the most appropriate institutions to implement the WPS agenda.

In short, Stéfanie von Hlatky’s Deploying Feminism is a tour de force. It is a powerful book which opens the door to further critical, yet practical, studies of the way militaries approach gender and diversity. Von Hlatky is generous in her writing, offering clear, immersive prose in a book that is suitable for anyone who wants to learn about gender perspectives, gender mainstreaming or the WPS agenda, or who is seeking another view on how NATO operates.

Disclosure: In the summer of 2018 and 2019, the reviewer worked for Dr. von Hlatky as a research assistant on projects that served the writing of this book. However, the reviewer’s contribution was at arm’s length and consisted primarily of translation and basic data gathering on gender mainstreaming at NATO and attitudes toward women in the countries which are the largest contributors to the International Security Assistance Force.

ENDNOTES

1. Information given to the reviewer by a member of the Canadian Armed Forces via email.
