



## **THE ROLE OF WOMEN IN ENSURING PEACE AND DEVELOPMENT**

**Radjabova Aziza Matlubovna,**

Associate Professor, Department of International Relations

Doctor of Philosophy in Political Science (PhD)

[azizaenvoy1989@gmail.com](mailto:azizaenvoy1989@gmail.com)

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### **Abstract:**

Contemporary international politics is increasingly characterized by state actors adopting pragmatic approaches, prioritizing the pursuit of national interests over adherence to the principles of equality and justice. It is an undeniable fact that women and children are among the most affected by the increasingly tense and complex global situation, which is driven by geopolitical rivalries, unconventional threats, and the consequences of climate change. Three-quarters of the world's population living in extreme poverty reside either in Sub-Saharan Africa or in fragile, conflict-affected countries. In 2023, nearly 612 million women and girls lived within 50 kilometers of 170 active armed conflicts—a 41% increase since 2015. According to the United Nations, conflict-related sexual violence has risen by 50% since 2022, with women and girls accounting for 95% of the victims. This represents yet another form of violence and discrimination faced by women and children already living in poverty. In today's era, when every region of the world is confronted with varying degrees of economic and political challenges, protecting the rights and interests of women, enabling them to realize their potential, and ensuring their contribution to societal development have become more urgent than ever. In this context, the article is dedicated to examining the role of women in decision-making processes, their participation in conflict resolution, and aspects of gender equality related to achieving sustainable development, as well as the international legal dimensions of the principle of gender equality. The author present her scientific conclusions by analyzing these issues through specific case studies.

**Keywords:** Conflict, women, children, gendered violence, women empowerment, sustainable development, security challenges, clash of interests, systemic inequalities.

### **INTRODUCTION**

World politics in the 21st century is marked by an intensifying clash of national, regional, and ideological interests, rooted in power struggles, resource competition, identity politics, and geopolitical rivalries. These tensions manifest through both traditional military competition and non-traditional instruments such as economic coercion, cyber operations, and proxy warfare. The multipolar nature of the current international system, coupled with the decline of liberal hegemony, has produced a volatile environment where overlapping and incompatible interests generate persistent conflict. States, as primary actors, pursue power to ensure survival, resulting in inevitable competition and strategic balancing (Waltz, 1979; Mearsheimer, 2001). This perspective helps explain recent great-power tensions such as: U.S.–China rivalry, especially in the Indo-Pacific and around Taiwan, NATO expansion and Russia's reactionary strategy in Eastern Europe, culminating in the war in Ukraine and regional power competitions between Iran and Saudi Arabia, especially through proxy conflicts in Syria, Yemen, and Lebanon. These strategic interests are driven by security dilemmas, where defensive measures by one state are perceived as threats by others, leading to escalation and potential conflict<sup>1</sup>.

Concurrently, the rise of non-traditional and transnational threats—such as cyber threats, climate change, and economic instability—has made regional security more complex and multidimensional. The competition for strategic resources, unequal development, weaponization of trade, and the externalization of conflict consequences to vulnerable populations—all indicate that economic globalization is not inherently peace-promoting. On the contrary, under certain

<sup>1</sup> Following the end of the Cold War, NATO extended membership to several post-Soviet and Eastern European states, including Poland, Hungary, the Czech Republic, and later the Baltic states. From the perspective of these countries, NATO membership was a **defensive move**, aimed at deterring any resurgence of Russian influence. The alliance also portrayed this enlargement as a step toward promoting democratic values and regional stability.

conditions, it intensifies insecurity, particularly for those marginalized by the global economic order. Economic globalization—the increasing interconnectedness of national economies through trade, finance, technology, and migration—has transformed global power relations. While often presented as a force for peace and prosperity, globalization has also served to exacerbate geopolitical rivalries, widen economic disparities, and intensify conflict in both direct and structural forms. This dual nature of globalization is central to understanding many of today's complex security challenges. Globalization has not benefited all actors equally. Feminist and critical scholars argue that it has entrenched structural inequalities between and within nations, particularly along lines of class, race, and gender (True, 2012; Peterson, 2003).

While global power struggles are often framed in state-centric and strategic terms, the women population bears a unique and multifaceted burden from these conflicts. Their suffering is rooted not only in the direct impacts of violence, but also in structural inequalities reinforced or created by geopolitical tensions. Geopolitical conflicts often result in mass displacement—as seen in Ukraine, Syria, Afghanistan, Sudan, and Palestine<sup>2</sup>. Women and girls make up a majority of the displaced population, facing gender-specific risks such as: Sexual and gender-based violence (SGBV) in refugee camps and during migration, limited access to reproductive health services, including contraception and maternal care and loss of documentation and legal identity, increasing vulnerability to trafficking and exploitation<sup>3</sup>.

An increasingly recognized yet often underrepresented aspect of global security and sustainable development is the vital role of women in peacebuilding processes and conflict resolution. Numerous studies and international frameworks—including United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325—affirm that the inclusion of women in peace processes not only enhances the legitimacy of peace agreements but also increases their durability and effectiveness (UN Women, 2015).

Despite being heavily impacted by conflict, women are rarely included in the diplomatic and political arenas where geopolitical interests are negotiated. Less than 10% of peace negotiators in formal processes are women (UN Women, 2021)<sup>4</sup>. Geopolitical settlements often prioritize state and elite interests over grassroots gender justice. Women's local peacebuilding initiatives are chronically underfunded and undervalued. The role of women as mediators in peacebuilding has increasingly been recognized as essential for achieving inclusive, sustainable, and durable peace. Despite this recognition, their participation remains limited due to structural barriers, sociopolitical exclusion, and patriarchal norms embedded in formal peace processes. The adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in 2000 marked a pivotal shift in global peace and security policy. It acknowledged that women's participation in conflict prevention, negotiation, and reconstruction is not only a right but a necessity. Subsequent resolutions, including UNSCR 1820, 1889, and 2242, emphasized the importance of women's leadership and gender-sensitive approaches in peacebuilding. However, despite normative frameworks, implementation lags behind. According to UN Women (2020), between 1992 and 2019, women constituted only 13% of negotiators, 6% of mediators, and 6% of signatories in major peace processes.

The inclusion of women in peace and security processes is not only a matter of equity but also a strategic imperative. Empirical studies show that peace agreements are more likely to be implemented and sustained when women are meaningfully involved in negotiations and post-conflict recovery (O'Reilly, Ó Súilleabáin & Paffenholz, 2015). UN Security Council Resolution 1325 (2000) recognizes the pivotal role women play in conflict prevention, resolution, and peacebuilding. Despite this, women remain underrepresented in formal diplomatic and security institutions. Their contributions—particularly at the community level—often go unrecognized, despite their centrality to reconciliation, resource management, and humanitarian response.

Today, the world faces record levels of conflict and violence with a significant impact on people. In 2023 alone, over 170 armed conflicts were recorded. By the end of the 2024, nearly 120 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations, and events seriously disturbing public order. While the human cost of war is undeniable and profound, the environment also suffers immense and often-overlooked consequences. Beyond the immediate destruction, conflicts disrupt ecosystems, deplete natural resources, pollute the environment, and jeopardize the health of our planet for generations to come. Armed conflict significantly disrupts the natural environment, leading to severe consequences for ecosystems, natural resources, and human well-being. The destruction associated with war—including deforestation and environmental contamination—undermines agricultural productivity, pollutes water sources, and threatens both health and livelihoods. Military operations frequently involve the removal of vegetation or the alteration of ecosystems to deprive enemy forces of cover or to forcibly displace civilian populations. Such tactics have been documented in conflicts like the civil war in Sudan and during the draining of wetlands in Iraq, resulting in long-lasting environmental degradation.

In Ukraine, vast areas of land face contamination from landmines and unexploded ordnance, while intense shelling, fires, and flooding have polluted soil, rivers, and forests. The clearance of these hazardous remnants of war is

<sup>2</sup> At the end of 2024, an estimated 123.2 million people worldwide were forcibly displaced due to persecution, conflict, violence, human rights violations and events seriously disturbing the public order. <https://www.unhcr.org/global-trends>

<sup>3</sup> During the Syrian civil war, over 5 million women and girls were displaced. Reports from UN Women and Human Rights Watch documented increased rates of child marriage, sexual abuse, and barriers to education for girls in refugee communities (UN Women, 2018).

<sup>4</sup> In the Afghanistan peace talks with the Taliban (2020), women's rights advocates were largely excluded, resulting in a settlement that **failed to guarantee protections** for girls' education or women's political participation.

a long-term and resource-intensive process. In Ukraine alone, the projected cost for demining efforts is estimated at approximately US\$34.6 billion<sup>5</sup>.

According to a study by Scientists for Global Responsibility and the Conflict and Environment Observatory, militaries account for an estimated 5.5 percent of global greenhouse gas emissions. Nearly two years of conflict have left over two million Palestinians, half of whom are children, without access to sufficient water, food or medical care. Famine has become a deadly reality, with catastrophic hunger tightening its grip across the population. Over 90% of homes in Gaza have been damaged or destroyed, leaving nearly 1.9 million Palestinians without a permanent and safe place to live. People are seeking refuge in tents or makeshift shelters that fail to provide safety or dignity. While states react to perceived threats with militarization and force, the effects of these actions are not experienced equally. Women and marginalized gender groups often bear disproportionate burdens of the resulting insecurity:

- ✓ Increased military spending<sup>6</sup> often comes at the expense of social services (health, education, reproductive care).
- ✓ Militarization of societies heightens risks of gender-based violence, including sexual violence in conflict zones<sup>7</sup>.
- ✓ Displacement, breakdown of law and order, and restrictions on civil liberties disproportionately affect women and children.

Despite more than two decades of international advocacy for gender-inclusive peacebuilding—most notably through the adoption of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325)—the representation of women in formal peace processes remains strikingly low. Empirical data show that from 1990 to 2018, mediation was utilized in only 34% of the 876 documented conflict-years, and women served as co-mediators in just 10% of those instances (UN Women, 2020). This pattern reflects not only a limited institutional uptake of mediation strategies but also a systemic marginalization of women from key decision-making roles in conflict resolution. Recent figures underscore the persistence of this exclusion. In 2023, women comprised only 9.6% of negotiators, 13.7% of mediators, and 26.6% of signatories in formal peace processes (UN Women, 2023). While these numbers represent incremental improvements in some areas—particularly in signatory roles—they remain far from parity, and progress has been uneven across regions and contexts.

Today, global politics demands more than ever before a commitment to inter-state dialogue, negotiation, and diplomacy (Berridge, 2010). Diplomatic instruments have proven to be among the most effective tools in preventing international conflicts and fostering cooperative relations (Risse, 2011). Regular engagement and direct communication between states enhance mutual trust and serve as crucial mechanisms for peaceful conflict resolution. The emergence of new actors in the international system, the necessity to resolve territorial disputes, recognize sovereignty, and implement political agreements, all underscore the need for structured and inclusive negotiation processes (Diez, Stetter, & Albert, 2006). In many cases, resolving complex disputes requires the involvement of neutral third parties, further highlighting the growing importance of arbitration and mediation institutions (Zartman, 2008).

A sustainable future is only possible when it is inclusive, equitable, and gender-just. Inclusive governance and peace processes are more effective and legitimate when women participate. Women often advocate for issues like education, health, and justice in public policy, contributing to stable institutions. Empowered women make informed decisions that improve child nutrition, maternal health, and community resilience. While the normative case for gender inclusion in peace processes is widely accepted, its practical realization remains uneven and insufficient. Addressing this gap requires

<sup>5</sup> <https://www.un.org/en/peace-and-security/how-conflict-impacts-our-environment>

<sup>6</sup> Global military expenditure increased to \$2718 billion in 2024, the 10th year of consecutive rises. The world's 15 largest spenders in 2024 all increased their military expenditure. The global military burden—the share of global gross domestic product (GDP) devoted to military expenditure—increased to 2.5 per cent in 2024. Military spending in Europe (including Russia) rose by 17 per cent to \$693 billion and was the main contributor to the global increase in 2024. All European countries increased their military spending in 2024 except Malta. Total military spending by NATO members amounted to \$1506 billion, or 55 per cent of global military expenditure. Of the 32 NATO members, 18 spent at least 2.0 per cent of GDP on their militaries, according to SIPRI methodology, up from 11 in 2023 and the highest number since NATO adopted the spending guideline in 2014. Military spending by the USA rose by 5.7 per cent to reach \$997 billion, which was 66 per cent of total NATO spending and 37 per cent of world military spending in 2024. Military expenditure in the Middle East reached an estimated \$243 billion in 2024, an increase of 15 per cent from 2023 and 19 per cent more than in 2015. Israel's military expenditure surged by 65 per cent to \$46.5 billion in 2024, the steepest annual increase since the Six-Day War in 1967/ <https://www.sipri.org/media/press-release/2025/unprecedented-rise-global-military-expenditure-european-and-middle-east-spending-surges>

<sup>7</sup> In conflict zones, political violence is often accompanied by gender-based violence, including sexual assault, rape, sexual slavery, human trafficking, and intimate-partner violence. Higher rates of violence against women can be found in militarized societies, especially during and in the aftermath of wars. Multiple UN resolutions and special reports, culminating in UNSCR 1325, suggest that the increased participation of women at all levels of the political system may contribute to peacebuilding and reduce the rate of gender-based violence. The proportion of women killed in armed conflicts doubled in 2023 compared to the previous year. Sexual violence in conflict rose dramatically with UN-verified cases of conflict-related sexual violence soaring by 50 per cent to 3688 cases and the number of girls affected by grave violations in situations of armed conflict increased by 35 per cent. <https://www.unwomen.org/en/articles/facts-and-figures/facts-and-figures-women-peace-and-security#90012>

not only increasing the number of women at the negotiation table but also ensuring their meaningful participation through institutional reforms, gender-responsive mandates, and stronger accountability mechanisms.

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