



Air Force Senior Master Sergeant Laquetta Spann, 374th Operations Support Squadron chief radar approach controller, Yakota Air Base, Japan, provides remarks as panel speaker during Pacific Air Forces' first Women, Peace, and Security symposium, hosted from Joint Base Pearl Harbor–Hickam, Hawaii, March 30, 2021 (U.S. Air Force/Nick Wilson)

The Women, Peace, and Security Act

Implementation Strategies for a Modern Department of Defense

By Kyleigh Cullen

Peace negotiations are more likely to succeed and achieve longer lasting results when women are involved in the process. Women's civil society groups and the first all-woman

United Nations (UN) peacekeeping team were notably active in the peace process following Liberia's civil conflict.¹ Moreover, three women—Helga Schmid, Federica Mogherini, and

Wendy Sherman—were recognized by their peers for their roles in negotiating the 2015 Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action to curb Iran's nuclear program. The Graduate Institute in Geneva conducted an in-depth analysis of 40 post-Cold War peace processes, revealing that negotiators reached an

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agreement more often when women's groups had a prominent role in the negotiation process.² Acknowledging the benefit of female involvement, the UN passed Security Council Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325). Subsequently, more than 80 nations, including the United States, have developed their own National Action Plans on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS).³ The U.S. National Action Plan makes a statement on policy related to WPS and identifies objectives, actions, and reporting criteria for Federal agencies and departments. Approximately a year after the U.S. National Action Plan was published, the Department of State and U.S. Agency for International Development created formal implementation plans, including integration strategies and planned actions to accomplish national objectives.

As an envoy of U.S. policy, the Department of Defense (DOD) plays a significant role through its extensive interaction with joint and partner-nation militaries in the WPS agenda. Still, DOD waited until June 2020 to publish its implementation plan, 9 years after the original U.S. National Action Plan, and it has generally fallen short of achieving plan objectives. Thus far, DOD's reluctance and half-hearted implementation of WPS have proved insufficient to achieve the National Action Plan's stated goals. In contrast, the United Kingdom (UK) Ministry of Defence (MOD) has played a leading role in the country's WPS agenda, assisting the Foreign & Commonwealth Office (since replaced by the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office [FCDO]) and the Department for International Development to develop the UK National Action Plan as early as 2006.

By considering and integrating best practices used in the UK MOD, DOD could meet the U.S. National Action Plan's objectives and enact meaningful progress. Following a brief background discussion of WPS, this article compares UK and U.S. defense establishment implementation of WPS, identifies best practices, and makes recommendations for improvements to DOD strategy toward WPS.

Background

The UN officially implemented the WPS plan on October 31, 2000, acknowledging that women often bear a significant burden during times of conflict and thus have a unique perspective. The goal of UNSCR 1325 was to expand the role of women at all levels in decisionmaking processes for preventing and resolving conflict.⁴ Since then, statistical analysis has shown that peace agreements are 35 percent more likely to last at least 15 years and 64 percent less likely to fail when women participate in the negotiation process.⁵ The statistics are compelling, considering that half of all peace agreements fail within 5 years.⁶ Despite such overwhelming evidence, women's participation has remained unmistakably low, with women making up only 13 percent of negotiators, 4 percent of signatories, and 3 percent of mediators in major peace negotiations from 1992 to 2018.⁷

To date, more than 80 nations have implemented their own National Action Plans to address the critical issue of WPS based on UN guidance. The United States developed its first National Action Plan in 2011 and subsequently revised it in 2016. The plan tasked Federal agencies with reporting annually on their efforts to meet five high-level objectives on WPS: national integration and institutionalization, participation in peace processes and decisionmaking, protection from violence, conflict prevention, and access to relief and recovery.⁸ On October 6, 2017, the WPS Act was signed into law, making the United States the first nation to do so. Public Law 115-68 mandates the development of a government-wide strategy within 1 year and requires specific implementation plans from all "relevant Federal agencies," including DOD.⁹ In June 2019, the White House released a National Strategy on WPS, and DOD only just expanded on its 2013 implementation guide by publishing a Strategic Framework for Implementation in June 2020.

Senior Leader Commitment

Achieving meaningful change within any organization requires engaged and invested leadership. The global study

on WPS identified strong governance and effective coordination as one of the five critical features of a high-impact National Action Plan.¹⁰ There is little doubt that the highest levels of U.S. leadership support the National Action Plan, but this backing has not translated to DOD. The 2017 National Security Strategy does not explicitly mention WPS, but it acknowledges its importance and commits to the fair treatment and empowerment of women and girls. However, the National Defense Strategy makes no mention of WPS, and it does not integrate WPS concepts into the strategic approach.¹¹ The Secretary of Defense and the Joint Chiefs of Staff's failure to acknowledge this issue, which the United States signed into law before the release of the National Defense Strategy, sends a message to commanders and defense personnel about where WPS stands in priorities.

To an extent, the WPS agenda seems to be gaining traction at the U.S. geographic combatant command level. Although to some the idea of a military implementing WPS concepts may seem contradictory to the policy's feminist ideals, the U.S. military's global presence offers an excellent opportunity to promote WPS principles and makes the geographic combatant commands' backing of this policy vital. Combatant commanders have incorporated WPS objectives into theater campaign plans, and some commands train new personnel on WPS during the check-in process.¹² U.S. Africa Command has added a WPS briefing to its orientation course. U.S. Northern Command incorporated a module on WPS into the USNORTHCOM 101 class for all new personnel.¹³ These actions seem promising, but without appropriate evaluation and reporting—another element of a high-impact National Action Plan—DOD cannot hope to achieve success.¹⁴ Of the six geographic combatant commanders, only two reported progress on WPS initiatives during their annual posture statement before the Senate Armed Services Committee. General Joseph Votel, USA, commander of U.S. Central Command, noted Kazakhstan's



Army Captain Jessica Campion, registered nurse, Civil Affairs Functional Specialty Team, Southern European Task Force–Africa, hands out school supplies and toys to teachers with Association des Femmes de We'a after conducting oral hygiene class in We'a, Djibouti, August 11, 2021, as part of Department of Defense's Women, Peace, and Security initiative (U.S. Air Force/Andrew Kobialka)

contribution to support programs for women. General Thomas Waldhauser, USMC, commander of U.S. Africa Command, reported directly on the success of training exercises that provided opportunities for integrating women into peacekeeping operations.¹⁵ The commitment of geographic combatant commanders to the WPS policy suggests progress, yet lack of accountability and explicit support from the Secretary of Defense and Joint Chiefs has caused the implementation of WPS within DOD to move at a glacier's pace.

In contrast, the United Kingdom's highest leadership levels show full support for integrating WPS into policy and military operations. The United Kingdom was among the first nations to enact a National Action Plan on WPS, and it is now on its fourth iteration of the document, making marked improvements with each revision. The FCDO,

MOD, and Department for International Development jointly own the UK National Action Plan, which directs work with nine focus nations on seven strategic outcomes: decisionmaking, peacekeeping, gender-based violence, humanitarian response, security and justice, preventing and countering violent extremism, and UK capabilities.¹⁶ High-level leaders were actively involved in these three key agencies, which resulted in clearly delineated areas of responsibility and monitoring criteria. Leaders report annually to Parliament, creating a unified, whole-of-government approach to WPS. The National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence Review, along with the International Defence Engagement Strategy, are additional documents that demonstrate the MOD commitment to the WPS agenda by reinforcing the UK National Action Plan and outlining specific WPS goals.¹⁷ In addition to taking

an active role in developing national-level plans and strategies on WPS, high-level leaders show buy-in by being seen at the forefront of enacting WPS initiatives. For example, the UK Secretary of State opened the inaugural Military Gender and Protection Advisers Course at the Defence Academy, and the Secretary of State for Defence met with civil society groups in London and women's groups in Nigeria to solicit recommendations. The United Kingdom also took a leadership role on the world stage, chairing the WPS Chiefs of Defence Staff Network in its inaugural year.¹⁸ High-level buy-in and visibility of principal agencies' leadership have indicated the implementation of WPS is a priority for the United Kingdom and have prompted measurable success.

Relevant Doctrine

A bureaucracy as large as DOD will need more than just supportive leader-



Lieutenant Clare Fitzpatrick, judge advocate general assigned to Singapore Area Coordinator, makes opening remarks during virtual Women, Peace, and Security subject matter expert exchange as part of Cooperation Afloat Readiness and Training Brunei 2020, Singapore, October 6, 2020 (U.S. Navy/Greg Johnson)

ship to implement WPS; DOD must provide a written instruction that clearly defines roles and responsibilities within the department. In August 2012, less than 1 year after the White House released the initial WPS National Action Plan, the Department of State published its 83-page implementation plan, including evaluation criteria and a departmental responsibilities matrix. DOD and the Joint Staff waited until early 2018 to form a synchronization group that met monthly to discuss best practices and lessons learned.¹⁹ In June 2020, DOD published its WPS Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan, which provides defense objectives but lacks specific guidance for how the department will achieve them.²⁰ Although the plan identifies interagency milestones and metrics, it lacks concrete

goals, fails to specify timelines, and does not identify entities responsible for monitoring progress.

The United Kingdom, however, has set out a clear, written policy statement to all MOD personnel. Version 1 of Joint Service Publication (JSP) 1325 was published in January 2019 in two parts, with a foreword by the Secretary of State for Defence. JSP 1325 aims to provide personnel with direction on integrating WPS into military activity and delineating responsibilities for implementation. Part 1 is directive in nature; part 2 includes guidance and best practices to assist personnel with compliance. Additionally, JSP 1325 lists educational opportunities, related documents, and an individual point of contact to field questions or take feedback.²¹ The MOD has succeeded in creating a roadmap and providing

resources for its personnel to implement WPS—while setting an excellent example for DOD to follow.

Education Across the Chain of Command

A WPS instruction will provide a framework for implementation but has the potential to get lost among the other hundreds of instructions and doctrinal publications that DOD personnel must regularly review and comply with. Establishing joint instruction and educating military personnel will be the most effective means for implementation. A survey by the New America Foundation in 2016 found that national security practitioners knew little about issues relating to WPS.²² All WPS guiding documents—including UNSCR 1325, the U.S. National Action Plan, Public

Law 115-68, and the U.S. National Strategy—have emphasized education; however, DOD WPS educational opportunities are minimal and remain focused on only a small group of personnel. For example, commands with a gender advisor billet ensure that planners consider gender perspectives, and these advisors attend a weeklong course.²³

Halfhearted DOD efforts to educate personnel may stem from weak language in guiding national documents. For example, the U.S. National WPS Strategy directs that military personnel will be trained “as appropriate,” and courses that historically attract only male international students should “consider ways to incentivize the inclusion of female students.”²⁴ Thus far, the National Defense University offers the only professional military education (PME) elective directed specifically at WPS. The Naval War College and Air University offer electives that address gender issues more generally.²⁵ Although it is not a hard requirement, the significance of WPS—and the success it has shown when implemented—should be reason enough for DOD to incorporate education on the subject into PME and for deploying personnel.

Spearheading education, the United Kingdom has created training and educational programs to reach a broader and more diverse military personnel body. All deploying UK troops now receive training on WPS and prevention of sexual violence in conflict. Additionally, the United Kingdom has training modules for deploying personnel from other countries.²⁶ As stated, the Defence Academy conducted its first annual Military Gender and Protection Advisers Course in 2018, providing in-depth training to UK- and FCDO-funded international students.²⁷ To ensure they gained a diverse perspective on integrating WPS into military planning, students were trained by government personnel and civil society groups with a vested interest in the subject matter, such as the nongovernmental organization Gender Action for Peace and Security.²⁸ The MOD has yet to fully realize the benefits of these recently implemented training and education opportunities. Nevertheless, military

personnel who are more knowledgeable on WPS issues will undoubtedly be better equipped to address them.

Improving DOD Strategy Toward WPS

Before and since the United States released its first National Action Plan on WPS, the U.S. military has been preoccupied with fighting wars in multiple theaters and managing countless other obligations. DOD is stretched thin. With national security concerns focused on remaining competitive with near-peer nations while also reforming for improved affordability, the lackluster efforts to implement WPS within DOD are not surprising. To this point, DOD has interpreted the use of Marine Female Engagement Teams and Special Operations Cultural Support Teams as a success in integrating women into combat roles, furthered by the December 3, 2015, lift of the ban on U.S. women in combat occupational specialties.²⁹ These steps forward have improved the U.S. military’s operational effectiveness; however, the United States will not realize positive gains in domestic and global security unless DOD joins the interagency community by comprehensively integrating WPS initiatives. Change takes time and can require significant funding, especially for an organization as large as DOD. Regardless, implementing WPS needs to be prioritized—not only because it is the law but also because of the potential benefits to U.S. and global security that remain untapped.

Using the example set by the United Kingdom and with a little initial investment, DOD can significantly improve its implementation of WPS by showcasing committed leadership, setting clear policies and goals, and increasing educational opportunities for military personnel. Success in this arena starts with leadership at the most senior levels. The Secretary of Defense, Joint Chiefs, and combatant commanders should make WPS a topic that regularly appears in policy, strategy, and posture statements. Such acknowledgment of the importance of this crucial issue will cascade WPS through the ranks and ensure

it becomes an important initiative for all personnel. DOD should build on the June 2020 WPS Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan and publish an instruction with well-defined guidance and monitoring criteria. If DOD gives specific and clear guidance to Service branches and individual commands’ roles and responsibilities, it could successfully integrate WPS into joint and multinational operations. To maximize the reach and effectiveness of the WPS agenda within DOD, all PME institutions should integrate WPS into their core curriculum, and DOD should develop WPS training for all deploying personnel. In fiscal year 2019, the National Defense Authorization Act allotted \$4 million in specific funding for implementing the WPS Act.³⁰ If DOD were to dedicate this funding and a bit of time to develop a detailed WPS instruction, education curriculum, and training plan, it would realize significant improvements in the WPS initiative.

It has been nearly 20 years since the UN passed UNSCR 1325, 9 since the first U.S. National Action Plan was released, and 2 since the United States signed WPS into law. Nevertheless, DOD, the largest and most well-funded defense department in the world, still lags in implementation. It is time for the U.S. military to realize it does not have all the answers and to look to other examples. The UK MOD began implementing WPS after its first National Action Plan in 2006, 5 years before the first U.S. National Action Plan and 14 years before the formal DOD implementation plan. By examining and adopting policies and best practices of the United Kingdom, DOD stands to meet the WPS Act and national strategy requirements while also enacting meaningful change that can have lasting effects on global security. JFQ

Notes

¹ Roméo Dallaire, Shelly Whitman, and Sam Holland, “Innovation in the Prevention of the Use of Child Soldiers: Women in the Security Sector,” *PRISM* 6, no. 1 (2016), 168, available at <<https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1042401.pdf>>.

² Radhika Coomaraswamy, *Preventing Conflict, Transforming Justice, Securing the Peace: A Global Study on the Implementation of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325* (New York: United Nations [UN] Women, October 12, 2015), available at <<https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/UNW-GLOBAL-STUDY-1325-2015.pdf>>.

³ UNSCR 1325 at 20 Years: *Perspectives from Feminist Peace Activists and Civil Society* (New York: PeaceWomen, 2020), available at <<https://www.wilpf.org/portfolio-items/uns-cr-1325-at-20-years-perspectives-from-feminist-peace-activists-and-civil-society/>>.

⁴ UN Security Council, “Resolution 1325 (2000),” S/Res/1325 (2000), October 31, 2000, available at <<http://unscr.com/en/resolutions/doc/1325>>.

⁵ Rachel B. Vogelstein and Jamille Bigio, “Three Things to Know: The Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, October 13, 2017, available at <<https://www.cfr.org/blog/three-things-know-women-peace-and-security-act-2017>>.

⁶ *United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security* (Washington, DC: The White House, June 2019), available at <https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2019/06/WPS_Strategy_10_October2019.pdf>.

⁷ “Women’s Participation in Peace Processes,” *Council on Foreign Relations*, n.d., available at <<https://www.cfr.org/interactive/womens-participation-in-peace-processes>>.

⁸ *The United States National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security* (Washington, DC: The White House, June 2016), available at <<https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1868/National%20Action%20Plan%20on%20Women%2C%20Peace%2C%20and%20Security.pdf>>.

⁹ *Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017*, Pub. L. No. 115-68, 131 Stat. 1202, 115th Cong., 1st sess. (October 6, 2017), available at <<https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ68/PLAW-115publ68.pdf>>.

¹⁰ *Final Independent Review of the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security 2012–2018* (Canberra: Department of the Prime Minister and Cabinet: Office for Women, October 24, 2018), available at <<https://www.pmc.gov.au/sites/default/files/publications/independent-review-of-the-NAP-on-women-peace-and-security.pdf>>.

¹¹ *National Security Strategy of the United States of America* (Washington, DC: The White House, December 2017), available at <<https://trumpwhitehouse.archives.gov/wp-content/uploads/2017/12/NSS-Final-12-18-2017-0905.pdf>>; *Summary of the 2018 National Defense Strategy of the United States of America: Sharpening the American Military’s Competitive Edge* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, 2018), available at <[\[Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf\]\(https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/Documents/pubs/2018-National-Defense-Strategy-Summary.pdf\)>.](https://dod.defense.gov/Portals/1/</p></div><div data-bbox=)

¹² *National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security*.

¹³ Anne A. Witkowsky, “Integrating Gender Perspectives Within the Department of Defense,” *PRISM* 6, no. 1 (2016), 38, available at <<https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1042401.pdf>>.

¹⁴ Miki Jacevic, “What Makes for an Effective WPS National Action Plan?” *Inclusive Security*, March 25, 2019, available at <<https://www.inclusivesecurity.org/2019/03/25/what-makes-for-an-effective-wps-national-action-plan/>>.

¹⁵ U.S. House Appropriations Committee, *Great Power Competition: The Current and Future Challenges in the Middle East*, Statement of General Joseph L. Votel, commander, U.S. Central Command, on the Posture of U.S. Central Command, 116th Cong., 1st sess., March 6, 2019; U.S. Senate Armed Services Committee, Statement of General Thomas D. Waldhauser, United States Marine Corps, Commander, United States Africa Command, 116th Cong., 1st sess., February 7, 2019.

¹⁶ *UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace & Security 2018–2022* (London: Government of the United Kingdom, January 2018), available at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/677586/FCO1215-NAP-Women-Peace-Security-ONLINE_V2.pdf>.

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¹⁸ *UK National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security 2018–2022: Annual Report to Parliament 2018* (London: Government of the United Kingdom, 2018), available at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/765743/UK_National_Action_Plan_on_Women_Peace_and_Security_2018_-2022_annual_report_to_Parliament_2018.pdf>.

¹⁹ Chuck Broadway, “DOD Works to Incorporate More Gender Perspective in Operations,” *DOD News*, March 8, 2018, available at <<https://www.defense.gov/Explore/News/Article/Article/1461815/dod-works-to-incorporate-more-gender-perspective-in-operations/>>.

²⁰ *Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan* (Washington, DC: Department of Defense, June 2020), available at <https://media.defense.gov/2020/jun/11/2002314428/-1/-1/1/women_peace_security_strategic_framework_implementation_plan.pdf>.

²¹ Joint Service Publication 1325, *Human Security in Military Operations* (London: Ministry of Defence, January 15, 2019), available at <<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/human-security-in-military-operations-jsp-1325>>.

²² Joan Johnson-Freese, “Women, Peace, and Security in Professional Military Education,” *Small Wars Journal*, July 26, 2017, available at <<https://smallwarsjournal.com/jrnl/art/women-peace-and-security-in-professional-military-education>>.

²³ Joan Johnson-Freese and Andrea Goldstein, “How the Pentagon Can Build on NATO’s Success with Women, Peace & Security,” *RealClear Defense*, May 13, 2019, available at <https://www.realcleardefense.com/articles/2019/05/13/how_the_pentagon_can_build_on_natos_success_with_women_peace_security_114418.html>.

²⁴ *United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security*.

²⁵ Johnson-Freese, “Women, Peace, and Security in Professional Military Education.”

²⁶ *National Security Strategy and Strategic Defence and Security Review 2015: First Annual Report 2016* (London: Government of the United Kingdom, December 2016), available at <https://assets.publishing.service.gov.uk/government/uploads/system/uploads/attachment_data/file/575378/national_security_strategy_strategic_defence_security_review_annual_report_2016.pdf>.

²⁷ *Women, Peace and Security 2018–2022: Annual Report to Parliament 2018*.

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²⁹ Robert Egnell, “Gender Perspectives and Military Effectiveness: Implementing UNSCR 1325 and the National Action Plan on Women, Peace, and Security,” *PRISM* 6, no. 1 (2016), 73, available at <<https://apps.dtic.mil/dtic/tr/fulltext/u2/1042401.pdf>>.

³⁰ Sahana Dharmapuri, “Letter from the Director: Make 2019 the Best Year Yet for Women, Peace, and Security,” *Our Secure Future*, January 21, 2019, available at <<https://www.oursecurefuture.org/opinion-insights/make-2019-women-peace-security>>.