

An Ancillary Duty?

The Department of Defense Approach to Women, Peace, and Security in Security Cooperation Programs

By Barbara Salera Lopez

It has been six years since the passage of the Women, Peace, and Security Act, which aimed to increase the “meaningful participation of women in conflict prevention and conflict resolution processes” in order to “promote more inclusive and democratic societies” globally.¹ This act institutionalized the United States’ approach to furthering the United Nations Security Council’s Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Agenda. After the Act passed in 2017, the Department of Defense (DOD) instituted its own framework—the Strategic Framework, and Implementation Plan (SFIP)—to organize and outline DOD efforts to achieve the objectives of the 2019 U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security (WPS).² The SFIP outlines three major objectives: “model and employ WPS principles,” “promote partner nation women’s participation,” and “promote protection of partner nation civilians.”³ The SFIP applies to the entire Department of Defense and will require the DOD not only to coordinate internally and across agencies, but successful implementation will require engagement with civil society sectors in partner countries to develop a whole-of-society approach. The National Defense and Authorization Act FY2020 further reinforced the WPS framework by legislating that the DOD incorporate “gender perspectives and participation of women in security cooperation activities to the maximum extent practicable.”⁴

The purpose of this article is to provide an overview of the Department of Defense’s efforts to integrate WPS objectives into security cooperation activities since the passage of the 2017 legislation. Most other research has focused on the benefits of integrating women into the security sector, but not on tracing the experience of how that has been done. This article is meant to help fill that gap between theory and practice. In addition, this article will provide a brief overview of the theoretical space that underwrites the

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Women, Peace and Security: Security Council Open Debate, October 19, 2019. Photo by UN Women/Ryan Brown (<https://www.flickr.com/photos/unwomen/48982235008>).

WPS agenda, how it has been conceptualized and implemented in the DOD, and limits to the current implementation approach.

From Feminist Theory to WPS Practice

While the Women, Peace, and Security Agenda may seem like a recent invention, how best to incorporate and consider women's insecurity has been on the forefront of the UN agenda since it declared 1975-1985 the decade of women. With roots in the feminist critiques of international relations during the post-Cold War period, international society actively sought to integrate women into "full and equal participation in all human affairs,"⁵ to include security. Beginning with Cynthia Enloe's *Banana's Beaches and Bases*, many researchers also began to ask "where are the women?"⁶ The research that emerged found that when women are included in peacebuilding and conflict resolution, it "enlarge[s] the scope of those agreements to include a broader set of critical societal priorities and needs required for lasting peace."⁷ Further research into the role of women in the security sector found that the inclusion of women in peace and security operations served as a force multiplier for the partner nation and the United States in the operational planning and execution of these activities. Women, as half the population,⁸ have active roles in the security sector and are therefore instrumental in peacebuilding, though they often do not have a seat at the table. The United Nations Security Council adopted Resolution 1325 (UNSCR 1325) on 31 October 2000 in order to rectify that issue.⁹

The passage of UNSCR 1325 has had a profound impact on member states, as each is urged to integrate gender perspectives into peacekeeping operations¹⁰ and invite gender training "in their national training programmes (sic) for military and civilian police personnel in preparation for deployment,"¹¹ leading to the development of National Action Programs (NAP). In later years, the United Nations passed resolutions

1820, 1888, 1960, 2106, 2133, and 2242 to further elaborate the Women, Peace, and Security agenda.¹² For the United States, this agenda culminated in the 2017 Women, Peace, and Security Act.

The Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 was the catalyst for formally establishing the integration of gender and gender-based criteria into security cooperation activities. Subsequent legislation followed, such as the 2018 Women's Entrepreneurship and Economic Empowerment Act and WPS provisions in various National Defense Authorization Acts (NDAA) as a requirement for certain programs. The Women, Peace, and Security Act itself is also authoritative guidance on how the DOD should implement the WPS agenda. Specifically, this legislation has sought to increase the participation of women in the security sector through the integration of gender perspectives in various activities, such as development, diplomacy, and security cooperation. The act also has an education requirement, as the Department of Defense is to ensure training of "relevant personnel" on the importance of meaningful participation of women in peacebuilding, conflict prevention, and various other security sector activities.

Subsequent NDAs sought to further institutionalize WPS objectives by requiring the integration of a "gender perspective" in security cooperation activities. Though the SFIP identifies three defense objectives, they can be condensed into one overarching goal—to increase the meaningful participation of women in the security sector, peacebuilding, and conflict resolution and to ensure the protection of women's rights, especially during times of conflict in the United States and abroad.

According to the 2022 United States Women, Peace, and Security Congressional Report,¹³ the DOD has stated it has made significant strides towards achieving WPS objectives. Some of the accomplishments highlighted by the DOD have been the integration of Gender Advisors (GENAD)

into geographic combatant commands and the hiring of other WPS personnel among the joint staff. The DOD has also established policies and programs to advance the WPS agenda, such as the integration of WPS objectives and gendered analysis into security cooperation activities. The DOD implemented WPS-focused training of military personnel and qualified personnel to train GENADS. The Congressional Report also highlighted the classes offered to military personnel about women in the security sector, and the Defense Security Cooperation University (DSCU) contracted staff to “design, develop, and deliver WPS training and education.”¹⁴ There is also a wider effort in various Professional Military Education (PME) institutions to integrate gender into mainstream curricula, and many offer gender studies courses as electives.

What is missing is data on how effective this integration has been, and in fact personal experience and feedback on classes has demonstrated a low-level backlash on the integration of gender training. This article is based on surveys of those tasked with implementing the WPS agenda and focuses on how it affects the security cooperation enterprise. Security cooperation as a focus was chosen because, as highlighted by the WPS Congressional Report, many of the strides made in the DOD were in integrating WPS into security cooperation activities. To be clear, security cooperation is defined as DOD activities “to build and develop allied and friendly security capabilities for self-defense and multinational operations, provide the armed forces with access to the foreign country, and build relationships that promote specific United States security interests.”¹⁵ What makes the U.S. security cooperation (SC) approach worthy of study is that in the integration of WPS principles in SC activities, it also, in essence, requires foreign nations working with the United States to address the WPS agenda. This makes implementing the WPS agenda an important aspect of American foreign policy.

Methodology and Data

Research, including surveys and interviews with individuals who have participated in educating, or implementing Women, Peace, and Security objectives within the DOD or have served as GENADs in combatant commands reveal that each respondent had a different interpretation of how to operationalize the Women, Peace, and Security agenda. In fact, one respondent commented, “it is always interesting to me observing the Gender Advisor’s struggle to operationalize gender in the defense and security environment.” Others saw operationalization as “raising WPS awareness,” but another respondent stated that operationalization should be “what we [the United States] already do” by leading through example, i.e., highlighting to our partner the number of U.S. women in high-ranking positions in the U.S. military.

These different conceptualizations may be rooted in the fact that there is very little guidance within DOD on how to operationalize the WPS agenda, much less gender. In fact, Jody Prescott argues “the U.S. military [fails] to consider gender as an operational factor.”¹⁶ Doctrine and other guidance documents often use gender neutral language. In her analysis of U.S. Joint Civil Affairs doctrine, Prescott concludes that “The lens through which the operational environment is analyzed is male, apparently based on the assumption that what is applicable to the men... is equally applicable to women.”¹⁷ However, since Prescott’s article JP 5-0 Joint Planning has been revised to include “gendering analysis” as an important aspect of depicting the operational environment. There is also an appendix to JP 3-20 Security Cooperation that provides a tool for gender analysis specifically for security cooperation. It should be noted that this tool was released in 2022. Prior to this, there was very little guidance, and many respondents have interpreted incorporating WPS principles simply as adding women personnel. For example, in some geographic combatant commands, well-meaning security personnel



Woman in South Sudan Army. Photo by Jaroslav Šmahel (<https://pixabay.com/photos/africa-army-women-south-sudan-1331327/>).

have focused on getting partner nations to increase the number of females attending American-led military training activities, organizing one-off “women in the military” workshops, or as one respondent put it, “random acts of WPS.” The respondent further stated these type of activities “make us feel great,” but do not lead to lasting change.

As discussed, many combatant commands have hired GENADs to help address these issues. However, there are a few issues with this approach. For one, often GENADs are not additional personnel, but people already working—regularly female personnel—and given the title of GENAD as an

ancillary duty. In addition, those given this duty often are not subject matter experts in gender analysis, and they may or may not receive subsequent training once in the position. As one respondent stated, one of the biggest impediments to the current DOD approach to WPS implementation is that it is an impermanent, informal approach in which female officers are given this “extra duty.” The respondent then indicated that there is also an uneven recognition of the importance of the WPS agenda, and their first duty is often to convince command that the WPS framework is value-added to the mission. As another respondent put it, WPS is

viewed as a “distraction or a pet rock” and command “doesn’t understand how it can improve operational effectiveness.”

A common critique often cited is that gender leads or GENADs are most often “the nearest woman” chosen under the assumption “you are female, you should know about WPS” or “you are female, you should be able to do gender analysis” without paying attention to expertise or even an acknowledgment that gender analysis does not mean strictly an analysis of “womenandchildren.”¹⁸ This further confuses what GENADs or gender leaders are to do, other than advocate or consider women’s rights or increase the number of female participants.

This interpretation of “gender considerations” required by the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 oversimplified as advocating for women’s rights seems further reinforced by some education security cooperation personnel. Lessons are not focused on defining or teaching how to integrate gender considerations, or even what meaningful participation of women would look like in security cooperation, other than providing an overview of the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 or other pieces of American legislation or policies. This is often done without nuance to the student audience, as international officers, security cooperation officers, and security cooperation planners are often shown the same information. For each of these lessons the focus is on advancing Women, Peace, and Security objectives without indication of what those are, or how these objectives map to common security cooperation activities or wider strategic objectives.

The lessons do not adequately answer the questions of what WPS does for security cooperation, or how it assists both the United States and foreign nations in reaching common security objectives. For example, one respondent indicated that many males “made [negative] facial expressions” when teaching the WPS lesson to foreign security cooperation

personnel. While the women were interested, many males sat with “their eyes glazed over.” Even American student audiences expressed skepticism with WPS information, as both female and male students expressed integrating WPS “as just another thing we have to do” when they are already so busy. Still others taking the Security Cooperation Officer (SCO) course did not understand why the course focused so much on one single program, WPS, among many other security cooperation programs. This indicates that steps should be taken to increase reception of WPS information and adoption of WPS principles by adjusting the approach to teaching WPS principles. Instruction should focus on the mission benefits of integrating WPS principles and conducting gender analysis, rather than simply the legal requirements to do so.

Mixed reactions to WPS lessons mirror wider concerns respondents had when integrating WPS objectives into security cooperation plans and activities. One respondent indicated that part of the issue is that the reaction even among American military personnel to integrating WPS is almost seen as “political correctness” run amok. Other respondents indicated they felt uncomfortable with this overt integration of WPS into security cooperation activities, as it seemed like “we impose Western beliefs on another country.” Another educator argued that,

As we are already seeing in some countries, the U.S. is being accused of ignoring the ‘culture’ of that country. We [the US] are being ‘preachy’ and Russia and China are gaining a strategic edge in those countries. We should be leading by example but not forcing this [WPS] on other countries. Our country did not reach the stage we are at overnight, we evolved to where we are today.

Some respondents further argued that the way the DOD has sought to integrate WPS has also been rather “ham-fisted” and only served to reinforce the

notion that only women should be concerned with WPS and that only women benefit from WPS. As one respondent argued, the Department of Defense makes many assumptions when seeking to integrate WPS objectives. These are:

- 1) *You are a female, you should know about WPS.*
- 2) *You are a female, you should be the lead for WPS.*
- 3) *You are female, you should be able to do a gender analysis.*
- 4) *All-male, authoritarian, autocratic [partner nation's] military leadership will listen to the one US military woman in the delegation about WPS concerns.*
- 5) *[Partner nations] care about incorporating WPS into their military.*
- 6) *[Partner nations] will include women in their military forces.*
- 7) *[Partner nations] will allow women to fill leadership roles in their military.*

These assumptions further reinforce the notion that the WPS framework is about women only, and only women should be “doing” WPS. Additionally, this further adds to the burden on a small number of military women who are “volun-told” to do WPS as a “check the box” event, especially if they cannot demonstrate the immediate value-added of WPS requirements towards the mission or toward achieving wider security objectives over the long term. This matches the experience of other females working in the security sector outside the United States. Nina Wilen found that if WPS-integrated security cooperation activities did not appear to immediately benefit the mission or strengthen the relationship between the United States and the partner nation, it ended in a “backlash of women’s participation altogether” and added to the burden of requirements for female peacekeepers to conduct WPS activities.¹⁹

Many respondents also indicated they simply “lack the resources” in terms of both people and training to pay adequate attention to implementing the WPS agenda within security cooperation. Respondents also indicated that the manner in which WPS objectives were implemented lacked the nuance to context to ensure lasting change within partner nations. As one respondent argued, “some countries require implicit [subtle] versus explicit inclusion of WPS in [security cooperation] programs.” Another respondent argues that taking a context-driven nuanced approach may be better done if it refrained “from going in one direction with highlighting women issues as a priority.” As opposed to Women, Peace, and Security, the respondent preferred that the initiative be presented as ‘human peace and security’ to set the pace for integration processes “in all directions, as opposed to the past behavior of taking part in one single way” meaning focusing only on women.

While the American legislation (WPA of 2017, NDAA FY22) does specifically focus on increasing the meaningful participation of women, it also highlights the need for “gender considerations.” Focusing on integrating gender considerations may be one way in which the United States can work towards increasing the “meaningful participation of women” without doing what respondents have categorized as forcing “Western beliefs on another country.” Taking into account gender considerations imply that for security cooperation programs, SC implementers should analyze how effects of said SC activity or initiative may affect men and women differently. Program implementation can then be adjusted according to this analysis to ensure that women can participate by understanding male- or female-specific barriers to participation.

Changing the focus to “gender perspective” highlights the needs of both men and women in any given context. This will allow security cooperation planners and implementers the flexibility to tailor



The Ukrainian military is defending its positions. Brothers in arms man and woman at war. Photo by Dmytro Sheremeta (Shutterstock Photo ID: 2197766007).

initiatives to all segments of the population in partner nations. This approach, because it is not widely understood in the DOD, requires adequate education on gender and conducting gender analysis. Unfortunately, WPS lessons to American military and security cooperation personnel often focus on the “what” rather than the “how.” It is important for the American security cooperation workforce to understand policies. However, little guidance is provided on how security cooperation practitioners can integrate a gender perspective in ways that can prove meaningful in their daily work. Often, students are given scenarios and then instructed to “integrate WPS” without being given practical tools on what this means or how to do it. Because of this, students often default to “just add women and stir,” meaning seeking to increase the presence of women. In addition, the scenarios presented only reinforce women as victims, or the integration of women into peacebuilding based on stereotypical cases, such as kidnapping or human trafficking.

This approach fails to consider how women are more than just victims or peacebuilders. They can be combatants, part of insurgencies, or regular members of the partner nation’s military. This instrumentalist approach to the integration of women, as Yaliwe Clarke²⁰ argues, “treats them either as overlooked beneficiaries or as sources of knowledge and skills which will enhance the world of the security structures.”²¹ This approach only serves to limit the transformational benefits of integrating a gendered perspective by limiting it to increasing a women’s “token participation in stereotypical roles”²² or in a stereotypical manner.

WPS lessons aimed at the security cooperation sector often take a “cookie-cutter” approach, demonstrated by using similar slides for different student audiences, without contextualizing for different cultural contexts, educational contexts, or the needs of the students. Martin-Brule and others, when researching gender training in international

peace and security, found that when training lacks contextualization to the needs of the audience, it “fails to convince the audience about the necessity and relevance of the material presented; at worst, it can cause those who may be unconvinced about the need for integrating gender perspective to feel a sense of ‘normative imposition.’”²³

Educators, gender leaders, gender advisors, security cooperation planners and implementers have all expressed some degree of this sense of normative imposition when integrating WPS into security cooperation activities. In contrast to a policy-based cookie-cutter approach, WPS trainings should focus on familiarizing participants with what a gender perspective means, beyond just “womenandchildren” and contextualizing this to the student’s daily work. For security cooperation planners, security cooperation officers and other American security cooperation personnel, lessons should also seek to provide a set of tools and principles for “integrating gender into their daily work.”²⁴ Education should also focus on providing information on how integrating gender perspectives can have both short-term and long-term positive benefits, increase success of the security initiative, and help achieve mission objectives. Most important, it should increase the understanding that WPS principles are not a security cooperation program. Legislation may make it seem like “another SC program,” but by integrating WPS principles into the daily work of the DOD as a whole, it provides the United States a cutting edge over near peer competitors such as Russia or China. As opposed to just appealing to a country’s leaders, by integrating WPS objectives the United States can demonstrate why its actions within partner nations are beneficial to all segments of a country’s population, further cementing the meaningfulness of continuing a relationship with the United States. In addition, by changing the focus from “women” to “gender” and by training DOD security cooperation practitioners

to undertake a gender analysis that is meaningful to their daily work, this will begin to change the paradigm that equates a gender perspective with women and women only. This would also serve to provide tools to security cooperation officers, implementers and planners that work with partner nations to contextualize WPS initiatives to the culture to avoid an overly paternalistic approach to integrating women in the security sector of partner nations.

Conclusion

It has been over five years since the passage of the Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017, and it seems the DOD is following the same path as the lackluster progress in integrating the WPS agenda within the UN. In the case of the UN, it has been over twenty years since the passage of UNSCR 1325, and researchers are still unsure of the progress made in institutionalizing the role of women in the security sector. As noted by Cheryl Hendricks, “there is little substantive progress in increasing women’s participation in peace and security structures and processes and in creating greater security for women.”²⁵

The approach to implementing the WPS agenda in the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO), the UN, and other countries has moved little beyond “add women and stir.”²⁶ Speaking with security cooperation implementers within the DOD, this seems to also be the case in the United States. In addition, the implementation of WPS for the whole of the DOD has fallen disproportionately on the shoulders of DOD women as key implementers or GENADs. This poses many problems. Not only are there a limited number of qualified GENADs but, as discussed above, sometimes the GENAD was just the “nearest woman” who did not necessarily have subject matter expertise. In addition, because of a lack of training, often this “gendered perspective” is interpreted as “advocating for women’s rights” or getting a higher percentage of women into training,

as opposed to the more nuanced “assessing gender roles in a given society and applying those assessments to mission analysis.”²⁷

Because of a lack of resources and education, integration of WPS objectives into security cooperation activities and education has been informal, ham-fisted, not contextualized to local conditions, and viewed as an afterthought or burden. The burden of carrying out WPS objectives has disproportionately fallen on female security cooperation personnel, because, in general, it seems “the nearest women” are given the task of implementation as an added ancillary duty. Because of both a lack of resources and an overt focus on women as key beneficiaries of WPS initiatives, little progress has been made towards increasing the “meaningful participation of women” beyond the goal of increasing the number of female participants in security cooperation activities.

If the Department of Defense is focused on making real gains towards achieving WPS objectives with partner nations, it should give security cooperation personnel the tools to apply a tailored and culturally appropriate approach. This might begin with switching the focus from WPS policy to “gender” in WPS-affiliated trainings. In addition, being a gender lead or GENAD should move beyond being an ancillary duty and given to individuals with the appropriate subject-matter expertise regardless of gender. Placing more men in these roles can also further decouple gender perspectives from advocating for women’s rights or women as beneficiaries only. A tailored, gender-focused approach led by both American female and male security cooperation personnel may not only lead to greater acceptance of WPS objectives by partner nations, but also to a transformational change that will increase meaningful participation of women in the security sector over the long-term, both within the United States and in the partner nations. **PRISM**

Notes

¹ Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017, PUBLIC LAW 115–68—OCT. 6, 2017, <https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ68/PLAW-115publ68.pdf>.

² United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security, Washington, D.C. The White House, 2019, http://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/WPS_Strategy_10_October2019.pdf.

³ Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan, Department of Defense, Washington, D.C. June 2020.

⁴ Section 1205, National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2020, PUBLIC LAW 116-92, December 20, 2019, <https://www.congress.gov/116/plaws/publ92/PLAW-116publ92.pdf>.

⁵ Reardon, Betty. 1992. *Women and Peace: Feminist Visions of Global Security*. Albany: State University of New York Press.

⁶ Enloe, Cynthia. 1989. *Bananas, Beaches and Bases: Making Feminist Sense of International Politics*. University of California Press.

⁷ Witkowsky, Anne A. 2016. “Integrating Gender Perspectives Within the Department of Defense.” *Prism* 6 (1): 34-57, p. 35.

⁸ Arostegui, Julie. 2014. Gender and the Security Sector Towards a More Security Future. Address at the Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, Washington, DC, 3 DEC 2014.

⁹ Tryggestad, Torunn L. 2009. Trick or Treat? The UN and Implementation of Security Council Resolution on Women, Peace and Security. *Global Governance* 15.4, pp. 539-557.

¹⁰ United National Security Council Resolution 1325, United Nations, New York, October 31, 2000.

¹¹ Ibid.

¹² Prescott, Jody. “Gender Blindness in US Doctrine,” *Parameters* 50, no. 4 (2020), <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol50/iss4/4>.

¹³ White House. United States Government Women, Peace and Security Congressional Report (July 2022) U.S. Women, Peace, and Security Congressional Report 2022 - United States Department of State.

¹⁴ Ibid., p. 46.

¹⁵ National Defense Authorization Act. U.S.C. Title 10 § 301 (2017).

¹⁶ Prescott, Jody. 2020. “Gender Blindness in US Doctrine,” *Parameters* 50, no. 4, <https://press.armywarcollege.edu/parameters/vol50/iss4/4>.

¹⁷ Ibid., p. 24.

¹⁸ Enloe, Cynthia. 1990. “Womenandchildren: Making Feminist Sense of the Persian Gulf Crisis.” *Village Voice*, 25 September, 29–32.

¹⁹ Wilen, Nina. 2020. “Female peacekeepers’ added burden” *International Affairs*, 96.6, p. 1602, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiaa132>.

²⁰ As quoted by Hendricks, Cheryl. 2015. “Women, Peace and Security in Africa: Conceptual and Implementation Challenges and Shifts.” *African Security Review*, 24.4; p. 368.

²¹ Ibid., p. 368.

²² Ibid., p. 369.

²³ Martin- Brule, Sarah-Myrian, et.al. July 2020. “Gender Trainings in International Peace and Security: Toward a More Effective Approach.” International Peace Institute, p. 7.

²⁴ Ibid., p. 6.

²⁵ Hendricks, p. 365.

²⁶ Antonijevic, Zorana. 2022. “How We Have Won the Battle and Lost the Peace; Women, Peace and Security Agenda Twenty Years After.” *Journal of Regional Security* 17.1; 5-24, p. 8.

²⁷ Ibid., p. 1062.