



OUR **SECURE** FUTURE

Women Make the Difference

From the Trump to the Biden Administration: The Women, Peace and Security Agenda

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KEY MESSAGE

This brief outlines the main WPS developments from the Trump to the Biden Administration. There were some significant changes made by the Biden Administration pertaining to gender policy and coordination in general, which likely will also have implications for WPS going forward.



WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY DURING THE TRUMP ADMINISTRATION

In June of 2019, the Trump Administration released the [“United States Strategy on Women, Peace and Security”](#) in keeping with the requirements of the [Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017](#).

The 2019 WPS Strategy defined **three strategic objectives** to be implemented and progress measured by 2023;

- Women are more prepared and increasingly able to participate in efforts that promote stable and lasting peace;
- Women and girls are safer, better protected, and have equal access to government and private assistance programs; and
- The United States and partner governments have improved institutionalization and capacity to ensure WPS efforts are sustainable and long-lasting.

To achieve these strategic objectives, the Strategy defined **four lines of effort**;

- Seek and support the preparation and meaningful participation of women around the world in decision-making processes related to conflict and crises;
- Promote the protection of women and girls’ human rights; access to humanitarian assistance; and safety from violence, abuse, and exploitation around the world;
- Adjust United States international programs to improve outcomes in equality for, and the empowerment of, women; and
- Encourage partner governments to adopt policies, plans, and capacity to improve the meaningful participation of women in processes connected to peace and security and decision-making institutions.

In addition to the Strategy, the Trump White House also released a separate document in 2019 entitled [“Women, Peace and Security Strategy: Metrics and Milestones.”](#) in which it defined specific achievements for each line of effort put forth in the WPS strategy.

The WPS Metrics document also defined more clearly both the overlap with, but also the distinctiveness of WPS from another Trump Administration priority, the [Women’s Global Development and Prosperity \(W-GDP\) Initiative](#). The WPS Act further required the development and release of specific implementation plans by the relevant Executive Agencies supporting the 2019 WPS Strategy (see here for the [Department of State](#), [USAID](#), as well as the Departments of [Defense](#) and [Homeland Security](#)), which occurred in 2020.

The 2019 WPS Strategy clearly recognized the need to “link our new, strategic approach to women, peace, and security to the NSS [National Security Strategy] and other national strategic guidance on matters of peace and security, including the 2018 National Strategy for Counterterrorism; the 2018 National Defense Strategy (NDS); State, DOD, and USAID 2018 Stabilization Assistance Review; the 2018 Strategy to Support Women and Girls at Risk from Violent Extremism and Conflict; efforts to counter trafficking consistent with the NSS, including pursuant to the Trafficking Victims Protection Act (TVPA); and National Security Presidential Memorandum (NSPM) 16: Promoting Women’s Global Development and Prosperity, which the President signed in February 2019, establishing the Women’s Global Development and Prosperity (W-GDP) Initiative. In line with the NSS, the W-GDP Initiative seeks to empower women economically around the world, and in so doing, create conditions for increased stability, security, and prosperity for all.”

But the 2019 WPS Strategy was far less specific on how this coordination was supposed to take place and who or what office would be empowered to do so. Beyond the linkage to other government strategies and documents cited in the Strategy, additional coordination needs emerged with the passage of the [Elie Wiesel Genocide and Atrocities Prevention Act of 2018](#) and the [Global Fragility Act](#), which also required strategies and reports related to conflict prevention, recovery and accountability, with WPS as a constituent component.

Several annual [Congressional Reports mandated by the Elie Wiesel Act](#) specifically reference the relationship of this Act to WPS. So does the [“Global Fragility Strategy”](#) required by the Global Fragility Act (GFA), which was released in 2020, and an updated supplemental GFA implementation document released by the Biden Administration in 2022 called [“Prologue to the United States Strategy to Prevent Conflict and Promote Stability”](#). These Acts further require coordination with the [Atrocity Early Warning Task Force](#), the 2019 successor entity to the [Atrocities Prevention Board](#), first established under President Obama in Presidential Directive 10.

The Women, Peace and Security Strategy: Metrics and Milestones document referenced above states as a goal that National Security Council (NSC) staff will coordinate at least three senior level Department and Agency meetings a year, and the WPS congressional report indicates that this metric was met.

However, it remains unclear what was discussed because there is no public documentation about this, as is typical for deliberations within the interagency. In addition, there is no public information to what extent the overall coordination across the entire government was successful and advanced WPS, as the meetings in and of themselves were the success metric.

Generally-speaking, it seems that the WPS Agency Implementation Plans are very ‘self-contained,’ meaning that they are monitored and implemented by each agency.

During the Trump Administration, high-level day-to-day WPS coordination fell to NSC Director Katherine Walsh at the Human Rights, Democracy and Conflict office, who also covered atrocity prevention matters. At the State Department, the Ambassador for Global Women’s Issues (GWI), Kelley Currie, and Assistant Secretary Denise Natali at the Bureau of Conflict Stabilization Operations (CSO) and their staffs played critical roles, in addition to Deputy Assistant Secretary of Defense for Stability and Humanitarian Affairs, Stephanie Hammond, at the Department of Defense and Cameron Quinn, Senior Officer at the Department of Homeland Security for WPS, as well as Michelle Bekkering, Assistant Administrator for Economic Growth, Education and Environment at USAID.

WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY DURING THE BIDEN ADMINISTRATION

To date, the Trump-era WPS-related documents have not been formally rescinded, changed or replaced by the Biden Administration, but continue to be operational. In June 2021, the new Administration submitted the first [WPS Congressional Report to Congress](#), required by the WPS Act two years after the release of a National WPS Strategy. In it, the Biden Administration reports on the implementation of the existing Agency Implementation Plans under the 2019 WPS Strategy and outlines progress in the four lines of effort contained in the 2019 WPS Strategy.

The current Administration sees the WPS work clearly as building on the first ever U.S. [WPS National Action Plan](#) (NAP), which was released during the Obama-Biden Administration in 2016, and directs the Executive Agencies to “prioritize gender equity and equality.” President Biden further states in the introduction of the report that “The persistent unequal treatment of women around the world— particularly women of color, LGBTQI+ women, and other women who face overlapping forms of discrimination—remains a critical, unfinished project of our time.”

Implementing a much broader aperture that also includes a broad domestic component on gender and equity, President Biden had issued an [Executive Order on the Establishment of the White House Gender Policy Council \(E.O. 14020\)](#) in March 2021 prior to the June WPS Report.

Yet, the WPS Report does not directly address the relationship between the WPS agenda and the Gender Policy Council (GPC). The GPC was established directly within the Executive Office of the President [and coordinates with other Policy Councils within the White House, including the National Security Council, the Domestic Policy Council, and the National Economic Council](#). Its co-chairs are Jennifer Klein, who also serves as the Executive Director, and Julissa Reynoso, who also serves as First Lady Dr. Jill Biden’s Chief of Staff. The Council is staffed by domestic and global gender policy experts, including a Senior Advisor focused on gender-based violence.

E.O. 14020 gives the GPC responsibility to coordinate within the U.S. Government a huge range of domestic and international policy priorities, including policies and programs to:

- (i) combat systemic biases and discrimination, including sexual harassment, and to support women’s human rights;
- (ii) increase economic security and opportunity by addressing the structural barriers to women’s participation in the labor force and by decreasing wage and wealth gaps;
- (iii) address the caregiving needs of American families and support the care-workers they depend upon;
- (iv) support gender equity and combat gender stereotypes in education, including promoting participation in science, technology, engineering, and math (STEM) fields;
- (v) promote gender equity in leadership;
- (vi) increase access to comprehensive health care, address health disparities, and promote sexual and reproductive health and rights;
- (vii) empower girls;
- (viii) prevent and respond to all forms of gender-based violence;
- (ix) address responses to the effects of the coronavirus disease 2019 (COVID-19) on women and girls, especially those related to health, gender-based violence, educational access and attainment, and economic status;
- (x) advance gender equality globally through diplomacy, development, trade, and defense;
- (xi) implement United States Government commitments to women’s involvement in peace and security efforts; and

(xii) recognize the needs and contributions of women and girls in humanitarian crises and in development assistance.

While E.O. 14020 does not mention WPS specifically, it is clearly included in several of the above policy priority areas.

The broad mandate of the Gender Policy Council is further reflected by the broad range of its participants. According to the E.O., in addition to the above mentioned Co-Chairs, the Council is composed of:

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| (i) the Secretary of State; | (xxi) the Representative of the United States of America to the United Nations; |
| (ii) the Secretary of the Treasury; | (xxii) the Director of the Office of Science and Technology Policy; |
| (iii) the Secretary of Defense; | (xxiii) the Assistant to the President for National Security Affairs; |
| (iv) the Attorney General; | (xxiv) the Assistant to the President for Domestic Policy; |
| (v) the Secretary of the Interior; | (xxv) the Assistant to the President for Economic Policy; |
| (vi) the Secretary of Agriculture; | (xxvi) the Assistant to the President on National Climate; |
| (vii) the Secretary of Commerce; | (xxvii) the Assistant to the President on COVID-19 Response; |
| (viii) the Secretary of Labor; | (xxviii) the Chief of Staff to the Vice President; |
| (ix) the Secretary of Health and Human Services; | (xxix) the Chair of the Council of Economic Advisers; |
| (x) the Secretary of Housing and Urban Development; | (xxx) the Chair of the Council on Environmental Quality; |
| (xi) the Secretary of Transportation; | (xxxi) the Director of the National Science Foundation; |
| (xii) the Secretary of Energy; | (xxxii) the Administrator of General Services; |
| (xiii) the Secretary of Education; | (xxxiii) the Administrator of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration; |
| (xiv) the Secretary of Veterans Affairs; | (xxxiv) the Chair of the Equal Employment Opportunity Commission; |
| (xv) the Secretary of Homeland Security; | (xxxv) the Administrator of the United States Agency for International Development; |
| (xvi) the Administrator of the Environmental Protection Agency; | (xxxvi) the Director of the Office of Personnel Management; and |
| (xvii) the Director of the Office of Management and Budget; | (xxxvii) the heads of such other agencies and offices as the Co-Chairs may from time to time invite to participate. |
| (xviii) the United States Trade Representative; | |
| (xix) the Administrator of the Small Business Administration; | |
| (xx) the Director of National Intelligence; | |

The E.O. further required the GPC to develop a “Government-Wide Strategy to Advance Gender Equity and Equality (NGS)” within 200 days. On October 22, 2021, the [National Strategy on Gender Equity and Equality](#) was released.

The NGS covers these general areas:

- Improve Economic Security and Accelerate Economic Growth
- Eliminate Gender-Based Violence
- Protect, Improve, and Expand Access to Health Care, including Sexual and Reproductive Health Care
- Ensure Equal Opportunity and Equity in Education
- Promote Gender Equity and Fairness in Justice and Immigration Systems
- Advance Human Rights and Gender Equality Under the Law
- Elevate Gender Equality in Security and Humanitarian Relief
- Promote Gender Equity in Mitigating and Responding to Climate Change
- Close Gender Gaps in Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics Fields
- Advance Full Participation in Democracy, Representation, and Leadership

Starting on page 28 of the NGS document, the Administration lays out its priorities under the heading “Elevate Gender Equality in Security and Humanitarian Relief.” Under the subheading “Promote Gender Parity and Gender Equality Issues in Security Processes,” the Administration highlights on page 29:

Globally, we will amplify our whole-of-government implementation of the U.S. Women, Peace, and Security Act. This strategy focuses internally on dedicated staffing, funding, training, and accountability requirements, as well as on policies and programs to advance women’s meaningful participation and leadership in conflict prevention, peace, security, and political processes. We will use our diplomacy and leverage in bilateral and multilateral fora to promote inclusive diplomacy, foreign assistance, inclusive security processes and the prioritization of women’s rights issues in conflict resolution and post-conflict reconstruction efforts. We will support the leadership of local women-led civil society organizations working to advance more inclusive peace and security agendas.

Under the subheading “Ensure Gender Equity in Humanitarian Relief and Refugee Resettlement Efforts” on page 30, the Administration states among other:

We will also strengthen our humanitarian response by amplifying our focus on gender equality, leveraging our role as the largest bilateral humanitarian donor to help ensure progress and accountability on these issues across the humanitarian system.

And under the subheading “Include Gender in Efforts to Counter Violent Extremism” on page 30:

To strengthen efforts to prevent terrorism and targeted violence at home and abroad, we will include women in prevention efforts, recognizing that women are well-positioned to lead efforts to spot and address radicalization and mobilization to such violence in their communities. We will also address the rising role of women in violent extremist activity, both as perpetrators and as victims. To better gather information about women and violent extremism, the Director of National Intelligence will designate a National Intelligence Officer for Gender Equality, who, among other responsibilities, will help analyze the interrelationship between gender and violent extremism. We will also increase the recruitment of women in the security sector to strengthen our efforts to mitigate against terrorist threats at home and abroad.

WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY ACTION PLANS AND POLICY GOALS IN 2022

The relevant agencies are now tasked with reviewing their work plans, programs, and policy priorities to ensure that they are in line with the priorities of the NGS, as its implementation is coordinated by the Gender Policy Council. In addition, the relevant WPS agencies are working on Action Plans in support of the Strategy goals. It is unclear at this point if these specific Action Plans will be made public, but Congress should ensure it is aware of them and that they reflect WPS Act priorities. On March 8th, International Women's Day, [the Biden Administration announced that it will request \\$2.6 billion in the FY23 Presidential Budget Request](#) for foreign aid programs that promote gender equality around the world. This is part of [the overall requests for \\$60.4 billion for the Department of State and \\$ 1.9 billion for the U.S. Agency for International Development \(USAID\).](#)

Gender perspectives improve security outcomes



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One Earth Future is an incubator of innovative peacebuilding programs in which we design, test and partner to scale programs that work hand-in-hand with communities to eliminate the root causes of war.