



POLICY BRIEF

US LEADERSHIP ON WOMEN AND FOREIGN POLICY: RECOMMENDATIONS FOR THE 116TH CONGRESS

I. INTRODUCTION

Passed unanimously in October 2000, United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 on Women, Peace and Security (UNSCR 1325) underscores women's agency, voice, and capacities as intrinsic to creating better policies and more equitable peace agreements.¹ UNSCR 1325 was drafted and adopted by the UN Security Council with significant leadership from women-led civil society groups around the world. It has been followed by seven other resolutions (UNSCRs 1820, 1888, 1889, 1960, 2106, 2122, and 2242), which make up the Women, Peace and Security Agenda (WPS).²

WPS is a transformative policy mandate with a global constituency. It provides policymakers with the tools to end cycles of violent conflict, create more equitable peace processes, halt inequalities between men and women, and promote gender equality on a global, national, and local scale.

II. WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY AND THE UNITED STATES

The Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017

Today, more than 70 states have National Action Plans (NAPs) to support implementation of UNSCR 1325 at the national level.³ Yet the US Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 (the WPS Act) is one of the first laws in the world to incorporate the international agenda into domestic law and promote the tenets of a more inclusive and equitable foreign policy.⁴ The law is a major accomplishment, with Israel as the only other country that has passed legislation on UNSCR 1325.⁵

In passing the WPS Act, the US Congress led the way to establishing a more inclusive, equitable foreign policy.⁶ The WPS Act states,

“It shall be the policy of the United States to promote the meaningful participation of women in all aspects of overseas conflict prevention, management, and resolution, and post-conflict relief and recovery efforts reinforced through diplomatic efforts and programs.”

The WPS Act falls under the jurisdiction of several major US Congressional committees where women hold senior leadership roles, including Appropriations, Armed Services, and Foreign Relations.

Since the passage of the law, Congress has taken concrete measures to provide the Department of Defense with the resources it needs to implement the law.

For example, the FY19 Defense Appropriations Act includes an additional \$4 million to place gender advisors within the regional combatant commands. The role of the gender advisors is being established by the Under Secretary of Defense for Policy in the Office of the Secretary of Defense (OSD), which is using the North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO) gender advisor role as a model for incorporating gender perspectives into military operations. In addition, US Indo-Pacific Command has established a pilot course to train gender advisors that is currently being reviewed by other commands.

This is an example of important progress, and demonstrates that Congress could take further measures to provide other US agencies with the resources required to implement the WPS Act as well.

Although the WPS agenda has been focused on conflict affected environments, it also offers approaches that are relevant to other national security issues. For example, the WPS Act also provides an opportunity to strengthen certain aspects of the US National Security Strategy (NSS) in the areas of diplomacy, human rights, and hard security issues such as nuclear policy, sanctions, and domestic security. The following is a brief overview and discussion of this broader approach to security.

The US National Security Strategy and Women's Participation in Foreign Policy

Whether addressing the nuclear threat posed by Iran or North Korea, or developing robust international sanctions regimes, solutions require the cooperation of America's friends, allies, and regional partners. Furthermore, reducing the threat posed by rogue regimes also requires the full and meaningful participation of women in public life.

An emerging body of evidence demonstrates that when women are in leadership roles, their unique perspectives and skills can improve the functions of governments.

Studies show that when women participate in peace negotiations, it is 35 percent more likely that peace will last 15 years or more.⁷

Studies also show that female representatives often press for different policy priorities than male representatives. For example, in one global study, female parliamentarians were 122 percent more likely than their male counterparts to engage in a health-care debate.⁸ Another study examining the US Congress found that women were more effective legislators. Women in the minority party were 31 percent more effective at pushing legislation through than their male counterparts, and women in the majority were 5 percent more effective.⁹

Building on this evidence, Pillar IV of the 2017 US NSS focuses on "Advancing American Influence" and recognizes the crucial role that women leaders play in international security. It states:

*"Governments that respect the rights of their citizens remain the best vehicle for prosperity, human happiness, and peace. . . . For example, governments that fail to treat women equally do not allow their societies to reach their full potential."*¹⁰

In addition, the US NSS emphasizes the need to manage relations with other powerful states such as China, Russia, North Korea, and Iran.

While the Trump Administration has emphasized an "America First" approach to foreign policy, numerous members of Congress have offered alternative approaches to managing state relations, stating that threats cannot be mitigated by US efforts alone. For example, Senator Susan Collins (R-ME) expressed her dismay that the Administration was backing away from diplomatic solutions:

"It would have been a better course of action for the United States to continue to work closely with our allies to fix the serious deficiencies in the agreement so we can achieve the original goal . . . to prevent

*Iran from obtaining a nuclear weapon and the means to deliver it. As we move forward, the Iranian threat remains a serious national security problem in urgent need of an effective and permanent solution. I do hope that the Trump Administration will embark on an aggressive effort, alongside our allies, to counter it through a strong, revised agreement."*¹¹

The Role of Civil Society and the US National Security Strategy

While the US NSS does reference the importance of women's full participation in free societies, it does not highlight the power of civil society to bring people together to prevent conflict by resolving disputes through negotiation, mediation, and dialogue.

This is a gap that needs to be addressed because civil society organizations are an important medium for female leaders to elevate their voice within society and call for change. Women-led civil society organizations often help identify political, social, and economic impacts of policies and programs that might otherwise be overlooked.

AN EXAMPLE OF CIVIL SOCIETY PERSPECTIVES ON SANCTIONS: WHAT THE WOMEN SAY ABOUT SANCTIONS ON IRAN

"Women are bearing the brunt of the economic and social impact of sanctions. . . . Economic sanctions are blunt instruments that typically harm the civilian population far more than the state. . . . Since 1995, when the Clinton Administration honed in on the oil and gas sector to the current day where the banking and financial sectors have been targeted, private enterprise and ordinary citizens are the primary and overwhelming victims. . . . Sanctions introduced in the summer of 2010 directly targeted insurance companies that insured Iranian shipping involved in the import and export of products. Despite denials by proponents of the sanctions regime, this round of sanctions directly affected the availability of foreign-made medication and other healthcare products to Iranians including vitamins for children and pregnant women and sanitary products. The implication for serious illnesses including cancer is particularly profound."¹²

III. INTEGRATING WOMEN AND A GENDER PERSPECTIVE INTO US FOREIGN POLICY: EXAMPLES FROM CANADA AND SWEDEN

The 116th US Congress has an opportunity to explore policy proposals that go beyond implementing the WPS Act of 2017, which focuses predominantly on foreign policy. Policymakers can examine feminist approaches to domestic policymaking in other countries that provide examples of policies that could be replicated in the US to improve US homeland security. A feminist approach to security includes the increased participation of women in decision-making and the use of a gender analysis on peace and security issues.

For example, Sweden and Canada offer the United States robust examples of how a feminist approach to foreign policy has resulted in instituting gender-equitable policies at home and abroad. Both states have shown strong leadership at the individual and institutional levels. Their work serves as a model for how the United States can strengthen its approach to the WPS agenda.

Canada's Approach

In 2017, Canada launched its second NAP.¹³ It recognizes the important role of civil society organizations, calling for an increase in support to local women's organizations, and recognizes that "women and men must be equally committed to changing attitudes, behaviors and roles to support gender equality." It also acknowledges domestic challenges within the WPS agenda, including the high number of indigenous women who have gone missing or been murdered. Additionally, Canada developed a Feminist International Assistance Policy with broader commitments to achieving gender equality within poverty alleviation efforts led by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and the Minister of International Development and La Francophonie.¹⁴

Canada also made new commitments to UN peacekeeping reform, as evidenced by the 2017 UN Peacekeeping Defence Ministerial Conference hosted in Vancouver, which was a follow-up to the first ministerial meeting hosted by the United States in New York in 2015. At the ministerial meeting, Canada launched the Elsie Initiative to support the UN goal of increasing the percentage of female uniformed military and police personnel deployed to peacekeeping operations.¹⁵ Currently, only 4 percent of uniformed military personnel and 11 percent of police in UN peacekeeping missions are women. In October 2015, the UN set new targets for women to make up 15 percent of military personnel and 20 percent of police contributions

with the adoption of UNSCR 2242.¹⁶ The Elsie Initiative also established a new Multinational UN Trust Fund to accelerate the pace of change by helping troop- and police-contributing countries overcome barriers to deploying female personnel.

The Elsie Initiative is currently comprised of a Contact Group of 11 member states including Argentina, France, Ghana, the Netherlands, Norway, Senegal, South Africa, South Korea, Sweden, the United Kingdom, and Uruguay.

Sweden's Approach

Margot Wallström, Sweden's Minister of Foreign Affairs, has led the way in adopting a feminist approach to diplomatic relations. Stating that a feminist foreign policy is "an analysis of the world," Wallström offered some advice to the United States:

*"This will make America great again: if he includes women and makes sure he works for gender equality."*¹⁷

Wallström officially launched the concept of a feminist foreign policy in 2014 "in response to the discrimination and systematic subordination that still mark the daily lives of countless women and girls around the world." The policy "is based on the premise that men and women should have the same power to shape society and their own lives." Although the policy emphasizes the empowerment of women and girls, Sweden notes that equality is in everyone's interest because it results in a healthier, safer, and more prosperous society for all people.¹⁸

Furthermore, Sweden's *Handbook: Feminist Foreign Policy* highlights the importance of ensuring that policy is relevant to the realities of women and girls:

*"The feminist foreign policy begins and ends with reality. The policy shall be based on facts and statistics about girls' and women's everyday lives and shall produce results in people's lives. Otherwise, it loses its relevance."*¹⁹

Sweden's feminist foreign policy is a comprehensive approach, covering all areas of foreign and domestic policy. It includes internal considerations such as ambassador appointments and matters of multilateral engagement on UN peacekeeping operations. The Swedish *Handbook* also offers examples of how domestic policy on women's advancement contributes to its overall approach.

Sweden's approach is not just theoretical, it is targeted to specific contexts. Its NAP selected five priority countries where a gender-equitable approach will contribute the most to the peaceful resolution of conflict: Afghanistan, Colombia, Democratic Republic of Congo, Liberia, and Palestine.

What the US Can Learn from Canada and Sweden

Although the WPS Act of 2017 emphasizes the role of women in conflict-affected regions overseas, the broader approach taken by Canada and Sweden to consider the centrality of gender equality in all matters of domestic and foreign policy offers the United States examples of what more can be done within a feminist policy framework.

Canada and Sweden provide examples of what can be done within a feminist policy framework by considering the centrality of gender equality in all matters of domestic and foreign policy.

For example, the Swedish government commissioned the Swedish Gender Equality Agency to support government agencies with integrating gender perspectives into all of their operations. This is known as the Gender Mainstreaming in Government Agencies program.²⁰ In another example, Canada used its convening power to host the first-ever all female summit of foreign ministers, with women from almost 20 countries in attendance.²¹ These and many other initiatives to include women and a gender perspective in foreign policy should be utilized in US foreign policy as well.

The WPS Act of 2017 does not explicitly mention domestic policy. However, it does reference the US Department of Homeland Security as an implementing agency. This implies that the following areas of domestic policy may be considered under the WPS framework:

- Combating homegrown extremism;
- Cybersecurity;
- Disaster response;
- Gang recruitment and youth intervention;
- Gun control, including local mechanisms for disarmament and violence prevention;
- Immigration and family separation;
- Domestic violence;
- Sexual crimes against women; and,
- Human trafficking.

While some of these challenges lie within the jurisdiction of the US Department of Justice, they are issue areas where engaging women can make a difference, particularly in preventing violence to improve homeland defense.

IV. KEY RECOMMENDATIONS

Specific Recommendations to Congress

As Congress looks for specific ways to advance the WPS agenda, we offer the following recommendations:

- **FORM A CONGRESSIONAL WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY CAUCUS** with a long-term strategic goal to form an entity with dedicated staff.
- **FORMALIZE CONSULTATIONS** between the Administration, civil society, and congressional leaders to monitor the implementation of the WPS Act of 2017.
- **ELEVATE CONTRIBUTIONS OF FEMALE MEMBERS OF CONGRESS** as related to international negotiations with our allies and our adversaries, including regular briefings to the media and prime-time reporters.
- **FOSTER A MORE COLLABORATIVE APPROACH** with our allies and multilateral agencies to achieve WPS policy objectives by discussing comparative policy approaches with Canada and Sweden.
- **APPROPRIATE FUNDING** for the United States to contribute to the UN Trust Fund for the Elsie Initiative to increase the number of uniformed female personnel in UN peacekeeping missions.
- **JOIN THE ELSIE INITIATIVE** and contribute to the forthcoming UN Trust Fund. This could be done within the framework of the current Global Peacekeeping Operations Initiative jointly managed by the US Department of Defense and Department of State. Several aspects of the Canadian plan could serve as areas of cooperation with the United States such as comparing strategies to reduce violence against women and focusing on what works; committing to increasing the number of women in UN peacekeeping by contributing military and civilian personnel; and engaging in regular consultations with civil society at home and abroad.
- **ADOPT A LONG-TERM APPROACH TO PLANNING WPS INTERVENTIONS**, allocating multiyear funding for programs to support civil society and the development of NAPs in conflict-affected countries.
- **ENCOURAGE THE ADMINISTRATION TO ENGAGE IN ANNUAL CONSULTATIONS** with our regional partners and allies to compare approaches and strengthen cooperation on WPS.
- **MONITOR THE IMPLEMENTATION OF PLACING GENDER ADVISORS** within the US Department of Defense regional combatant commands.

PRIORITY RECOMMENDATION: ESTABLISH A WOMEN, PEACE, AND SECURITY CAUCUS

Given the passage of the WPS Act of 2017, the announcement of the creation and launch of a congressional membership entity dedicated to WPS issues on Capitol Hill would be a critical next step in the promotion of the WPS agenda in and outside of the US Congress. Such an entity would give current and new members of Congress a strategic and high-level platform from which to engage other lawmakers, critical executive branch offices, the media, and the general public, regardless of their specific committee assignments or individual congressional seniority.

The most expeditious and effective way to create such an entity is to establish what is commonly known as a Caucus, or—in more technical congressional parlance—a Congressional Membership Organization (CMO). CMOs operate under significant congressional rules and restrictions including a prohibition against hiring CMO-exclusive staff, maintaining a separate congressional CMO office, and maintaining or soliciting any kind of independent CMO budget.

These entities have proven to be extremely effective catalysts on Capitol Hill if properly supported by nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and if managed effectively at the congressional staff level.

The long-term NGO support must include analysis; education, including inviting CMO staff contacts to important conferences, relevant NGO meetings and events; identifying experts in the field and making them available for congressional events; and the promotion of CMO events, statements, letters, etc., on Capitol Hill, in the media, and among the general public through NGO networks. For example, the NGO International Civil Society Action Network has produced policy briefs on various topics including on Iran, Syria, Sri Lanka, and countering violent extremism that help to bring gender lense to the policymaking community.



Official White House Photo by Lawrence Jackson.

Specific Recommendations to the Administration

As the Administration continues to implement the WPS Act of 2017, we offer the following recommendations:

- **CONDUCT GENDER ANALYSIS OF MAJOR INTERNATIONAL CONFLICTS**, including public opinion surveys focused on female views and perceptions on the nature of the conflict and paths to peace (US Department of State/US Department of Defense).
- **INCREASE ENGAGEMENT WITH AND SUPPORT FOR CIVIL SOCIETY LEADERS** in the United States and abroad (all agencies).
- **SUPPORT THE DEVELOPMENT OF NAPs** on Women, Peace and Security in other countries (US Department of State/US Department of Defense).
- **JOIN THE CONTACT GROUP FOR THE ELSIE INITIATIVE** to increase the number of uniformed female personnel in UN peacekeeping, and contribute to the UN Trust Fund to help troop- and police-contributing countries overcome barriers to female deployment (US Department of State/US Department of Defense/US Mission to the United Nations).
- **OFFER PROTECTION AND SUPPORT TO FEMALE ACTIVISTS**, such as women human rights defenders, threatened by hostile regimes with sensitivity and attention to the dangers they may face in associating with western allies (all agencies).
- **ADDRESS GENDER EQUALITY WITHIN THE REGIONAL INTERESTS OF CHINA, RUSSIA, NORTH KOREA, AND IRAN**; find common ground to address the impact of conflicts on women in neighboring states; and support regional initiatives of UN Women as appropriate (US Mission to the United Nations/US Department of State).
- **HOLD REGULAR CONSULTATIONS WITH THE U.S. CIVIL SOCIETY WORKING GROUP ON WOMEN, PEACE AND SECURITY** in Washington and encourage embassies abroad to meet regularly with local female leaders about peace and security issues in their communities and countries (all agencies).

ENDNOTES

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- 2 The United Nations founding documents, and subsequent publications relating to UNSCR 1325, use the phrase “Women, Peace and Security” without an Oxford comma. This is because “Women, Peace and Security” emphasizes the importance of women’s participation and decision-making in international peace and security. However, the US National Action Plan on WPS and the US Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017 use the phrase “Women, Peace, and Security” with an Oxford comma. Both versions are used within this document depending on whether they are referring to the UN or to the US context.
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ONE EARTH FUTURE

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One Earth Future (OEF) is a self-funded, private operating foundation seeking to create a more peaceful world through collaborative, data-driven initiatives. OEF focuses on enhancing maritime cooperation, creating sustainable jobs in fragile economies, and research which actively contributes to thought leadership on global issues. As an operating foundation, OEF provides strategic, financial, and administrative support allowing its programs to focus deeply on complex problems and to create constructive alternatives to violent conflict.

OUR SECURE FUTURE


oursecurefuture.org 

Our Secure Future: Women Make the Difference (OSF) is a program of the Colorado-based One Earth Future Foundation. OSF works to strengthen the Women, Peace and Security movement to enable effective policy decision-making for a more peaceful world.

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OUR **SECURE** FUTURE

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