



Recommendations for the United States and Japan to Redefine Security: Applying a Bilateral Approach to Women, Peace and Security

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Introduction

For many people around the world, peace and security is an elusive dream. Daily, they live in fear of violence, abuse, and impunity by state and non-state actors. Many countries are perpetually on the verge of conflict as authoritarian or weakened governments provide fertile ground for instability. There are also an increasing number of climate change disruptions that add to

instability. But violence and instability are not inevitable. Policymakers are recognizing a powerful yet under-utilized force for peace: Women, Peace and Security (WPS).

WPS recognizes that women are on the frontlines of international security challenges as powerful agents of change to create stability and peace. The intent of WPS is to create a world that respects the dignity and rights of all people, and to ensure a more peaceful and secure world. This issue is not just new to Japan, it is new to the world. Creating legislation and parliamentary working groups (caucuses) that advance the WPS agenda are new security innovations that are in the early stages of evolution. There are only two countries in the world that have active parliamentary Women, Peace and Security Caucuses today: Japan and the United States.

In October 2022, Members of the Japanese Diet, the legislature of Japan, announced their intent to form the Diet Members' Network for WPS, a caucus-like body, to advance United National Security Council Resolution (UNSCR) 1325 and the Japanese National Action Plan on Women, Peace and Security.¹

How should the Japanese Parliamentary Caucus advance WPS? What should its main objectives be in its first five years?

To answer these questions, we can look at the only other formally established Women, Peace and Security Caucus established in the world: the bipartisan Women, Peace and Security Caucus in the U.S. Congress. The U.S. WPS Caucus was created to provide additional oversight and ensure accountability for the commitments laid out in the Women, Peace and Security Act (WPS Act) of 2017 (P.L. 115-68).

History of Women, Peace and Security Legislation in the United States

The WPS Act of 2017 was initiated by a coalition of civil society organizations working together as the U.S. Civil Society Working Group (CSWG) in Washington, DC. Additional stakeholders from think tanks and universities weighed in from outside of Washington, DC.

¹ Melanne Verweir, "Women, Peace, and Security in Japan: Collaboration with the Sasakawa Peace Foundation." Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, November 3, 2022, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/women-peace-and-security-in-japan-collaboration-with-the-sasakawa-peace-foundation%E2%82%AC%81/>

It took several years of advocacy and relationship building to achieve this milestone. In July 2012, the first iteration of the WPS Act was introduced by the 112th Congress with bipartisan support in both the House of Representatives and the Senate. The Act was then revised and reintroduced in both the House and the Senate during the 113th Congress (2013-2014) and reintroduced again in the Senate during the 114th Congress (2015-2016). The bill was sponsored in the House of Representatives by Jan Schakowsky (D-IL), Kristi Noem (R-SD), Eliot Engel (D-NY), and Ed Royce (R-CA). In the Senate, the bill was sponsored by Senators Jeanne Shaheen (D-NH), Shelley Moore Capito (R-WV), Marco Rubio (R-FL), Chris Coons (D-DE), and Ben Cardin (D-MD).

Pushed by extraordinary support from civil society, the U.S. Congress passed the WPS Act in 2017. The law mandates women's meaningful participation and the use of a gender perspective in international peace and security decision-making.

The passage of the WPS Act of 2017 exercised the first of the U.S. Congress' two major responsibilities under the U.S. Constitution:

- to make policy and funding laws
- to provide parliamentary oversight over executive agencies regarding the implementation of these policies.

With the passage of the WPS Act in 2017, the U.S. Congress stepped into a leadership role that until then had largely been occupied by the United Nations with UNSCR 1325 and various National Actions Plans, such as the Obama Administration's in 2011.

For the first time ever, a legislative body enshrined the WPS agenda into binding national law. Until this watershed moment, the implementation of UNSCR 1325 both on the international and national level was left to the good will of national governments and their executive agencies.

While the passage of the law was a major success for the WPS agenda, Congress in general has mostly abdicated its responsibility to provide formal oversight of its implementation.

Challenges to Oversight and Accountability

One of the barriers for effective legislative oversight in areas which involve several executive agencies is the strict jurisdictional limitations of individual committees. The WPS Act charges the Department of State, USAID, the Department of Defense, and the Department of Homeland Security to develop individual WPS implementation plans for each of the agencies.

In the current Congressional structure, these agencies are overseen by the Foreign Affairs Committees, the Armed Services Committees, and the Homeland Security Committees in the House and the Senate. These committees very rarely hold joint hearings for extraordinary reasons and circumstances.

Unsurprisingly, none of the committees held formal hearings on the National WPS Strategy, the required Agency Implementation Plans, or the subsequent two WPS Reports to Congress on these matters.

However, there has been some Congressional WPS engagement with the executive branch. Individual Members dedicated to WPS have fought hard for WPS priorities and funding and have provided further legislative and budgetary support, including in National Defense Authorization Acts and Appropriation bills. Without this engagement, there would not be any gender advisors at the Department of Defense, for example.

But as an institution run by the committee system with stove-piped individual jurisdictions, such initiatives were always initiated by individual Members with strong WPS credentials.

How Was the WPS Caucus Created in the United States Congress?

Recognizing this critical structural problem, [Our Secure Future \(OSF\)](#), a program of the [One Earth Future Foundation](#), began to engage Congressional WPS leaders in both parties from early 2019

to present, to explore the possible creation of a WPS Working Group on Capitol Hill, open to all Members regardless of their individual committee assignments, building on the legislative achievements of the WPS Act. After many consultations with Congressional offices and civil society organizations, these efforts resulted in the formal launch of the bipartisan [Congressional Women, Peace and Security Caucus](#) on March 9, 2020, under the bipartisan leadership of Representative [Lois Frankel \(D-FL\)](#) and Representative [Michael Waltz \(R-FL\)](#).² In comparison to formal Congressional Committees and Commissions ([Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission](#), [House Democracy Partnership](#), [Commission on Security and Cooperation in Europe](#), [Congressional Executive Commission on China](#), etc.) created by Congress through a formal act, Caucuses play a critical but less formal role on Capitol Hill.

These entities, officially referred to as Congressional Membership Organizations (CMOs) in the U.S. Congress, are truly open to every Member, are not appointment-based, and are the most effective interfaces for civil society organizations with Representatives from both parties with a whole range of committee assignments.³ It should be noted that under Congressional rules, caucuses are truly voluntary, do not have any budgetary authority, and can receive any kind of donation of monetary value. Civil society therefore plays a truly critical role in the success of a Caucus through public information and research sharing, by providing expertise and by participating in Caucus events at the invitation of a Caucus. OSF is committed to continue playing this important role for the WPS Caucus.

The Ever-Evolving Work of the WPS Caucus

Since its inception, the WPS Caucus has held Member-level briefings with Administration representatives on the National WPS Strategies and the Agency WPS Implementation Plans, and discussed the WPS Reports to Congress. The collaboration of the WPS Caucus Co-Chairs and Members also led to the strengthening of WPS provisions in the National Defense Authorization Act of FY 2022.⁴

² “The Women, Peace and Security Congressional Caucus,” Our Secure Future, Accessed August 2023, <https://oursecurefuture.org/our-secure-future/project/women-peace-and-security-congressional-caucus>

³ “Congressional Member Organizations (CMOs) and Informal Member Groups: Their Purpose and Activities, History, and Formation,” Congressional Research Service, Updated March 21, 2023, <https://crsreports.congress.gov/product/pdf/R/R40683>

⁴ “Co-Chairs Frankel, Waltz Joined by Reps. Keating, Speier in Advancing Women, Peace, and Security Agenda in National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2022,” Congresswoman Lois Frankel, September 23, 2021, <https://frankel.house.gov/news/documentsingle.aspx?DocumentID=3340>

Civil society plays a crucial role in the success of a congressional caucus and particularly for the Women, Peace and Security Caucus. Some of the activities that the Caucus engages in, with the support of civil society organizations are:

- Public education and providing expertise and ideas on critical and emerging security issues, at the invitation of Congressional Members.
- Current policy research on emerging security and peace issues.
- Convenings and consultations with women peacebuilders, WPS practitioners, and academics.
- Providing background questions and policy briefs to support Congressional briefings and hearings.
- Encouraging Congressional Members to use its own Congressional Research Service to examine current peace and security issues with a gender lens, such as the situation of women and girls in disaster affected areas and complex emergencies; the situation of women, men, boys, and girls in the Ukrainian conflict with Russia; and the situation of Afghan women and girls post-withdrawal.

Other Examples of Parliamentary Engagement on WPS

Other parliamentary bodies have also adopted cross-party parliamentary working groups, similar to the “WPS Caucus Mode.” British Parliamentarians from the upper and lower Houses of Parliament organized the “[All-Party Parliamentary Group on Women, Peace and Security \(APPG-WPS\)](#)” in 2006. The APPG-WPS secretariat is hosted by [Gender Action for Peace and Security \(GAPS\)](#), a British Women, Peace and Security civil society network. The APPG-WPS hosts the British Annual Report to Parliament on Women, Peace and Security and has held an impressive list of events during 2022, with topics ranging from the situation of women and girls in Afghanistan, to CRSV, Iraq, the Philippines, and Yemen.

Recommendations for Japan's Diet Members' Network for WPS

Adopt WPS Legislation for Japan

1. Adopt a mission statement for the WPS Caucus, a whole-of-government approach tied to international frameworks.
2. Conduct gender-sensitive reviews of existing domestic legislation (Penal Code, Family Law) and identify how to update and harmonize Meiji era laws with the Japanese constitution's promise of gender equality.
3. Adopt "evergreen" Women, Peace and Security legislation that establishes clear links to the international framework for WPS.
4. WPS legislation should require regular whole-of-government strategy and Ministry implementation plans based on the strategy, examined every 5 to 6 years or tied to Japan's National Action Plan timeframe for implementation and reporting.
5. Establish regular reporting and oversight by the Diet on the NAP commitments and legislation/obligations, particularly by the WPS Parliamentary Caucus.
6. Establish government WPS Focal Points representing executive agencies that can participate in relevant parliamentary working groups. Close collaboration with such parliamentary working groups will ensure their important work will receive political support by their legislature, and their agencies receive the necessary authorizations and funding for their programming and policies.

Strengthening Civil Society

7. Actively engage and strengthen civil society. While the formal creation of such a Caucus may be a relatively simple bureaucratic step depending on the rules and regulations of a legislative body, the success of such an entity entirely depends on the full commitment, support, and participation of civil society to advance the WPS agenda. Encourage civil society organizations to explore the possibility of the creation of a WPS working group.

8. Establish regular quarterly consultations between the WPS Caucus and Japanese civil society representatives on a variety of thematic issues or current or emerging peace and security matters. Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA can help identify the initial roster of civil society representatives to convene (former members of the Japan Oxfam International team that worked on the DRR for Tohoku, experts from academic and professional backgrounds, journalists, artists, local women's organizations, and advocacy groups, etc.).
9. Tap existing research capabilities for the Diet to conduct further research into the results of the National Census Data. In particular, perform a deep dive on the survey of women's responses to marriage, children, and professional life choices to find out why a majority of Japanese women said they would prefer not to be married and/or have children. Use this information to create a policy brief in consultation with civil society experts to create recommendations to uplift women and break through barriers for women in Japanese society.
10. WPS Caucus should conduct dialogues and hearings with women from conflict and disaster/humanitarian crises zones to amplify women's voices and solutions on important peace and security matters in the region and globally.

Conclusion

Women, Peace and Security holds the promise of being able to address a range of security threats, from conflict to climate change—but only if nations can commit to actions and implementation. Women, Peace and Security reflects the recognition that the meaningful participation of women is critical to peace and security and to lasting democracy. It is important to note that Women, Peace and Security is not only applicable to situations where there is active violent conflict. The agenda is meant to be applied to the full spectrum of peace and security from early warning and conflict prevention through long-term peace and democratic governance efforts, to disaster relief.

Japan and the U.S. are perfectly positioned to realize the intent of the women's organizations and civil society groups to transform how peace and security is understood and pursued so that it is fully inclusive and based on the human rights of all. Not only are there many opportunities for the

U.S. and Japan to collaborate on addressing these issues with a WPS lens, but it is also clear that increased collaboration between the U.S. and Japan on WPS will yield benefits far beyond the bilateral relationship that will improve security outcomes for decades to come.

Ms. Sahana Dharmapuri wrote in her personal capacity. The views and interpretations expressed by the author are solely her own.



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