



# Catalyst for Change: Strengthening the U.S.- Japan Alliance through Women, Peace and Security

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## Introduction

In July of this year, I led a delegation of eight Women, Peace and Security (WPS) experts from the United States in a week-long WPS research trip to Tokyo, Japan through the [Sasakawa USA Emerging Experts Delegation \(SEED\)](#) program. The program brought these experts involved in U.S. policymaking and implementation of WPS to engage with Japanese politicians, government officials, self-defense forces, academics, civil society leaders, and the media to explore the historical, societal, cultural and political challenges and opportunities for the development of WPS within the U.S.-Japan alliance. The delegates came from the four federal agencies tasked with implementing the United States' WPS national strategy (Department of State, Department of Defense, Department of Homeland Security, and USAID) as well as U.S. Indo-Pacific Command

and civil society entities who have championed WPS initiatives, policies, and research (Our Secure Future and Georgetown Institute of Women, Peace and Security).

Through engagements in Tokyo with the various meeting partners, it became clear that collaboration on the Women, Peace and Security agenda between the U.S. and Japan would greatly benefit both nations and that there is a desire from both sides to work together. There are a variety of areas where collaboration can take place, some of which are fairly easy to implement and others which are long-term projects that could take years, even decades, to be fully achieved.

In this paper, I will lay out why now is an opportune time for the United States and Japan to come together on WPS and offer recommendations for areas of collaboration. First, however, I will provide a brief overview of what Women, Peace and Security is and engagements in WPS by the U.S. and Japan.

## A Brief Overview of Women, Peace and Security

The official framework of Women, Peace and Security was first introduced under United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325 in October 2000. Not only did it formally recognize that women are uniquely and adversely affected by conflict, which then consequently impacts durable peace and reconciliation, but it also recognized the critical role that women play in the prevention and resolution of conflict and in building of safe and secure communities. UNSCR 1325 outlines four pillars that guide the how, why, and what of the Women, Peace and Security resolution: 1) Participation, 2) Protection, 3), Prevention, and 4) Relief and Recovery.

In a 2004 UN Security Council Presidential statement, member states were encouraged to nationally implement UNSCR 1325. It was suggested that this could be achieved by each nation creating and executing a National Action Plan (NAP) that would implement the four pillars of UNSCR 1325, and by collaborating with civil society, particularly local women's networks and organizations. Since then, 107 UN member states (55%) have adopted a NAP.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> "1325 National Action Plans (NAPs): WILPF Monitoring and Analysis of National Action Plans on Women, Peace and Security," Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, accessed August 28, 2023, <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/>.

While strides to implement policies and launch new initiatives have been made around the globe since UNSCR 1325 was introduced, progress has been slower than expected. Currently, 30% of the NAPs put in place are outdated and have expired,<sup>2</sup> and based upon studies conducted by the Georgetown Institute of Women, Peace and Security, women remain largely absent in peace negotiations, few gender provisions in peace agreements are present, and parity in women's representation in diplomacy has yet to be reached.<sup>3</sup> Clearly there is still a great deal of work to be done to fully realize the tenets laid out by UNSCR 1325.

## Overview of Women, Peace and Security in the U.S. and Japan

The United States adopted its first WPS National Action Plan in 2011, updating it in 2016. A landmark moment was then reached in October 2017 when the United States signed into law the Women, Peace and Security Act of 2017, making the United States the first country in the world to establish a comprehensive WPS law. In summary, this law requires a whole-of-government approach to ensure women have active and meaningful roles in their communities and makes clear the critical role women play in the country's and region's peace and long-term stability. Since then, the U.S. has adopted two Women, Peace and Security National Strategies, in 2019 and 2023, which are mandated by the WPS Act of 2017.

On another front, in 2020, a United States bipartisan WPS Caucus was established in Congress to educate and raise awareness to the public and Members of Congress on WPS policies and priorities, as well as to provide Congressional oversight on the implementation of the United States' WPS National Strategy.<sup>4</sup> Lastly, and most recently, the United States co-chaired with Romania the Women, Peace and Security Focal Points Network Capital-Level Meeting in Washington, D.C. in June 2023. This annual meeting convened UN Member States and regional organizations with the aim of improving and strengthening implementation of the WPS agenda

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<sup>2</sup> "National Action Plans: At a Glance," Women's International League of Peace and Freedom, accessed August 28, 2023, <http://1325naps.peacewomen.org/>.

<sup>3</sup> Robert U. Nagel, David Guzman, and Carla Koppell, "Monitoring Progress on the Women, Peace and Security Agenda," policy brief, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security, March 2023, <https://giwps.georgetown.edu/resource/monitoring-progress-on-the-women-peace-and-security-agenda/>.

<sup>4</sup> "Mission of the Women, Peace and Security (WPS) Caucus," Representative Michael Waltz website on Women, Peace and Security, accessed August 28, 2023, <https://waltz.house.gov/wps/>.

within each Member State. Nearly 300 participants from over 29 nations were in attendance, including Japan.

Japan formally began implementing a Women, Peace and Security agenda in 2015 with the creation of their first National Action Plan. Since then, two updated NAPs have been put into place: one in 2019, and most recently in April 2023. Furthermore, in October 2022, the Diet Member’s Network for Women, Peace and Security was created to hold discussions on advancing WPS within Japanese government and society, making Japan and the U.S. the only two countries in the world to have such caucus-like bodies focused on Women, Peace and Security. WPS has also begun to make its debut at the highest level of government. In March 2023 while in India, Prime Minister Kishida introduced Japan’s revised [Free and Open Indo-Pacific \(FOIP\)](#) plan, which indicates that one of the “fundamental principles that the international community should uphold for peace/peace building” is a “response from a perspective of Women, Peace and Security.”<sup>5</sup> Furthermore, WPS made it into Prime Minister Kishida’s speech when he noted that “Japan will also provide support that caters to the needs of women, taking in the perspective of Women, Peace and Security.”<sup>6</sup> It was a historic moment to see the WPS agenda being named—publicly, by the Prime Minister—as a tool for peacebuilding.

## U.S.-Japan Collaboration on Women, Peace and Security

### Why Now is the Time for Action

The U.S.-Japan alliance is stronger now than it has ever been. Geopolitical challenges in the region, including rising tensions with China, North Korea, and Russia have brought the U.S. and Japan closer together to cooperate on issues of integrated security. This has ushered in new areas of collaboration, new partnerships in the region, and a reinvigorated drive for the U.S. and Japan to turn to one another as they consider avenues to strengthen peace and security in the Indo-Pacific region. One area of potential collaboration remains largely untapped, however – Women, Peace and Security.

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<sup>5</sup> “New Plan for a ‘Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP),” Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, March 2023, [www.mofa.go.jp/files/100477660.pdf](http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100477660.pdf).

<sup>6</sup> Fumio Kishida, “The Future of the Indo-Pacific: Japan’s New Plan for a Free and Open Indo-Pacific – Together with India, as an Indispensable Partner,” speech, SSB, New Delhi, India, March 20, 2023, transcript, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Japan, <http://www.mofa.go.jp/files/100477739.pdf>.

Women, Peace and Security is vital to building peaceful and secure communities, both domestically and internationally. Collaborating on WPS would not only enhance the safety and well-being of all citizens in both countries, but it would make peace and security efforts more effective in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond. A study conducted on four areas of Women, Peace and Security research – governance, peacebuilding and conflict resolution, peace and security operations, and countering violent extremism – revealed that applying gender perspectives and including women’s participation increases the effectiveness of peace and security actors, laws, policies, programs, and operations.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, research has shown that when women participate in peace agreements, there is a 20% increase in the agreement lasting at least two years and a 35% increase in the agreement lasting fifteen years.<sup>8</sup>

Women, Peace and Security is at the core of the values and interests that the U.S. and Japan share – democracy, political and economic freedoms, human rights, a safe and secure international society, and prosperity for all. It only makes sense for the U.S. and Japan to come together to share best practices, learn from one another, and collaborate on the building and strengthening of the Women, Peace and Security agenda in the alliance and beyond. Additionally, it serves as a catalyst for other likeminded nations in the region with similar values to stand together in solidarity in the promotion of global peace, security, and human rights.

## Areas of Collaboration for the U.S. and Japan on WPS

Joint engagements on Women, Peace and Security between the U.S. and Japan have already begun to take place. In May 2022, WPS champion, Ambassador Melanne Verweir, Executive Director of the Georgetown Institute of Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS), and member of Sasakawa USA’s Advisory Committee, spearheaded a series of meetings that brought together U.S. government agencies working on WPS and civil society actors from the U.S. and Japan (GIWPS, Our Secure Future, Sasakawa USA, and Sasakawa Peace Foundation in Tokyo) to

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<sup>7</sup> “Just the Facts: A Selected Annotated bibliography to Support Evidence-Based Policymaking on Women, Peace and Security,” policy brief, Our Secure Future: Women Make the Difference, One Earth Future, January 2019, [https://oursecurefuture.org/sites/default/files/our\\_secure\\_future\\_annotated\\_bibliography.pdf](https://oursecurefuture.org/sites/default/files/our_secure_future_annotated_bibliography.pdf).

<sup>8</sup> “Women’s Participation in Peace Processes,” Council on Foreign Relations website on Women’s Participation in Peace Processes, accessed on September 4, 2023, <https://www.cfr.org/womens-participation-in-peace-processes/>.

explore potential areas of collaboration between the countries on Women, Peace and Security. Then in October 2022, the U.S. Embassy Tokyo hosted a meeting to connect with Japan on WPS, bringing together high-level officials and WPS-engaged civil society actors, including Sasakawa USA, Sasakawa Peace Foundation in Tokyo, and GIWPS. Most recently, U.S. Forces Japan and U.S. Indo-Pacific Command have held two separate engagements in 2023, a [symposium](#) and a [training](#) on WPS, bringing together counterparts within defense from the U.S., Japan, and Indo-Pacific nations to learn about and discuss the critical role WPS plays in peace and security, as well as to develop gendered-perspective skills on how to operationalize and institutionalize Women, Peace and Security within the defense sector.

So, what is next? Where else can the U.S. and Japan begin to establish collaboration on Women, Peace and Security to move the needle forward for a more safe and secure alliance and Indo-Pacific? Based on insights gained from engaging with WPS experts in the U.S. and Japan, below are my recommendations where the two countries can come together to leverage their existing experiences and learned best practices.

## 1. Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR)

Due to the numerous natural disasters Japan has had to unfortunately navigate, the country is a global leader when it comes to Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR). Particularly due to the Great East Japan Earthquake and Tsunami of 2011, Japan learned the critical need for implementing DRR policies and practices that incorporate a gender perspective. The United States also grapples with its fair share of natural disasters, which are increasing in frequency due to climate change. While both countries have been working to incorporate practices aligned with Women, Peace and Security as mandated by their respective WPS National Action Plans, they both have improvements to make. Sharing WPS-aligned lessons learned and best practices between the entities tasked with managing DRR in both countries will not only provide more gender-equitable support for communities hit by natural disasters but can also enhance coordination and response efforts between the U.S. and Japan in the event that joint relief and recovery needs to take place again.

One concrete way to start this collaboration is by sharing developed best practices. For example, the Gender Equality Bureau of the Cabinet Office of Japan has developed the resource guide [\*Guidelines for Disaster Prevention and Reconstruction from the Perspective of Gender Equality\*](#), as well as an [overview of the guidelines in English](#). This is for communities to use to strengthen their disaster response capabilities, which includes resources such as a detailed checklist of points to consider when setting up a shelter – items to prepare and spaces to provide that will be necessary to support all members of the community in a safe environment. This encompasses details that are specific to women and girls, men and boys, and even members of the community that are non-Japanese. This guide was a result of lessons learned from the 2011 triple disaster in Japan and undoubtedly contains insights that could be of benefit to the United States.

## 2. External Aid

For decades the United States and Japan have been heavily involved in providing external aid to countries. Entities like the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) are tasked under current Women, Peace and Security National Action Plans to utilize a WPS lens in carrying out their activities abroad. Sometimes, both entities are involved in projects in the same foreign countries. Collaboration between these entities could bring about various benefits, such as developing a shared understanding of WPS best practices when working in certain cultural and geographical contexts.

## 3. Women, Peace and Security Legislation

It took the United States five years to pass the WPS Act of 2017, which was spearheaded and advocated for largely by civil society. There is some interest in Japan to try to enact similar Women, Peace and Security legislation. While the United States and Japan have completely different legislative systems, American WPS advocates and practitioners can impart valuable lessons learned from their experience with achieving WPS legislation for the benefit of their Japanese counterparts. Bringing together civil society actors from the United States who worked fervently on the creation and passing of the WPS Act of 2017 with civil society actors in Japan to share resources, engage in dialogue, and workshop

ideas could alleviate potential challenges Japan may face if they embark on developing WPS legislation.

#### 4. Women, Peace and Security in Academia

In 2011, former U.S. Secretary of State Hillary Rodham Clinton and Georgetown University President John J. DeGioia launched the Georgetown Institute of Women, Peace and Security (GIWPS) to examine and highlight the roles women play in fostering peace and security and in growing economies around the globe. The institute engages in research; offers courses and a certificate program on Women, Peace and Security; hosts global summits; amplifies the voices of women peacebuilders; and publishes their signature [Women, Peace and Security Index](#) which measures women's wellbeing in over 150 countries. For 12 years they have been dedicated to building an evidence-based case for why WPS matters in foreign and domestic policymaking. Japan, on the other hand, currently does not have such a center; however, there is interest in creating one. Connecting GIWPS with academic leaders in Japan who have interest in developing a similar research institute would set up Japanese academics with excellent guidance, mentorship, and resources to aid in the creation of a civil society center for knowledge and advocacy on Women, Peace and Security.

#### 5. U.S.-Japan Working Group on WPS

Through the various SEED (Sasakawa USA Emerging Experts Delegation) meetings in Tokyo dialoguing with Women, Peace and Security leaders, practitioners, and supporters, it became abundantly clear that additional engagements would not only be helpful, but were strongly desired across the board. While high-level engagements, such as symposiums and trainings are steadily encouraged, conversations between pinpointed leaders from the U.S. and Japan to participate in dialogue, share insights, and initiate engagements on WPS would be of tremendous benefit to not only WPS efforts in each respective country, but also to Women, Peace and Security collaboration between the two countries.

A U.S.-Japan Working Group on WPS comprised of an initial small group of two to three principal WPS civil society leaders from each country would be ideal. This smaller group



would jointly identify key topics to discuss and WPS leaders and practitioners to involve in said discussions. Over time, the Working Group could expand to include WPS practitioners from various sectors (government ministries, military and self-defense forces, etc.), and committees that focus on specific topics. At the most basic level, it should be a group of dedicated WPS practitioners from both countries who are committed to strengthening Women, Peace and Security through collaborative learning and sharing.

## Conclusion

While Women, Peace and Security is a concept that has existed since 2000 when first introduced in United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, progress on its implementation has been slower than desired. Following the United States' first official action on WPS in 2011 and then Japan in 2015, both countries have taken steps to strengthen and improve their own WPS agendas. To build upon the momentum generated by these actions and to reap the full value of the lessons learned along the way, the United States and Japan should pursue collaborative efforts on Women, Peace, and Security for the benefit of not only their respective populations and the alliance, but also to enhance peace, stability, and security in the Indo-Pacific region and beyond.

*Ms. Shanti Shoji wrote in her personal capacity. The views and interpretations expressed by the author are solely her own.*



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