



The Power of Connection: Building Networks to Advance U.S.-Japan Cooperation on Women, Peace & Security

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This publication was part of Ms. Herrera's participation in Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA's Sasakawa USA Emerging Experts Delegation (SEED) program, where eight U.S. Women, Peace and Security (WPS) experts traveled to Japan from July 22 to 30, 2023. The 2023 SEED delegates engaged with Japanese policymakers and experts to understand the challenges and opportunities Japan faces with implementing WPS and to explore avenues for future U.S.-Japan collaboration on WPS.

Introduction

From 2015 to 2016, while serving on active duty in the United States Air Force, I participated in the Mansfield Fellowship Program in Tokyo, Japan, where I worked in various offices within the Government of Japan to strengthen relationships and build understanding on areas of mutual interest. It was during my first placement in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Gender Mainstreaming Division, that I was introduced to Women, Peace & Security (WPS). I was fortunate to support English translations of Japan's very first National Action Plan (NAP) on WPS, which was published at the end of September 2015. I spent the rest of my Fellowship year focused on identifying opportunities for U.S.-Japan defense cooperation on WPS and presented a research paper with my recommendations at Japan's Graduate Institute for Policy Studies.

Upon conclusion of my Fellowship, however, I was unsure if I would ever get the chance to work on the WPS implementation I had researched and written about. At that time, the U.S. Department of Defense (DoD) had not yet established formal WPS programming, and Japan was just getting started on implementation.

Fast forward to 2023, and the landscape around WPS in both nations now looks very, very different. In the seven years since concluding my Mansfield Fellowship, the U.S. passed national WPS legislation, released a national strategy on WPS, and four U.S. agencies (DoD, Department of State, Department of Homeland Security, and the U.S. Agency for International Development) published formal WPS implementation plans.¹ DoD also began hiring full-time positions to support WPS implementation, including several positions at U.S. Indo-Pacific Command as part of the [Office of WPS](#) where I currently work. Since 2019, our office has expanded operationalization and institutionalization of WPS and gender perspectives throughout the command and within the region, including supporting a U.S.-Japan bilateral defense WPS Symposium hosted by U.S. Army Japan (USARJ) in March 2023.² Meanwhile, Japan has advanced WPS through international engagements, establishment of a Diet Members' Network for WPS, and publication of its third NAP on WPS in April 2023. Their Ministry of Defense also designated a formal WPS lead for international cooperation this summer. There has been no better time in my mind to focus on strengthening U.S.-Japan cooperation on WPS, especially within the defense sector.

The Sasakawa Peace Foundation in Tokyo and Sasakawa Peace Foundation USA have also recognized WPS as an issue area of growing importance, with Sasakawa USA selecting WPS as the focus of their 2023 Sasakawa USA Emerging Experts Delegation (SEED) program this past July. It was an absolute privilege to participate in this program as a member of USINDOPACOM's Office of WPS, to revisit and build upon the work I had undertaken seven years ago as a Mansfield Fellow, and to explore new and evolving opportunities for U.S.-Japan defense cooperation on WPS. This report provides a summary of

¹ "Women, Peace, and Security Act of 2017," United States Congress, October 6, 2017, <https://www.congress.gov/115/plaws/publ68/PLAW-115publ68.pdf>; "United States Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security," U.S. Department of State, June 2019, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2021/01/WPS_Strategy_10_October2019.pdf; "Women, Peace, and Security Strategic Framework and Implementation Plan," U.S. Department of Defense, June 2020, https://media.defense.gov/2020/Jun/11/2002314428/-1/-1/1/WOMEN_PEACE_SECURITY_STRATEGIC_FRAMEWORK_IMPLEMENTATION_PLAN.PDF; "The Department of State's Plan to Implement the U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security," U.S. Department of State, June 2020, https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/06/20-01943-SGWI_v11_forWeb_Bookmarks508.pdf; "Department and Agency Implementation Plans for The U.S. Strategy on Women, Peace, and Security," U.S. Department of Homeland Security, Accessed October 2023, www.dhs.gov/sites/default/files/publications/wps-dhs-implementation-plan.pdf; "USAID's Women, Peace, and Security Implementation Plan," U.S. Agency for International Development, Accessed October 2023, <https://www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/2023-02/2020-USAID-Women-Peace-and-Security-Implentation-Plan.pdf>.

² "U.S. Army Japan Host Inaugural Women, Peace and Security Symposium," U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, April 4, 2023, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3351402/us-army-japan-host-inaugural-women-peace-and-security-symposium/>.

the 2023 SEED program, outlines key findings from my experiences on the study trip, and provides recommendations focused on defense sector implementation of WPS.

2023 SEED Program Summary

I participated in the 2023 SEED program alongside [seven other delegates](#):

- CDR Andre Agraviador, Senior Military Advisor, The Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues, Department of State
- Ms. Erin Cooper, Acting Director for International Humanitarian Policy, Department of Defense
- Ms. Sahana Dharmapuri, Director, Our Secure Future
- Dr. Jennifer Hawkins, Senior WPS Advisor and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Task Force Lead, USAID
- Ms. Kayla McGill, WPS Policy Advisor and Lead on WPS Centers of Excellence, The Secretary's Office of Global Women's Issues, Department of State
- Dr. Jessica Smith, Director of Research, Georgetown Institute for Women, Peace and Security
- Dr. Carolyn Washington, WPS Manager, Department of Homeland Security

The program included several virtual sessions to prepare us for the culminating event: a one-week study trip to Tokyo to meet with stakeholders working on WPS-related areas in Japan. From July 24-30, our delegation conducted 20 meetings with representatives from a wide range of Japanese government and non-governmental organizations all working on different facets of WPS implementation at different levels. This included meetings with offices in the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Ministry of Defense, members of Japan's WPS Parliamentary Network, the Japan International Cooperation Agency, the Gender Equality Bureau within the Cabinet Office, the Japan Bank for International Cooperation, Kosodate Village, and many others. A more complete report of all meetings conducted can be found on the [Sasakawa USA website](#).

Key Findings

There were two key themes that stood out to me during our delegation's meetings in Tokyo. The first is that the United States and Japan share several of the same challenges when it comes to meaningful

implementation of WPS. The second is that networks which facilitate collaboration across agencies and sectors can provide an important mechanism to advance WPS objectives.

Shared Challenges

One of the primary challenges facing both Japan and the United States when it comes to WPS is understanding the difference and relationship between efforts focused on increasing women's participation within peace and security sectors (such as those related to attracting, retaining, and promoting women into decision-making positions) and efforts focused on applying gender perspectives to peace and security sector issues (such as those related to conducting gender analysis). I have written a [blog post](#) related to this topic, since it remains one of the most frequently asked questions in discussions related to WPS. Ultimately, women's participation is a cornerstone of United Nations Security Council Resolution 1325, which established the formal international WPS agenda, but it is only one element of comprehensive WPS implementation.³ Resolution 1325 also calls for peace and security practitioners to adopt gender perspectives, alongside other core objectives that cannot be addressed through women's participation alone.

Another WPS challenge both our nations share is internal vs. external implementation. Commitments to implementing WPS are often seen in approaches associated with foreign policy, international affairs, or work being conducted by both nations abroad. This is partly because the U.S. Department of State and the Japan Ministry of Foreign Affairs are the lead agencies tasked with WPS policy in their respective countries. And although it makes sense for these agencies to lead when it comes to an international framework like WPS, the foundational principles of WPS, especially the application of gender perspectives, are equally valuable in tackling domestic issues. Therefore, building internal capacity and applying WPS principles at home should happen in concert with efforts to operationalize WPS abroad. Both the U.S. and Japan have made great strides reflected in their evolving national WPS policies, but bridging the gap between foreign and domestic implementation remains an ongoing challenge.

³ "Resolution 1325 (2000)," United Nations Security Council, October 31, 2000, <https://documents-dds-ny.un.org/doc/UNDOC/GEN/N00/720/18/PDF/N0072018.pdf?OpenElement>.

The Power of Cross-Sector Networks

In relation to the shared challenges discussed above, perhaps the greatest insight I took away from the SEED trip was the immense power of networks in enabling meaningful cross-sector collaboration on WPS. Although our U.S. delegation included representatives from across government and civil society, all of us either knew each other already or were acquainted with each other's organizations prior to our selection for the SEED program. Many of us work in close coordination with one another on a regular basis, and the collective inputs of our organizations have informed the U.S.'s evolving approach to WPS implementation over the years. Our familiarity with each other's work and specific subject matter expertise was a huge benefit during our many meetings in Tokyo. Not only did our delegation have representatives who could speak directly to the WPS topics of specific interest to the wide range of stakeholders we met, but each of us also clearly understood how our organization's work fit into broader U.S. WPS objectives and how our efforts complement and/or are informed by other agencies and organizations doing WPS work.

Japan has made significant progress advancing WPS across government and civil society, but some of the organizations we spoke with were unaware of the full range of stakeholders working on WPS in Japan. Establishing stronger cross-sector relationships, consultations, and active networks for collaboration could prove immensely valuable as Japan continues its efforts to widely implement WPS. In fact, in several of the meetings we attended, we were asked how our U.S. WPS networks function. Since our approach is just one example that continues to evolve each year, successful WPS network models and coordination mechanisms from other nations will also be helpful to consider as Japan continues to expand WPS implementation efforts.

Recommendations to Advance U.S.-Japan Defense Cooperation on WPS

I was incredibly grateful for the opportunity to engage directly with leaders in Japan's Ministry of Defense (MOD) and Japan Self Defense Forces (JSDF) while on this study trip. We received briefings covering Japan's efforts to integrate women more meaningfully into both the MOD and JSDF (such as through recruitment, retention, and promotion efforts) as well as how WPS is being integrated into Japan's international defense cooperation efforts (such as through peacekeeping operations training). I was impressed with the progress both MOD and JSDF have made since my Mansfield Fellowship over seven

years ago. Approaches and targets presented for gender integration are far more nuanced, and it is clear that WPS is now being considered as a meaningful element of Japan's defense engagements with partner nations. (Admittedly, neither of our two nation's defense forces had been meaningfully integrating WPS into security cooperation efforts back in 2015/2016.)

Based on these briefings, and in consideration of the key findings I discussed previously, there are three primary recommendations I would make focused specifically on defense sector implementation of WPS. First, deliberate efforts can be made between our two nations to create opportunities and build meaningful networks for WPS collaboration both within and between our defense agencies and forces. Second, defense sector implementation of WPS must consider not only issues associated with women's integration but also operationalization of gender perspectives within core mission areas and building institutional capacity for implementation. And third, all efforts should support whole-of-government and whole-of-society implementation while encouraging multinational collaboration on WPS.

Creating Opportunities for Collaboration

Stand-alone WPS events can help elevate the visibility of WPS, promote common understanding, and build relationships and networks across the defense sector. For example, in March 2023, USARJ hosted an inaugural bilateral defense WPS Symposium at Camp Zama, Japan on behalf of U.S. Forces Japan (USFJ).⁴ This was a unique opportunity to bring together personnel from the U.S. military and JSDF to learn foundational WPS concepts and skills. On the final day of the Symposium, participants broke into groups to discuss opportunities for future WPS cooperation. While there are clear benefits to events like these, outcomes can be better supported by developing coordination mechanisms to follow through on shared intent. Moving forward, bilateral defense efforts on WPS should leverage events like the annual USFJ Symposium to either create additional, working-level opportunities for collaboration and/or identify existing bilateral engagements (such as training events or exercise planning conferences) during which WPS practitioners can re-engage on areas of mutual interest. But follow-through will be key.

Establishing unilateral, bilateral, and multilateral WPS networks within the defense sector is a significant way to better implement opportunities that emerge from stand-alone WPS events. At U.S. Indo-Pacific

⁴ U.S. Army Japan Host Inaugural

Command, we leverage our relationships with WPS practitioners across DoD and in partner nations to inform and support our programs and vice versa. Building a similar defense network in Japan may take time but will pay dividends when it comes to increasing capacity to meaningfully implement WPS across the agency.

Operationalizing Gender Perspectives and Building Institutional Capacity

Training defense personnel to apply gender perspectives to defense sector mission sets is also a critical capability when it comes to operationalizing WPS in the defense sector. It is also one of the areas of emphasis within our U.S. Indo-Pacific Command approach to WPS and has allowed us to rapidly expand implementation within the region. We consider our trained DoD Gender Advisors (GENADs) and Gender Focal Points (GFPs) as force multipliers for meaningful WPS application within defense sector missions and security cooperation activities. But this requires special attention, as WPS can run the risk of being narrowly understood and implemented via efforts to increase women's participation in military and defense forces alone.

U.S. Indo-Pacific Command hosted an inaugural Regional Military Gender Advisor Course in August 2023 to support increasing demand for training which focuses both on operationalizing gender perspectives and institutionalizing WPS principles within defense organizations.⁵ We were pleased to welcome two members from the JSDF as students alongside nine other nations in attendance. Japan's MOD and JSDF should consider how to expand opportunities to train cross-functional personnel on gender perspectives related to the defense sector. One example would be the approach the U.S. Department of the Air Force took as part of developing their first-ever WPS Strategic Action Plan.⁶ The plan includes a training annex outlining a phased approach to building institutional capacity to implement WPS and targets specific organizations to be prioritized for GENAD and GFP training.

Whole-of-Government, Whole-of-Society, and Multinational Cooperation

No one agency or organization can or should implement WPS alone. As defense sectors in the U.S., Japan, and those around the world continue to promote WPS, efforts should emphasize engagement across

⁵ "U.S. Indo-Pacific Command Hosts Inaugural Regional Military Gender Advisor Course," U.S. Indo-Pacific Command, August 16, 2023, <https://www.pacom.mil/Media/News/News-Article-View/Article/3495609/us-indo-pacific-command-hosts-inaugural-regional-military-gender-advisor-course/>.

⁶ "Department of the Air Force Women, Peace, & Security Strategic Action Plan," U.S. Department of the Air Force, April 2023, https://www.af.mil/Portals/1/documents/2023SAF/DAF_WPS_Strategic_Action_Plan.pdf.

government agencies and in close partnership with civil society organizations. Civil society has much to teach the defense sector when it comes to being a meaningful partner on WPS. Further, engagement with non-traditional security stakeholders can expand traditional definitions of security in ways that better inform defense sector approaches to addressing complex threats at the strategic, operational, and tactical levels. This includes identifying and reducing core drivers of instability worldwide. A whole-of-government, whole-of-society approach will result in more holistic and inclusive security strategies focused on both promoting localized outcomes and supporting global peace and stability. Further, multilateral cooperation, where possible, can provide opportunities to more broadly share lessons learned and build upon shared commitments to the global WPS framework.

Conclusion

Participating as a delegate in the 2023 SEED program was an immense privilege resulting in unique and meaningful insights to advance WPS alongside our partners in Japan. I learned a great deal about how our two nations can address shared challenges, build networks and opportunities for collaboration, and continue to expand the application of gender perspectives to better inform our approaches to international security. I hope my key findings and recommendations positively influence our bilateral partnership on WPS moving forward. Ultimately, leveraging the power of connected people will remain at the heart of advancing this foundational security framework together.

The views expressed in this report are those of the author and do not reflect the official policy or position of the United States Government or Department of Defense.



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Monica previously served 12 years on active duty, most recently as a Foreign Area Officer at Pacific Air Forces. At this assignment, she also served for three years as the WPS Program Director for the command. Monica was also a Mansfield Fellow in Japan from 2015-2016 where she worked at placements within the Government

of Japan, including at the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Ministry of Defense, Ministry of Education, and the National Institute for Defense Studies. During this time, she contributed to Japan's first National Action Plan on WPS, and authored policy research focused on bilateral defense cooperation on WPS.

Monica started her career as a Behavioral Scientist. She has held assignments teaching in the Department of Behavioral Sciences and Leadership at the United States Air Force Academy and conducting research on human performance optimization at the Air Force Research Laboratory. Monica is also a Senior Fellow at the Mansfield Foundation. She holds an M.A. in Sociology from Rutgers University and a B.S. in Behavioral Science with Japanese minor from the United States Air Force Academy.
